

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**CABINET EXECUTIVE  
20 December 2022**

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Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys

**REPORT TITLE:** Crickhowell Area Review

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**REPORT FOR:** Decision

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 The aim of this paper is to share information with Cabinet on the findings of the Crickhowell Area Review which has been carried out recently and the impact (if any) of the review on the decision of the previous Cabinet to close Llanbedr C. in W. School from the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.

1.2 The report is supported by the following appendices:

Appendix A – Crickhowell Area Review – Engagement Report  
Appendix B – Crickhowell Area Review – Options Appraisal

**2. Background**

2.1 On the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the previous Cabinet considered a comprehensive consultation report in respect of a proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School and approved the closure of the school from the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022. That consultation report included a number of alternative proposals (other than closure of Llanbedr C. in W. School) from members of the community.

2.2 Furthermore, on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022, the previous Cabinet considered a comprehensive Objection Report in respect of a proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School and approved the closure of the school from the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022. Once again the report included a number of alternative proposals (other than closure of Llanbedr C. in W. School) from members of the community.

2.3 On the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022, the present Cabinet considered a further report in respect of Llanbedr C. in W. School and agreed to delay implementation of the proposal to close the school for 12 months to the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023, and to commence an area review of the Crickhowell catchment.

- 2.4 At the time, the new Cabinet were aware that a judicial review process had been implemented with regard to the decision to close Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School. The judicial review process has now been concluded with 2 different High Court judges coming to the conclusion that it was unarguable that the school closure process was flawed, and as such the process was “entirely appropriate”. There has been no subsequent appeal to the Court of Appeal.
- 2.5 As instructed by the present Cabinet, officers have undertaken a review of schools within the Crickhowell catchment area. The Portfolio Holder for a Learning Powys met with the Governors and Local Members of/for Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School on 26th September 2022 and clearly articulated that they should include in their responses to the Catchment review, any new proposals for Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School or new information that might persuade the Cabinet to reconsider the implementation of the closure of Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School.
- 2.6 The review of the Crickhowell catchment has included the following:
- An engagement exercise to provide an opportunity for stakeholders in the Crickhowell area to let the Council know their views on the preferred way forward for the whole catchment – the findings are attached as Appendix A.
  - The subsequent development of an Options Appraisal Paper relating to the Crickhowell catchment – this is attached as Appendix B.
- 2.7 As there was no new information and/or proposals that were put forward for Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School in the engagement responses, it is considered that the case for closure of Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School, as set out in the reports to the previous Cabinet dated the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022, continue to be sound.
- 2.8 Therefore, in light of the absence of new proposals for Llanbedr C. in W. Primary School in the engagement responses, it was considered that the appraisal of options would have to exclude consideration of the continuation of Llanbedr C. in W. School.

A summary of the two appendices is provided below.

i) **Crickhowell Area Review – Engagement Report**

- 2.9 Between the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022, the Council carried out an engagement exercise to understand the views of stakeholders in the Crickhowell catchment about the current educational provision in the area and the way forward for the delivery of education in the catchment.

- 2.10 An online questionnaire was developed which was available throughout the engagement period. Information about the questionnaire was circulated to all schools in the area to share with their school communities, and was also shared in the local press and on the Council's social media platforms.
- 2.11 In addition, face to face engagement events were held for staff and governors in the catchment.
- 2.12 A report has been produced which summarises the findings of the engagement exercise. This is attached as Appendix A.
- 2.13 228 responses were received to the online questionnaire, as well as 5 separate written responses.
- 2.14 The questionnaire asked respondents to outline strengths related to the current educational provision in the Crickhowell catchment area. The following is a summary of the responses received:
- The schools provide a good standard of education
  - There is a choice of religious and non-religious provision
  - Schools deliver education locally, which minimises travel time and means that pupils can walk / cycle to school
  - Post-16 provision at Crickhowell High School offers a wide range of subjects
  - The sizes of the schools are just right
  - There is good cluster working in the catchment
  - There are strong links between the schools and the community
  - There are town schools and rural schools
  - There is excellent transition to secondary school
- 2.15 The questionnaire also asked respondents to outline weaknesses related to the current provision in the Crickhowell catchment area. The following is a summary of the responses received:
- Insufficient funding is provided
  - The High School is over-subscribed
  - Many of the pupils at the high school are from out of the catchment area
  - Poor quality buildings
  - Class sizes are too big in some cases
  - There is no Welsh-medium provision in the catchment
  - Early years provision needs to be reviewed
  - Threat of closure / school reorganisation activity is causing uncertainty in the area
- 2.16 Respondents were asked to provide suggestions about the way forward for the catchment area. The following is a summary of the suggestions received:

- Retain the status quo
- Federation options
- Reduce the number of primary schools in the catchment
- Multi-sited primary schools
- Establish an all-age school
- Enhanced cluster working / sharing resources
- Review admissions arrangements
- Provide more funding
- Improve the buildings

- 2.17 Respondents were asked to what extent they agree that establishing an all-age school would be an appropriate way forward in the Crickhowell catchment. 20 respondents (8.8%) indicated that they agree or strongly agree that this would be an appropriate way forward, whilst 166 respondents (73.2%) indicated that they disagree or strongly disagree that this would be an appropriate way forward.
- 2.18 Respondents were also asked to what extent they agree that there is a need to introduce Welsh-medium provision in the Crickhowell catchment. 76 respondents (33.5%) indicated that they agree or strongly agree that there is a need, whilst 105 respondents (46.3%) indicated that they disagree or strongly disagree that there is need.
- 2.19 5 separate written responses were also received. 4 of these were from schools in the catchment. The points included in each are summarised in the Engagement Report which is attached as Appendix A.
- 2.20 The Engagement Report also outlines the feedback received during the engagement sessions with staff and governors in the catchment which were held during the engagement period.
- 2.21 Staff and governors were asked to complete a SWOT assessment of the current provision in the area. Combined SWOTs which list the responses received in the session with staff and the session with governors are included in the Engagement Report.
- 2.22 Staff and governors were also asked to provide suggestions about the way forward for the catchment area. The following is summary of the suggestions received:
- Retain the status quo
  - Improve collaboration across the catchment e.g. sharing of key roles such as business manager, caretaker, ALN
  - Invest in buildings
  - Distribute funding more evenly across the county
  - Establish 3-19 provision
  - Establish a Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School
  - Explore opportunities to introduce a Welsh-medium stream

ii) **Crickhowell Area Review – Options Appraisal**

2.23 The options appraisal document includes the following:

- The Strategic Context
- An overview of current provision in the Crickhowell catchment
- A SWOT assessment of the current provision in the Crickhowell catchment
- Identification of possible future options for the Crickhowell catchment
- An assessment of the options against Critical Success Factors
- A SWOT assessment of shortlisted options
- A financial evaluation of shortlisted options

2.25 The report identified 9 possible options for the catchment based on a number of assumptions. These options were assessed against a number of Critical Success Factors, and three options were shortlisted for further consideration. The shortlisted options are as follows:

<b>Option 1</b>	Status Quo
<b>Option 4a</b>	Merge Crickhowell C.P. School and Crickhowell High School to establish a new all-age school operating on the two existing sites.
<b>Option 4b</b>	Merge Crickhowell C.P. School, Llangynidr C.P. School and Crickhowell High School to establish a new all-age school on the three existing sites.

2.26 Further assessment was carried out of these options. This included a SWOT assessment and financial evaluation.

2.27 Whilst the SWOT assessment identified a number of Strengths / Opportunities associated with Option 4a and 4b, there are no revenue savings to these options.

2.28 Options 1, 4a and 4b have all been assessed for their impact on the ongoing formula funding and other revenue funding requirements for the schools. As the proposals do not involve a reduction in the number of sites used to deliver education in the Crickhowell catchment, there would be no change to the ongoing revenue funding requirements for any of the options.

2.29 Merging the schools would involve the existing schools closing and being re-opened. There would be a range of one-off costs related to this process including ICT implications, providing cover for headteacher time required to establish the new school, new signage / branding, establishing a temporary governing body for the new school and so on. These are expected to amount to approximately £60,000.

- 2.30 In addition, any teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) payments for existing staff are usually protected for 3 years following such a process, costing £40,000 per year over the three years.
- 2.31 The Council would also be responsible for writing off any deficit / surplus budgets (current overall figure is £62,534 deficit based on March 2022 figures)
- 2.32 Therefore, the conclusion of the Option Appraisal Exercise is that the Status Quo (**i.e. all schools remain separate entities, with Llanbedr C. in W. School closed**) is the preferred way forward for the Crickhowell catchment at this point in time. The reason for this is due to the lack of revenue saving and additional costs associated with establishing a new all-age school in Crickhowell, given the current fiscal climate.

### **3. Advice**

- 3.1 Based on the findings of the options appraisal document and the engagement exercise carried out, the advice of officers is that the preferred way forward for the Crickhowell catchment is to retain primary provision in Crickhowell C.P. School, Llangynidr C.P School and Llangattock C.i.W Primary School, and to retain secondary provision in Crickhowell High School.
- 3.2 No new information came forward during the engagement exercise to suggest that the case for the closure of Llanbedr C. in W. School was no longer valid. Therefore, the decision by the previous Cabinet to close Llanbedr C. in W. School should be implemented, meaning that Llanbedr C. in W. School will close on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023.
- 3.3 During the engagement exercise, it became apparent that there is strong collaboration between schools in the Crickhowell catchment, and that there is scope to deepen the collaboration and to share resources to support all the schools. It is therefore advised that the schools further explore this in partnership with the Council.
- 3.4 It is also advised that Crickhowell High School and Crickhowell C.P. School consider the appointment of a shared Headteacher, as both schools currently have Acting Headteacher arrangements. This would enable the development of cross-phase collaboration, which would align with the benefits of the all-age model and would provide a basis for further consideration of the all-age model at a later date.
- 3.5 The current lack of Welsh-medium provision in the catchment is also acknowledged. This does not reflect the aspiration of the Council's WESP to provide access to Welsh-medium provision in each of the 13 localities. It is advised that further work is undertaken to consider

options to introduce Welsh-medium provision in the Crickhowell catchment.

#### 4. **Resource Implications**

4.1 The closure of Llanbedr C. in W. School would realise an estimated ongoing revenue saving of approximately £53,000 per annum. This is a net saving figure made up of £105,500 delegated schools formula funding saving plus estimated catering savings of £9,000 reduced by estimated additional transport costs of £43,700 and for prudence, an estimated loss of RSG of £17,800 should some pupils go to schools in other authority areas.

4.2 As set out in paragraph 2.28 above, as the proposals do not involve a reduction in the number of sites used to deliver education in the Crickhowell catchment, there would be no change to the ongoing revenue funding requirements for any of the options. However, merger would result in one-off costs estimated at approximately £60,000.

4.2 Current indicative formula funding 2023-24 to 2025-26:

	<b>Indicative Formula Funding 2023-24</b> £	<b>Indicative Formula Funding 2024-25</b> £	<b>Indicative Formula Funding 2025-26</b> £
Crickhowell High School	£4,210,912	£4,221,879	£4,215,245
Crickhowell C.P. School	£743,946	£741,911	£698,258
Llangynidr C.P. School	£456,198	£443,508	£414,047
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£5,411,056</b>	<b>£5,407,298</b>	<b>£5,327,550</b>

4.2 If the decision was made to proceed with either options 4a or 4b, which would involve merging the existing schools to create an all-age school, there would also be the cost implication to the Council of writing off the current schools' deficits/surpluses. Currently Crickhowell High school has a significant cumulative deficit that they are reducing over the future years while both Crickhowell C.P. and Llangynidr C.P. have significant surpluses but are forecasting that these will reduce over the future years. The table below sets out the cumulative positions as at 31 March 2022 which will be detrimentally impacted by the current challenging public finance environment. However, it is acknowledged that the schools are working hard to reduce any deficit and surpluses maybe impacted by the current fiscal crisis and the authority will work with all schools to minimise any deficit on closure if they were to close.

	<b>Cumulative Surplus / (Deficit) as at 31 March 2022</b> (£)
<b>Crickhowell High School</b>	<b>(496,605)</b>

<b>Crickhowell C.P. School</b>	259,156
<b>Llangynidr C.P. School</b>	174,914
<b>Total</b>	<b>(62,534)</b>

4.3 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report and can support the recommendation as the original decision to close Llanbedr C. in W. School would realise an ongoing revenue saving of £53,000 per annum. Additional costs would be incurred should merger be considered this would create an additional financial pressure on the Council's budget.

4.4 If agreed by Cabinet, Human Resources colleagues will work closely with the School Governors, management and staff to ensure that the appropriate employment processes are followed and that the staffing levels are retained at the most suitable level.

## **5. Legal implications**

5.1 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows:

I have no comments with regards to the proposals arising out of the Catchment Review. However, Members of Cabinet should take into account the following matters when coming to a conclusion whether or not to implement the decision made by the former Cabinet to close Llanbedr CiW School.

The School Organisation Code provides that;

- 1) Proposals must normally be implemented as determined or approved (with or without modifications).
- 2) If a proposer is satisfied, after consultation with any affected governing body, either that implementation of proposals would be unreasonably difficult or that circumstances have so altered since the proposals were approved that their implementation would be inappropriate altogether, it may determine that the proposals should be abandoned.

The reference in the Code to implementation of proposals being unreasonable refers in essence to the implementation being impracticable and as such the Cabinet should implement the decision to close Llanbedr CiW School unless it is satisfied that "that circumstances have so altered since the proposals<sup>4</sup> - were approved that their implementation would be inappropriate altogether".

It is of course a matter for Cabinet to decide whether circumstances have so changed, and in coming to a decision on this issue they should take into account that:



- a) no further proposals were put forward as the engagement process
- b) a judicial review has failed and the court has found the school closure process to be appropriate
- c) it has recently become apparent that the Council's revenue budget is significantly under strain and will continue to do so in future years
- d) there are no significant increases in numbers at the school in future years.

## **6. Data Protection**

6.1 N/A

## **7. Comment from local member(s)**

7.1 Cllr Matt Beecham (Crickhowell with Cwmdy and Tretower):

"I am very disappointed in the outcome of the catchment review. The local community was promised that the review would encompass all the primary schools and the High School. However, it is clear from the paper that Llanbedr Church in Wales School was discounted before an options appraisal took place despite qualitative comments suggesting options such as federation.

The Vale of Grwyney community feel let down by Powys County Council and feel that they have not had the opportunity of a fair hearing. The financial savings of closing the school are so minimal especially in light of the fact that closing the school will effectively kill a thriving small, rural community. Llanbedr is a prime example of a small, rural community that we should be seeking to protect not consign to the wilderness by taking away its community hub.

There is nothing transformational about closing down a very good primary school that works well within arguably the strongest education cluster in Powys."

Cllr Sarah-Jane Beecham (Crickhowell with Cwmdy and Tretower):

"If the closure of Llanbedr Church in Wales School goes ahead it will displace a whole school community and have a longstanding, catastrophic impact on a thriving rural community. Llanbedr Church in Wales School is the heartbeat of Llanbedr and surrounding area and its loss will be felt for years many to come. You just need to look at the other end of our ward, Cwmdy, where a thriving village school was closed and lost, and this closure is still felt to those who were involved and to the whole community by removing its heart and lifeblood. Children who have already faced disruption and heartache during the COVID pandemic will now face another monumental

disruption to their school career, including being torn away from friends, teachers and a safe school environment once more.

Parents and friends of Llanbedr Church in Wales School are deeply concerned about the children's wellbeing. They are concerned about their mental health and emotional wellbeing if they are forced to be torn from their school again through no fault of their own. What long term plans are there to support our children? Immediate plans may have been considered but, as it is evident from the COVID pandemic, catastrophic disruption to a child's education does not always emerge immediately. Where will our displaced children go? Some children have already moved from other schools in the cluster due to their previous school not working for them and Llanbedr being a school where they can thrive and flourish to be the best they can be. Do you propose these children return to schools where they were unhappy did not thrive?

We need to make sure our children are at the forefront of any decision and that their future will not be affected due to yet another period of uncertainty and upheaval. Our children are our futures and to cause them unnecessary distress and trauma at a young age is indefensible."

## **8. Impact Assessment**

- 8.1 Impact assessments were considered by Cabinet at each stage of the process to close Llanbedr C. in W. School. These were updated at each stage to reflect the issues raised.

No further impact assessment is required at this stage as there is no new proposal.

## **9. Recommendation**

- To implement the decision made by the previous Cabinet to close Llanbedr C. in W. School from the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023 as circumstances have not altered since the decision of the former Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022, such that implementation would be "inappropriate altogether".
- To retain primary provision at Crickhowell C.P. School, Llangynidr C.P. School and Llangattock C. in W. Primary School and to retain secondary provision at Crickhowell High School.
- To support the Crickhowell catchment to deepen their collaboration as set out in their responses to the engagement exercise.
- To support Crickhowell High School and Crickhowell C.P. School to explore the option of appointing a shared headteacher which would

provide a basis for further consideration of the all-age model at a later date.

- To undertake further work in the Crickhowell catchment, as outlined in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, including discussions with Mudiad Meithrin to explore the establishment of a Cylch Meithrin. This will also include discussions with neighbouring authorities.

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