

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET EXECUTIVE

10th October 2023

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Pete Roberts
Portfolio Holder for a Learning Powys

REPORT TITLE: Llangedwyn C. in W. School – Proposal Paper

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This paper requests Cabinet approval to commence the statutory process on the following proposal:
- To close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School
- 1.2. The report is supported by the following appendices:
- Appendix A – Options Appraisal
 - Appendix B – Draft Community Impact Assessment
 - Appendix C – Draft Integrated Impact Assessment
 - Appendix D – Pre-consultation response from the Diocese of St Asaph

2. Background

Llangedwyn C. in W. School

- 2.1 Llangedwyn C. in W. School is a small English-medium primary school located in the village of Llangedwyn in the Llanfyllin catchment area of North Powys.
- 2.2 It currently operates as part of a formal federation with Llanfechain C. in W. School. Ffederasiwn Dwy Afon was established in 2018. The Federation has a single governing body and headteacher that are responsible for both schools.
- 2.3 Pupil numbers at Llangedwyn C. in W. School have decreased significantly over recent years. Current pupil numbers at the school are as follows¹:

¹ Teacher Centre, 22nd September 2023

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	9

Llanfyllin / North Welshpool Catchment Review

- 2.4 In the Summer of 2022, the Council updated and relaunched its Strategy for Transforming Education², and also published a work programme for Wave 2 of implementation of the Strategy. This includes a commitment to restart and conclude the review of the Llanfyllin / North Welshpool catchment, which commenced in 2020. This restarted in April 2023.
- 2.5 In September 2023, the Council’s Cabinet considered a paper which outlined the findings of the review and presented an indicative preferred way forward. The preferred way forward included the possible closure of Llangedwyn C. in W. School, however this would be subject to the Statutory Process as outlined in the School Organisation Code (2018).
- 2.6 The paper considered by Cabinet included a recommendation that a proposal paper is prepared in respect of the closure of Llangedwyn C. in W. School, for consideration by Cabinet in October 2023.

Information about Llangedwyn C. in W. School

- 2.7 The following is a summary of key data relating to Llangedwyn C. in W. School:

Pupil Numbers

i) Current pupil numbers³

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	9

² Available at <https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/9344/Transforming-Education-Strategy>

³ Teacher Centre, 22nd September 2023

ii) **Historical pupil numbers⁴**

	Jan. 2016	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020	Jan. 2021	Jan. 2022
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	31	26	28	31	18	23	17

iii) **Projected pupil numbers (Birth rate)⁵**

	Jan. 2023 ⁶	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	15	16	13	8	8

iv) **Projected pupil numbers (Finance projections)⁷**

	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	13	13	12	n/a	n/a

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

	Current Capacity ⁸	Currently Filled	Surplus Capacity
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	47	9	38 (80.85%)

⁴ PLASC (R – Yr6)

⁵ Powys Schools Service Projections based on PLASC & Birth Rates

⁶ These are the projected figures based on PLASC 2022 information, therefore include a projection for January 2023. PLASC 2023 information and projected pupil numbers based on PLASC 2023 are not yet available.

⁷ Powys Finance Projections based on data provided by the school – updated by Finance August 2023

⁸ MSCW Capacity Jan. 2022 from the Welsh Government Planning of School Places Return – October 2022

ii) **Building condition⁹**

	Condition	Suitability
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	C Poor	B Satisfactory

Quality of Education

i) **Estyn**

	Llangedwyn C. in W. School
Date of Inspection	January 2020
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement
Follow up activity	<p>The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.</p> <p>Outcome of Estyn review 2021:</p> <p>The school is judged to have made sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the Section 28 inspection. The school has been removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn review. There will be no further monitoring activity in relation to this inspection.</p>

⁹ Condition, Suitability and Sufficiency – The Transforming Education PowerBI Dashboard – 2022

Financial information

i) Cost per pupil¹⁰ (Section 52 Budget Statement, 2023/2024)

	Budget share per school	Budget share per pupil	Notional SEN budget	Non ISB funds devolved to the school
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	£164,000	£12,625.92	£12,000	£0
Powys average (Primary)	N/A	£4,729.23	N/A	N/A

The Case for Change

2.8 The following is a summary of the main challenges facing Llangedwyn C. in W. School:

2.9 Low pupil numbers

Current pupil numbers¹¹ at Llangedwyn C. in W. School are as follows:

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	9

The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school with less than 91 pupils. Pupil numbers are significantly lower than this.

2.10 High budget share per pupil

Based on the Council's Section 52 Budget Statement for 2023-24, the school's budget share per pupil during 2023-24 was £12,625.92. This is significantly higher than the Powys average of £4,729.23.

¹⁰ Section 52 Budget Statement 2022/2023

¹¹ Teacher Centre, 22nd September 2023

Llangedwyn C. in W. School has the highest budget share per pupil of all primary schools in Powys.

2.11 Combined age classes

The small pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes, with foundation phase learners in one class and older learners in another. Because pupil numbers in each year group are small, it is more difficult to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged.

Options appraisal

2.12 An options appraisal exercise has been carried out to identify and consider reasonable options for Llangedwyn C. in W. School. This is attached to this report as Appendix A.

2.13 The options appraisal includes the following:

- Consideration of key data
- Identification of reasonable options
- SWOT analysis of each option
- Assessment of each option against a number of critical success factors
- Identification of an emerging preferred option
- Further consideration of the emerging preferred option against factors listed in the School Organisation Code (2018) as factors to be taken into account when developing school organisation proposals.

2.14 Based on the options appraisal carried out and further consideration against the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code, the preferred option is as follows:

Close Llangedwyn C. in W. School, pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School

2.15 The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers at Llangedwyn C. in W. Primary School
- Would increase pupil numbers at Llanfechain C. in W. School
- Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- The Council would no longer need to maintain the Llangedwyn building
- Pupils would attend a larger school where they would be part of a larger cohort of pupils

- Pupils would transfer to a school they are already familiar with
 - Pupils would continue to access Church in Wales provision
- 2.16 The options appraisal document considers the impact of the preferred option on the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code as factors to be considered when developing school organisation proposals. This is included in 'Part C' of Appendix A.
- 2.17 The preferred option aligns with the vision and guiding principles as set out in the Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys.
- 2.18 Implementation of the preferred option is subject to the statutory process outlined in the School Organisation Code (2018).
- 2.19 As Llangedwyn C. in W. School is identified in the School Organisation Code as a rural school, a draft Community Impact Assessment has been carried out on the preferred option, which considers the impact on the community. This has been developed with input from the school. The draft Community Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix B.
- 2.20 The draft Community Impact Assessment includes the following conclusion:
- 'Should Llangedwyn C. in W. School close, there would be an impact on the village of Llangedwyn as there would no longer be a school in the village. However, the impact of school closure on the village would likely be minimal, particularly as most pupils that currently attend the school don't live in Llangedwyn.
- In addition, information received from the school indicates that whilst there are links between the school and the community, community use of the school building is minimal. There is a Village Hall in Llangedwyn which is already used more widely by the local community, so any events / meetings etc which are currently held at the school could be located to the Village Hall.'
- 2.21 As Llangedwyn C. in W. School has a religious character, the School Organisation Code includes the following requirements:
- 'In the case of proposals to reorganise schools for which land and/or buildings are held on trust or which have a designated religious character, the proposer **must** conduct consultation with the trustees and/or appropriate religious body before the consultation document is published. The proposer **must** allow 28 days for the receipt of comments and **must** have due regard to those comments before any decision is made to proceed to general consultation.'
- 2.22 Consultation has been carried out with the Diocese of St Asaph, the response received is provided in Appendix D.

Statutory Process for School Organisation Proposals

2.23 The process for school organisation proposals is set out by the Welsh Government in the School Organisation Code (2018). The process is summarised below:

i) Consultation

Consultation would be carried out with stakeholders as required by the Code. This includes consultation with the pupils, to ensure that their views are taken into account, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Feedback from the consultation would be collated and summarised, and a report would be presented to the Cabinet. Cabinet would consider the report and the feedback received during the consultation period, and would decide whether to proceed with the proposal, to make changes to the proposal or to not proceed with the proposal.

If Cabinet decides not to proceed, that would be the end of this proposal.

ii) Statutory Notice

If Cabinet decides to proceed, a Statutory Notice would be published, which would give a period of 28 days for people to submit written objections.

If there were objections, the authority would publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and the authority's response to them. A further report would be presented to the Cabinet, which they would consider alongside the objection report, in order to decide whether or not to approve the proposal.

iii) Implementation

If Cabinet approves the proposal, it would be implemented in accordance with the date given in the Statutory Notice or any subsequently modified date.

Presumption against closure of Rural Schools

2.24 The School Organisation Code (2018) includes special arrangements in regard to schools identified in Appendix F of the Code as rural schools, which require proposers to follow a more detailed set of procedures and requirements in formulating a rural school closure proposal and in consulting on and reaching a decision as to whether to implement a rural school closure proposal.

2.25 As indicated in the Code:

‘This does not mean that a rural school will never close but the case for closure must be strong and all viable alternatives to closure must have been conscientiously considered by the proposer, including federation.’

2.26 The School Organisation Code includes a number of steps required to be taken when formulating a rural school proposal which relate to the following headings:

- Formulating the proposal
- Identifying reasonable alternatives
- Preparing a proposal paper for the decision maker

2.27 As the School Organisation Code identifies Llangedwyn C. in W. School as a rural school, the additional requirements for rural schools have been addressed when developing the proposal paper.

3. Advice

3.1 It is advised that Cabinet approves a recommendation to commence the statutory process on the following proposal:

- To close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School.

3.2 The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers at Llangedwyn C. in W. Primary School
- Would increase pupil numbers at Llanfechain C. in W. School
- Would reduce the Council’s overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- The Council would no longer need to maintain the Llangedwyn building
- Pupils would attend a larger school where they would be part of a larger cohort of pupils
- Pupils would transfer to a school they are already familiar with
- Pupils would continue to access Church in Wales provision

3.3 Although the option for pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School has been identified as the preferred option, pupils would be able to apply for places at alternative schools should they prefer. These applications would be dealt with in accordance with the Council’s admissions policy.

- 3.4 Should the recommendation to commence the statutory process be approved, it is anticipated that consultation would commence in October 2023.
- 3.5 It must also be noted that implementation of this proposal does not preclude that school from being a part of future reorganisation proposals.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 The amount of funding provided to schools is driven by the funding formula. Any change to the formula funding provided will impact on the Council's revenue budget. Based on the current formula, it is estimated that implementation of the proposal would result in annual revenue savings to the Council of around £56.4k. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of over £91.0k and estimated additional transport costs of £34.6k. The proposal is expected to have no impact on the costs of delivering a catering service.
- 4.2 The school is currently projecting a carry forward deficit of £31k at the end of financial year 2023-24 rising to a cumulative deficit of £177k by 31 March 2026.
- 4.3 The Scheme for Financing Schools also states the following in section 3.7.2:

'In order to ensure effective stewardship of the resources available to schools, the Authority may impose additional restrictions on a school scheduled to close, including but not limited to:

- Restriction of expenditure to agreed plans
- Removal of powers of virement'

The Council will consider the use of these powers of intervention where appropriate.

- 4.4 Based on the current school condition data report it would cost approximately £90k to bring the building up to current standards, however this figure is expected to rise due to construction industry inflation experienced. If the proposal is implemented this cost would be avoided.
- 4.5 The building is in the ownership of the Diocese of St Asaph. It is likely that there may be some costs related to the building disposal service so that it can be transferred back to the Diocese. This would be in the region of £10k (based on costs of disposing other school buildings recently) and would be a one-off cost funded from the Council's Corporate Transformation budget.

- 4.6 Implementation of the proposal would require involvement from various service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, Finance, HR and ICT. These service areas will be kept informed of the development of the proposal throughout the statutory process.
- 4.7 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report and supports the recommendation.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: The Recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view as the Schools Organisation Code will be followed.
- 5.2 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer has commented as follows: "I note the legal comment and support the recommendations"

6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 6.1 Implementation of the proposal would impact on travel arrangements for pupils currently attending Llangedwyn C. in W. School. This could have a negative environmental impact, as additional home to school transport would need to be provided to transport pupils to their nearest alternative school. However, Llangedwyn is not currently the closest school for the majority of pupils attending the school, so the number of pupils impacted by this would be minimal – it is possible that there would be a reduction in travel for some pupils.
- 6.2 In addition, running a single school site would be more environmentally friendly than running two, due to a reduction in the use of heating and electricity amongst other factors.

7. Data Protection

- 7.1 N/A

8. Comment from local member(s)

- 8.1 Not yet received.

9. Impact Assessment

- 9.1 An initial impact assessment in respect of the recommendation is attached as Appendix C. The impact assessment considers the proposal's impact on the Welsh Government's well-being goals, as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 9.2 The summary of the impact assessment is as follows:

'The aim of the proposal is to improve the educational provision for learners. However, whilst this impact assessment has identified some

positive aspects, in particular relating to learning and skills and ensuring the best strategic management of the Powys schools estate, the assessment has also identified some negative aspects. These primarily relate to the impact on the community of Llangedwyn due to loss of educational provision from the village, and the associated additional travel requirements for pupils.'

9.3 Should Cabinet approve the commencement of the statutory process in respect of the recommendation, the impact assessment would be updated throughout the process, to take account of feedback received.

10. Recommendation

10.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves commencing the statutory process on the following proposal:

- To close Llangedwyn C. in W. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to Llanfechain C. in W. School

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