

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET EXECUTIVE

17 September 2024

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

REPORT TITLE: Ysgol Bro Cynllaith – 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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from 31 August 2025 with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their closest school in Powys.
- 1.2. For most pupils, the closest school in Powys will be Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant.
- 1.3. The report is supported by the following appendices:
- Appendix A – Options Appraisal
 - Appendix B – Draft Community Impact Assessment
 - Appendix C – Draft Integrated Impact Assessment

2. Background

Ysgol Bro Cynllaith

- 2.1 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is a small English-medium primary school located in the village of Llansilin in the north of the Llanfyllin catchment area in North Powys.
- 2.2 Current pupil numbers at the school are as follows¹:

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	3	2	6	2	6	2	5	26

¹ Teacher Centre, 5th September 2024

Llanfyllin / North Welshpool Catchment Review

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, however this would be subject to the Statutory Process as outlined in the School Organisation Code (2018).
- 2.5 During 2023-24, the Council carried out the statutory process on one element of the preferred way forward identified for the Llanfyllin / North Welshpool catchment, which was to close Llangedwyn C. in W. School. This school closed on the 31st August 2024.
- 2.6 The Council is now considering future options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.

Information about Ysgol Bro Cynllaith

- 2.7 The following is a summary of key data relating to Ysgol Bro Cynllaith:

Pupil Numbers

i) Current pupil numbers³

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	3	2	6	2	6	2	5	26

ii) Historical pupil numbers⁴

	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020	Jan. 2021	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	32	29	30	26	26	23	27	25

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

³ Teacher Centre, 5th September 2024

⁴ PLASC (R – Yr6)

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

	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027	Jan. 2028
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	27	26	24	27	24

iv) **Projected pupil numbers (Finance projections)⁶**

	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027	Jan. 2028
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	25	25	20	n/a	n/a

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

	Current Capacity ⁷	Currently Filled	Surplus Capacity
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	54	26	28 (52%)

ii) **Building condition⁸**

	Condition	Suitability
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	C Poor	B Satisfactory

Quality of Education

i) **Estyn**

	Ysgol Bro Cynllaith
Date of Inspection	December 2023

⁵ Powys Schools Service Projections based on PLASC 2023 & Birth Rates

⁶ Powys Finance Projections based on data provided by the school – updated by Finance June 2024

⁷ MSCW Capacity from the Welsh Government Planning of School Places Return – October 2023

⁸ Welsh Government Return June 2023

Recommendations	<p>R1 – Address the safeguarding issue that was raised during the inspection</p> <p>R2 – Strengthen procedures to monitor and track pupil progress to evaluate more effectively the standards they achieve</p> <p>R3 – Improve the standards of pupils’ writing across the school</p> <p>R4 – Provide appropriate challenge and regular opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills</p>
Follow up activity	<p>Estyn Review.</p> <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>

Financial information

i) Cost per pupil⁹ (Section 52 Budget Statement, 2024/2025)

	Budget share per school £	Budget share per pupil £	Notional SEN budget £	Non ISB funds devolved to the school £
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	£200k	£8,000	£7,000	£18,000
Powys average (Primary)	N/A	£4,800	N/A	N/A

The Case for Change

2.8 The following is a summary of the main challenges facing Ysgol Bro Cynllaith

⁹ Section 52 Budget Statement 2024/2025, available at [Delegated School Budgets per pupil, by school \(£\) \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/Delegated-School-Budgets-per-pupil-by-school)

2.9 Low pupil numbers

Current pupil numbers¹⁰ at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith are as follows:

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	3	2	6	2	6	2	5	26

The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school with less than 91 pupils. Pupil numbers are significantly lower than this, and the latest projected pupil numbers suggest that pupil numbers are not expected to increase significantly over the coming years.

2.10 High budget share per pupil

Based on the Council's Section 52 Budget Statement for 2024-25, the school's budget share per pupil during 2024-25 was £8,000. This is significantly higher than the Powys average of £4,800. Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is ranked the 3rd highest school in Powys by budget share per pupil¹¹.

2.11 Combined age classes

The low pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes, with foundation 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. One day a week, all pupils are in the same class. Small year groups mean that peer working is limited.

Options appraisal

2.12 An options appraisal exercise has been carried out to identify and consider reasonable options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. 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

¹⁰ Teacher Centre, 5th September 2024

¹¹ Section 52 Budget Statement 2024/5

- 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:

To close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from 31 August 2025 with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their closest school in Powys.

2.15 For most pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys will be Ysgol Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant.

2.16 The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers.
- 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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith building.
- Pupils would attend a larger school, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum.
- Pupils would attend a larger school, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities.
- Pupils would attend a school with better quality accommodation.
- Pupils would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages.
- Pupils would be able to continue to access provision in Powys.
- Potential opportunity to realise a capital receipt from sale of the site.

2.17 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.

2.18 The preferred option aligns with the vision and guiding principles as set out in the Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys.

2.19 Implementation of the preferred option is subject to the statutory process outlined in the School Organisation Code (2018).

2.20 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.

2.21 The draft Community Impact Assessment includes the following conclusion:

'It is clear that a wide range of extra curricular activities are available to pupils at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. Should there be no school in Llansilin, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. These would be larger schools, and the expectation is that at least a similar range of activities would be available for pupils. However, it is acknowledged that Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is currently the closest school for almost all current pupils. Should the school close, additional travel would be required to enable pupils to access their closest school.

Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the home to school transport policy which is in operation at that time, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and there could also be an impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc. This could impact on their ability to access activities, particularly where these take place after school. Concern was also expressed that should there be no school in Llansilin, pupils may access alternative provision in England.

The information received by the school suggests that there are extensive links between the school and the local community, and that many community activities are arranged in the school which are accessed by the community. It is therefore acknowledged that closure of the school could have an impact on the community in terms of the services and activities available.

There is a Memorial Hall in Llansilin which would continue to be available to the community should the school close. However, the school has indicated that closure of the school would make it virtually impossible for the hall to continue. Concern has also been expressed about the impact on other business in the village, such as the community shop and the local pub.

The information received from the school indicated that closure of the school would have a significant impact on the local community.'

Statutory Process for School Organisation Proposals

2.22 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

2.23 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.

2.24 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.'

2.25 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

2.26 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is not included in the list of 'rural schools' which is included in the Code, however the Council's view is that this was an error when determining the list, and that the school should be included. Therefore, the Council will treat Ysgol Bro Cynllaith as a school identified 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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from 31 August 2025 with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their closest school in Powys.**

3.2 For most pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys will be Ysgol Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant.

3.3 The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers.
- 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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith building.
- The Council would no longer need to maintain the Ysgol Bro Cynllaith building.
- Pupils would attend a larger school, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum.
- Pupils would attend a larger school, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities.
- Pupils would attend a school with better quality accommodation.
- Pupils would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages.
- Pupils would be able to continue to access provision in Powys.
- Opportunity to realise a capital receipt from sale of the site.

- 3.3 Should the recommendation to commence the statutory process be approved, it is anticipated that consultation would commence in October 2024.
- 3.4 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 **£77k**. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of over £145.8k and estimated additional transport costs of £70.8k, with a minimal £2k estimated saving in respect of catering.
- 4.2 There will be a further £10.6k annual revenue saving to the Council in respect of the funding provided to the school on top of the saving identified in 4.1. This relates to funding which is delegated to the school for the purposes of paying rent to the village hall for the use of their facilities for the school day. This saving is dependent upon successfully negotiating a termination of the lease which currently commits the Council to part funding the upkeep of the building.
- 4.3 The school is currently projecting a carry forward surplus of £20.6k at the end of financial year 2024-25 reducing to £6.7k by the end of 2025-26. The costs will not be as much as planned should the school close on the 31st August 2025 and will therefore improve the forecast balance projected. If the school remains open, the school is projecting a deficit position in future years, based on current indicative funding levels.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.

- 4.6 The Director of Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer) notes the contents of this report and supports the recommendations.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: Provided that the requirements of the School Organisation Code (2018) are followed, the recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view..
- 5.2 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer has commented as follows: "I note the legal comment and support the recommendation."

6. Climate Change & Nature Implications

- 6.1 Implementation of the proposal would impact on travel arrangements for pupils currently attending Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. This would have a negative environmental impact, as additional home to school transport would need to be provided to transport pupils to their nearest alternative school. Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is currently the closest school for the majority of pupils attending the schools, so it is likely that additional travel would be required for all pupils.
- 6.2 However, implementation of the proposal would mean that there would be a reduction in the number of schools run by the Council, with pupils being accommodated at other existing schools. This would result in a reduction in the Council's use of heating and electricity amongst other factors.

7. Data Protection

N/A

8. Comment from local member(s)

CIlr Aled Davies, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant and Llansilin:

Llansilin is a village on the Welsh/English, Powys/Shropshire border. The border is just across the field from the school and can be seen from the classroom window. Powys CC delivered services in Llansilin Parish would be negligible, if the school was to be close. This would be a clear indication the Cabinet has complete disregard of the language and culture of this Welsh village, which has played a major part in Welsh history.

I welcome the Impact Assessments that have been produced.

In this report the Ysgol Bro Cynllaith Options appraisal is limited, I would have wished to see a further option of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith linking with Ysgol Llanfyllin, an all through school, with the site in Llansilin being retained but managed by Ysgol Llanfyllin. There are natural linkages and pathways to Llanfyllin as all the children travel in that direction to receive their secondary education. Ysgol Llanfyllin also has the advantage of greater capacity and resources to support the two 'classrooms in countryside'.

I fully acknowledge that the classes within Ysgol Bro Cynllaith are not big enough and there would be educational advantages having larger class size of children of the same age. A strong link with Ysgol Llanfyllin will help overcome these challenges and provide the children with an excellent education.

The report produced for cabinet is a misleading and Cllr Roberts must take responsibility for this. There is little reference in the report about the unique position of Llansilin, the report is full of constant references to schools in Powys but little reference to the closest schools, and these closest schools are in Shropshire and Wrexham Borough Council.

In the options of appraisal it states that 'some pupils may be closer to schools in Shropshire should the council proceed with the closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith' However the truth is that **almost all pupils**, roughly 90%, are closer to Shropshire schools than they are to the closest Powys school, this is clearly misleading. The map within the report still shows a school in Llangedwyn however Powys CC sadly closed the school at the end of August. The map also fails to show the proximity of the Shropshire schools, clearly this has been done for effect.

Building condition and suitability score C and B, clear explanations of why the school was scored C and B has not been made. The school has recently had a new roof and drive resurfaced and it is important to understand how much of a maintenance backlog exists within the school. I disagree that the condition score is C

Projected numbers are contained within the report are low however 23 new houses have recently been completed and another 4 family homes are about to be built. There will be a small upward tick in the school numbers though I doubt it would be significant to take it up to the 80/90 pupils that attended the school at the beginning of the 2000s

The report also fails to identify the number of children leaving Llansilin catchment to receive their education in Welsh at other local schools, this failure of Powys CC to provide Welsh medium education in Llansilin has had a major impact on the school numbers.

At present one child comes from outside the catchment and 96% of the children attending from within Ysgol Bro Cynllaith catchment. If Ysgol Bro Cynllaith was to close, only three of the children would be closer to Powys schools all other children would be closer to Selattyn and Trefonen schools, both of which are in Shropshire.

Cost of transportation of children to other schools if Ysgol Bro Cynllaith was too close are not accurate. If the children chose not to attend Llanrhaeadr school the council would still have the duty to transport children to their nearest school, therefore 90% of the children would be eligible for free transport to schools in Shropshire, this cost would be borne by Powys CC. These children would also fall off the Powys school statistics and would have a negative impact on Welsh Government funding received through the RSG, Powys would have the costs but no income. It is a serious error that this is not fully explained in the report.

However, the financial implications pale into insignificance when compared to the impact on the culture and language of the local community. The children will attend their closest school, therefore 90% would go to Shropshire. They will then naturally follow their class cohort to the closest high school which would be in Oswestry. Welsh Government can kiss goodbye to the Llansilin's contribution towards the one million Welsh speakers. But maybe the Cabinet doesn't care.
Solution:

The Council's Schools Transformation is a difficult challenge of small rural schools that sit on the border. Small schools are additionally challenged when delivering the new Welsh Government curriculum. The opportunities when child cohorts are larger is clear, in and out of the class room and during and after the school day.

Ysgol Bro Cynllaith should become a part of Ysgol Llanfyllin's Teulu, it ticks so many boxes;

- Educationally
- Culture and Language
- Support and Governance
- Reduced running cost
- Wrap around provision
- Increased incentives to receive education in Powys
- Transport pathways and costs
- Maintain funding streams

If the Cabinet is uncertain about this solution, I would suggest that the Cabinet build in a review once Ysgol Llanfyllin's new build has been completed. Brilliant facilities and excellent education would be so attractive and support positive pupil pathways.

Llansilin is a part of Wales, don't turn your back on the village.

9. Integrated Impact Assessment (draft)

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 Llansilin due to loss of educational provision from the village, the associated additional travel requirements for pupils, and the potential impact on the village hall should the lease arrangement currently in place with the school be terminated. It is also acknowledged that whilst transport would be provided to enable pupils to attend alternative provision in Powys, the closest provision for most pupils would be located in England, and that pupils transferring to provision in England would no longer access the Welsh curriculum, nor would they have the opportunity to learn Welsh in school.'

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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from 31 August 2025 with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their closest school in Powys.**

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