

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**CABINET EXECUTIVE  
18 February 2025**

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

**REPORT TITLE:** Ysgol Bro Cynllaith – Consultation Report

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**REPORT FOR:** Decision

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**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 Further to the decision made by Cabinet on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2024, the Council has carried out consultation on the following proposal:
- To close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2025, with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative school in Powys.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet members of the responses received to the consultation and to determine whether or not to proceed with the statutory process to close the school.
- 1.3 The report is supported by the following appendices:
- Appendix A – Consultation Document
  - Appendix B – Consultation Report
  - Appendix C – Minutes of meetings with Governors and Staff
  - Appendix D – Updated Impact Assessments

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is a community primary school located in the village of Llansilin in the Llanfyllin catchment area in North Powys.
- 2.2 Current pupil numbers at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

	<b>R</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Ysgol Bro Cynllaith</b>	3	2	6	2	5	2	5	25

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<sup>1</sup> Teacher Centre, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024

- 2.3 In the Summer of 2022, the Council updated and relaunched its Strategy for Transforming Education<sup>2</sup>, and also published a work programme for Wave 2 (2022 – 2027) 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 The paper considered by Cabinet included a recommendation that a proposal paper is prepared in respect of the closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, for consideration by Cabinet in September 2024.
- 2.6 On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2024, Cabinet considered a proposal paper in respect of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, and approved the following recommendation:
- 'It is recommended that Cabinet approves commencing the statutory process on the following proposal:
- To close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025, with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative school in Powys.'
- 2.7 Consultation has subsequently been carried out, as agreed by Cabinet.

### **The Consultation Period**

- 2.8 Consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith commenced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2024 and ended on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2024.
- 2.9 The consultation document was available on the Council's website throughout the consultation period. The document was also distributed to stakeholders as required by the School Organisation Code (2018). The consultation document that was issued is attached as Appendix A.
- 2.10 Consultees were asked to respond to the consultation by either completing the online consultation form, filling in a paper copy of the form and returning it to the Transforming Education Team, or by writing to the Transforming Education Team.

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

- 2.11 During the consultation period, meetings were held with pupils, staff and governors of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. The minutes of these meetings are attached as Appendix C, and the issues raised in the meetings are included in the Consultation Report (Appendix B).

### **Consultation Responses**

- 2.12 A total of 81 written responses were received.
- 2.13 35 respondents completed the online response form which was available on the Council's website. In addition, 20 respondents completed paper versions of the response form.
- 2.14 26 other written responses were received, which included responses from Estyn.
- 2.15 Estyn's response to the consultation is provided on page 18 of the Consultation Report (Appendix B).

### **Consultation Findings**

- 2.16 The findings of the consultation are provided in full in the Consultation Report (Appendix B) and are summarised below.
- 2.17 The issues raised in the written responses to the consultation and those raised in the consultation meetings are listed in the Consultation Report (Appendix B), from page 21 onwards, along with the Council's response to those issues.
- 2.18 The issues raised relate to the following headings:
1. Comments about the school
    - 1.1 General positive comments about the school
    - 1.2 Ability to deliver the new Curriculum for Wales
    - 1.3 Comments about extra-curricular provision at the school
    - 1.4 Comments about pupil numbers / capacity
    - 1.5 Comments about the use of Welsh at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith
    - 1.6 Comments about support for ALN pupils
    - 1.7 Comments about the experiences of past pupils
    - 1.8 Comments about the quality of provision at the school
    - 1.9 Comments about the school being a small school
    - 1.10 Comments about the school buildings / grounds
    - 1.11 Comments about the school's location
    - 1.12 Everyone is friends at the school
    - 1.13 Links between the school and the community
    - 1.14 Reference to pupils that have transferred to the school from other schools
    - 1.15 The school is the closest school for almost all pupils

2. Impact on pupils
  - 2.1 Concern about access to extra-curricular provision
  - 2.2 Concern about the impact on pupils of having to move to a different school
  - 2.3 Concern about the impact on the quality of education for pupils
  - 2.4 Concern that pupils would be separated from their friends
  - 2.5 Concern that pupils would transfer to schools in Shropshire and would miss out on the Welsh curriculum
  - 2.6 Other comments about the impact on pupils
3. Impact on the community
  - 3.1 General concern about the impact on the community/village
  - 3.2 The school is the heart of the village/community
  - 3.3 Comments about the impact on the village hall
  - 3.4 Closure of the school would mean that people would not want to live in the area
  - 3.5 Comments about housing developments in the area
  - 3.6 Comments about the impact of previous school closures on communities
  - 3.7 Comments about the impact on local businesses
  - 3.8 Queries about what would happen to the school building should the school close
4. Impact on staff
5. Impact on parents / families
6. Comments about early years provision
7. Comments about small / rural schools
  - 7.1 Positive comments about small/rural schools
  - 7.2 Parents should be able to choose a small/rural school
  - 7.3 Other comments about small/rural schools
8. Comments about other schools
  - 8.1 Comments about Ysgol Llanrhaeadr
  - 8.2 Comments about other schools
9. Travel implications
  - 9.1 The proposal would lead to additional travel
  - 9.2 Concern about the impact on the environment
  - 9.3 Concern about the impact on pupils' access to after school activities
  - 9.4 Concern about pupil safety on home to school transport
  - 9.5 Comments about additional transport costs

- 9.6 Queries about the Council's Home to School Transport Policy
- 9.7 Other comments about travel implications
- 10. Financial implications
  - 10.1 Comments suggesting the only reason for the proposal is to save money
  - 10.2 Other comments
- 11. Criticism of Powys County Council
  - 11.1 Criticism of the Council's approach to small / rural schools / communities
  - 11.2 Criticism of the Council's treatment of the school
  - 11.3 Other criticisms of Powys County Council
- 12. Comments about the Consultation Documentation
- 13. Comments about impact on Protected Characteristic Groups
- 14. Comments about impact on the Welsh language
  - 14.1 Comments about the area's cultural significance
  - 14.2 Concern that the proposal would have a negative impact on the Welsh language
  - 14.3 Suggested improvements which would have a positive impact on Welsh
  - 14.4 The proposal would not have a negative impact on the Welsh language
  - 14.5 Other comments about impact on the Welsh Language
- 15. Alternative options
  - 15.1 Retain the status quo
  - 15.2 Develop the provision at the school
  - 15.3 Shared leadership
  - 15.4 Federation / merger with another school
  - 15.5 'Classroom in the countryside'
  - 15.6 Develop Welsh-medium provision
  - 15.7 Other alternative options

### **3. Advice**

- 3.1 Based on the findings of the consultation, and further assessment of the options in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code in terms of the Presumption Against Closure of Rural Schools, the advice of officers is that the Council should proceed with the proposal to close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith by publishing a Statutory Notice.
- 3.2 The reasons for the proposal 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 larger schools, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum
  - Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
  - 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
- 3.3 If approved by Cabinet, it is anticipated that the Statutory Notice would be published in February / March 2025, and that a further report, summarising any objections received, would be considered by Cabinet in April / May 2025.
- 3.4 The target date to implement the closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2025.

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

- 4.1 The amount of funding provided to individual 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 in addition to 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 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is currently projecting a carry forward surplus of £23.4k at the end of financial year 2024-25 which is estimated to reduce to £14.3k by 31 March 2026.
- 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 budget position by September 2025 is estimated to be as follows:

	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>
<b>In year Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	(3,246)	(3,800)
<b>Bfwd Balance</b>	26,732	23,486
<b>Cfwd Balance</b>	23,486	19,686

- 4.5 The most recent condition survey of the school carried out in July 2024 identified estimated backlog costs of £127,456 for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. If the proposal is implemented this cost would be avoided.
- 4.6 Whilst the Council's proposal is to close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith and for pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys, many consultees raised the issue that families may choose to attend out of county schools, given that the village is so close to the Shropshire border, and it is therefore prudent to estimate the financial impact of this. If all current pupils transferred to out of county schools there would be a saving of approximately £202k in revenue funding (excluding Statutory testing and Rates element). However, this would be offset against a loss in the Revenue Support Grant of approximately £105k. Combined with the small catering saving this would leave an estimated net saving to the Council of **£99k**. There would be no additional transport costs to consider, and there would be an estimated nominal reduction in costs of approximately £7.5k, based on a reduction of mileage as vehicles currently provide a connecting service.
- 4.7 Implementation of the proposal would require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from Education, Finance, HR, Catering, Transport, Property, Legal and ICT. These service areas will be kept informed of the development of the proposal throughout the statutory process.
- 4.8 Director of Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer) comments as follows: "I note the resource implications set out above. Education is one of the highest priorities for the Council and the Transforming Education Strategy is a fundamental part of the Sustainable Powys work that will deliver a sustainable council for the future. The annual revenue savings realised, along with the avoidance of the future maintenance and capital investment costs will contribute towards reducing the future financial pressures for the Council."

## **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 Legal: 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 recommendations."

## **6. Climate Change & Nature Implications**

- 6.1 Implementation of the proposal would impact on travel arrangements for pupils currently attending Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. 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.
- 6.2 In addition, pupils for whom Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is currently the closest school who are currently able to walk to school would no longer be able to do so.

## **7. Data Protection**

N/A

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

To follow.

## **9. Impact Assessment**

- 9.1 An initial impact assessment was considered by Cabinet on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2024.
- 9.2 In addition, a range of draft impact assessments were produced as part of the consultation documentation. These included an Integrated Impact Assessment, an Equalities Impact Assessment, and a Community Impact Assessment.
- 9.3 These draft impact assessments have been updated to reflect issues raised during the consultation period, and are attached in Appendix D.
- 9.4 The Overall Summary from 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.'*

**10. Recommendation**

- 10.1 To receive the Consultation Report in respect of the proposal to close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith
- 10.2 To approve the publication of a statutory notice proposing closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2025, with Powys-based pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative school in Powys.

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