

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 17th February 2015

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Eryl Williams, Lead Member for Education

Report Author: Head of Customers and Education Support

Title: Modernising Education Programme – Ruthin Primary Area – Ysgol Llanbedr

1. What is the report about?

This report is to brief Cabinet about the recent decision of the Minister for Education and Skills regarding the future of Ysgol Llanbedr.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

This report provides information for Members regarding the Minister's decision in respect of Ysgol Llanbedr.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 Cabinet notes the contents of the Ministerial letter attached as Appendix 1.

3.2. Cabinet agrees for officers to commence consultation with the Church in Wales on the proposal to close Ysgol Llanbedr and report back to Members.

4. Decision of the Minister for Education and Skills

4.1 The Cabinet in March 2014 approved a proposal to close Ysgol Llanbedr as of the 31st August 2014. This decision was referred to the Minister for Education and Skills by the Diocese of St Asaph in April 2014 and the Minister rejected the proposal in January 2015.

4.2 In noting the merits of the proposal the Minister concluded that there are a number of arguments in favour of his approving the proposal, and he is generally satisfied that it would:

- maintain the standard of education provision and ensure the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum
- allow pupils who attend Ysgol Llanbedr access to education at an alternative English medium Church in Wales school which is within a reasonable distance and which is more sustainable for the future.
- provide a choice of other schools should parents prefer a smaller school
- deliver education more equitably and more cost effectively
- make savings that will be retained in the education budget
- reduce surplus places by 54 places

- 4.3 However the Minister in his later dated 27th January stated that he “feels he has no alternative other than to reject this proposal, notwithstanding the educational merits of the proposal. The Minister has concluded that the consultation was flawed and the flaws were significant.” The extent of these flaws in his view meant that he could not support the proposal based on the formal consultation document.
- 4.4 At the end of the letter the Minister comments that he “is concerned about the future of Ysgol Llanbedr in the light of the relatively low number of children on roll, and the temporary nature of current leadership. He expects the local authority to consider the future of the school carefully and if it decides that it should be retained, believes that it should be provided with support. If the local authority decides, on the other hand, that other arrangements would be in the educational interests of all pupils in the area, the Minister expects it to carefully comply with the mandatory requirements of the School Organisation Code in respect of any changes it proposes.”
- 4.5 To address these concerns of the Minister, Officers from Denbighshire will commence consultation with the Church in Wales Diocese to consider the future of the school and is minded to recommend re-commencing the formal consultation process to enable the school to be closed as of 31st August 2016. Following the outcome of these discussions with the Diocese a paper will be presented for consideration by Cabinet in April / May.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The proposal will support the corporate priority of “improving performance in education and the quality of our school buildings”.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 At this stage there are no significant additional costs arising from this report. At this stage the costs are officer time in drafting any proposals emerging and attending meetings.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

At this stage no decision has been made therefore an EqIA template has not been completed.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

An initial briefing has been scheduled with officers from the St Asaph Diocese and with the Chair of Governors and Headteacher of Ysgol Llanbedr. Full consultation will take place regarding the proposal in accordance with the Welsh Government’s School Organisation Code.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 Not applicable at this stage.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 There are a number of risks currently being managed at a programme level by the Modernising Education Programme Board. All individual projects will include risk management procedures.

11. Power to make the Decision

The proposals are in accordance with the Modernising Education Policy Framework.

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides the legislative requirement for local authorities to review school proposals and to progress proposals to reconfigure school provision.