

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 2nd June 2015

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

Report Author: Head of Customers and Education Support

Title: Ysgol Llanfair and Ysgol Pentrecelyn

1. What is the report about?

The report is to inform Cabinet Members of the findings of the formal consultation for the future of Ysgol Llanfair and Ysgol Pentrecelyn and to seek support to publish the required statutory proposals for the closure of both schools and create new area school.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

A decision is required by Cabinet to give approval to proceed to the next stage to create a new school to serve the existing schools of Ysgol Llanfair and Ysgol Pentrecelyn.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- (i) To note the findings of the formal consultation for the closure of Ysgol Llanfair and Ysgol Pentrecelyn and the opening of a new area school on the two existing sites;
- (ii) To approve the publication of a statutory notice for Denbighshire County Council to close Ysgol Llanfair DC and Ysgol Pentrecelyn on the 31st August 2016; and the Church in Wales to establish a new Voluntary Controlled Area School on the existing sites from the 1st September 2016.
- (iii) To note the option for parents to apply to send their children to Ysgol Pen Barras as an alternative school should they wish their children to remain within a Category 1 school.

4. Report details.

- 4.1 Denbighshire County Council in partnership with the Church in Wales St Asaph Diocese has undertaken formal consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Llanfair and Ysgol Pentrecelyn as of 31st August 2016 and to establish a new area school based on the existing sites as of the 1st of September 2016. The formal consultation started on the 3rd of February 2015 and came to an end on the 16nd of March 2015. Currently Ysgol Llanfair has 94 Full time pupils and Ysgol Pentrecelyn has 35 Full time pupils (see Appendix 1 for distribution of pupils). The consultation included a range of meetings for stakeholders and

a questionnaire to gain the views of both children and parents. We received 42 letters and emails, 96 online response forms, 63 postal response forms and 4 children's response forms. A summary of all views received is included within the Formal Consultation Report (see Appendix 2).

Formal Consultations Findings

4.2 Of the 205 responses 69 of the responses were from parents. Of this 69, 34 were parents of pupils at Ysgol Llanfair and 35 were parents of pupils at Ysgol Pentecelyn. The majority of respondents from Ysgol Llanfair supported the proposal whilst the majority of respondents from Ysgol Pentecelyn opposed the proposal. The following views were expressed from respondents:

Issue	Concern	Response
The language of new school	Respondents from both schools wanted to retain their individual language category identifying the negative impact of change	Having considered all the responses to the consultation the Council believes that Category 2 will allow a high number of pupils to continue to be educated through the medium of Welsh
Guarantee of Category 2 Delivery	How can the current model of Category 2 delivery at Ysgol Llanfair be guaranteed? How can the Welsh ethos remain as strong in the new area school?	The Council will work with the Governing Body to safeguard the existing model. The status of the school will also be monitored on an annual basis by the Head of Education Services
Maintain Ethos of School	How will the local authority and governing body of the new school ensure that the Welsh language and culture will remain at the centre of the school?	The Council will work with the Governing Body to ensure the current strong ethos of both schools is retained. The authority will work with the new Governing Body to ensure that the relevant policies and procedures are adopted including the Instrument of Government to safeguard this position.
Religious Designation	Should the new school be a Church in Wales school? Support for this from those associated with Ysgol Llanfair, others want to know what it means, how is it different?	Overall there has been broad support for the school to be designated as a Church in Wales school. The school will have additional support from the Diocese.

In respect of positive comments regarding the proposals the majority of people agreed that a new Area school to bring the 2 schools together was the right option for the future sustainability of education provision in this rural area and that the facilities at both schools are no longer suitable for the modern curriculum.

Impact of Language on Proposal

- 4.3 In considering responses submitted the main area of contention in relation to the proposal was the categorisation of the new school as a Category 2 school. The majority of respondents from Ysgol Llanfair supported the designation of the new school as a Category 2 (Dual Stream School) whilst the majority of respondents from Ysgol Pentrecelyn requested that the designation of the school should be reviewed with a Category 1 (Welsh Medium) school as a preference.
- 4.4 The outcomes for pupils educated within the Welsh Stream of either a Category 1 or Category 2 should be the same, namely that regardless of home language they would be able to transfer easily to Welsh medium secondary provision and by the end of junior stage will have reached a standard in English equivalent to that reached by pupils in predominately English Medium schools. (See Appendix 3 for further information)The concern from the majority of respondents who opposed the proposal was that there would be insufficient safeguards in place to ensure that the ethos of the new school would uphold the commitment to delivering Welsh Medium provision and that in time standards would be eroded. As a consequence many expressed a preference to attend a Category 1 school rather than send their children to the new area school.
- 4.5 Having reviewed the volume of responses the Council is still of the view that designating the new school as a Category 2 school would remain the best option for maintaining and potentially growing the number of pupils who are assessed through the medium of Welsh. If the school was designated as a Category 1 school there is a risk that pupils from Ysgol Llanfair may transfer to English medium education and an overall reduction in the numbers of pupils assessed through the medium of Welsh would occur. Therefore on balance the Council wishes to proceed along the initial proposal.
- 4.6 The Council has a clear commitment within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan for more seven-year-old children to be taught through the medium of Welsh. To achieve this, the Council has invested significantly to increase the capacity for Welsh Medium Education, with since 2010, £7.1m worth of investment in the primary sector to increase capacity. Further investment has also been approved in the Ruthin area. At the ground level work has been progressed to increase access to Ti a Fi provision with new groups being established recently in Bodelwyddan and Ruthin.
- 4.7 The Council will shortly consider the findings of the report which it commissioned for “a detailed review of the use of the Welsh language as a result of the reduction seen in the number and proportion of people 3 years old

and over who can speak Welsh in the county over the last decade, a reduction of 1.8% since the 2001 Census” and consider how it intends to respond to these findings. The work undertaken to date has supported growth in pupils accessing Welsh medium education since the last census date and the Council is of the view that the proposal will help sustain this growth.

- 4.8 The choice of school following a school organisation proposal is always a matter of choice for individual parents. If parents from Ysgol Pentrecelyn wished to send their children to Ysgol Penbarras, Ruthin (as the nearest alternative Category 1 school) then all applications would be considered within the admission arrangements subject to availability of places etc. In terms of transportation the current policy states that “the Authority will provide discretionary transport to the nearest school providing Welsh medium education even if it is not their nearest qualifying school. For this purpose, it would be a school which is categorised as 1 or 2 within the Welsh Government guidelines on Welsh Medium Provision.”
- 4.9 In terms of safeguards for the status of the school, should the proposal be implemented, the Council will work closely with the Governing Body to maintain the strong ethos currently within both schools. The Head of Education will monitor all schools on an annual basis via the School Standards Monitoring Group and the Welsh in Education Strategic Group in addition to her role as Statutory Director for Education to ensure compliance with their relevant language category. The Head of Education would provide direct support or intervention should concerns be raised. Whilst the policies regarding recruitment and management of the school will be an issue for the Governing Body, the Council would expect that the policies would reflect the requirements of a school to deliver outcomes through the medium of Welsh and recommend that such appointments complied with Welsh essential skills and intervene where this didn't occur. The Governing Bodies Instrument of Government would also reflect the status of Welsh at the new school. Should the new school or the Diocese propose an amendment to its language category the Council would be a statutory consultee, and should a proposal emerge which would not deliver the outcomes that are expected from a Category 1 and 2 School then the Council would seek to object to the proposal.
- 4.10 The Governing Body will be established predominately of school staff, parents and members of the community and it would be the responsibility of these community members to maintain the strong Welsh ethos which has existed in both local schools for many years. The latest data suggests based on the current combined cohort of pupils, 81% of these pupils would be educated through the medium of Welsh at the new school. This compares to 73% of pupils who currently attend Ysgol Llanfair who are educated in the Welsh Stream.

The Way Forward

- 4.11 Following the conclusion of the consultation period it is recommended that the Council proceeds to publish a statutory notice based upon the current

proposal. The Statutory Notice will be required to be published for 28 days. During this 28 day period anyone wishing to make objections to the proposal has the opportunity to do so. To be considered as statutory objections, they must be made in writing or by e-mail, and sent to the proposer within 28 days of the date on which the proposal was published. It is intended that subject to approval this proposal will be published on the 18th June 2015 with the objection period ending on the 15th July 2015.

- 4.12 Following this date the Council will need to publish an objections report and the Cabinet will be asked to utilise its powers under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to consider any objections submitted and to determine whether to implement the proposal.

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

- 5.1 The proposal supports the priority of “Improving performance in education and the quality of our school buildings” and has been highlighted as a workstream as follows:
“We will continue to review school provision across the County to ensure that we provide the right number of school places, of the right type, in the right location.

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

- 6.1 There will be minimum costs to the Council via the publication of the statutory notices. This will be mainly postage and printing costs associated with the actual publication. The requirement for such notices to be published in local newspapers has now been removed reducing such costs.
- 6.2 Should the recommendation be approved it has been identified that the proposed savings would outweigh the initial costs whilst the school operated on two sites. In order to progress to phase two, there will also be a need to undertake feasibility work on the potential sites and then the preferred site. This work will be undertaken by staff from Finance and Assets. The costs for this work will be met from the existing allocation for the Corporate Plan as approved by Council in February 2015.

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.

- 7.1 Should the proposal be implemented, initially there would be minimal change for staff and pupils as the new Area School will be operating from the 2 existing sites. There would be a new headteacher and a new leadership structure for phase 1 and work will immediately begin on the staffing structure for the new build when both sites are consolidated onto one. Please see the full Equality Impact Assessment in Appendix 4 for further details.

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

8.1 Full consultation has been undertaken with all stakeholders and the findings from the Formal Consultation period are summarised in the main body of the report. The Governing Body of Ysgol Llanfair have responded positively to the consultation providing their support for the proposal to move forward. In particular they have confirmed that “the Governing Body and the community in Llanfair and Pwllglas are fully committed to protecting and promoting the Welsh language and believe that the most effective means of doing so is by maximising the number of children who are fluent in Welsh by the end of KS2. This is what Ysgol Llanfair has successfully achieved over many years.”

8.2 The Governing Body of Ysgol Pentrecelyn have expressed their (full response is within Appendix 2) view that they “are not against the formation of a new school as it will no doubt improve the educational provision for all children within the area” they “object to Denbighshire County Councils proposal for a Category 2 Church in Wales school on 2 counts, namely language category and faith provision”. In their response they have also suggested that the following options should be considered:-

- Federating with the other rural category 1 schools – Ysgol Carreg Emlyn and Gwyddelwern with 1 managing head
- Federating with Ysgol Penbarras although this would not satisfy the County’s concerns over the maintenance backlog of our building and would parents naturally gravitate to one of the new schools anyway?
- The new area school being a category 1 community or voluntary controlled school and pupils seeking English medium (and faith based) education transferring to Ysgol Borthyn or Ysgol Llanbedr or Ysgol Stryd Y Rhos
- Two schools, one site, an executive head managing the 2 schools,
- One school, 2 defined and separate streams, English and Welsh, therefore a clear choice from the start for parents, the immersion would still be there for those pupils from non-Welsh speaking families in the Welsh stream.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 The costs around the statutory process are not significant and will be contained within existing resources. The full cost and savings implications of the project, including the impact on school transport, will become clearer as it progresses and clear recommendations regarding these will be made at that time.

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

There is a strong possibility that the proposal could result in adverse publicity for the Council and in adverse public comments.

To minimise this risk the Council will seek to ensure clear communication with all stakeholders.

11. Power to make the Decision

School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Act 2013
Modernising Education Policy Framework (approved by Cabinet January 2009)