

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 25th June 2013

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Eryl Williams

Report Author: Head of Customers and Education Support

Title: Ruthin Area Primary Review

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report seeks to brief Cabinet Members on the findings from the recent review of primary school provision in the Ruthin area and proposes recommendations to be considered by Cabinet for changes to the current provision.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 A decision is required on whether to proceed to formal consultation for a number of proposals and to note further recommendations to improve education provision in the area.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- (i) To note the findings of the consultation
- (ii) To approve formal consultation for proposals to close Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog on the 31st August 2014, merging the two schools as a new area school to be opened on the 1st September 2014 on the existing sites.
- (iii) To approve formal consultation for proposals to close Ysgol Llanbedr on the 31st August 2014 with existing pupils transferring to Ysgol Borthyn, subject to parental preference.
- (iv) To recommend to the Governing Bodies of Ysgol Pentrecelyn and Ysgol Llanfair DC that they form a federation to be in place no later than 1st September 2014.
- (v) To note the findings of the initial feasibility study to identify potential sites for the provision of primary schools in the Ruthin area and recommend that further detailed feasibility works be undertaken prior to the confirmation of any formal recommendations for Rhos Street School, Ysgol Borthyn, Ysgol Penbarras and Ysgol Rhewl.

4. Report details.

- 4.1 The Council has undertaken informal consultation on the future of primary provision in the Ruthin area. Extensive consultation has taken place with the 11 schools in the review, including meetings with parents, staff and governors. Parents were encouraged to complete questionnaires on a number of issues relating to provision. The Council was clear at the start of the review that a number of issues needed to be addressed. These included the reliance on mobile accommodation, poor condition of school sites and above average surplus places in the area.

Current School capacity and pupil number (PLASC January 2013)

School Name	Capacity (Full-time pupils)	Number on roll (Full-time pupils)	Surplus Places	% Surplus Places
Borthyn	142	111	31	21.8%
Bro Fammau – Llanferres & Llanarmon	135	92	43	31.8%
Clocaenog	36	36	0	0%
Cyffylliog	45	19	26	57.8%
Gellifor	91	87	4	4.4%
Llanbedr	77	21	56	72.73%
Llanfair	113	90	23	20.35%
Pentrecelyn	56	31	25	44.6%
Pen Barras	252	223	29	11.5%
Rhewl	82	55	27	32.9%
Rhos Street	189	165	24	12.7%
Total	1,218	930	288	23.6%

Informal Consultation Findings

- 4.2 In total 195 questionnaire responses were received, in addition to 63 letters and emails from interested parties. Four proposals from individual schools, governing bodies and affiliated groups were also received. In respect of the findings of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), the most influential factor was the quality of education. The second factor was distance from home and then grouped closely together, Welsh Medium Education, size of school, another

child already at the school, ease of access / transport to school and the quality of school buildings.

- 4.3 The main factors that would influence change included a school within walking distance of their home (21.97%), whilst the impact upon work commitments (10.6%) was also cited, should they be required to travel a further distance than they currently do. Overall, a journey time of less than 20 minutes each way was considered acceptable for the majority (91.5%) of parents.

The Way Forward

- 4.4 The Council wishes to propose a number of recommendations to enable a more long term sustainable provision in the Ruthin area. The extent and rate of change will depend on financial resources. The proposals that have emerged have been grouped together as appropriate, dependent upon their impact on other schools within the area.

Proposal 1 – Creation of new Area School to serve the communities of Clocaenog and Cyffylliog (see appendix 2)

- 4.6 The review process identified a strong desire to retain education provision in the rural areas to the West of Ruthin. At present 55 full time pupils attend the two schools, with Ysgol Clocaenog experiencing a high demand at present, whilst numbers have dropped in recent years at Ysgol Cyffylliog. As neither of the sites is suitable for extending, it is recommended that Denbighshire creates a new area school to serve these communities. In the initial stage, the area school will be based on the existing sites with Reception to Year 2 (Foundation Phase) pupils attending the Cyffylliog site and Years 3 to 6 (Key Stage 2) pupils attending the Clocaenog site.
- 4.7 This should be considered as a two phased approach with a longer term commitment to create a single site school which could enable both existing sites to close and a new facility being opened, potentially linked to community facilities. It is suggested that this first phase of change should occur for the start of September 2014.

Proposal 2 – Closure of Ysgol Llanbedr with the transfer of pupils to Ysgol Borthyn, Ruthin subject to parental preference (see Appendix 3)

- 4.8 The review process noted the recent decline in pupil numbers at Ysgol Llanbedr and the concerns of the Governing Body and others that this issue should not be considered in isolation when any decision was made on the future of the school. However in considering provision within the town of Ruthin and its close environment, there appears to be significant over provision of English medium places. Ysgol Llanbedr, (as is Ysgol Borthyn) is an English Medium Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School. At present, analysis of parental demand has identified only 20 pupils within the natural catchment area for the school opting for English medium education. At present within close proximity there would be an alternative English medium church school at Ysgol Borthyn (2.8 miles) and non –faith provision at Ysgol

Gellifor (2.3 miles) and Rhos Street (1.9 miles). Therefore in view of the need to reduce the overall supply for such provision, it is recommended that consultation should commence regarding the recommendation that Ysgol Llanbedr should close at the end of the 2013/2014 academic year.

Proposal 3 – Ruthin Town Area (see Appendix 4)

- 4.9 The review noted strong support for the continued provision from all three town schools, whilst acknowledging the long term difficulties associated with the Rhos Street / Ysgol Penbarras site. This shared site has significant access problems from the main A494 Trunk Road with no suitable drop off areas for pupils, leading to congestion and safety issues. This site also relies heavily on mobile provision, particularly for Ysgol Penbarras. The findings of the review and an assessment of the suitability of the site suggests that as an immediate priority, the Council should identify the suitability for potentially building a new school campus at the Glasdir site to the North of the Town. Initial feasibility has suggested that the land currently allocated in the Local Development Plan for a new school may be able to accommodate the needs of both Rhos Street and Ysgol Penbarras. This option needs to be considered in greater detail before any decisions are made.
- 4.10 Linked to any proposal for the Glasdir site is the future for both Ysgol Borthyn and Ysgol Rhewl. The need to ensure diversity of choice through continued faith provision (particularly should the recommendation to close Ysgol Llanbedr be progressed) has led to the recommendation that Ysgol Borthyn should be retained.
- 4.11 The study of the Ysgol Rhewl site identified scope to expand the current provision. However in considering this, the state of the current buildings at the site need to be considered and the need for investment in these buildings to bring them up to a suitable standard for long term provision. Overall, it may be difficult to justify significant investment in the Ysgol Rhewl site should new provision be built on the Glasdir site. Therefore the findings of the review suggest that the future of the school should be considered in conjunction with the Glasdir development. This would include the option for the closure of Ysgol Rhewl upon completion of the works for the new school(s). Any proposal that may arise to close Ysgol Rhewl, would require formal consultation and the publication of a statutory notice.
- 4.12 In respect of formal proposals, should either or both Rhos Street and Ysgol Penbarras move from their existing site to the Glasdir site, if the school does not change significantly in size, there would be no need for statutory proposals to be published as the school would transfer sites by less than a mile.

Proposal 4 – Proposed Federation of Ysgol Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd and Ysgol Pentrecelyn (see Appendix 5)

- 4.13 The consultation process identified strong support for the retention of educational provision in the communities around Llanfair DC and Pentrecelyn. From Ysgol Llanfair DC, a clear case for investment in the facilities was

identified and it was accepted by many that the existing school was not fit for purpose. At Ysgol Pentrecelyn, the importance of the school within the community was also emphasised alongside the difference between providing Welsh medium and dual stream provision. In considering the needs of the wider area and the need for significant investment, a phased approach is suggested.

- 4.14 The first phase would involve retaining both schools and recommending that both Governing Bodies enter into discussions to form a federation. Denbighshire County Council would seek for an agreement in principle to progress this, to be in place by January 2014 with a view to the new federation commencing in September 2014. The long term plans that would form part of Band B proposals (scheduled for 2019 onwards) for 21st Century Schools, would see progression towards a new area school to serve the communities of Pentrecelyn and Llanfair DC. Any move towards a new area school would require formal consultation and this would be progressed at the appropriate time.

Proposal 5 – Support for Federation of Ysgol Bryn Clwyd and Ysgol Gellifor (see Appendix 5)

- 4.15 During the informal consultation stage, it was suggested that Ysgol Bryn Clwyd should be included within the Ruthin review, despite its close geographical proximity to Denbigh. This was because of the implications for any recommendation for change at Ysgol Gellifor as the schools have combined leadership and management arrangements following their federation in 2011.
- 4.16 Ysgol Gellifor is a popular school serving the community of Gellifor and surrounding areas. The school draws in a number of pupils from outside of its natural area and is currently at capacity. There is limited scope to extend the school.
- 4.17 In terms of the federation arrangements, there is a clear difference between pupil numbers at both sites: Ysgol Gellifor has a small number of surplus places (4%) whereas Ysgol Bryn Clwyd has a significant number of surplus places (67.6%). Clearly this has implications for the long term sustainability of the federation arrangements.
- 4.18 One of the matters questioned during the informal consultation stage was the language categories of both schools. Currently both schools are identified as Category 5, which means that only the minimum amount of Welsh has to be taught in the schools. Moving along, the Welsh language continuum would see the amount of Welsh taught in the schools increase as a response to the views of stakeholders.
- 4.19 The Governors have sought assurances regarding the future of Ysgol Bryn Clwyd as a consequence of this review and a desire that the long term future of the school be linked to any proposals emerging from the Ruthin review.

The Council acknowledges this to prevent any further uncertainty regarding the federation.

- 4.20 Therefore the Council recommends to the Governing Body that the status quo should remain, subject to agreement to explore the future language category of Ysgol Bryn Clwyd. The balance of pupils at both schools will need to be addressed through the admissions arrangements.

Proposal 6 – Retention of Ysgol Bro Famau (see Appendix 5)

- 4.21 The review has identified that the school serves predominately its local area and that both sites at Llanferres and Llanarmon are generally in good condition. However it is noted that at present there are significant surplus places at the school.
- 4.22 On balance, it is recommended that the status quo should remain. In the short term, the Authority will work with the Governing Body to review its current use of space.

Way forward

- 4.23 It is recommended that any formal consultation should commence in September 2013. This will allow the discussions to commence at the start of the school term with consultation taking place for at least six weeks. This consultation process will give parents, pupils, governors and staff the opportunity to comment upon the proposals before a decision is made by Cabinet whether to proceed and formally publish proposals for change. It is important to note that the only proposals that will require formal consultation at this stage will be 1 and 2.
- 4.24 The feasibility works for proposal 3 will commence over the summer months, with a view to a preferred option being presented to Cabinet in the late autumn. This work will lead to clarification regarding the variety of options for securing the necessary improvements for the town. This information will enable Cabinet to consider the business case for investment.
- 4.25 For the remaining proposals 4 – 6, the Head of Education and the Head of Customers and Education Support, subject to approval, will commence discussions with the respective Governing Bodies to secure the necessary agreements to undertake the changes highlighted. Should approval not occur then alternative proposals may be presented to Cabinet in the spring of 2014.

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 The main cost for this stage of proposals will be around printing and posting and the costs associated with arranging public meetings. The feasibility work will be funded from the existing capital resources in Education.

6.2 Should the proposals proceed and become implemented, it is anticipated that there will be a need for HR support for staff that will be impacted upon by the proposed changes.

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 The initial EqIA undertaken suggests that at this stage – approval to commence consultation - that there is not a need to undertake a full assessment on this decision.

7.2 Prior to proceeding towards seeking permission to implement the proposal (i.e. publishing any statutory proposal) full Equality Impact Assessment's will be undertaken.

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 Informal Consultation period are attached as Appendix 1.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 There are only minor costs associated with the review process and these will be met from within existing budgets. The proposals emerging from the reviews will have significant financial implications.

9.2 As the Ruthin area review is not part of the Council's 21st Century Schools Band A proposals, the Council will have to fund 100% of the capital costs associated with any proposals. It is anticipated that proposals will be considered for funding through the allocation provided within the Corporate Plan and from savings generated from the review.

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

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

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

11. Power to make the Decision

- 11.1 S28 and 29 School Standards and Framework Act 1998.
School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Act 2013
Modernising Education Policy Framework (approved by Cabinet January 2009)