

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013

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

**Report Author:** Head of Customers and Education Support

**Title:** Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog

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**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 Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog 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 Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

The recommendation is:-

- i) To note the findings of the formal consultation for the closure of Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog and the opening of a new area school on the two existing sites;
- ii) To approve the publication of a statutory notice for the closure of Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014 and to open a new area school on the existing sites on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014.
- iii) To confirm the commitment to work towards delivering a new area school on one site subject to the availability of capital funding;

**4. Background to the Proposal**

- 4.1 In November 2012, Denbighshire County Council's Cabinet approved the commencement of the review of 11 primary schools in the Ruthin area. The informal consultation was held during February and March 2013. The approach to this informal review was to consider all options for the future of education in the area and to present a range of proposals which would allow investment to be made to improve educational facilities whilst also reducing the overall level of surplus places in the area.

4.2 On the 25<sup>th</sup> June 2013, Cabinet approved six proposals, see Appendix 1 for details. This report relates to one of the proposals.

## **5. Report details – Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog**

5.1 Denbighshire County Council has undertaken formal consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Clocaenog and Ysgol Cyffylliog as of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014 and to establish a new area school based on the existing sites as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2014. The formal consultation started on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2013 and came to an end on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2013. The consultation included a range of meetings for stakeholders and a questionnaire to gain the views of both children and parents. We received 23 letters and emails, 12 online response forms and 25 postal response forms.

### Formal Consultations Findings

5.2 Of the 60 responses received 37 had a connection with Ysgol Clocaenog and 20 had a connection with Ysgol Cyffylliog (See Appendix 2). Three respondees didn't state a connection. There were 36 positive responses supporting the proposal and 22 responses against the proposal. The following views were expressed from respondents:

- The language of new school – respondents from both schools wanted to retain their individual language category identifying the negative impact of change.
- Parents of both schools had concerns regarding transporting pupils citing the suitability of the roads, suitability of transport used, logistical arrangements and duration of the journeys.
- Education provision was a concern for respondents citing differences in standards between both schools and a possible increase in class sizes. There was support for reducing the taught age range in each class.
- Phase 1 – One school on two sites (current proposal) was viewed negatively by respondents who identified splitting up siblings and the proposed classroom configuration, as concerns. A number of respondents indicated that it would be tolerated as a first step towards a new school in the short term.
- Phase 2 – One purpose built area school had significant support although respondents queried its location, proposed size and admission number, availability of funding and the impact of competing projects on it being delivered.
- The timescale of the project was a significant concern for respondents. There were concerns that a prolonged dual site arrangement would damage the future intake of the school and lose the support of parents. Respondents stressed the importance of communicating the timescale regarding the new build to parents.

5.3 Of those who answered the question as to whether they would send their child to the new dual site school:

- 74% responded that they would;
- 26% stated they wouldn't.

- 5.4 A children's version of the consultation document (Appendix D) was produced and distributed to the pupils of both schools. The main response from children was as a result of consultation meetings which were arranged with both school councils. The analysis of their responses identified that the majority of pupils consulted thought the proposal was a good idea with stronger support from pupils in Ysgol Clocaenog. The pupils of both schools identified the advantage of joining both schools as an opportunity for more friends although similar concerns were expressed regarding siblings being on different sites, change of teachers and additional travel time.

### The Way Forward

- 5.5 Respondents have clearly demonstrated that there is support for an area school to serve the rural area to the west of Ruthin. The support is significantly stronger for phase two rather than phase one with positive respondents indicating that a dual site arrangement is supported as a 'means to an end' rather than a desired long term solution.
- 5.6 Therefore 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 initial view, that both schools by themselves remaining in isolation will not address the issues facing both schools, still holds strong.
- 5.7 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 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014 with the objection period ending on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014.
- 5.8 Following this date the Council will need to publish an objections report and the Cabinet will be asked to utilise its new powers under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to consider any objections submitted and to determine whether to implement the proposal.

### Capital Implications

- 5.9 The consultation document noted the long term commitment from Denbighshire to seek to invest in a new school site to replace the existing Clocaenog and Cyffylliog sites. To enable any funding to be accessed there will be a requirement to undertake further site analysis to confirm the suitability of the identified sites in the Clocaenog area and then to progress a business case to secure the necessary funding based on the findings of a feasibility study.
- 5.10 As part of the Council's Corporate Plan approximately £23m was agreed in principle to implement the findings of area reviews and other priorities. It is anticipated that the majority of this funding will be available for investment in

schools, subject to continued support from all elected members, predominately from 2016/17 onwards. For Members to agree any capital allocation there will be a need for a clear business case demonstrating why investment should be made and the likely long term revenue and capital implications of proceeding with each project. Appendix 3 illustrates the funding commitments for 21st Century Schools Band A projects together with an illustration of the range of projects which could be funded from this £23m allocation. At this stage these costs are indicative and would be developed further to prior to the approval of any business cases.

- 5.11 The decision to progress the proposal and proceed to the publication of statutory notices does not necessary commit the Council at this stage to funding the second phase. The overall plan for the allocation of the £23m will be the subject of further debate upon the completion of relevant business cases.

## **6. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

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.

## **7. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 Should the recommendation be approved it has been identified that one school on two sites will increase the budget requirement for the school during this interim period. This will have no overall impact on the costs for the Council as these increased costs will be considered as part of the overall funding formula for schools and will be met across the entire school budget.
- 7.3 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 priority area for Modernising Education within the Council’s Capital Programme.

## **8. 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.**

The EqIA undertaken on the proposal suggested that there would be minimal impact in respect of the first phase of the proposal. The development of an

area school would provide greater capacity to respond to fluctuations in pupil numbers and reduce the age range taught together.

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

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.

**10. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

The direct financial impact to the Council of the recommendations of this report are low, consisting of postage and printing costs in the first instance. The increase in costs incurred by operating one school on two sites for the interim period will be considered as part of the overall funding formula for schools and therefore will not impact on the Council's overall budget requirement. Phase 2 will involve significant capital investment but will be the subject of further debate upon completion of relevant business cases taking into account resources available at that time. The aspiration stated within the Corporate Plan is to identify funding of approximately £23m to implement the findings of area reviews and other improvements. The latest estimates have identified potential funding of approximately £17m.

**11. 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.

**12. Power to make the Decision**

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