

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 6 th January, 2016
Report Subject	School Modernisation – School Standards and Reorganisation action 2013 – Ysgol Llanfynydd
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To inform Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of responses from the statutory consultation period for the proposal to close Ysgol Llanfynydd.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee is requested to consider the responses from the statutory consultation period for Ysgol Llanfynydd.
---	---

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS
1.01	<p>In June 2015, the Cabinet determined that we enter into formal consultation on closure and other school organisation options for Ysgol Llanfynydd by September 2016.</p>
1.02	<p>The proposal was put forward on the basis of criteria laid down in the Council's School Modernisation Strategy, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unfilled places across the primary school portfolio – Ysgol Llanfynydd as at January 2015 (based on the Pupil Level Annual School Census or PLASC) had 42 full time pupils with unfilled places at 47.5%. As of September 2015 the school population had 34 full time pupils with unfilled places at 57.5%.• Diminishing resource criteria (i.e. schools supported by pupils not from their local community and/or small numbers within the community raise concern regarding sustainability within the school's portfolio); for 44% of pupils attending Ysgol Llanfynydd is not their nearest school, and• Small School Criteria – the school population and capacity of Ysgol Llanfynydd is lower than national designation of a small school, additionally school numbers do not meet the minimum requirements of primary school models as noted in the Council's School Modernisation Strategy.
1.03	<p>The formal consultation period for Ysgol Llanfynydd commenced on Wednesday 21 October 2015 and ended on Wednesday 2 December 2015.</p>
1.04	<p>The Council has issued consultation documents in accordance with the statutory School Organisation Code.</p>
1.05	<p>Reviewing the future of any school is controversial and emotive. Pupils, parents, carers and teachers, past and present, have strong ties to local schools as part of their own life-stories. The Council is challenged with balancing the sensitivities of community feeling on the one hand, with providing a high quality education offer which can be sustained and afforded. The Council cannot avoid making decisions for the future which are in the best interests of pupils and students.</p>
1.06	<p>During the consultation responses from the pupils, community, staff, parents and carers have focused on the following concerns, in summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accuracy of data contained within the consultation documents;• impact on pupils/transition/friendship groups;• education standards;• capacity of other schools in the area to accommodate pupils;• admissions to other schools should Ysgol Llanfynydd close;• transport and traffic

1.07	As part of the consultation the views of children and young people have been sought. The Pupils of Ysgol Llanfynydd do not want their school to be closed. They have expressed concern that they will lose friendship groups, concern for their teachers and transition onto a new school. Other nearby school councils consulted were sad that the school could close but would try to make Ysgol Llanfynydd pupils welcome and would be happy to make new friends should the school close. (see Appendix 2 Consultation Report)
1.08	Responses also focus on the strengths of the school, such as the family ethos and the inclusive nature of the school. These strengths are positively acknowledged.
1.09	Additionally an alternative suggestion of federation has been made by a number of consultees, notably the governing body. They want the Council to use powers to federate Ysgol Llanfynydd with another school. Governing Bodies also have the power to promote a federation proposal, but a key factor for success is having two or more willing partners. At the time of writing the Governing body of Ysgol Llanfynydd have not identified a willing partnering school or schools in which to pursue a federation.
1.10	The Governing Body has also requested a reduction in its school funding formula allocation in order to demonstrate a lower operating cost per pupil. This is an innovative suggestion. However, the primary school funding formula was fundamentally reviewed in 2013/14 with full involvement and consultation with schools and other stakeholders including the Schools Budget Forum and Education and Youth Scrutiny. The formula must be applied consistently across all schools with any changes to the formula being consulted on and agreed. There is a primary schools funding formula group comprising Authority officers and nominated Headteachers which meets regularly to consider formula issues. A key ongoing concern from small primary schools has been to secure adequate resources to enable school leaders to fulfil their responsibilities.
1.11	It is for individual schools to ensure that they are deploying the funds allocated to them in the best interests of the pupils in the school at that time. Where schools do not fully spend their allocation in year due to staff vacancies they are entitled to carry balances forward, however, where balances are above 5% they are subject to “claw back” arrangements.
1.12	The consultation documents are subject to rigorous compliance checks prior to their publication, which includes verifying information provided by the schools and national sources (see Appendix 1 - Compliance Statement).
1.13	The Local Authority would take all practicable steps to ease the transition for all pupils, most especially for vulnerable learners such as those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). As part of implementation plans the Council would work alongside pupils, their parents, and the relevant schools to make appropriate transition arrangements for pupils to familiarise themselves with their new environments (subject to parental preference).

1.14	The Local Authority has demonstrated in its consultation documents that there is sufficient capacity within the local school network to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Llanfynydd should it close. This view is upheld by Estyn in its response. However, additional places if required can be established at Ysgol Parc Y Llan, Treuddyn, at either no cost or minimal cost for that school to be available to all current pupils at Ysgol Llanfynydd.
1.15	<p>Transport eligibility is determined by the Authority in which the pupil resides. Seventeen pupils who live in Flintshire would be entitled to free home to school transport based on the assumption that pupils transfer to their nearest school (Ysgol Parc Y Llan) on the basis of the following grounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the nearest appropriate available school is more than 2 miles away; • That the route to the alternative schools would be considered to be hazardous by the Council due to its rural location which has limited footpaths in and out of the village.
1.16	Estyn's formal response to the consultation confirms the independent inspectorate's view that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the present standards of education provision in the area. Overall, pupil outcomes in all four alternative schools are currently good, with all schools judged as having the necessary capacity to improve further. Pupil attendance in all of these schools is good.
1.17	Previous and current school leaders have worked hard to maintain stability within the school's operations and should be commended for this. However, pupil numbers have dropped from 43 full time pupils in January 2015 to 34 full time pupils at September 2015. This will not provide sufficient income to sustain high quality provision at the school. With such exceptionally low numbers the quality of the social experience within the school will also be limited.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There is sufficient staff capacity to prepare the detailed transition plans for pupils.
2.02	Should the current proposals be implemented, the Council will work with the current members of staff at Ysgol Llanfynydd, including teaching and support staff, should they seek redeployment opportunities. Staff displaced by the proposal may have the opportunity to be employed in the local primary network.
2.03	The estimated annual costs of transport as a result of the proposal are £16,150. However, actual transport costs can only be fully assessed once all families have chosen their preferred school.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	If the Cabinet decision is to proceed, the Council will publish a Statutory notice providing a 28 day notice period for objections. If objections are received, the Council must publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them within 28 days of the end of the objection period.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	A Programme Board is set up to oversee the implementation business plans and manage risks in close detail. Reports are made to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny at key stages of decision-taking, performance reporting and evaluation.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Compliance statement Appendix 2 – Consultation report Appendix 3 – Estyn response Appendix 4 – Statutory proposal anticipated timeline

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	All responses from the consultation period (and responses received before the consultation period) are available in the members' library. Contact Officer: Damian Hughes Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision Telephone: 01352 704135 E-mail: Damian.hughes@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	(1) PLASC – The Welsh Government Pupil Level Annual School Census is mandatory with returns for all sectors required every January including nursery, primary, middle, secondary and special. Returns are required every January. (2) School Organisation Code – The new School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 makes Local Authorities responsible (rather than the Welsh Ministers prior to October 2013) for the determination of most statutory school organisation proposals that receive objections. Such provisions apply to any proposals published on or after 1 st October 2013

that consider the establishment, discontinuance or otherwise significantly alter schools.

The Council does this in line with the Welsh Government's statutory School Organisation Code

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/130719-school-organisation-codes-en.pdf>

(3) Estyn - Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting primary and secondary schools and nursery schools maintained by, or receive funding from local authorities.

(4) Federation – The federation of schools is a legal process which enables schools to work together through a formal structured process by sharing a governing body that will make decisions in the best interest of all the schools, staff and pupils in that federation.

The Welsh Government have brought in new regulations around federation of maintained schools in Wales. The Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014 which came into force on 22 May 2014 gives effect to Council's powers to federate schools. (School governors already have powers to federate by choice under provisions introduced in 2010). These powers have now been consolidated into the 2014 Regulations.