

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Friday, 5 th February 2016
Report Subject	School Modernisation - School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 - Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton
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 Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee is requested to consider the responses from the statutory consultation period for Ysgol Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS
1.01	In June 2015 the Cabinet determined that we enter into formal consultation on closure and other school organisation options for Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton by September 2016.
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 Gymraeg Mornant had 48 full time pupils as at January 2015 (PLASC) with unfilled places at 57.76%. As at September 2015 the school had 44 full time pupils with unfilled places at 60.36% (based on the current school capacity assessment of 111 full time pupils); • Diminishing resource criteria (i.e. small numbers within the community raise concern regarding sustainability within the school's portfolio); • Small School – The school population of Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant 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; • Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant is currently (July 2015) in Welsh Government categorisation 4 (out of 1-4) with 4 being the lowest for standards. Welsh Government review their categorisation annually. At the time of writing this report, the categorisation of Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant, Picton had not been reviewed by Welsh Government (NB annual revised categorisation is scheduled to be released before the Cabinet meeting).
1.03	The formal consultation period for Ysgol Mornant commenced Wednesday 11 th November 2015 and ended on Wednesday 23 rd December 2015.
1.04	The Council has issued consultation documents in accordance with the statutory School Organisation Code.
1.05	School organisation 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).
1.06	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.
1.07	During the consultation responses from the community, staff, parents and carers have focused on the following concerns, in summary:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on Welsh Culture (language, community & education provision); • Transport, with concerns regarding distance and time to alternative schools; • Impact on the wider community; • Concern that the Council is not following own Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP); • Impact on childcare, parents and carers; • Impact on pupils; • Concern about the consultation documents and procedure.
1.08	Responses also focussed on the strengths of the school, such as the welcoming family ethos and comments from the wider community regarding their personal links to the school.
1.09	An alternative suggestion of federation has been suggested by a number of consultees, notably the governing body. During consultation the governing body has actively sought potential federal partners.
1.10	The Governors of Ysgol Croes Atti, Flint, considered an official request to federate with Ysgol Mornant at their governing body meeting dated 20th January 2015. However, the Governors decided unanimously that they wouldn't be in favour of forming a federation at this time (see Appendix 2). Other Welsh Medium primary schools in Flintshire whilst not supporting the proposal have not and are not advocating a federal arrangement with Ysgol Mornant. The Governors of Ysgol y Llys, Prestatyn offered no response to the consultation.
1.11	However, representatives of Ysgol Maes Garmon have stated that they would wish to engage further with the Governors at Ysgol Mornant and the Council to explore ways in which Welsh Medium provision could be sustained in the area and what support they could offer to achieve this (see Appendix 2). This has not advanced to a formal decision of the Governing Body or a formal proposal.
1.12	As part of the consultation the views of children and young people have been sought. The pupils at Ysgol Mornant do not want their school to close and have the following concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possible split of friendships groups and siblings; • potential loss of the Welsh language; • staff jobs; • that their families will have to pay more to access education at another school; • the loss of family connections with the school; and • concerns about what will happen with the school site.
1.13	Children and young people offered alternative ideas to closure. Their suggestions were to continue to try and get more pupils to the school, open a bigger Welsh school and the County Council to support small schools.

1.14	Other nearby school councils consulted stated that they had mixed feelings. Some were sad that another Welsh school may close. Some said they would be happy as their school will have more children. Some felt the rationale for closure was “a fair enough reason” and some thought it a good idea if there are not enough children. Others raised concerns on the impact on pupils under 5, insecurity about their own school’s future, concerns about the Welsh Language, transport to other schools and care for what happens to the teachers. Some stated that, as the Urdd Eisteddfod was in Flintshire this year, the school should be kept open (see Appendix 2 pages1-17)
1.15	In the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and through the work in the Welsh in Education Strategic Partnership, the Council works in partnership to increase the number of fluent Welsh speakers within its boundaries, with the aim of creating an increasingly bilingual county and country. Actual take up in individual schools and areas depends on parental preferences.
1.16	Welsh Language surveys commissioned by the Council in 2009 and 2013 confirmed that the greatest demand for Welsh medium education in Flintshire is currently in the Deeside area and Buckley/Mynydd Isa area. The Local Authority has responded to this demand by extending the provision of Ysgol Croes Atti (Flint) onto an additional site in Shotton and this opened in September 2014. The numbers of pupils attending the new school site are rising.
1.17	Conversely, pupil numbers at Ysgol Mornant have been in steady decline to the current number of 44 full-time pupils. 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. There are approximately 200 unfilled places in the nearest Welsh medium primary schools.
1.18	The Council would take all practicable steps to ease the transition for all pupils, most especially for vulnerable groups of learners such as Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Should the proposal be implemented, 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).
1.19	Ysgol Mornant was inspected by Estyn in October 2014 and was placed in the follow up category of ‘Estyn Monitoring’. Since Estyn’s visit in October 2014, the school has been supported by a bespoke package of support from both the Council and from GwE. Additionally, the Council has also provided additional funding to support the implementation of the post-inspection action plan by funding an additional teacher 0.6 to cover the teaching commitment of the Headteacher to enable her to focus on leadership and improvement issues. The Council has funded additional time of an experienced Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) to assist the school with its documentation and processes in relation to pupils with ALN and purchased new furniture for the Foundation Phase classroom.

1.20	Ysgol Mornant was revisited by a team of inspectors on January 25 th and 26 th . The team reviewed the progress the school has made in meeting the recommendations in the original report. The outcome of the monitoring visit and the final report will not be available in the public domain for several weeks.
1.21	Transport costs will not be known until the future of the school is decided and parents have expressed a preference to a new school and have been offered a place. However, given the geographical location most parents would be entitled to free home to school transport to their nearest appropriate school. Transport provision provided by the Council would not be in contravention of the learner travel (Wales) Measure 2008.
1.22	The community impact assessment noted the school is not widely used and there would be a limited impact on a small number of community activities which currently take place at Ysgol Gymraeg Mornant, Picton. Therefore, the potential loss of the school would have a limited impact on a small number of community activities which take place at the school. The largest impact would be to the Cylch Meithrin (non-statutory provision). However, Cylch Meithrin provision is available at both Ysgol Y Llys, Prestatyn and Ysgol Gwenffrwd, Holywell.
1.23	The Council has no plans for the school site should the school close. In line with established practice, future usage of the school site will only be determined following confirmation that the school site is no longer required for educational purposes.
1.24	Estyn has provided its statutory response to the consultation that <i>'It is likely that the current proposal will at least maintain education provision and outcomes for pupils in the area'</i> and <i>'The proposal has considered in detail the likely impact of each option on Welsh medium provision in the local authority. It is fair in pointing out that the closure of the school may result in parents and pupils choosing an English medium school nearer to their home. This may reduce the numbers of pupils taught and assessed through the medium of Welsh. However, it reasonably suggests that parents and pupils who are committed to continuing to receive a Welsh-medium education may choose another Welsh-medium school accordingly'</i> (see Estyn's full response Appendix 4).

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There is sufficient team capacity to prepare the detailed transition plans for students.
2.02	Should the current proposals be implemented, the Council will work with the current members of staff at Ysgol Mornant, 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 net annual saving that could be achieved if the proposal to close the Ysgol Mornant goes ahead is as follows:-														
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2.04	Actual transport costs can only be established 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.
3.02	At the County Council meeting, 26 th January 2016, Councillor Glyn Banks handed in a petition opposing closure of Ysgol Mornant.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	A Programme Board is set up to oversee the implementation of 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 – Federation responses Appendix 3 – Consultation report Appendix 4 – Estyn response Appendix 5 – 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. Consultation documentation links:

<http://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Schools/School-Modernisation-Related/Home.aspx>

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7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	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.
7.02	<p>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 1st October 2013 that consider the establishment, discontinuance or otherwise significantly alter schools.</p> <p>The Council does this in line with the Welsh Government’s statutory School Organisation Code</p> <p>http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/130719-school-organisation-codes-en.pdf</p>
7.03	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.
7.04	<p>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.</p> <p>The Welsh Government has 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.</p>
7.05	Estyn’s definition of small school is a school of 100 or less.