

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 19 April 2016
Report Subject	School Modernisation – School Standards and Reorganisation Act 2013 – Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain.
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To inform Cabinet of the responses from the statutory objection period for Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain.

To invite Cabinet to determine on the statutory proposal for school organisational change at Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Cabinet is requested to consider the responses from the statutory objection period for Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain.
2	Cabinet is requested to determine whether to implement the proposal for school organisational change at Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING SCHOOL ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AT YSGOL MAES EDWIN, FLINT MOUNTAIN
1.01	In June 2015 Cabinet determined that we enter into formal consultation on closure and other school organisation options for Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain 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 Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain as at January 2015 (PLASC) had 66 full time pupils with unfilled places of 13.16%. As of September 2015 the school population has 55 full time pupils with unfilled places at 27.63%; pupil numbers at January 2016, 39 full time pupils.• 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) - 83.63% of pupils attending Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain are not attending their local school (See Appendix 1);• Small School Criteria – The School population and capacity of Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain 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, and• Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain is currently (July 2015) in Welsh Government categorisation 4, on a scale of 1 - 4, with 4 being the lowest for educational standards. The school has remained in the same category when the Welsh Government conducted their annual review (January 2016).
1.03	The formal consultation period for Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain commenced on Wednesday 21 st October 2015 and ended on Wednesday 2 nd December 2015. The Council issued consultation documents in accordance with the statutory School Organisation Code.
1.04	The committee report and consultation report was considered by both Education and Youth Overview and Scrutiny 6 th January 2016 thereafter, Cabinet 19 th January 2016
1.05	Cabinet determined that a Statutory Proposal be issued for Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain. This was published on 29 th January 2016 and ran until 26 th February 2016.
1.06	Under the School Organisational Code the Statutory Proposal for Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain is determined by the Council's Cabinet, rather than Welsh Ministers.

1.07	<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 primary 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>
1.08	<p>During the objection period, the Council has received the following concerns in summary form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about children’s welfare, pupils have already transferred from other schools, bullying, unable to obtain a place in schools of their preference, loss of friendship, do not want a large school, concern about support, large class sizes. • Concern that parental preference was being taken away. • Concerns about the consultation process, data, new housing development, process unsettling to school community. • Impact on the community/future use of site should the school close. • Concerns that money already invested in the school. • Concern the Council did not allow enough time for the Governors to consider Federation. • Transport.
1.09	<p>Responses also focussed on the strengths of the school, i.e. family atmosphere, small class sizes, happy children, good staff and teachers.</p>
1.10	<p>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).</p>
1.11	<p>Applications from Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain pupils wishing to transfer to other schools will be administered in line with the Council’s Admissions Policy. A mini admissions process will be administered to assist families in transition to other schools should Cabinet determine closure.</p>
1.12	<p>The Council needs to ensure there are a sufficient number of school places, of the right type, in the right locations. This is not straightforward in that there are a large number of surplus school places in some areas of the County, whilst other areas don’t have enough places to meet the local demand. In other areas, school populations are sustained by children and young people from outside the local area through parental preference. School Organisation change does not take away a parents ability to express a preference for a school of their choice.</p>
1.13	<p>It is the Council’s view that there is sufficient capacity within the local school network to accommodate pupils from Ysgol Maes Edwin should it close. Estyn have commented <i>that ‘The local authority has given a clear</i></p>

	<i>rationale for the proposed expected benefits when compared with the status quo in relation to finance, surplus places and the continuity and progression in pupils' learning.'</i>
1.14	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).
1.15	The Council has fully considered school capacity and potential housing development yield within its consultation documents. Data regarding potential pupils which could be generated from new housing developments is calculated using a housing yield formula. The housing yield formula has been derived from research work from a partnering authority. This was applied to all current housing development planning applications approved by the planning authority.
1.16	The housing yield figures produced are a maximum figure and do not take into account parental choice and/or pupil movement i.e. pupils moving into the new homes but who are already in the local education system.
1.17	The pace of housing developments will be constrained by the plans of the site owners/developers, the housing market, current economic climate and other factors which are unpredictable.
1.18	The community impact assessment has identified the impact of closure on a small number of local families and on the local community. The loss of the school would impact on a small number of community activities taking place and the range of community facilities within Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain.
1.19	The Council has no preconceived plans for the use of 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.
1.20	Most pupils at Ysgol Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain are not attending their nearest school. For a small number pupils currently living in Flint Mountain the distance travelled would increase, however this would not be in excess of the learner travel guidelines. The distance from Flint Mountain village to Ysgol Owen Jones, Northop is under 2 miles, it is likely that pupils in the Flint Mountain area would be eligible for transport under the criteria that the route to their new schools would be considered as hazardous.
1.21	Under the Regulations, Governors have had powers to federate since 2010. The Council has considered and discounted the option of federation within its consultation documents. At the time of writing, the Governing body of Ysgol Maes Edwin has not been able to identify a willing partnering school or schools with which to pursue a federation. There is no prospect of federation.

1.22	Estyn has provided its statutory response to the consultation. It is Estyn's view that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the present standards of education provision in the area. They noted that consultation documentation appropriately set out the advantages of the proposal, which include the efficient and effective use of resources; a reduction of unfilled pupil places within the primary school network; at least maintaining the current standards and the quality of education in the area; and the reduction in travel to school for the majority of pupils should they choose their local school.
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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 Maes Edwin, Flint Mountain 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 £9,120. However, actual transport costs can only be assessed once all families have a school place confirmed at an alternative school.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	No further consultations are required as part of the School Organisation Code.

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 – Pie Chart showing where pupils reside Appendix 2 – Compliance statement Appendix 2 – Objection Report Appendix 4 – Estyn response

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>All responses from the objection period are available to Cabinet Members.</p> <p>Additionally for Cabinet, and in accordance with the School Organisation Code to make a determination the following documents will also be made available:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a copy of the consultation document • a copy of the consultation report • a copy of the published notice • a copy of the objection report • copies of the statutory objections • copies of all of the above in relation to any proposals which are related to the proposal requiring approval (not applicable in the case of this proposal) <p>Contact Officer: Damian Hughes, Senior Manager, School Planning and Provision Telephone: 01352 704135 E-mail: Damian.hughes@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>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.</p> <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> <p>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.</p> <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 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.</p>
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