

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**CABINET EXECUTIVE
15th December 2015**

**REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Arwel Jones
Portfolio Holder for Education**

SUBJECT: Nantmel C. in W. School

REPORT FOR: Decision

Summary

This report recommends the commencement of formal consultation on the closure of Nantmel C. in W. School from the 31st December 2016, with Rhayader C. in W. School to be named as the receiving school.

The report is supported by the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Data sheet for Nantmel C. in W. School
- Appendix B – Draft Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix C – Draft Community Impact Assessment
- Appendix D – Financial Assessment

Background

On the 11th November 2014, Cabinet approved a new Powys School Transformation Policy, which set out the Council's vision and process for the transformation of primary and secondary schools in the county.

The Policy includes:

- a range of criteria to be used to determine which schools would be reviewed
- the establishment of a School Organisation Review Panel (SORP) to carry out reviews of schools
- the establishment of a School Review Process to be used to review schools

In December 2014, the SORP carried out an Initial Assessment of Schools in accordance with Stage 1 of the School Review Process, during which data for all schools was considered. Schools were also ranked against the criteria outlined in the School Transformation Policy. As a result of this Initial

Assessment of Schools, SORP agreed to carry out a detailed review of a number of schools, which included Nantmel C. in W. School.

Nantmel C. in W. School met the following criteria:

- Pupil Numbers: The school has had fewer than 50 pupils on roll for the three previous years
- Capacity: The percentage of surplus places in the school is higher than 15%
- Building Condition: The overall building condition is categorised as category D or C based on the Welsh Government's assessment of building condition
- Financial: The cost per pupil is more than 120% of the council's average for the sector

Dialogue has taken place with the governing body, acting headteacher, local member and diocesan representative during 2015 in accordance with Stage 2 of the School Review Process as described in the School Transformation Policy. This has included:

- An initial meeting to agree data in respect of the school and to discuss future options relating to the school
- An opportunity for the governing body to provide feedback on the options presented to them
- A SORP meeting to agree a draft recommendation in respect of the school
- A further meeting to discuss the draft recommendation to be considered by Cabinet and to give the governing body a further opportunity to present additional evidence.

In the feedback received from the Governing Body of Nantmel C. in W. School, the Governing Body stated that their preferred option was federation with Rhayader C. in W. School. However, following consideration of the data agreed with the school (attached as Appendix A) and the feedback received from the Governing Body, the SORP's view is that federation would not address the issues listed above relating to pupil numbers, capacity and cost per pupil. Therefore, the SORP's draft recommendation in respect of Nantmel C. in W. School is closure of the school from the 31st December 2016.

In accordance with the School Transformation Policy, Cabinet is required to consider draft impact assessments assessing equality issues and impact on the community when deciding whether or not to approve the SORP's draft recommendation. Draft impact assessment documents are attached as Appendix B and Appendix C.

Proposal

- i) That Cabinet receive the SORP's draft recommendation in respect of Nantmel C. in W. School, which is as follows:

Closure of Nantmel C. in W. School from the 31st December 2016.
Rhayader C. in W. School to be named as the receiving school.

- ii) That Cabinet approves the commencement of formal consultation in accordance with the School Organisation Code in respect of the closure of Nantmel C. in W. School from the 31st December 2016.

A financial analysis of the draft recommendation has been carried out, details of which are attached as Appendix D. It is estimated that implementation of this draft recommendation would lead to annual savings of £69,033.

One Powys Plan

‘Transforming Learning and Skills’ is a key priority within the One Powys Plan, and the Authority’s aim is to ensure that ‘all children and young people are supported to achieve their potential’. The plan states that the Authority needs to ‘reorganise schools (primary, secondary and post 16) to ensure affordability, sustainability and appropriate leadership capacity’.

Options Considered/Available

The SORP discussed a number of possible options with the Governing Body of Nantmel C. in W. School. These are outlined below, as well as an analysis of the Advantages and Disadvantages of each.

- i) **Status Quo**

Advantages	Disadvantages
No additional transport or travel required	Pupil numbers would continue to be below 50
Maintains provision in Nantmel	Surplus places would continue to be above the Authority’s accepted threshold
Maintains community facilities in Nantmel	Cost per pupil would continue to be significantly more than 120% of the Council’s average for primary schools
	Potentially difficult to recruit a permanent headteacher

- ii) **Closure of Nantmel C. in W. School and site**

Advantages	Disadvantages
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Would address the issue of low pupil numbers	Additional travel for those pupils for whom Nantmel C. in W. School is currently the closest school
Would reduce the Authority's overall surplus capacity in primary school	Loss of provision from Nantmel
Would address the issue around cost per pupil	Loss of community facilities in Nantmel
Permanent leadership arrangements in place in proposed receiving school	

iii) **Closure of Nantmel C. in W. School, but keep the site open as part of another school**

Advantages	Disadvantages
No additional transport or travel required	Pupil numbers on the Nantmel site would continue to be below 50
Maintains provision in Nantmel	Surplus places would continue to be above the Authority's accepted threshold
Maintains community facilities in Nantmel	
Permanent leadership arrangements in place in alternative school	Under the current funding arrangements, current pupil numbers on the Nantmel site would not attract sufficient funding to maintain 2 classes, therefore the site would need to be subsidised by the other school
Increased opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff	More difficult to run a school on two sites
	Nantmel C. in W. School would lose its own identity

iv) **Federation of Nantmel C. in W. School and Rhayader C. in W. School**

Advantages	Disadvantages
No additional transport or travel required	Pupil numbers in Nantmel C. in W. School would continue to be below 50
Maintains provision in Nantmel	

Maintains community facilities in Nantmel	Surplus places would continue to be above the Authority's accepted threshold
Permanent leadership arrangements in place in alternative school	Cost per pupil would continue to be significantly more than 120% of the Council's average for primary schools
Increased opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff	Rhayader C. in W. School would lose some control over their own school through the establishment of a joint Governing Body
Both schools would retain their own identity	

v) Amalgamation of Nantmel C. in W. School and another school to create a new school on two sites

Advantages	Disadvantages
No additional transport or travel required	Pupil numbers on the Nantmel site would continue to be below 50
Maintains provision in Nantmel	Surplus places would continue to be above the Authority's accepted threshold
Maintains community facilities in Nantmel	Under the current funding arrangements, current pupil numbers on the Nantmel site would not attract sufficient funding to maintain 2 classes, therefore the site would need to be subsidised by the other site. If the other site also had less than 50 pupils, this model would be unviable
Increased opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff	More difficult to run a school on two sites
	Both schools would lose their own identities

Preferred Choice and Reasons

Following consideration of each of the options and the feedback received from the Governing Body of Nantmel C. in W. School, the SORP's view is that option (ii), closure of the school, is the most suitable way forward.

Sustainability and Environmental Issues/Equalities/Crime and Disorder,/Welsh Language/Other Policies etc

A draft Equality Impact Assessment has been produced and is attached as Appendix B. In addition, a draft Community Impact Assessment has been produced, and is attached as Appendix C.

The impact assessments will be updated following any formal consultation period to include qualitative information based on the responses received to the consultation.

Children and Young People's Impact Statement - Safeguarding and Wellbeing

The authority's Schools Transformation Programme is intended to improve educational outcomes for children and young people. This aligns with the aspiration to improve safeguarding and well-being for children and young people.

Local Member(s)

The following comments were received from local members:

Cllr D. O. Evans

"I am very much opposed to the draft recommendation to approve the commencement of formal consultation on the closure of the Nantmel Church in Wales School. Nantmel School is an award winning school and has enjoyed the reputation for being one of the most successful schools in Powys providing an excellent standard of education for its pupils. The draft recommendation is also opposed by the School Governors who are proud of the excellent educational and personal achievements of its pupils down through the years and whose paramount priority is to ensure that education continues on the Nantmel School site. The school is the heartbeat and focus of Community life in Nantmel, it binds the Community together and is very precious to everyone.

It is hugely disappointing that the basis for the whole report is NOT to address issues of a failing school; Nantmel has an excellent teaching history extending over 150 years. Rather it appears to simply be a cost saving exercise for the local authority with little attention paid to the wider impact and costs (socially as well as financially) which will fall to the to the community in terms of access to/availability of after school clubs, holiday clubs as well as the loss of the only public building in Nantmel for community events, social gatherings and so on.

At a recent meeting the Head of Schools Service, Mr Ian Roberts, stated that he had no concerns whatsoever over the standards of teaching and learning at Nantmel School and the last ESTYN report was good highlighting no important shortcomings and the ERW monitoring reports are also good. The Governors consider it a matter of great regret that the quality of education of the pupils has been considered irrelevant to the SORP's consideration. It is interesting and important to note that following a whole-day Core Visit 1 on the 6th November the challenge advisor has made the indicative assessment that the school should be moved up from amber to yellow.

I also have considerable doubts that the financial savings predicted by SORP if Nantmel School were to be closed can be achieved. Over recent months we have been provided with numerous statistics relating to the school and each time they have produced completely different results and predictions.

This gives me little confidence in their assessments. To continually dwell on the cost per pupil being above average is misleading. To arrive at an average cost per pupil you will necessarily have schools that cost less and schools that will cost more. It is obvious that providing school services in rural parts of Powys is greater than the urban parts of Powys - that is a fact of life that we in Powys deal with every day. Is every school with an above average cost per pupil at risk of closure?

Powys County Council's draft recommendation is also opposed by the parents, the Church in Wales, Nantmel Community Council, Chris Davies our member of Parliament, Kirsty Williams our member of the Welsh Assembly, the wider community who use the school for a plethora of community and social events and most importantly the pupils of Nantmel School whose welfare appears to have scant weight in the report evidenced by the fact that there are other viable alternative options to closure which are not being pursued by the Council.

Nantmel School is perfectly able and competent to operate as a stand-alone school but if there has to be a change in status then the Governing Body's

preferred option is Federation with Rhayader Church in Wales School.

Federation has been and is being adopted successfully in a number of Powys schools and this option as detailed at item 'iv' of the Portfolio Holder's report should at the very least should be given equal consideration at Nantmel with further investigative work undertaken by the Council. I am simply unable to agree to the closure of Nantmel School without being fully convinced that the Governors' preferred option of Federation is not viable.

I really do find it hard to believe that the Powys Schools Service are willing to pursue the closure of a first class rural school with an outstanding record of achievement and over 150 years of history of providing excellent teaching and education located in a well used and valuable Community Hub (the only one in fact). The impact would be devastating and so unnecessary especially given the small savings anticipated to be made. It would be displaying a disregard for the wishes and requirements of all those who live in the area and indeed of all those living in many similar rural Communities throughout Powys.

The well being of the pupils appears to be of secondary importance to SORP because the premise of the report and the draft proposal to close the school is being considered wholly on a financial basis. This is sad indeed and in any event any meagre savings predicted would not even pay the salary of a single one of the more senior officers we employ at Powys County Council.

As County Councillors we are the servants of the people of Powys and we need to treat them as equal partners. We need to listen and find out what matters to them and not necessarily to us. We must remember that it is our duty as County Councillors to do our very best to improve the conditions and facilities of those we represent. We must strive at all times to achieve the outcomes that the people are looking for and not what we as Councillors are looking for. I hope I can rely on all Cabinet members to support me in rejecting the proposal to close Nantmel School."

Other Front Line Services

N/A

Support Services (Legal, Finance, Corporate Property, HR, ICT, Business Services)

Legal: Legal advice has been sought throughout the SORP process in respect of Nantmel C. in W. School

Finance: “The Finance Business Partner for Schools confirms the estimated savings in the report, but notes that figures do not include an estimate of any redundancy costs at this stage.”

HR: The Schools’ HR Team continues to work closely with the Schools’ Service with the aim of providing timely advice and support regarding any HR processes which may be required as a result of the proposal detailed in this report.

Local Service Board/Partnerships/Stakeholders etc

N/A

Corporate Communications

Communications Comment: ‘The report is of public interest and requires a proactive news release and use of social media to publicise the recommendation.’

Statutory Officers

The Strategic Director Resources (S151 Officer) notes the comments made by finance and notes that funding is in place to meet any redundancy costs.

The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: “ I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report.”

Members’ Interests

The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If Members have an interest they should declare it at the start of the meeting and complete the relevant notification form.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To receive the SORP's draft recommendation in respect of Nantmel C. in W. School. 2. To approve the commencement of formal consultation with stakeholders in accordance with the School Organisation Code on the closure of Nantmel C. in W. School, with Rhayader C. in W. School to be named as the receiving school. 	To ensure future sustainability of primary education.

Relevant Policy (ies):	School Transformation Policy		
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	Cllr D O Evans
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	School Transformation Team
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	31 st January 2016

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Background Papers used to prepare Report: