

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**CABINET EXECUTIVE
15th December 2020**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Phyl Davies
Portfolio Holder for Education and Property

REPORT TITLE: Mount Street Infant School, Mount Street Junior School
and Cradoc CP School - Proposal Paper

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1. On the 29th September 2020, the Council's Cabinet considered a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) which included a range of options in order to address issues with schools in the Brecon catchment area.
- 1.2. Without requiring Cabinet to make a decision on the future configuration of schools in the catchment, the SOC identified a preferred way forward, which is to invest in the development of:
- A new 360 place English-medium primary school in Brecon, to replace Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Juniors School and Cradoc C.P. School, with a co-located Pupil Referral Unit and a community swimming pool – to be built on the site of the old Brecon High School.
 - A new 180 place dual-stream primary school in Sennybridge, replacing the current poor accommodation at Sennybridge CP School – to be built on the current site of Sennybridge CP School.
- 1.3 This report outlines the options considered in order to achieve the preferred way forward and requests Cabinet approval to commence the statutory process on the following proposal:

Phase 1

- To amalgamate Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Juniors School and Cradoc C.P. School to create a new primary school that would operate from the current three sites
- The target date for establishing the new primary school is September 2022.

Phase 2

- To make a regulated alteration to transfer the school to a new school building on a new site in Brecon
 - It is anticipated that the new school would be open by 2024/5, but this is dependent on the availability of capital funding and approval of business cases by the Welsh Government.
- 1.4 There is no requirement for a statutory school reorganisation process for the Sennybridge school development.
- 1.5 The report is supported by the following appendices:
- Appendix A – Options Appraisal – Mount Street Infants, Mount Street Juniors and Cradoc
- Appendix B – Impact Assessment

2. Background

Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys

- 2.1. On the 14th April 2020, a new Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys was approved by the Leader via a delegated decision.
- 2.2. The Strategy was developed following extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders during two separate periods between October 2019 and March 2020.
- 2.3. The Strategy sets out a new vision for education in Powys, which is as follows:
- ‘All children and young people in Powys will experience a high quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically productive, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens of 21st century Wales.’*
- 2.3 The Strategy also sets out a number of guiding principles which will underpin the transformation of education in Powys. These are as follows:
- *A world class rural education system that has learner entitlement at its core*
 - *Schools that are fully inclusive, with a culture of deep collaboration in order to improve learner outcomes and experience*
 - *A broad choice and high quality of provision for 14 – 19 year old learners, that includes both academic and vocational provision, meeting the needs of all learners, communities and the Powys economy*
 - *Welsh-medium provision that is accessible and provides a full curriculum in Welsh from Meithrin to age 19 and beyond Provision for*

learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Additional Learning Needs (ALN) that is accessible as near to home as is practicably possible, with the appropriate specialist teaching, support and facilities that enables every learner to meet their potential

- *A digitally-rich schools sector that enables all learners and staff to enhance their teaching and learning experience*
- *Community-focused schools that are the central point for multi-agency services to support children, young people, families and the community*
- *Early years provision that is designed to meet the needs of all children, mindful of their particular circumstances, language requirements or any special or additional learning needs*
- *Financially and environmentally sustainable schools*
- *The highest priority is given to staff wellbeing and professional development*

- 2.4. The new Strategy sets out a number of Strategic Aims and Objectives, to shape the Council's work to transform the Powys education system over the coming years. One of these Aims is to '*improve learner entitlement and experience*' and includes an objective to '*rationalise primary provision*'.

3. The Case for Change

- 3.1 The preferred way forward for the Mount Street schools and Cradoc CP School was outlined the Programme Business Case that was considered by Cabinet on the 29th September 2020. A number of options were considered and assessed, however, the report presented to Cabinet did not include the advantages and disadvantages of Option 4C which was to build new schools for Mount Street Infant and Junior School, Sennybridge CP School and Cradoc CP School due to an error with version control, although the option was assessed against the investment objectives and critical success factors, based on the following advantages and disadvantages, and was discounted from further assessment.

Option 4C New build Sennybridge, new build Brecon primary school, new build Cradoc	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves learner entitlement and experience by pupils being in brand new facilities in three schools • Establishing a new primary school in Brecon would create a larger school which enables economies of scale in that school • Removes backlog maintenance of circa £3m • Retains provision in all three locations and would be more acceptable to local communities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential disruption to Cradoc and Sennybridge schools during construction • Would potentially require temporary relocation of pupils during construction along with associated costs • Does not maximise efficiencies • Does not provide opportunities for staff from being part of a larger school • Does not have a positive impact on the Council's overall schools' budget through rationalisation of schools

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would enable energy efficiencies reducing the buildings carbon footprint and ongoing running costs; • New primary school in Brecon would create efficiencies in school staffing structure; • Possibilities for additional community facilities that have the potential to offer additional income streams for the new schools • Merging an infant and junior school enables the educational advantages afforded through improved transition between key stages • No additional transport costs for the Council. • Improves safeguarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital cost of building three new schools on three separate schools does not provide value-for-money • Does not maximise opportunity for capital receipts
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3.2 The following is a summary of the main challenges facing Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc CP School:

3.3 **Mount Street Infants and Mount Street Juniors**

i) **Building condition**

The current building condition of the two schools is as follows:

	Condition
Mount Street Infants School	C – Poor
Mount Street Junior School	C – Poor

There are issues with building condition in both schools, with the condition of both schools being rated as poor, with approximately £1.7m in backlog maintenance outstanding across the two sites.

ii) **Last remaining infant and junior schools in Powys**

School reorganisation in Powys has gradually moved to a model of ‘all-through’ provision in primary schools across the county. Mount Street Infant and Junior Schools represent the last remaining separate infant and junior schools within the County.

The advantages offered by single school provision for primary age pupils are well known and evidence based. Due in part to an increased critical mass of learners, ‘all-through’ primary schools are usually able to offer both enhanced continuity of provision and a curriculum which is more broad and balanced in content delivered in a continuous and coherent way from the Foundation Phase through to the end of Key Stage 2.

iii) Transition arrangements

Whilst the two schools work closely together to minimise disruption for pupils on transition from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2 in order to ensure that they can effectively move from one school to the other, the current arrangement does mean that there is an additional transition for pupils during their educational careers, which can cause disruption to pupils and their families.

iv) Staff development opportunities

The current arrangement provides the opportunity for staff to specialise in a particular educational phase – either Foundation Phase or Key Stage 2. However, this does mean that it is more difficult for them to gain experience across the primary age range.

3.4 Cradoc C.P. School

The following is a summary of the main challenges facing Cradoc C.P. School:

i) Decreasing pupil numbers¹

	Jan. 2014	Jan. 2015	Jan. 2016	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020
Cradoc C.P. School	141	139	136	142	133	123	112

Pupil numbers have decreased significantly over the last five years. It has a capacity of 175 pupils² with 95 on roll, according to latest pupil data, although forecasting information suggests pupil numbers may increase.

ii) Building condition

The current building condition of the school is as follows:

	Condition
Cradoc C.P. School	C – Poor

There are issues with building condition at Cradoc C.P. School, with the condition of the school being rated as poor, with approximately £628k in backlog maintenance outstanding. The building is also not fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

¹ PLASC

² Welsh Government School Places Return – August 2020

iii) Building configuration

The configuration of the school is problematic and creates safeguarding concerns. The school also utilises three aging demountable buildings, only one of which has toilet facilities; therefore children have to leave the classroom to enter the main building in order to use the toilets.

4. Information about Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc CP School

The following is a summary of key data relating to the three schools:

	School Type	Language Category	Admission Number ³	Rural School? ⁴
Mount Street Infants School	Community Infants School building owned by Powys County Council	English medium	43	No
Mount Street Junior School	Community Junior School building owned by Powys County Council	English medium	43	No
Cradoc C.P. School	Community Primary School building owned by Powys County Council	English medium	25	Yes

Pupil Numbers

i) Current pupil numbers⁵

³ Powys Admissions Information and Arrangements 2011-22

⁴ Annex F of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018) (<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/school-organisation-code-second-edition.pdf>) includes a list of 'rural schools', to which the 'Presumption against the closure of rural schools' applies.

⁵ Finance NOR – 2020 Pupil Count Day (6th November 2020)

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Mount Street Infants School	39	33	41					113
Mount Street Junior School				47	49	38	39	173
Cradoc C.P. School	13	10	12	19	14	13	14	95
TOTAL	52	43	53	66	63	51	53	381

ii) **Historical pupil numbers⁶**

	Jan. 2014	Jan. 2015	Jan. 2016	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020
Mount Street Infants School	159	176	191	187	179	171	150
Mount Street Junior School	153	124	138	139	145	143	152
Cradoc C.P. School	141	139	136	142	133	123	112
TOTAL	453	439	465	478	457	437	414

iii) **Projected pupil numbers (Birth rate)⁷**

	Jan. 2021	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025
Mount Street Infants School	105	109	110	111	110
Mount Street Junior School	159	156	151	139	130
Cradoc C.P. School	98	98	99	99	94

⁶ PLASC 2020

⁷ Powys Schools Service Projections (R – Yr6) based on PLASC 2020 & Birth Rates

TOTAL	362	363	360	349	334
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iv) **Projected pupil numbers (Finance projections)⁸**

	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025
Mount Street Infants School	113	112	N/A	N/A
Mount Street Junior School	173	178	N/A	N/A
Cradoc C.P. School	95	94	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	381	384	N/A	N/A

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

The following table provides information about the current capacities of school and the capacity:

	Current Capacity⁹	Currently Filled	Surplus Capacity
Mount Street Infants School	129	113 (87.6%)	16 (12.4%)
Mount Street Junior School	172	173 (100.6%)	-1 (0.5%)
Cradoc C.P. School	175	95 (54.3%)	80 (45.7%)

ii) **Building condition**

In 2009, Welsh Government carried out condition and suitability assessments of the school.

	Condition	Suitability	Access to hall on site
Mount Street	C	B/C	Yes

⁸ Powys Finance Projections based on data provided by the school – November 2020

⁹ Welsh Government School Places Return – August 2020

Infants School	Poor	Good/Poor	
Mount Street Junior School	C Poor	A/B Excellent/Good	Yes
Cradoc C.P. School	C Poor	B/C Good/Poor	Yes

Standards of Education

i) Estyn

	Mount Street Infants School
Date of Inspection	January 2020
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Excellent
Leadership and management	Good
Follow Up	School will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

	Mount Street Junior School
Date of Inspection	March 2016
Standards	Good
Wellbeing	Good
Learning experiences	Good

Teaching	Good
Care, support, and guidance	Good
Learning environment	Good
Leadership	Good
Improving quality	Good
Partnership working	Good
Resource management	Good
Follow Up	The school will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations

	Cradoc C.P. School
Date of Inspection	May 2017
Standards	Adequate
Wellbeing	Adequate
Learning experiences	Adequate
Teaching	Adequate
Care, support, and guidance	Adequate
Learning environment	Adequate
Leadership	Adequate
Improving quality	Adequate
Partnership working	Adequate
Resource management	Adequate
Follow Up	The school will draw up an action plan, which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the schools progress

ii) **School Categorisation¹⁰**

	Standards Group	Improvement Capacity	Support Capacity
Mount Street Infants School	N/A	A	Green
Mount Street Junior School	N/A	C	Amber
Cradoc C.P. School	N/A	B	Yellow

Financial information

i) **Cost per pupil¹¹ (Section 52 Budget Statement, 2020/2021)**

	Budget share per school	Budget share per pupil	Notional SEN budget	Non ISB funds devolved to the school
Mount Street Infants School	£526,000	£4,618	£44,000	£8,000
Mount Street Junior School	£558,000	£3,821	£67,000	£21,000
Cradoc C.P. School	£423,000	£4,226	£21,000	£5,000
Powys average (Primary)	N/A	£4,264	N/A	N/A

5. Statutory Process for School Organisation Proposals

5.1 The process for school organisation proposals is set out by the Welsh Government in the School Organisation Code (2018). The process is summarised below:

i) **Consultation**

Consultation would be carried out with stakeholders as required by the Code. This includes consultation with the pupils at both schools, to ensure that their views are taken into account, in

¹⁰ 2019

¹¹ Section 52 Budget Statement 2020/2021

accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Feedback from the consultation would be collated and summarised, and a report would be presented to the Cabinet. Cabinet will consider the report and the feedback received during the consultation period, and will decide whether to proceed with the proposal, to make changes to the proposal or to not proceed with the proposal.

If Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of this proposal.

ii) Statutory Notice

If Cabinet decides to proceed, a Statutory Notice would be published, which would give a period of 28 days for people to submit written objections.

If there were objections, the authority would publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and the authority's response to them. A further report would be presented to the Cabinet, which they would consider alongside the objection report, in order to decide whether or not to approve the proposal.

iii) Implementation

If Cabinet approves the proposal, it would be implemented in accordance with the date given in the Statutory Notice or any subsequently modified date.

6. Advice

6.1 Officers have carried out an options appraisal on possible options for these schools. This is attached to this report as Appendix A.

6.2 The options appraisal includes the following:

- Consideration of key data relating to the two schools
- Identification of options
- SWOT analysis of each option
- Initial financial appraisal of each option
- Assessment of each option against a number of critical success factors
- Identification of an emerging preferred option
- Further consideration of the emerging preferred option against factors listed in the School Organisation Code (2018) as factors to be taken into account when developing school organisation proposals.

- 6.3 Based on the options appraisal carried out and further consideration against the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code, the preferred option is as follows:

Merge Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc CP School to create a new primary school.

- 6.4 The reasons for this are:

- One new, larger school would be established which would offer enhanced opportunities for pupils
- Would enable staff expertise and good practice to be shared across the entire primary age range
- Fairer for staff – all staff at the three schools would have the opportunity to secure positions in the new school
- More flexibility and personal development opportunities for staff
- Parents of pupils currently attending Mount Street Infants would not have to re-apply for admission to junior phase
- Improved transition arrangements between Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 for pupils attending Mount Street Infants
- Potential to attract capital funding to provide a new building
- Would reduce the Council's surplus places in primary schools
- Would lead to rationalisation of the primary school estate
- Financial saving to the Council
- Meets all the Critical Success Factors

- 6.5 It is therefore advised that Cabinet approves a recommendation to commence the statutory process on the following proposal:

Phase 1

- To amalgamate Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Juniors School and Cradoc C.P. School to create a new primary school that would operate from the current three sites
- The target date for establishing the new primary school is September 2022.

Phase 2

- To make a regulated alteration to transfer the school to a new school building on a new site in Brecon

- 6.6 Should the recommendation to commence the statutory process be approved, it is anticipated that consultation would commence in January 2021.

- 6.7 It must also be noted that implementation of this proposal does not preclude that school from being a part of future reorganisation proposals.

7. Resource Implications

- 7.1 The amount of funding provided to schools is driven by the funding formula. Any change to the formula funding provided will impact on the Council's revenue budget. Based on the current formula, the phased approach would deliver the following estimated annual revenue savings to the Council:

Phase 1: £16,181. There would be no additional transport costs associated with this phase, although there would be some additional set-up costs.

Phase 2: The move to a new building would result in additional estimated revenue savings in delegated funding amounting to £184,306 per annum and £35,760 for catering functions. It is currently projected that there would be no additional transports costs as current bus routes can accommodate this model.

- 7.2 In line with the Council's Scheme for Financing Schools, should a school be in a deficit budget position when closed the deficit is written off.

- 7.3 The Scheme for Financing Schools also states the following in section 3.7.2:

'In order to ensure effective stewardship of the resources available to schools, the Authority may impose additional restrictions on a school scheduled to close, including but not limited to:

- Restriction of expenditure to agreed plans
- Removal of powers of virement'

The Council will consider the use of these powers of intervention where appropriate.

- 7.4 Development and implementation of the proposal would require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, Finance, HR and ICT. These service areas will be kept informed of the development of the proposal throughout the statutory process.
- 7.5 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report. If approval to commence the statutory process is given today, feasibility and preparatory work for the development of the new school and community facilities (Phase 2) will begin and costs will be incurred from the existing Band B programme. This work is undertaken at risk and should the project not proceed these costs will be ineligible for Capital Funding and would fall on the Council's revenue budget.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 Legal: The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view
- 8.2 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: "I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

9. Comment from local member(s)

- 9.1 **Comments from: Cllr Liz Rijnenberg (St Mary Ward), Cllr Matthew Dorrance (St John Ward) & Cllr David Meredith (St David Within Ward)**

We share the Council's aspiration to create high quality education facilities for our young people. We believe that Mount Street Infants, Mount Street Juniors and the Pupil Referral Unit buildings need to be replaced with fit for purpose, properly resourced and properly equipped modern learning facilities to help deliver that ambition.

Whilst school buildings are important community facilities, we recognise that schools which are in a poor condition negatively impact on the learning experience of our young people. It is our belief that this Council must act to radically improve the learner experience and ensure that the educational opportunities available to young people in Powys enable them to reach their full potential.

However, this business case is extremely complex in that it is proposing the medium-term merger of three schools to make a single Primary school by 2022 and a new build in Sennybridge. It is also setting out a proposal to build a new 360 place Primary School in Brecon by 2025, with a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Pool/Leisure facilities. Immediate stakeholders (Education staff/Governors) have so far only been provided with cursory briefings about these plans with no engagement taking place so far with parents and children.

The complexity of the proposals combined with the way the options have been grouped means that the scoping exercise is attempting an analysis across four schools with quite different circumstances. For example, the issue around Cradoc Primary in terms of closing, merging, or moving to a new build in Brecon raises distinct issues, some of which are not applicable when assessing the Mount Street Infants and Juniors or the PRU.

The business case assessed 11 options and we are concerned that the Cabinet has discounted the current Mount Street sites too soon. These are close to Brecon town centre and within walking distance for young

people and parents/carers. The preferred Penlan site is more difficult to access especially for families without access to a car.

We believe that closer and more detailed consideration needs to be given to extensive remodelling or building a new school on either of the Mount Street sites and we are formally requesting that the Council make available all of the evidence and documentation considered in discounting these options other than the list of advantages and disadvantages which are lumped together in options involving Cradoc and Sennybridge. We would also welcome further detail on the workarounds that have been considered to mitigate some of the disadvantages described – eg disruption and inconvenience of building/remodelling on existing sites.

There is no assessment of the Penlan site in terms of how favourable or otherwise it might be to a primary setting. For example, this site would set the school apart from the wider primary school community within Brecon, creating an out-of-town provision that flies in the face of active travel, community-based schools and any attempt to reconcile the current climate emergency as it would encourage more parents to transport their children to school by car. These three developments (school, PRU and Swimming Pool) combined with traffic using the Leisure Centre, Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon High School and Hoggan Park will have a significant impact on traffic flow and pollution. What assessment and workarounds are in place to address these issues?

The PRU delivers a specialist provision for young people unable to attend mainstream provision. The proposals suggest co-locating the PRU within the new school development, but it is not clear what impact this will have on the young people accessing their education provision through the PRU. Therefore, the Cabinet must provide details of the evidence it has considered about the impact of co-locating this service when drawing up its proposals.

The local Youth Club currently operates from the same building as the PRU but Youth Services have not featured in any of the papers under consideration. Whilst we appreciate the Cabinet is focussing on schools it does need to consider the broader needs of young people in Brecon when designing services for them.

The Cabinet's preferred option risks creating a large complex, disconnected project which could end up over budget and not achieving the investment objectives and success factors planned for. Therefore, as Brecon's County Councillors, we need assurances that this proposal is not motivated primarily by a desire for cost saving, ticking boxes to attract Welsh Government funding, or rolling several projects into one which can be attractive to developers, but which may not necessarily be in the best interests of the community we represent.

We favour a closer examination of alternative options as noted above and more time for those involved on the ground to provide input. Given the complexity of the current proposal it would be far better going out to consultation in two stages so that people can focus firstly on the specific issues relating to a merger of three schools. This will enable a meaningful consultation where the Council gets the best feedback from those who have the detailed knowledge to inform the plans and improve them.

It would also improve confidence in the process if the consultation could be in excess of the minimum 42 days. Again, given the complexity of the proposals this would ensure that interested parties could work together and combine knowledge to inform and present alternative proposals. Equally, we are responding to an escalating Coronavirus pandemic and whilst more people may be using digital solutions it should not be assumed that a comprehensive consultation can be completed via digital means.

10. Integrated Impact Assessment

10.1 An initial impact assessment in respect of the recommendation is attached. The impact assessment considers the proposal's impact on the Welsh Government's well-being goals, as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

10.2 The summary of the impact assessment is as follows:

This impact assessment suggests that the impact is generally positive with some negative aspects, such as the requirement for some pupils to travel further than they currently do to school, and loss of provision in the village of Cradoc. Whilst the intention is to initially establish the new school on the three existing sites, eventually the intention is that the school would move to a new building. This would provide much improved buildings and facilities for pupils compared with the current poor condition buildings, ensuring that future pupils would be taught in facilities that are fit-for-purpose, improving their learner entitlement and experience. The new facilities would be fully DDA compliant, supporting learners with disabilities.

10.3 Should Cabinet approve the commencement of the statutory process in respect of the recommendation, the impact assessment would be updated throughout the process, to take account of feedback received.

11. Recommendation

11.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves commencing the statutory process on the following proposal:

Phase 1

- To amalgamate Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Juniors School and Cradoc C.P. School to create a new primary school that would operate from the current three sites
- The target date for establishing the new primary school is September 2022.

Phase 2

- To make a regulated alteration to transfer the school to a new school building on a new site in Brecon

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