

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET EXECUTIVE

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REPORT TITLE: Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys – Strategic Aim 2
'To improve learner entitlement and experience for post-16 learners'

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report presents the outcome of the work carried out by the Council's Post-16 Workstream in relation to Strategic Aim 2 of the Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-30 – 'To improve learner entitlement and experience for post-16 learners'. The report also requests Cabinet's approval to establish a new structure for the strategic management of the Powys Post-16 provision in accordance with the Proposal document (appendix 1).
- 1.2. This report outlines the process followed and options considered.
- 1.3. The report is supported by the following appendices:
 - Appendix 1 – Proposal for Strategic Management of Powys Post-16 Provision
 - Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment
 - Appendix 3 - Options Evaluation – Investment Objectives
 - Appendix 4 - Options Evaluation – SWOT analysis
 - Appendix 5 – [September 2019 Cabinet Report "Review of Sixth Form Provision 2019"](#)

2. Note

- 2.1. Reference to "Powys post-16 provision" in this document pertains to all provision (educational, pastoral, enrichment and careers advice and guidance) from "Powys post-16 centres" (Powys Sixth Forms and Powys Special Schools which support learners aged 16+).

3. Background: Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys

- 3.1. On the 14th April 2020, a new Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys was approved by the Leader via a delegated decision.

- 3.2. The Strategy was developed following extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders during two separate periods between October 2019 and March 2020.
- 3.3. 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.’
- 3.4. 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

4. The Post-16 context and the case for change

- 4.1. The council’s Transforming Education 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.
- 4.2. The requirement to improve post-16 provision falls under Strategic Aim 2: “we will improve learner entitlement and experience for post-16 learners”.
- 4.3. The purpose of Strategic Aim 2 is: “to ensure that post-16 learners (and 14-16 year old learners) are able to access a broad range of subjects within Powys,

with a blended offer of academic and vocational provision, and to ensure that the post-16 section in Powys is sustainable”.

- 4.4. The initial focus of Strategic Aim 2 is to: “focus on enhanced collaboration between schools to ensure a high-quality post-16 curriculum that is accessible to all learners and is affordable within the funding received from the Welsh Government. This will include more digital learning opportunities where learners are taught via video-conferencing across more than one school.”
- 4.5. The core challenges facing post-16 provision which must be addressed are identified in the strategy, in the [Powys Post-16 Review Paper](#) presented to Cabinet in September 2019; and are also evidenced by the associated data sets hosted on the council’s website alongside the strategy document. These challenges are outlined in the following section.

5. Post-16 finance – the current situation:

- 5.1. Powys sixth forms are funded annually by the Welsh Government’s Local Authority Post-16 Education Provision grant (herein referred to as the “post-16 funding”).
- 5.2. The council’s allocation for 2021-22 is £4,691,633. Of this £35,000 is to be retained by the council to fund marketing and other central costs with the remainder being distributed to sixth forms by a formula based on year 13 courses provided and year 12 pupil numbers, with uplifts for deprivation, sparsity and Welsh Medium provision (based on the formula used by Welsh Government to distribute funding to Welsh local authorities).
- 5.3. The post-16 funding is based on learner numbers and Powys has seen a trend of reducing funding allocations since 2013-14 due to its declining learner population. This in turn leads to a decrease in the number of subjects that can be offered.
- 5.4. There is a statutory minimum offer of 30 “level 3” subjects (AS / A level and equivalent), including 5 vocational subjects. To meet this statutory requirement, the council has been operating a North and South Powys Post-16 Partnership for a number of years, where schools collaborate to provide a joint timetable. Learners can choose to study a subject at more than one school and the council funds the inter-school transport. The cost of this in 2017/18 was £240k, which is in addition to the council’s home-to-school transport budget.
- 5.5. The review of sixth form provision (September 2019, appendix 5) shows that despite this collaboration there remained significant duplication of courses, with many subjects available at 9 or 10 of the 11 Powys sixth forms. This duplication is unsustainable and reduces further the choices available to learners; leading them to seek alternative provision elsewhere. In turn this leads to a reduction of funding for Powys sixth forms.

6. The Post-16 workstream approach

- 6.1. The council established the “Post-16 Workstream” in June 2020 to take forward Strategic Aim 2 of the Strategy. The workstream membership includes a Workstream Lead, two Powys Secondary Headteachers, two Challenge Advisors, ALN advisors, the HR and finance business partners and project management and communications officer support.
- 6.2. The workstream has followed the council’s Transformation Approach to ensure that the customer remains the central focus and that any proposals are tested and refined as the work progresses.
- 6.3. The workstream first worked with all Powys Secondary Headteachers to set out the Learner Entitlement criteria (appendix 1).
- 6.4. The workstream then explored three potential models of post-16 provision and evaluated the models against the learner entitlement criteria (appendix 3).
- 6.5. To ensure that any proposal supports learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), a post-16 ALN report was produced outlining the current situation and future post-16 ALN requirements. The requirements formed part of the proposal evaluation and are an integral part of the final proposal.
- 6.6. The evaluation process identified a preferred option and this was ratified by the Transforming Education Programme Board ahead of further stakeholder engagement.
- 6.7. Informal engagement was undertaken with key stakeholders from January to March 2021 inclusive. Stakeholders included all Powys Post-16 Centre Headteachers (Secondary and Special Schools) as well as other key groups including Governors and the Welsh Government (table 1 lists the key stakeholders). Learner Focus groups with current Powys sixth form students have helped to test assumptions and to gain learner insight.
- 6.8. The final proposal has been developed following this engagement period. Stakeholder feedback has contributed significantly to the final proposal and to the drafting of the Frequently Asked Questions section of the proposal (appendix 1). The Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee was engaged at this stage to ensure that feedback from the Committee could be fully incorporated into the final proposal.

Table 1. Informal stakeholder engagement, January – March 2021, included:

Stakeholder	Meeting Date
Secondary Head Teachers Group (+ regular informal updates from the 2 Head Teacher Post-16 w/s representatives to the group)	19/01/2021, 24/03/2021
Education Transformation Board	20/01/2021
Governors Consultative Committee	20/01/2021
Powys Public Service Board (written update)	20/01/2021

Briefing with the Leader and Portfolio Holder	22/01/2021
Briefing with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder	25/01/2021
Cabinet Management Team	26/01/2021
Learner Focus Group: Llanfyllin	23/02/2021
Informal Learning & Skills Scrutiny Committee	26/02/2021
Learner Focus Group: Llanfair Caereinion	09/03/2021
Schools Budget Forum	09/03/2021
Welsh Government	02/03/2021
Schools Service: Service Manager for Inclusion & Youth Services & ALN Manager	18/03/2021
Learner Focus Group: Crickhowell	23/03/2021

7. Post-16 Options

- 7.1. The workstream has focused on improvements to post-16 provision delivered by Powys post-16 providers (sixth forms and special schools). Whilst the proposals do not directly impact on partner providers at this stage, the proposals take account of how more co-ordinated and strategic partnership working could be facilitated by the proposal going forward with a view to providing the required breadth of courses for Powys post-16 learners.
- 7.2. Three core models for post-16 provision were identified and options papers were produced accordingly. The papers detailed how each model could operate and whether it could deliver against the core Learner Entitlement criteria. A summary of each proposal is provided below.
- 7.3. **Do Nothing:**
This model reflects the current situation wherein current post-16 providers continue to manage provision independently of each other and collaboration between centres and with other partners is arranged on an informal basis.
- 7.4. **Establish a single Powys Post-16 provider:**
Under this model a new, single Powys post-16 provider would be introduced. The provider would be responsible for post-16 provision across the county and would replace provision currently offered by Powys secondary schools. The option does not make assumptions about where the provision would be delivered or the number of locations it would be delivered from. The option would mean that there would be one single provider operating from one or multiple sites across the county.
Under this model there would be a level of input from Powys secondary head teachers however the new provider would have its own governance structure.

7.5. Introduce a new structure for the strategic management of Powys post-16 provision (Preferred Option):

This is the preferred option and as such the option has evolved, following stakeholder feedback, since the original proposal paper was written. A summary of the proposal is written below. The full proposal document is provided at appendix 1. The document provides more detail about the proposal and also sets out terms of reference for the proposed Boards. An FAQs section is also provided within the full proposal document.

This model would introduce a new structure for the strategic management of Powys post-16 provision. This would comprise a high-level Strategic Management Board (SMB) and two “Powys Post-16 Centre” cluster groups (north and south) with Operational Management Boards (OMBs). All secondary head teachers (including special school headteachers) would be represented on the OMBs.

The SMB would have delegated authority for determining how the Powys post-16 grant funding is spent. No provider would be able to obtain post-16 funding to run a course if it has not had the approval of the SMB.

The OMBs would be required to submit annual post-16 provision proposals to the SMB. The proposals would be collaborative proposals between all providers in the OMB cluster groups. The proposals would need to meet specific requirements as set out in appendix 1 and which would be further detailed by the SMB once established.

Strategic management of provision will enable the council to meet its aim of ensuring post-16 provision has a broad and balanced curriculum offered through the mediums of Welsh and English and that Additional Learning Needs (ALN) support is properly catered for.

Underpinning the proposal is the concept that there is a “whole-Powys” Post-16 provision on offer for learners. Under the proposal learners will have a “home base” (most likely at their local Post-16 centre) but will also be able to access all Powys Post-16 centres for their studies. The provision on offer will also be county-wide and where learners are geographically unable to travel to attend a course they would be “distance learners” taking the course via e-sgol from their home base.

8. Options evaluation

- 8.1. The options outlined above have been studied in detail and evaluated by the post-16 workstream. Evaluation papers are provided at appendixes 3 and 4.
- 8.2. Evaluation of the “Do Nothing” option supports the view that change is necessary. Whilst there are some examples of excellence in current post-16

provision and some elements that need to be kept; overall there remain to be significant weaknesses and threats in the “Do Nothing” option.

- 8.3. Option 2 (Establish a single Powys Post-16 provider) presents a radical and hard-hitting change which is not supported by the workstream and which is not considered to be necessary in the current climate. The weaknesses and threats of this option outweigh the strengths and opportunities.
- 8.4. Option 3 (introduce a new structure for the strategic management of Powys post-16 provision) is the most suitable and appropriate option. This model is progressive and builds upon the growing collaborative environment that has been fostered between schools during the Covid-19 outbreak. The model can deliver the necessary improvements whilst retaining local ownership of provision, ensuring there is coordination of delivery across the county and importantly also ensuring that our most valuable resource (our headteachers and staff) play a crucial role in leading the change. The model also enables the council to build stronger and better co-ordinated strategic partnerships with providers including but not limited to: colleges; universities; businesses; the PTHB; Mudiad Meithrin; Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership.
- 8.5. The preferred option addresses the weaknesses and threats of the “Do Nothing” option whilst also introducing additional strengths and opportunities. The strengths of the model are wide ranging and greater in number than those of Option 2 whilst the weaknesses and threats are fewer.
- 8.6. Strengths and opportunities of the Preferred Option:
 - Maintains local ownership.
 - Current providers remain central to decision making.
 - Familiar format for pupils and parents.
 - Post-16 centres remain in a broad range of locations geographically.
 - Strategic co-ordination of provision, quality and partnerships.
 - Financially sustainable.
 - Commissioning model will enhance the curriculum offer especially for Welsh Medium and ALN.
 - Two levels of quality assurance - locally and strategically.
 - Staff employment remains with individual providers.
 - Provision will continue to be supported by knowledgeable, engaged and professional Head Teachers and staff.
 - No consultation requirement or disruptive school re-organisation.
 - Covid-19 has enhanced the appetite for collaboration amongst Head Teachers and staff; offering the opportunity and willingness to formalise this.
 - Extends an ethos of professional learning and collaborative working.
 - e-sgol and blended learning uptake has accelerated due to Covid-19, providing an opportunity to extend this further.

9. Resource implications

- 9.1. Moving to a funding delivery model under the direction of the Strategic Management Board will minimise duplication which will in turn lead to more choice for learners and better value for money. The two cluster groups (North and South) would propose a curriculum offer for their cluster for review and approval by the SMB. The SMB will have delegated authority to determine how the post-16 funding is allocated, based on the approved curriculum offer. Initially there will be no change to the way in which premises costs are allocated from the post-16 funding by the council.
- 9.2. It is expected that the membership of the SMB would be part of the substantive role of those members and any additional costs would be absorbed within their current roles, with the exception of any expenses as a result of travelling to meetings. It is anticipated that these would be minimised by holding meetings virtually (virtual meetings are written into the Terms of Reference for the SMB and OMBs).
- 9.3. The SMB would require some officer support that would also manage the marketing of the post-16 offer. It is anticipated that in total the officer support and potential expenses would cost approximately £55,000 per annum. During the initial stages of establishing the SMB it is proposed that these additional costs would be included within the current transformation budget for the post-16 workstream and thereafter, would be self-funded by the increased post-16 grant allocations as a result of an increase in the number of learners accessing post-16 education within Powys post-16 centres.
- 9.4. 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 process.

10. Section 151 officer implications

- 10.1. The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report. As post-16 provision is entirely grant funded, the proposals must be entirely self funding and should provide the most cost-effective model for delivering post-16 education provision to the learners of Powys.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view.

12. Comment from local member(s)

- 12.1. N/A

13. Integrated Impact Assessment

- 13.1. An initial impact assessment in respect of the recommendation has been completed. 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.

The summary of the impact assessment is as follows:

- 13.2. The aim of the proposal is to improve learner entitlement and experience for post-16 learners across Powys through establishing a new structure for the strategic management of post-16 provision and this impact assessment suggests that the impact is generally good or very good, with no negative impact.
- 13.3. 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.

14. Recommendation

- 14.1. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the establishment of a new structure for the strategic management of Powys post-16 provision, from the end of May 2021, in accordance with the proposal document at appendix 1.

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