

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**CABINET EXECUTIVE
23 November 2021**

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

REPORT TITLE: Castle Caereinion C. in W. School

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Further to the decision made by Cabinet on the 13th July 2021, the Council published a Statutory Notice proposing to close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet members of the outcome of the statutory objection period and objections received.
- 1.3 The report includes a recommendation to proceed with implementation of the proposal to close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022.
- 1.4 The report is supported by the following appendices:
- **Appendix A** – Statutory Notice
 - **Appendix B** – Objection Report
 - **Appendix C** – Updated Impact Assessments

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. The Strategy sets out a new vision education in Powys, 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 new 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 the Strategic Aims of the Strategy is to '*improve learner entitlement and experience.*' Within this aim, the Strategy sets out a Strategic Objective to '*rationalise primary provision.*'

2.5 On the 9th February 2021, the Council's Cabinet considered an options appraisal paper in respect of Castle Caereinion C. in W. School, and agreed to carry out consultation on the following:

- To close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools

The Consultation Period

- 2.7 Consultation on the proposal to close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code (2018) from the 14th April 2021 to the 2nd June 2021.
- 2.8 A Consultation Report listing the issues raised during the consultation and the Council's response to them was published. This was considered by Cabinet on the 13th July 2021.
- 2.9 At the meeting on the 13th July 2021, Cabinet agreed to proceed with the publication of a Statutory Notice in order to proceed with the process to close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.

Statutory Notice

- 2.10 Further to the decision made by Cabinet on the 13th July 2021, the Council published a Statutory Notice proposing the following:
- 'i. To discontinue Castle Caereinion Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School, Castle Caereinion, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 9AL.'*

It is proposed to implement the proposal on 31st August 2022.'

- 2.11 The Statutory Notice was published on the 9th September 2021 for a period of 28 days, in accordance with the guidance within the School Organisation Code (2018). A copy of the Statutory Notice is attached as Appendix A.
- 2.12 The objection period ended on the 7th October 2021.

Objections

- 2.13 21 objections were received during the statutory objection period.
- 2.14 The objections received included a petition against the proposal which received 102 signatures.
- 2.15 Objections were received from the following:
- Castle Caereinion Community Council
 - Diocese of St Asaph
 - Castle Caereinion Recreation Association
 - Parents and members of the community

- 2.16 The objections received are included in the Objection Report (Appendix B), along with the Council's response to the issues raised in the Objections.
- 2.17 As outlined in the Objection Report, the main issues raised in the Objections are as follows:
1. Concern about the impact on the community
 - General concern about the impact on the community
 - Concern about the impact on the community centre
 - Concern about the impact on the local church
 - Reference to housing developments in the village
 2. Concern about the impact on pupils
 - General concern about the impact on pupils
 - Concern that pupils would struggle in larger schools
 3. Comments about transport
 - Concern about the impact of additional travel time
 - Comments about the cost of transport
 - Concern about the environmental impact of transport
 - Concern that reliance on transport would impact on pupils' ability to access after school activities
 - Queries about the transport that would be provided
 4. Concern about access to Church in Wales provision
 5. Positive comments about Castle Caereinion C. in W. School
 6. Positive comments about small / rural schools
 7. Concern that additional pupils would put pressure on other schools
 8. Comments about the process
 - Concern about the process taking place during the Covid pandemic
 - Suggestion that the correct process has not been followed
 9. Suggestion that Federation with Welshpool C. in W. School should be looked at again

3 Advice

- 3.1 Having considered the objections received, it is recommended that the Council proceeds with implementation of the proposal to close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, as outlined in the Statutory Notice (Appendix A).
- 3.2 The reasons for this are as follows:
- To address the issue of low pupil numbers
 - To reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
 - To realise a financial saving to the Council
 - To enable pupils to attend larger schools, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum
 - To enable pupils to attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
 - To enable pupils to attend schools with better quality accommodation
 - The proposal meets all the Critical Success Factors

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 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, it is estimated that implementation of the proposal would deliver annual revenue savings to the Council of around **£58,100**
- 4.2 The overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of over £90,400 calculated by re-running the school funding formula for all the schools potentially affected should Castle Caereinion C. in W. School close. This takes into account any changes in funding needed to accommodate additional pupils at these schools, based on pupils attending their nearest alternative Powys school. However, the Council recognises that parents may choose any school for their children.
- 4.3 The savings from the delegated school funding is offset by estimated additional transport costs of £32,300, based on providing home to school transport for 16 pupils at £170 per school day (190 school days per annum).
- 4.4 The Statutory Notice published in respect of this proposal states that in addition to transport being provided in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, *'the Council will provide transport for Church in Wales provision for pupils currently attending Castle Caereinion Church in Wales School who wish to transfer to Welshpool Church in Wales Primary School'*. As the Council does not currently know which schools pupils would choose to transfer to, it is not

possible to calculate the exact cost of this. However the following is an estimate of the range of costs which could be required, depending on how many pupils require transport:

- **Minimal costs** – all pupils can be accommodated within existing transport provision for secondary, albeit some routes may need to be extended - £10-£20 per school day - £1,900 - £3,800 per annum
- **Need to increase size of bus** – £50 per day - £9,500 per annum
- **Additional Taxi required** – approx.. £60 - £75 per day - £11,400 - £14,250 per annum
- **New bus required** – £170 - £230 per day - £32,300 - £43,700

4.4 The school had a cumulative surplus balance of £51,788 as at the 31st March 2021. The budget approved by the Governing Body for the current year shows this decreasing to £32,786 by 31st March 2022.

4.5 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’

4.6 It is therefore proposed that:

- Spend at the school is restricted to that included in its approved budget plan and no virement of funds between budget headings is permitted unless approved by the Authority;
- Any staffing changes are subject to approval by the Authority;
- Any contracts awarded for the supply of goods or services are subject to approval by the Authority.

This will ensure that expenditure is limited to that which is absolutely necessary to protect Council resources.

4.7 Implementation of the proposal would require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, HR and Finance.

4.8 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer): “I note the resource implications set out above and support the proposals set out in section 4.6. limiting expenditure to that approved in the school’s approved budget.

5. Legal implications

5.1 Legal: the recommendations can be accepted from a legal point of view

5.2 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”.

6. Comment from local member(s)

6.1 No comments received.

7. Integrated Impact Assessment

7.1 An initial impact assessment was considered by Cabinet on the 9th February 2021.

7.2 In addition, a range of draft impact assessments were produced as part of the consultation documentation. These included an Integrated Impact Assessment, an Equalities Impact Assessment, and a Community Impact Assessment.

7.3 The draft impact assessments were updated to reflect issues raised during the consultation period and the updated impact assessments were considered by Cabinet on the 13th July 2021 when considering whether or not to proceed with the publication of a statutory notice.

7.4 These have been further updated following the objection period, and the updated version is attached as Appendix C.

8. Recommendation

- To receive the Objection Report in respect of closing Castle Caereinion C. in W. School.
- To approve the proposal to close Castle Caereinion C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.

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