

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD BY TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 14
DECEMBER 2021**

PRESENT

County Councillor M R Harris (Chair)

County Councillors MC Alexander, B Baynham, P Davies, A W Davies, I McIntosh and R Powell

In attendance: County Councillors L Rijnenberg, P Roberts and R Williams

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor Heulwen Hulme and from the Executive Director, People and Organisational Development and the Executive Director Economy and Environment.

2.	MINUTES
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The Leader was authorised to sign the minutes of the meetings held on 23rd and 26th November 2021 as correct records.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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County Councillor Iain McIntosh declared a prejudicial interest in the report on Mount Street Infant School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc CP School. He would be speaking in the debate as a local member not as a Cabinet member and would not be voting.

4.	MOUNT STREET INFANT SCHOOL, MOUNT STREET JUNIOR SCHOOL AND CRADOC CP SCHOOL
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Cabinet considered responses received to the consultation on proposals to

Phase 1

- To close Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School
- To establish a new English-medium primary school for pupils aged 4-11 on the current sites of Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School.

Phase 2

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

During the consultation period, virtual meetings had been held with staff, governors and school councils. 229 respondents had completed the consultation

response form which was included in the consultation document. In addition, 53 written responses were received from respondents including Estyn, by e-mail or post. The written responses included an online and paper petition to 'Save Cradoc Primary School!', which was signed by 1,275 people. The Leader confirmed that the Cabinet had read all of the correspondence received.

The issues raised in the written responses to the consultation and those raised in the consultation meetings, were set out in Appendix B to the report along with the Council's response to these issues.

Based on the findings of the consultation, and further assessment of the options in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code in terms of the Presumption Against Closure of Rural Schools, the advice of officers was that the Council should proceed with the proposals to amalgamate Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School to create a new primary school that would initially operate from the current three sites before moving to a new building in the future, by publishing a Statutory Notice.

County Councillor Iain McIntosh argued that the closure of Cradoc school would go against the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys guiding principles both on community-focused schools, because of the number of clubs and community uses associated with the school which would be lost and on environmentally sustainable schools. He noted that no separate impact assessment had been created for Cradoc school and that the joint impact assessment for the project had not measured the impact of the proposal on climate change. He reminded Cabinet of the community's preferred option for a new school at Cradoc which had not been presented to the Cabinet and he argued that this was in contravention of the Council's Constitution. He also noted that none of the papers had been translated into Nepali or Welsh.

County Councillor Roger Williams argued that Cradoc school provided a choice for parents who wanted a rural education for their children and urged the Cabinet not to impose urban solutions on a rural area. As a governor of Mount Street Junior School, he was supportive of merging Mount Street Infants School and Mount Street Junior School to create an all-through primary school. He also asked the Cabinet to look again at the siting of the school noting the concerns raised about the site during the consultation.

County Councillor Liz Rijnenberg asked for further consideration to be given to option 3a i.e. merging Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and retaining Cradoc school and queried whether the scoring of the options had been reviewed again in light of the consultation. She noted concerns in the community about the process dragging on and the impact this was having on education and the pastoral care of children. She asked the Cabinet to reflect on the Estyn comments questioning what the Council's assessment that standards, wellbeing, provision and leadership would be strengthened by amalgamation was based on. She asked if option 4 went ahead would it be option 3b by the back door as phase 1 would not happen until 2023 and parents may choose to send their children to other schools.

Comments from County Councillor Matthew Dorrance, who was unable to be present were read out at the meeting. He challenged the consultation process, questioning why documents had not been translated into Nepali until Councillors

had raised this issue. He also raised concerns about ALN provision in Brecon, the accessibility of the Penlan site and the affordability of the project and the debt burden it would place on future generations.

County Councillor Pete Roberts, Chair of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee presented the Committee's recommendations. He advised that the Committee had been assured that the proposals were robust. The Committee had asked for an explanation of why the option to merge the two Mount Street schools and then federate with Cradoc School had had been discounted. This was included in the response to the Scrutiny recommendations that had been circulated to the Cabinet. The Committee accepted the arguments in favour of Mount Street Infants School and Mount Street Junior School but had sought further assurance on Cradoc School, in particular, on the early years provision on site. The Committee had been given some assurance that the Authority would be looking at how that provision could be accommodated. Assurances were received on transport that distances travelled by pupils would not be excessive. There were a large number of movements across the catchment and for future consultations it would be beneficial to know why this was the case. The Committee had received assurances about the accessibility of the site and that costs would be contained within the current funding band.

The Portfolio Holder and officers responded to the comments made by local members and the Chair of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

It was explained that just under 50% of pupils at Cradoc travelled from outside the catchment so if a new school was to be built, it would be a two-class school which was not a sustainable model. Currently the longest journey was just over 6 miles, if the proposal was accepted, the longest journey would be just over 9 miles. There were buses already travelling to the Penlan site.

Responding to the comments about sustainability, Cabinet was reminded that the aim of the proposal was to provide a brand new building which would be in accordance with the Welsh Government's target for carbon net zero buildings. It made sense to have one school on the Penlan site with the infrastructure and travel arrangements already in place. Active travel plans would be developed.

On finance and affordability, it was confirmed that the funding would come from unallocated funds in the 21st Century Schools Programme which was 65% funded by Welsh Government, 35% from the County Council. This is subject to full business case approval. The financial commitment is already recognised in the Council's Capital Programme. Welsh Government would provide an additional 10% for net carbon zero new builds. The Head of Finance confirmed that the impact of debt on future generations had to be considered and advised this was done by profiling the debt over the life of the asset for which it provides a service for its users. It was noted that if the Cabinet accepted the new funding formula later in the meeting, the savings from the proposal would reduce by approximately by £50,000.

On the points made about Estyn, their endorsement of the Council's transformation strategy was noted.

On the alternative option proposed to merge Mount Street Infants and Junior Schools and federate Cradoc, this had been discounted as it would impact on

the timescales for implementation of the proposals. It would also mean that there would still need to be a third process to merge the schools together in order to establish one school in a new building.

The proposal was on a phased basis. Phase 1, to amalgamate the three schools to create a new school was integral to implementing phase 2. It was very important that the new school had an input into the development of the new build. The implementation date had been put back to 2023 which reflected the complexity of the consultation.

Concerns about the Penlan site had been noted and included in the impact assessment. Active travel plans and safe routes to school would be looked at very early on in the design phase of the new build.

The Director of Education confirmed that it would be essential to have the governance structures in place at phase 1. It would be very beneficial to share leadership and expertise across the three sites before coming together in the new building. This had been the experience when primary schools had merged in Welshpool. Referring to the comments made by Estyn which had been referred to by local Members, the Director noted that the merger of primary schools in Welshpool had seen an improvement in standards. The school improvement advisers judged that standards in all three schools were good and that sharing leadership and expertise in phase 1 would further improve provision and standards.

On impact assessments, one had been drafted for the proposal as a whole but when there were differences between the communities, this was clearly set out in the document.

On early years provision, it was confirmed that this would be an integral part of the new school. It was acknowledged that there would be an impact in Cradoc and the Council would work with the community to see whether an element of the provision could be retained in Cradoc.

In moving the recommendation, the Portfolio Holder noted that this was an exciting, transformational proposal which offered a sustainable way forward and which he wished was available throughout the county. He thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their work and their conclusion that the case for change had been made as long as it progressed to phase 2.

RESOLVED

- 1. To receive the Consultation Report in respect of the proposals affecting Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior School and Cradoc C.P. School.**
- 2. To approve the publication of a statutory notice to:**
Phase 1

- **To amalgamate Mount Street Infants School, Mount Street Junior 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 2023.**

Phase 2

- **To make a regulated alteration to transfer the school to a new school building on a new site in Brecon**
- **The target date for this phase is 2025/6.**

County Councillor Iain McIntosh announced that he was resigning from the Conservative group on the Council and from the Cabinet with immediate effect.

5.	LLANFYLLIN CATCHMENT TRANSFORMATION
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The Leader advised that this report was being deferred for a week.

6.	SCHOOL DELEGATED BUDGET FUNDING FORMULA REVIEW / REVISIONS TO THE POWYS SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS
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Cabinet considered responses received to the consultation to changes to the School Funding Formula for mainstream Primary phase schools and revisions to the Powys Scheme for Financing Schools.

The formula had been developed as part of the Authority's Post Inspection Action Plan following the Estyn inspection in July 2019.

A Formula Review Group had been established with a range of stakeholders along with Council officers, chaired by the Strategic Lead for Education. The group reviewed a range of school funding formulae from other rural Welsh local authorities before developing a set of formula proposals for mainstream primary phase schools that were consulted upon in October 2021.

The aim of the proposed formula was to support a move to a pupil-led formula that would provide a stable, transparent and equitable funding arrangement for mainstream, primary phase schools, which would

- Create a more equitable provision for all learners across Powys
- Support the aspirations of the transformation programme
- Support all learners including helping offset the effects of disadvantage
- Support a collaborative schools' community which offers effective professional learning to facilitate the self improving system.
- Support inclusion and bilingualism, and promote access to excellence for all learners.

County Councillor Pete Roberts presented the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee comments. The Committee were supportive of the proposals and pleased that they were being phased in to give schools time to adjust. The Committee had recommended that indicative figures for individual schools should be published within a month of the Cabinet decision and that when the review of the new formula was undertaken, that the Scrutiny Committee have an opportunity to scrutinise the outcome of that review.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Property confirmed that he would be happy to bring the revised formula back to Scrutiny. He also confirmed the fact that small streams continued to be funded was a recognition of the situation as it was but that the Cabinet remained committed to transformation.

RESOLVED

- 1. the proposed amendments to the current formula for primary schools with specialist centres be implemented in full from 1 April 2022;**
- 2. the initial Per Pupil Allocation is calculated using the cost elements set out in Appendix A of the Consultation document;**
- 3. Component 3 includes a top up for small schools, scaled by bands of pupil numbers, for schools with fewer than 91 pupils;**
- 4. Component 3 includes a class size top up for schools with between 61 and 149 pupils (inclusive) as calculated in 3.9 above;**
- 5. Component 3 includes a junior school top up as set out in 3.10 – 3.11 above;**
- 6. Component 3 includes a dual stream top up which includes a small stream top up and a dual stream class size top up as set out in 3.12 above.**
- 7. Component 3 includes a bilingual top up for Welsh medium or dual stream schools, as set out in 3.13 above;**
- 8. Component 3 includes a surplus internal area top up as set out in 3.14 above;**
- 9. Component 3 includes a surplus external grounds area top up as set out in 3.15 above;**
- 10. Component 3 includes a building condition top up as set out in 3.16 above;**

11. Component 3 includes a top up to match the actual cost of non-domestic rates, statutory testing, insurance for premises and employees;
12. Implementation is phased over a three year period;
13. The revisions to the Powys Scheme for Financing Schools as set out in Appendix B and approved by Schools Budget Forum are agreed.

i)	DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST MEETING
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Cabinet noted the delegated decisions taken by Portfolio Holders.

ii)	FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
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Cabinet noted the forward work programme.

iii)	EXEMPT ITEMS
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

iv)	WELSH GOVERNMENT REGIONAL ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK FOR MID WALES
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Cabinet considered a report on Welsh Government's draft Regional Economic Framework for Mid Wales.

RESOLVED to approve the recommendations in the report.

**County Councillor Rosemarie Harris
Chair**