



Plans for Powys Schools

Vision 2025

Consultation Document

Consultation dates:

21st November 2017 – 30th January 2018

Plans for Powys Schools

Overview The council has a duty to ensure that schools are organised as efficiently as possible in order to provide the best possible educational opportunities to all pupils.

The council's most recent Schools Organisation Policy was approved by the council's Cabinet in September 2015. Following the county council elections held in May 2017, the policy has been refreshed to ensure that it aligns with the new Cabinet's vision for Powys, 'Vision 2025'.

This document is also available on the council's website via the following link: <http://www.powys.gov.uk/index.php?id=2260>.

How to respond You can respond to this consultation by completing the online response form which is available via the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5LB7FTH>

Alternatively, you can respond in writing using the contact details below.

All responses must be received by 30 January 2018 at the latest.

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What will happen next Once the consultation period has ended, a consultation report will be produced and the document will be updated to take account of the feedback received. An updated version will be considered by the council's Cabinet in the spring.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A renewed vision for education in Powys

Powys County Council is committed to the success and well-being of every child and young person. We want all children and young people to develop the knowledge, skills and characteristics that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens.

This is an exciting and inspiring time for education in Powys and Wales. A national educational reform is underway, with a new mission for education, a new curriculum and significant changes to the way support for learners with additional learning needs will be delivered.

Vibrant communities and a prosperous society are built on the foundation of a strong education system. Our education system in Powys is built on a strong partnership with schools, parents, guardians and communities so that our children and young people can become the best they can be and the leaders of tomorrow.

This new policy represents a step-change in the council's approach to developing the infrastructure required to meet the challenges ahead. We wish to work with schools and communities to develop a positive and innovative network of schools, based on a commitment to collaborative learning and developing partnerships with schools, families, communities and businesses, all working together to create a system that is accessible, integrated and responsive.

We welcome your ideas in developing the ideas within this consultation document, so that we are able to implement positive delivery plans that will support education across our diverse communities.

By working together, we can achieve excellence in Powys and give all of our children the opportunity to reach their potential.

Councillor Myfanwy Alexander
Portfolio Holder for Education

Ian Budd
Director of Education

2. THE VISION FOR SCHOOLS IN POWYS

The council's Cabinet has recently launched its 'Vision 2025', which sets out its priorities for the coming years. 'Learning and Skills' is one of the priorities outlined within this vision, and the Cabinet's vision is as follows:

'Learning and Skills'

We will strengthen learning and skills

- *School leavers have the right qualifications to progress*
- *Access to education provision and good career advice is equitable*
- *Working in partnership with schools, colleges, universities and businesses will improve career opportunities*
- *High quality teaching and learning environments embrace new technology for the population*
- *Pupils have access to remote/alternative learning opportunities*
- *Early years provision is helping families to return to meaningful employment'*

Vision 2025 also includes a commitment to engagement with residents and communities, and a commitment to 'Change how we work', which includes a commitment to promote strong partnership working.

3. OUR AIMS

The main aims of the council's Learning Service are to ensure that the children and young people of Powys are supported to be:

- Safe, healthy, confident and resilient;
- Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- Ethical and informed citizens ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

In order to support the achievement of these aims, the council aspires to have an educational infrastructure that meets the following aims:

- Provides all learners with the opportunity to achieve high standards of achievement and attainment
- Has high quality, resilient leadership and management
- Has high quality learning environments
- Has a greater focus on collaboration and partnership working, in order to enable schools to provide the best possible opportunities for learners
- Enables schools to run more efficiently
- Increases demand for Welsh-medium provision and provides access to provision which will enable pupils to become confident Welsh speakers
- Develops our schools into establishments that are central to community activity

4. HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS

Powys is a large, sparsely populated county. However, there are significant differences across Powys, from larger market towns to very small villages, and from areas which are traditionally Welsh speaking to areas where very little Welsh is spoken. Powys' diversity is reflected in the school provision available across the county – there are significant variations in terms of school size, as well as differences in terms of language medium and denominational status.

Most Powys schools operate as stand-alone primary or secondary schools, however many of these schools are involved in informal collaborative arrangements with one or more other schools. Separate infant and junior schools continue to operate in two towns, and one school operates as an all-through school, providing education for pupils from 5 – 18 years of age. In addition, some secondary schools operate over more than one site, and there is one formal federation of three schools.

The authority has been proactive in initiating a move towards alternative models of delivering education. Many of these new models have resulted in numerous benefits for the schools involved, and have ensured the continued provision of education in rural areas.

In order to move towards a more efficient educational infrastructure, whilst also retaining the provision of education in rural areas, the authority's School Organisation Programme will move forward in partnership with schools and the communities they serve, with a greater focus on alternative models of delivering education, such as collaboration models, federation, multi-site schools and all-through schools. Any changes will be taken forward in discussion with the school communities affected, in order to achieve the best solution for each area, with governing bodies engaging with their communities in order to plan sustainable schools provision for the future.

Our guiding principles for developing the schools infrastructure until 2025 are as follows:

- More secondary schools to become 'all-through schools', or part of multi-sited arrangements
- More small primary schools to be part of formal collaborations / federations / amalgamations
- Remove infant / junior split by creating 'all-through' primary schools
- Strong, innovative 'Locality Management' models established
- New Welsh-medium provision established / an increased number of Welsh-medium places, in order to create demand
- All special schools to be in condition A/B buildings
- A resilient, attractive post-16 model implemented

5. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following are some of the key considerations which will be taken into account by the council when determining its work programme:

5.1 School size

There is significant variation in school size across Powys, in both the primary and secondary sectors. The council acknowledges that in a rural county as diverse as Powys there is no one size fits all approach to school size and school organisation, and that different solutions will be appropriate in different parts of Powys, to meet local needs.

The authority acknowledges the important contribution small, rural schools make to the viability of rural communities. Whilst the authority is committed to safeguarding the provision of education in rural communities, it must be noted that there are particular challenges facing small, rural schools. These include:

- Difficulties with the recruitment and retention of staff, including headteachers
- Concerns about the workload of headteachers
- Challenges associated with teaching mixed age classes
- Restricted size of peer groups, which result in reduced challenge for pupils and reduced opportunities for social interaction
- Challenges with offering a wide range of subject choices for pupils in the secondary sector, particularly in Key Stage 4 and post-16.

Many of these challenges can be mitigated through greater collaboration with other schools, which can result in benefits to pupils, staff, governors and other members of the school community.

The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school that contains fewer than 91 registered pupils.¹ The authority will work in partnership with schools that meet this definition to identify opportunities for collaboration with other schools, with the aim of ensuring that all 'small schools' are involved in some form of collaboration / federation / amalgamation with one or more other schools by the year 2025.

5.2 Leadership

The authority aspires to ensure effective, distributed and resilient leadership in all Powys schools, and to ensure that organisational structures enable school leaders to focus on effective leadership of the school and school improvement.

¹ Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2014/1133/made>

In many Powys schools, shared headteacher arrangements have been introduced in order to address difficulties with recruiting headteachers and other issues. Whilst these shared headteacher arrangements can bring many benefits for the school involved, the current informal arrangements which are often put in place do not always provide certainty and resilience for the schools.

In discussion with the school communities involved, the authority will move to formalise these type of arrangements, either through collaboration, federation or amalgamation, in order to provide greater certainty to the schools involved and to provide improved resilience in terms of their leadership.

In addition, when headteacher vacancies arise, the authority will enter into discussion with the school's governing body, to identify whether there are any possible shared leadership options which could be explored.

Alongside the need to formalise current leadership arrangements, the authority recognises the need to develop our own future school leaders, to ensure high quality leadership for our schools in the future.

5.3 Learning environment

Powys County Council aims to provide learning environments that meet the aspirations of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme.

Major capital investment in school buildings in Powys will continue to be taken forward through the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme, and the authority's programme for Band B will focus on buildings identified to be in the poorest condition.

Alongside this, capital funding through our major repairs programme will be focussed on where the need is greatest, as identified through the Schools Service's Asset Management Plan.

5.4 The Welsh language

In July 2017, the Welsh Government launched Cymraeg 2050², an ambitious new Welsh language strategy which sets out the vision to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This strategy acknowledges the role of education in the achievement of this aim, and also states that *'Welsh-medium immersion education is our principal method for ensuring that children can develop their Welsh language skills, and for creating new speakers.'*

² <http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/welsh-language-strategy-and-policies/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy/lang=en>

Powys County Council acknowledges the key role that Welsh-medium education will play in achieving the Welsh Government's aim to increase the number of Welsh speakers, and will prioritise the implementation of its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan in order to contribute towards this aim.

5.5 Financial resources

Powys County Council, like many other local authorities, is currently facing significant financial pressure, which is unlikely to improve in the coming years. This pressure is affecting all council services, including schools.

In order to continue to provide high quality services in this challenging financial climate, the authority needs to work towards a schools infrastructure which operates more efficiently, whilst also retaining access to provision in rural communities. To realise this, the authority will facilitate greater collaboration between schools, to include joint planning work, and will support schools to move towards shared staffing arrangements. These initiatives will enable schools to operate more efficiently, in order to maximise use of their budgets.

5.6 Geographical factors

Powys is the most sparsely populated county in England and Wales, and there is considerable travelling distance between some communities. The county's rural nature will be a key consideration in any school organisation developments. The council's expectation is that every child will be able to access high quality education within a reasonable distance of their home, and within the guidelines provided in the council's Home to School Transport Policy.

The council acknowledges the importance of rural schools in rural communities, and the contribution they make to the long-term sustainability of the local community, and will prioritise the retention of educational provision in rural communities.

5.7 The Community

The council's expectation is for the county's schools to become focal points within their communities. Many Powys schools are already used extensively by their community, and have strong links with the communities in which they are located. The council aspires to maximise this, in order to further develop the role of all schools in their community.

Where possible, the council will work to ensure the co-location of council services and other services on school sites, in particular as part of new build projects.

5.8 Post-16 provision

The post-16 sector in Powys is currently facing significant challenges, and increased competition from out-of-county providers. The authority is committed to providing the best possible opportunities to our post-16 learners, and will work in partnership with schools, NPTC group of colleges and other organisations to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of learners, and the needs of the local and national economy.

6. THE SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION WORK PROGRAMME

The council will take a flexible approach to school reorganisation, working in partnership with school communities to determine the best solution for each area, therefore avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach.

The council would welcome approaches from governing bodies wishing to pursue any partnership / collaborative arrangements with other schools.

6.1 Agreeing the Work Programme

The Schools Service's Management Team, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Education, will develop an annual work programme based on factors including, but not limited to the following:

- Schools which meet the Welsh Government's definition of a 'small school' (i.e. less than 91 pupils)
- Priorities outlined in other policies / plans e.g. Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- Opportunities to establish all-through provision (to replace separate infant / junior provision or separate primary / secondary provision)
- Headteacher vacancies
- Requests from individual governing bodies

Following agreement of the work programme, officers from the Schools Transformation Team will initiate discussions with the school communities affected, in order to identify the best solution for each area, with governing bodies engaging with their communities in order to plan sustainable schools provision for the future.

6.2 Statutory Processes

Should a solution be identified which requires organisational changes to one or more of the schools involved, e.g. establishing a federation of schools or amalgamating schools, the authority will need to follow the statutory procedures as outlined in The Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations or the School Organisation Code. Cabinet approval would be required at appropriate stages.

6.3 Governance

The Learning and Skills Programme Board will monitor progress and will report annually as part of the new governance arrangements within Powys County Council.

APPENDIX A GLOSSARY

All-through school

All-through schools are those that combine primary and secondary education in one establishment. Some are located on separate sites, whilst others are located on one site. Powys currently has one all-through school, Ysgol Bro Hyddgen in Machynlleth, which was established in 2014 following the amalgamation of Machynlleth Primary School and Ysgol Bro Ddyfi. All-through schools are growing in popularity across Wales, in both rural and urban areas.

To establish an all-through school, the authority would need to follow the formal process as outlined in the School Organisation Code.

Amalgamation

An amalgamation would see two or more schools merging and becoming one school, operating on their current sites, under one headteacher and governing body.

In order to amalgamate schools, the authority would need to follow the formal process as outlined in the School Organisation Code.

Collaboration

Bringing schools together under collaboration arrangements can make better use of resources, pool expertise, and allow schools to explore ways of doing things more effectively and efficiently. All schools are encouraged to collaborate with a range of other schools and there is no formal agreement required for this kind of collaboration. However, there are regulations in place to establish more formal partnerships between schools: 'The Collaboration Between Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2008'.

Federation

The term 'federation' describes a formal and legal agreement by which the schools involved work together in formal partnership under a single governing body. Schools in a federation remain separate; they retain their names and their individual identity. They are individually inspected by Estyn, and individual data is collected by the Local Authority and the Welsh Government.

In rural communities, federation is seen as an opportunity to strengthen the sustainability of schools, and to ensure that schools are retained in their local communities. Federation also enables smaller groups of pupils and staff to network and share good practice, ideas and resources.

A proposal to establish a federation can either be taken forward by the local authority or by the governing bodies of the schools involved in the federation. There is a defined process which needs to be followed in order to establish a federation. This process is outlined in the Welsh Government Circular 011/2014, 'Federation process of maintained schools in Wales: Guidance for governing bodies and local authorities', which was issued in May 2014.

Multi-sited school A school that operates across more than one campus e.g. Newtown High School, which includes a second campus in Presteigne.

Rural School The Welsh Government has recently consulted on revisions to its School Organisation Code, which has designated some schools as rural primary schools for the purposes of the presumption against closure of rural schools.

A proposed list comprising "villages in the sparsest context" and "other sparsest context" of the National Statistics Urban-Rural Classification identified 191 schools (out of 1275 primary schools in Wales). A list of schools identified as rural schools was attached to the consultation paper.

The consultation document suggests that this is the minimum number of schools which should be designated as rural for the purpose of the presumption against closure of rural schools. The final methodology and list will be included in the revised Statutory Code.

School Organisation Code The School Organisation Code is made under Sections 38 and 39 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. It imposes requirements on relevant bodies and includes statutory guidance which they must take account of when making proposals for the reorganisation of schools.

Small School In the Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014, the Welsh Government defines a 'Small School' as a school that contains fewer than 91 registered pupils.³

Welsh in Education All authorities are required to prepare a plan outlining how they will develop Welsh-medium education, with the

³ Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2014/1133/made>

Strategic Plan

aim of increasing the number of pupils educated through the medium of Welsh.