

MEETING	Gwynedd Council Cabinet
DATE	2 April 2019
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Gareth Thomas
OFFICER	Garem Jackson
TITLE OF ITEM	Begin local discussions on opening a new primary school in Cricieth

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

- a) To approve permission to begin local discussions to identify options for the construction of a new primary school in Cricieth, because of the poor condition of Ysgol Trefferthyr's existing buildings
- b) To approve the inclusion of Ysgol Llanystumdwy in local discussions.

2. INTRODUCTION

Ysgol Trefferthyr

2.1 Ysgol Trefferthyr is located in the centre of Cricieth. The school's capacity is 119 and there are currently 114 pupils between 3 and 11 years on the register (September 2018) in 5 mixed age classes. The majority of the pupils (104) are from Ysgol Trefferthyr's catchment area, with ten additional pupils from other nearby catchment areas. It received an Estyn inspection in 2018, and the five core inspection areas were assessed as "Good". The inspection also noted that the pupils contributed significantly to the community, enthusiastically taking part in local concerts and the Cricieth Festival.

2.2 Ysgol Trefferthyr received a budget allocation of £384,101 in the financial year 2018-19 with a cost per pupil of £3,739.

21st Century Schools Programme

2.3 During the first phase of the 21st Century Schools Programme (Band A), Gwynedd Council succeeded in attracting approximately £50m to improve the condition of school buildings thus benefiting the education of the County's children.

2.4 The second phase of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme (Band B) will begin in April 2019 and will run until 2026. Following a prioritisation exercise based on the Authority's needs and Welsh Government requirements, 5 projects were identified. These formed the application submitted by Gwynedd Council.

2.5 This application identified the need to improve primary provision in Cricieth, as the surveys identified that the condition of Ysgol Trefferthyr's buildings were in category C - namely that the overall defects in the buildings imply that they are in poor condition and that it would be uneconomical to continue to try to maintain these buildings in the future.

Cabinet Report 16 June 2018

- 2.6 Following confirmation of the Welsh Government's financial contribution from the 21st Century Schools Programme (Band B), a report was submitted to Cabinet on 16 June 2018, requesting:
- a) an approval in principle of the initial priorities for Band B of the 21st Century Schools Programme
 - b) to await the result of the process of establishing the Council's Asset Management Plan before adopting the final programme.
- 2.7 Following a discussion on the report, the Cabinet approved both recommendations. The Council's Asset Management Plan has now been adopted, and match funding for Ysgol Trefferthyr is included in the Plan.

Engagement Arrangements

- 2.8 Education Department officers have already held a number of initial meetings with Ysgol Trefferthyr's governing body to outline the need for a discussion on the future of Ysgol Trefferthyr and the arrangements for holding local discussions.
- 2.9 In accordance with the established procedures for engagement processes in Gwynedd, a local panel is being established to provide an opportunity for discussion and to receive local input on the future of education provision in the area. It is also intended to ensure that the discussions during these meetings are further disseminated to other local groups. These panels include representatives of the relevant schools - the headteacher, chair of governors, parent governors, local elected members, and representatives of other appropriate organisations.

3. THE REASONS FOR THE NEED TO CONSIDER THE SCHOOL'S FUTURE

Poor condition

- 3.1 Surveys relating to the condition of Ysgol Trefferthyr's buildings have identified a number of issues which mean that a number of significant defects to the structure will require attention within the next five years. As a result, the school has been designated category C regarding its condition.
- 3.2 A little over 5 years ago, approximately £500k was spent in an attempt to extend the lifespan of the buildings for around five years.
- 3.3 Parts of the structure are made from timber and are of poor quality. A substantial part of the school was built in the 1970s using a Vic Hallam type structure, which had a lifespan of approximately 25 years, and is now in poor condition.
- 3.4 The effect of the temporary work is now coming to an end. Unless plans are now made for a long-term solution, there is a high risk of having to deal with an urgent situation during the next 5 years. We have recently encountered similar situations with schools in Groeslon and Glan Cegin, Bangor.

Other schools in the area

- 3.5 In recognising the lessons learnt from previous projects, the Council is of the view that school construction projects should be based on the total number of children in the current school catchment area, rather than on the numbers that currently attend the school.
- 3.6 The information about the number of children who live in the Trefferthyr catchment area demonstrates that a number of children within the catchment area currently attend other nearby schools. Consequently, it was decided to inform the two schools that have the highest number of children from the Trefferthyr catchment area on their registers, Ysgol y Gorlan and Ysgol Llanystumdwy, in order for them to consider any possible impact on their pupil numbers.

Table 1 – Primary schools attended by children from Trefferthyr catchment area (September 2018)

Schools attended by the children						
Trefferthyr	Llanystumdwy	Y Gorlan	Eifion Wyn	Garndolbenmaen	Borth y Gest	Other
104	9	9	3	2	1	2

- 3.7 Initial discussions have been held with the Governing Body, Staff and Parents/Guardians of Ysgol Llanystumdwy to discuss the possible impact of building a new school in Cricieth on pupil numbers in their school. As a result of these discussions, Ysgol Llanystumdwy governors have noted that they are eager to participate in the Local Review Panel. This panel will discuss issues such as possible locations, requirements for the new school as well as options relevant to the situations of Llanystumdwy and Trefferthyr schools.
- 3.8 As Ysgol Llanystumdwy is a Voluntary Controlled School (Church in Wales), Education Department officers have also met representatives from the Bangor Diocese, and discussions regarding any developments will continue. If the outcome of the local discussions involves any change to Ysgol Llanystumdwy, it would be mandatory to hold a pre-consultation process with the school in accordance with the School Organisation Code.

4. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Application for Welsh Government funding

Gwynedd Council has received confirmation from the Welsh Government that an *Outline Strategic Application* for funding in relation to the 5 projects has been agreed in principle. The Government has confirmed its commitment to financing 65% of this project's cost, subject to the submission of a successful business case that justifies the investment and demonstrates value for money. The application includes a total of approximately £4.97m, with £3.23m funded by the Welsh Government and a contribution of £1.74m from Gwynedd Council. Gwynedd Council's contribution will be funded under Gwynedd Council's Asset Management Plan 2019-2029.

4.2 Education Strategies

The "Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd" strategy was adopted by the Council in April 2009, with the aim of setting out a clear vision, objectives and principles for the relevant considerations in relation to the organisation of the County's schools.

Additionally, an over-arching strategy was developed and supported "*Towards 2025 - Strategic Programme*" by the Council in October 2010. This document was prepared as a strategic foundation for steering developments in the field of education and training in Gwynedd for the next 15 years. The programme was presented in the context of local and national policies and plans, with the aim of transforming the services provided for children, young people and their families, to provide the best possible learning experiences for all the County's learners.

4.3 Principles of a Fit for Purpose Education System

At its meeting on 18 December 2018, the Cabinet approved the Principles of a Fit for Purpose Education System. The primary education principles are a basis for realising the vision of the Education Department and developing the system to ensure high quality education for the children and young people of Gwynedd for the twenty first century.

Changes to the Schools Organisation Code

4.5 The Schools Organisation Code states the requirements that relevant bodies (including Local Authorities) must adhere to. It includes the statutory guidance that relevant bodies must take into account, and sets out the policy context, the general principles and the factors that are relevant to school reorganisation proposals.

4.6 A new version of the Schools Organisation Code (011/2018) has been published, which includes the requirement to make special arrangements for rural schools (as defined in the Code), including the establishment of a procedural assumption against closing rural schools. This makes it a requirement for proposers to follow a more detailed series of procedures and requirements if a decision is taken that would involve a proposal to close a rural school.

The Welsh Government has noted that Ysgol Llanystumdwy is a rural school.

5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

5.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision, a Local Review Panel will be established to identify and discuss options, with the intention of identifying a preferred option that addresses the area's education needs. This Panel will include the Cabinet Member for Education, officers from the Education and Property Departments, and representatives of the relevant schools, Local Members and a Church in Wales representative.

5.2 Following local discussions, a Cabinet report will be prepared, to request approval to proceed in undertaking any necessary statutory processes, in accordance with the Schools Organisation Code (011/2018).

5.3 A comprehensive business case (in accordance with the Treasury's five case guidance) will be prepared in order to secure the Welsh Government's contribution of capital funding.

Work programme

Date	Activity
April – June 2019	Hold a series of Local Review Panel meetings. The purpose of these meetings will be to discuss the objectives of the work, present information about the schools, agree communication methods, discuss locations and possible options, assess impact and identify a favoured option.
July 2019	Report back to Cabinet following receipt of local feedback to request approval to hold any necessary statutory processes, in accordance with the Schools Organisation Code (011/2018).

6. VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

I am satisfied that the report represents an appropriate step in initiating the discussion and highlighting the key factors which will contribute to the work.

Head of Finance Department:

I confirm the accuracy of the financial information which appears in section 2.2, 2.3, and 4.1 of the report, including the 65% contribution from the Welsh Government to the estimated cost of the project, subject to submitting a successful business case. I support the decision sought, emphasizing the need to ensure sustainable arrangements and to adhere to the timetable noted in section 5.3.

Views of the Local Members:

Cllr. Eirwyn Williams, Cricieth:

Agree fully with the report. Cricieth really needs a new primary school.

Cllr. Aled Evans, Llanystumdwy:

Thank you for the opportunity to give an opinion. With particular reference to point 3.7 I think that it is positive that the Governors of Llanystumdwy have indicated that they are eager to be part of the Local Review Panel.

I trust that the requirements of Llanystumdwy will be given a fair hearing in the discussions. It was important that the School had received an invitation to discuss and it will be interesting to see how things develop.