

Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Ysgol Abersoch
Date of Meeting	8 October 2020
Relevant Officer	Gwern ap Rhisiart, Area Education Officer
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams

1. Background

- 1.1. At its meeting on 15 September 2020, permission was granted by the Cabinet to “undertake a statutory consultation, in accordance with the requirements of section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposal to close Ysgol Abersoch on 31 August 2021 and to provide a place for the pupils at Ysgol Sarn Bach from 1 September 2021 onwards.”
- 1.2. The report presented to the Cabinet included the results of local discussions, as well as detailing the process of evaluating all the options, including the preferred proposal for further consultation. The report also includes an explanation of the steps following consultation and the outline timetable.

2. Proposed statutory consultation process

- 2.1. Proposals for school organisation in Wales must be made in accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, as well as the requirements of the School Organisation Code 011/2018.
- 2.2. The proposed statutory consultation process in relation to Ysgol Abersoch will comply with the requirements and guidelines of the School Organisation Code 011/2018. As part of the consultation process, the Education Department will follow the following procedures:
 - Publish a consultation document, together with relevant background papers, in an electronic format on the Council's website (hard copies available on request)
 - Distribute electronic copies of the document to the relevant stakeholder (as required by the Code)
 - Publish the consultation document during the school term of the school in question, giving consultees at least 42 days to respond to the document, with at least 20 of these being school days.
 - Receive written comments / responses on the proposed proposal by post or email (during the designated consultation period).
- 2.3. The Code does not impose a requirement to hold consultation meetings. Instead, the Code states that, “Proposers may use other ways to engage consultees as they think appropriate.”
- 2.4. In previous consultations, the Education Department has held "Drop In" sessions to discuss the proposed proposal with parents, governors and staff of the school in question. Due to the restrictions with COVID-19, it will not be possible to hold the "Drop In" sessions in the same

way. However, in order to ensure that stakeholders in Ysgol Abersoch have the same opportunity to receive information, seek clarification and comment, it is intended to hold "Drop In" sessions via virtual meeting software. In addition, stakeholders will have the opportunity to e-mail questions regarding the proposal to the Education Department, and officials will provide a timely response to enable stakeholders to submit informed responses during the consultation period.

- 2.5. Arrangements will also be made to ensure that we receive the views of children and young people attending the schools which will be affected by the proposed proposal. It is envisaged that the designated sessions will be held with a group of pupils from both schools - the exact arrangements are to be confirmed.

3. Rural Schools

- 3.1. The School Organisation Code 011/2018 ('the Code') introduces new, special arrangements in relation to rural schools, establishing a procedural presumption against closure. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure must be strong, and that all other viable options have been conscientiously considered. This means that a more detailed set of procedures and requirements must be followed when formulating a closure proposal (defined within the Code).
- 3.2. Specific schools are designated as rural schools for the purposes of the presumption against closure by the Welsh Government, using the ONS rural and urban categories. The list includes schools located in a sparsely populated rural village, or in a very small village or other sparsely populated isolated area.
- 3.3. Ysgol Abersoch is not designated as a 'rural school' for the purpose of the Code. However, in developing the proposed proposal for further consultation, the Education Department has followed a similar process to the process and procedures required in relation to a rural school. As part of the process to develop the proposal, a range of options for the school were considered and evaluated, and a series of impact assessments were undertaken, including:
 - Welsh language impact assessment
 - Assessment of the likely impact on quality and standards of education
 - Assessment of the likely impact on travel arrangements
 - Assessment of the likely impact on the community
 - Assessment against the Well-being Act
 - Assessment against the Equality Act
- 3.4. The above impact assessments will be updated with current information and statistics before proceeding to statutory consultation.