

PET(4)-05-12 p10b

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Petitions Committee 13 March 2012

P-04-376 Reorganise Education in Powys

Petition Committee evidence
Builth Wells Supporting Education for All
1st march 2012

‘We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to call in Powys County Council’s proposals to reorganise education in Powys, which would lead to Builth Wells’s **bilingual dual stream** English-medium sixth form becoming a Welsh designated sixth form.’

As a community what we are petitioning for is that the Education Portfolio Holder Cllr. Stephen Hayes, Powys County Council, will re-instate the Sixth form English Medium A level designation at Builth Wells High School, which he has closed in the secondary education modernisation in Powys. He has stated there have been radical changes in secondary education, but it appears the only change he has made is close the second largest viable English medium sixth form in Powys (Currently 125 pupils). This option taken by Cllr Hayes was not part of the consultation for secondary school modernisation. This decision has now created inequity, segregation of pupils who wish to maintain their Bilingual dual stream sixth form. (Currently there is one pupil studying 'A' levels in Welsh medium from the 2011 cohort). Builth Wells High School welsh designation sixth form is mentioned throughout the draft Welsh Education Strategy Plan document for Powys, which also has made the Builth Wells community feel very nervous and powerless despite the majority of the community not being in support of this proposal. The community are very proud of the bilingual dual stream High School at Builth Wells and it forms the centre of a rural community, the change to the designation of the school will also lead to negative effects to the socio-economics of this rural bilingual speaking community.

Please find attached two letters that were sent to the Builth Wells Supporting Education for All, one from local councillors and one from the Education Portfolio Holder Cllr. Stephen Hayes on the 7th December 2011 to the local Councillors. The letters evidence that there is not the critical mass to have a viable welsh medium sixth form at Builth Wells High School :-

“the implementation of post 16 education solely through the medium of Welsh should be allowed to grow organically and at its own speed and not implemented until a) it was financially viable and b) that there were sufficient pupils seeking to be educated through the medium of Welsh at ‘A’ Level.

AND

“I also accept that the date mentioned in the report of 2015 for full change-over is likely to prove unrealistic, as the time necessary for cohorts of pupils to move through earlier stages of their education will require a lengthier transition period.”

With this statement in mind, why sanction the closure and demise of a large thriving, successful and viable English medium sixth form? The majority of the community oppose this decision and still remain proud of the bilingual dual stream 11-18 yrs High School. All the members hope for is that the Welsh designation is changed back to Bilingual dual stream sixth form, to give the English medium A level students equality of opportunity which is an entitlement for all pupils regardless of the medium of education.

Summary of points relating to the closure of the English Medium Sixth form at Builth Wells High School.

This decision still dismays and confuses the Builth Wells community for several reasons:-

- Builth Wells High School is the only sixth form in Powys to be closed for English medium, the community feels there is now an **inequity** that Powys County Council education portfolio holder has endorsed, compared to the rest of Powys sixth forms. Equality of opportunity which is an entitlement for all pupils regardless of the medium of education.
- Builth Wells High School is the second largest English medium sixth forms in South Powys and has maintained high achievement's with A level results and the sixth form is financially viable.
- The current sixth form AS & A level 2011-2012 has 120 pupils opting to take their A levels at Builth Wells High School, this figure includes 8 pupils from the Welsh medium GCSE cohort, 7 of those pupils elected to take English medium A levels and now 1 (one) pupil is taking Welsh medium A levels.
- The area is 95% English speaking households, but the community remains proud of the bilingual status of the High School and closure of the English medium sixth form will inevitably lead to the demise and eventual closure of the 11 to 16 English medium education provision.
- The education portfolio holder Cllr Stephen Hayes has now acknowledged that *“the implementation of post 16 education solely through the medium of Welsh should be allowed to grow organically and at its own speed and not implemented until a) it was financially viable and b) that there were sufficient pupils seeking to be educated through the medium of Welsh at ‘A’ Level.*

- *Education Portfolio holder, Cllr. Stephen Hayes quoted “I also accept that the date mentioned in the report of 2015 for full change-over is likely to prove unrealistic, as the time necessary for cohorts of pupils to move through earlier stages of their education will require a lengthier transition period.”*
- **Most importantly the pupils wish to continue the bilingual dual stream sixth form in Builth Wells High School, pupils do not want separation or segregation from their friends/peers.**
- The decision will lead to the slow demise of the school with parents opting to not send their children to Builth Wells High School English Medium school due to the lack of choices, uncertainty and loss of continuation of English medium education provision to 18yrs.
- The local economy of Builth Wells community will be severely affected, potentially less investment and less migration to this beautiful area due to loss of English medium High School Education. The community are proud of the bilingual status of the school.

We hope that Powys County Council will change the designation of the sixth form and re-instate the English medium sixth form. Please keep our High School as a Dual Stream Bilingual sixth form. Let the school prove they have a financially viable bilingual dual stream sixth form, why close a Band 2 school, one of only two High Schools who achieved this level in all of South Powys?

Please help the High School and community in Builth Wells to request a re-think of Powys County Councils decision to close the English medium sixth form, give Builth Wells High School an equal chance with the rest of the sixth forms in Powys. The request is that Powys County Council removes the welsh designation and re-instates the bilingual dual stream sixth form. Please do not treat Builth Wells High School and community unequally compared to the rest of Powys High School pupils.

Yours sincerely
 Builth Wells Supporting education For All
 (Sarah Wheeler)

NB. Sarita Marshall, Deputy Committee Clerk, Petitions Committee has a copy of the manual petition containing over 1020 signatures as supporting evidence for Builth Wells Community.

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Annex A

Letter to petitioners from Cllr Avril York

Schools Modernisation Programme

Since the announcements on Schools Modernisation on 8th November, I have been working to improve the position of Builth Wells High School in relation to its sixth form provision.

Cabinet meeting on 22nd November: I spoke against the proposal for a Welsh only sixth form provision and requested that Builth Wells High School was able to work with the commissioning body to put on a range of economically viable English medium courses. This was picked up by one of the cabinet members, Tony Thomas; the minutes for the meeting state ..

The Portfolio Holder explained the rationale for a central planning and funding system for commissioning post-16 courses. He confirmed that this approach had the support of the Welsh Government. In answer to Members' questions he advised that it was necessary for the commissioning body to be autonomous and free from competing interests. Democratic overview would be provided by the Scrutiny Committees. He confirmed that when a preferred model for the commissioning body had been approved by Cabinet, consultation would take place before submission to Welsh Government. He wanted the commissioning body to work with neighbouring authorities including those in England. He advised that there was nothing preventing the new body commissioning a small number of subjects in English at the schools designated Welsh medium.

Because of continued confusion about what had been agreed, Cllr Tim Van Rees, myself and three other councillors wrote to the portfolio holder, Stephen Hayes, on 5th December to clarify the position. We reminded Cllr Hayes that the concession was given that *"the implementation of post 16 education solely through the medium of Welsh should be allowed to grow organically and at its own speed and not implemented until a) it was financially viable and b) that there were sufficient pupils seeking to be educated through the medium of Welsh at 'A' Level. It was also conceded that the commissioning body could provide 'A' Level education through the medium of English in subjects again if financially viable"*

Cllr Hayes responded by letter on December 7th. He accepts that the date in the report of 2015 is likely to prove unrealistic and that it will require a much lengthier transition period. He confirmed that *"any new commissioning body would be free to make such decisions relating to courses in either medium as it considered justified by demand and available resources"* Cllr Hayes continued that *"It is not proposed that any application to change the designation of Builth and Caereinion High Schools will be made prior to setting up of the new Commissioning Body"*

I trust this clarifies the position for Builth Wells High School – and I wish to record my thanks to Cllrs Tim Van Rees, David Price, Maureen Mackenzie and Kelvyn Curry for supporting me.

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Annex B

Letter to Builth Wells Councillors from Cllr Stephen Hayes, holder of education portfolio

Cllr Kelvyn Curry,
Cllr Maureen MacKenzie,
Cllr David Price,
Cllr T Van Rees,
Cllr Avril York

Dear Members,

Secondary, Welsh Medium and Post-16 school modernisation

Thank you for your letter of 5th December regarding the modernisation proposals as they affect Builth High School.

As you know, and I am happy to confirm, the proposals to establish centres of excellence for post-16 Welsh Medium education at Caereinion and Builth High Schools, which were agreed by Cabinet on 22nd November, envisage a move by increments to a position where the two schools offer A and AS courses through the medium of Welsh only.

As the Cabinet paper stated, the intention is 'to create sufficient critical mass of learners to enable the cost-effective delivery of courses and to enhance the range of courses available'. The aim, as the paper said, is to commission an increasing number of Welsh medium A/AS courses from Builth Wells Secondary school. The paper went on to say that it is anticipated that English Medium A/AS provision will cease to be provided at Builth in due course, with pupils accessing this provision at Llandrindod Wells High School.

It is clearly accepted, therefore, that progression to designated Welsh medium status at post-16 will occur over time, with no overnight cessation of English medium courses. I referred in presenting the report to the undertaking that no pupil who begins a course or a key stage at a school will be required to move before they complete that course of study. I also accept that the date mentioned in the report of 2015 for full change-over is likely to prove unrealistic, as the time necessary for cohorts of pupils to move through earlier stages of their education will require a lengthier transition period.

At the Cabinet meeting, a question was asked about the effect of the new central commissioning of courses on post-16 provision in Builth HS, and I confirmed that any new commissioning body would be free to make such decisions relating to courses in either medium as it considered justified by demand and available resources. It is not proposed that any application will be made to alter the designation of Builth and Caereinion High Schools prior to the setting up of the new commissioning body.

The commitment to providing a full range of Welsh-medium courses at post-16 is an important one, and goes hand in hand with the decision to fund enhanced Welsh medium provision at 11-16 at both Builth and Brecon High Schools. There are currently over 450 pupils receiving primary education through the Welsh medium in the catchments of the two High Schools, with demand growing. It is important that we give these pupils, and others in the future, the prospect of first-class secondary education through the Welsh medium. Far from being a threat to the future of Builth HS, the proposal gives the school a key strategic role in the south of the county.

Finally, I am happy to confirm that the details of implementing what is a high-level strategy decision will need to be considered and taken forward through the Authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The draft of this plan will be worked up with stakeholders, including school governing bodies and senior management teams, and consultation will take place before submission of the final document to Welsh Government. This gives a genuine opportunity not only for those immediately affected, but for the wider public, to input their views on all aspects of implementation of the decision.

Yours sincerely,