



Powys County Council

Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys

2020 – 2030



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This document has been developed following the Council’s Strategic Review of Education in Powys, carried out in 2019–20. It replaces the Council’s School Organisation Policy 2018, and any previous versions.



Foreword

Over the last six months, the Council has engaged widely to seek the views of our citizens about the future of our schools in Powys. There is a genuine appetite for all to work together to bring about changes that will transform the learner experience and entitlement.

We have been left in no doubt that learners, the profession and the wider public are now expecting us to work closely with Welsh Government and our schools' community to deliver change that will benefit all of our learners, and that it is now time to take some significant decisions.

Throughout our engagement, there was overwhelming support for a vision of schools as hubs for wider community activity. We have been encouraged to be bold in making changes that can provide our learners with more choice in their curriculum, especially from the age of 14. There is strong support for developing a clear strategy for a comprehensive and growing Welsh-medium sector, as there is for the need to ensure that our schools are configured in ways that can enable them to collaborate more deeply to take on the exciting challenges of the new curriculum for Wales. Additionally, we have been told repeatedly to consider carefully the requirements of learners with additional learning needs in order to make sure that they are better provided for through early interventions and ongoing support to meet their needs.

It is my sincere belief that after we have implemented some of the significant changes in Powys, we will all be able to look back with pride at what we have achieved for our learners.

Cllr Phyl Davies

Portfolio Holder for
Education & Property



The national mission of our education system in Wales sets out to support a curriculum designed to ensure that our young people become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives,
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work,
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world, and
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

I believe that with commitment, investment and energy, Powys can be an important contributor to our national mission, ensuring that young people brought up in rural Wales benefit fully from a new educational system which will help them collaborate with and compete with the best in the world.

It's a great task and we must now prove that Powys County Council and its partners are up to the challenge.

Cllr Phyl Davies

Portfolio Holder for Education and
Property

March 2020

Education in Powys – Why Change is Needed

Powys is a large, rural authority. Covering a quarter of the landmass of Wales, it contains only 4.2% of the population, making it the most sparsely populated county in Wales.

Delivering services across such a large, sparsely populated area is challenging and expensive. This is particularly true for education. In January 2019, there were 9,099 learners in Powys primary schools and 6,266 learners in Powys secondary schools (up to age 16.) The county has 75 primary schools, 2 infant schools and 2 junior schools – these are a combination of community primaries, Church in Wales voluntary controlled or voluntary aided schools, and one foundation school. The county has 10 secondary schools across 12 sites, 1 all-age school, 3 special schools, 2 pupil referral units and a number of specialists units. Each secondary school has a sixth form, providing AS/A level provision to just over 900 learners. 2,471 learners are in Welsh-medium education, which is delivered in 20 primary schools, 5 dual stream secondary schools and 1 dual stream all-age school. There are 29 maintained early years settings across the county.

Whilst there has been some school reorganisation activity over recent years, this has mainly focussed on rationalisation of primary provision and establishment of alternative governance arrangements in the secondary sector, through the establishment of all-through or multi-sited provision. Over the last ten years, the authority has carried out catchment or area reviews in Ystradgynlais, Gwernyfed, John Beddoes, Machynlleth, Llanidloes and Welshpool towns. In most areas, this led to a reduction in the number of schools with significant capital investment in improving the schools' estate. However, reorganisation on a similar scale has not taken place across the remainder of Powys. The county's schools' infrastructure remains similar to that in place 20 years ago, for secondary it is largely unchanged for the last 45 years.

In the autumn term 2019, the Council engaged with key stakeholders to identify the challenges facing education in Powys. These are outlined below.

High proportion of small schools

Although there has been a reduction in the number of small schools in Powys over recent years, there continues to be a large proportion of schools which meet the Welsh Government definition of a small school (fewer than 91 pupils).

Based on PLASC 2019 figures, there are currently 33 small primary schools in Powys – this is approximately 40% of the primary provision in the county. 21 schools have fewer than 50 pupils and for those the budget share per pupil is generally higher than the Powys average for primary schools.

Decreasing pupil numbers

Pupil numbers have decreased over the past decade and are expected to continue to decrease further over the next five years.

Pupil numbers in the primary sector in Powys are expected to decrease by approximately 4% by 2025. Pupil numbers in the secondary sector are expected to decrease slightly by 2025 with a greater reduction between 2025 and 2030.

High number of surplus places

Whilst the Council has been working to reduce the level of surplus places in its schools over recent years, a significant level of surplus places remain.

Based on PLASC 2019 figures, there is currently 18% surplus capacity in Powys primary schools, and 26% surplus capacity in Powys secondary schools.

With pupil numbers across Powys projected to decrease overall over the coming years, the proportion of surplus places across the county will continue to increase.

Building condition

Whilst the Council has invested in its schools' estate through the 21st Century Schools Programme and the Asset Management Plan, building condition remains an issue across Powys, with associated maintenance costs.

The Welsh Government categorise school buildings on a scale of A to D, with A being new schools and D being schools that need significant investment and are in a poor state of repair. The recently opened Brecon High School is categorised as a condition A school and Ysgol Maesydderwen which received significant investment a few years ago is categorised as condition B. The rest of the secondary school estate is categorised as C/D. Without significant capital investment, the repair and maintenance cost of maintaining this estate will only increase.

Financial pressures

The Council is currently facing significant financial pressures in general. This is affecting all service areas, including the schools' sector, with increasing numbers of schools facing deficit budget positions. There are significant variations in the budget share per pupil^[1] across Powys schools, ranging from £3,127 to £7,877 in the primary sector, and from £3,438 to £6,419^[2] in the secondary sector.

[1] Per the revised Section 52 budget submittal.

[2] This figure includes middle schools.

A review of the Council's funding formula for schools was carried out in 2018, and a new formula was subsequently introduced in 2019. The funding formula was needed to ensure that all schools could function and provide an appropriate curriculum for their learners. Whilst small schools appear to have benefitted from the new funding formula, larger schools are funded below levels in similar authorities.

The current Powys schools' infrastructure means that the overall education funding envelope is having to be spread too thinly. This is evidenced in schools by a curriculum that provides limited choices for learners and limited support for learners who require additional support.

Inequality in access to Welsh-medium education

Welsh-medium education is delivered through a network of schools across Powys.

In the primary sector, this includes a mixture of Welsh-medium schools and dual stream schools. In the secondary sector, Welsh-medium provision is delivered via Welsh-medium streams in a number of schools across the county.

The size and proportion of the secondary streams varies considerably across the county, and the range of subjects available through the medium of Welsh also varies significantly. The curriculum offer is increasingly limited for Welsh-medium learners, and there is significant concern amongst the profession regarding the commitment of the authority to learners who study in Welsh.

In contrast to most other areas of Wales, the majority of Powys learners are unable to access a designated Welsh-medium secondary school, apart from learners in the Ystradgynlais who can access full Welsh-medium secondary provision at Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur, located in Neath Port Talbot.

In 2017 the Welsh Government launched an ambitious strategy to create a million Welsh speakers by the year 2050. This Strategy acknowledges that increasing the number of pupils accessing Welsh-medium education will be key in order to meet this aspiration. In contrast with other areas of Wales, the number of pupils accessing Welsh-medium education in Powys has stagnated over recent years. This suggests that the current Welsh-medium provision in Powys is failing to meet the Welsh Government's aim to increase the number of pupils accessing Welsh-medium education.

Estyn identified in its report on Education Services in Powys, June 2019 that: 'the authority's record on stimulating the growth of Welsh-medium education is weak. As a result, the proportion of pupils receiving their education through the medium of Welsh has stagnated over recent years.'

It is recognised that significant changes are needed to the Welsh-medium offer in Powys in order to reverse the trend of the last few years and ensure that all Powys learners can access comprehensive Welsh-medium provision throughout their educational careers.

Limited post-14 and post-16 offer

In September 2019, the Council's Cabinet considered a report on post-16 provision which outlined a number of challenges facing the sector, including decreasing learner numbers, financial challenges and sustainability of the curriculum offer, including Welsh-medium provision.

One of the biggest challenges facing the Council is the increasing number of pupils accessing provision outside Powys – during 2018/19, it is estimated that approximately 450 Powys learners were accessing post-16 provision outside Powys. This is having a significant impact on the provision that can be offered in Powys, due to the loss of funding.

Engagement with schools throughout November and December 2019 highlighted that the concerns previously raised regarding the poor choice for learners at 16 is now being echoed for learners at 14.

Inequality in access to SEN provision

Within Powys, pupils with special education needs (SEN) attend a range of settings, including special schools, specialist centres, the pupil referral unit (PRU) as well as mainstream schools.

While some mainstream schools provide very well for pupils with SEN, this is not consistent across all schools. Not all schools have the facilities they require to be able to meet the needs of pupils with SEN, including those with physical and/or medical difficulties and those with significant behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder.

Currently, not all pupils are educated in the setting that meets their needs best. For example, there are pupils in special schools and the PRU who could be taught in mainstream classes or specialist centres.

Depending on where pupils live, they have access to a different quality and type of provision. Some pupils have to travel long distances to reach a provision that meets their needs. Many pupils experience difficulty on transition from primary to secondary settings, due to a lack of suitable provision. There are not enough facilities for pupils to access SEN provision through the medium of Welsh.

Historical lack of political decision making

Although there have been some developments in terms of the schools' infrastructure in Powys over recent years, these have mainly involved changes to primary provision and establishing all-through / dual sited schools.

In 2016, the Council carried out consultation on significant changes to secondary provision in Mid and South Powys, which included proposals to rationalise secondary and Welsh-medium provision in the area. At the same time, the Council was also consulting on proposals to close a number of small schools in the Mid Powys area. Whilst a number of these proposals were implemented, several of the proposals were not approved by the Council's Cabinet.

The Council's failure to implement a number of high-profile proposals during this period has left a legacy in Powys, and there has been a reluctance to embark on large scale reorganisation of education provision since then. This is reflected in Estyn's report following its inspection of Education Services in Powys in June 2019: 'Despite making modest progress in reorganising primary schools over time, the authority has been unable to deliver on a few key proposals in recent years, particularly following consultation to reorganise secondary schools in south Powys.'

Engagement with schools' staff during November and December 2019 has revealed a deep scepticism amongst the profession regarding the Council's political commitment to schools and to the delivery of the improvements that are needed.



Vision and Guiding Principles

This Strategy is based on the following Vision and Guiding Principles, which have been developed through engagement with a range of stakeholders.

Vision Statement

All children and young people in Powys will experience a high-quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically productive, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens of 21st century Wales.

Guiding Principles

- A world class rural education system that has learner entitlement at its core
- Schools that are fully inclusive, with a culture of deep collaboration in order to improve learner outcomes and experience
- A broad choice and high quality of provision for 14 – 19 year old learners, that includes both academic and vocational provision, meeting the needs of all learners, communities and the Powys economy
- Welsh-medium provision that is accessible and provides a full curriculum in Welsh from Meithrin to age 19 and beyond
- Provision for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Additional Learning Needs (ALN) that is accessible as near to home as is practicably possible, with the appropriate specialist teaching, support and facilities that enables every learner to meet their potential
- A digitally-rich schools sector that enables all learners and staff to enhance their teaching and learning experience
- Community-focused schools that are the central point for multi-agency services to support children, young people, families and the community
- Early years provision that is designed to meet the needs of all children, mindful of their particular circumstances, language requirements or any special or additional learning needs
- Financially and environmentally sustainable schools
- The highest priority is given to staff wellbeing and professional development

In bringing forward any proposals, the Council will adhere with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code, but, in addition, the following will apply:

- The best interests of learners are at the forefront of all proposals and decision-making
- The Council will always operate in an open and transparent manner
- Staff and learners will be fully supported through any process of change.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

During the engagement carried out between October 2019 and February 2020, a number of suggestions were received regarding what the Council's priorities should be going forward.

Based on this feedback, the Council has developed a series of Strategic Aims and Objectives which will shape its work to transform the Powys education system over the coming years. These are as follows:

Strategic Aim 1: We will improve learner entitlement and experience

The purpose of this aim is to ensure that early years provision, primary, special and secondary schools are configured to work in ways that will secure a coherent and inspiring learning journey for all learners in Powys. This reconfiguration, mindful of both efficiency and equity, will enable school leaders and teachers to prioritise the learning and wellbeing of our children (and their colleagues), and for those schools to be considered amongst the best in Wales.

The Council's aspiration is to develop, within the 13 secondary school localities, an infrastructure of all-age (sometimes known as all-through) schools. Initially, these may be multi-sited all-age schools, however, the aspiration is to develop new purpose-built schools that will not only provide state of the art facilities for teaching and learning, but also childcare and early years provision, community and leisure facilities, multi-agency areas that can provide support for learners and their families and SEN/ALN facilities of the highest quality. This will require major capital investment.

This will ensure that schools are able to provide high-quality progression, wide curriculum choice and wellbeing support for our learners. Whilst some aspects of this work will be a sustained long-term programme, there must be pace to bring about early improvements.

Strategic Objectives

S.O.1.1 – Develop a network of all-age schools based around the 13 current secondary school locations

S.O.1.2 – Reconfigure and rationalise primary provision

Strategic Aim 2: We will improve learner entitlement and experience for post-16 learners

The purpose of this aim is to ensure that post-16 learners (and 14 – 16 year old learners) are able to access a broad range of subjects within Powys, with a blended offer of academic and vocational provision, and to ensure that the post-16 sector in Powys is sustainable.

Initially, this will focus on enhanced collaboration between schools to ensure a high-quality post-16 curriculum that is accessible to all learners, and is affordable within the funding received from the Welsh Government. This will include more digital learning opportunities where learners are taught via video-conferencing across more than one school.

The next phase will be the development of sixth form centres that will be able to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners, without having to travel between schools to study subjects not available in their home schools.

Strategic Objectives

S.O.2.1 – Implement short-term improvements outlined in Cabinet report 18th September 2019 – improved marketing, roll out of digital learning and enhanced partnership working

S.O.2.2 – Reorganise sixth form provision across the county by developing sixth form centres that would deliver a wide range of provision across all subject areas. These could also offer vocational and STEM opportunities for 14 – 16 year olds, working in partnership with schools and other providers



Strategic Aim 3: We will improve access to Welsh-medium provision across all key stages

The purpose of this aim is to ensure that, in future, a growing number of children can access Welsh-medium education from early years to their school leaving age.

From the evidence gathered during the engagement exercise, it is apparent that there is no equality of provision for Welsh-medium learners across the county, and the level of Welsh-medium provision available, is a postcode lottery. In addition, learners in Powys do not have access to a Welsh-medium secondary school.

The Council's new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2021-2031 will be fully aligned with this Strategy and will include additional actions to support this Strategic Aim.

Strategic Objectives

S.O.3.1 - Move schools along the language continuum

S.O.3.2 - Develop new primary and secondary provision

S.O.3.3 - Work with Mudiad Meithrin to establish new early years provision

S.O.3.4 - Develop immersion opportunities



Strategic Aim 4: We will improve the provision for learners with SEN/ALN

The purpose of this aim is to ensure that all schools are fully inclusive, educating pupils with a wide range of SEN/ALN. This will require all schools to have an inclusive ethos, a skilled workforce and buildings and resources that can support all learners. For learners with more complex needs, the aim will be to ensure that there is a range of specialist provision and support as close to home as is possible.

Strategic Objectives

S.O.4.1 – Develop a new county-wide network of specialist SEN/ALN provision including post-16

Enabling Actions

To support the implementation of the four Strategic Aims, the following enabling actions will be taken forward:

Enabling Actions

E.A.1 – The implementation of a major capital investment programme that will ensure that schools in Powys have inspiring, environmentally sustainable buildings that can provide opportunities for wider community activity, including where possible childcare services, early years, ALN, multi-agency support and community and leisure facilities. This will also include developing a reliable, high quality digital infrastructure.

E.A.2 – A revision of the schools funding formula, including recognition of the additional costs of community-focused schools.

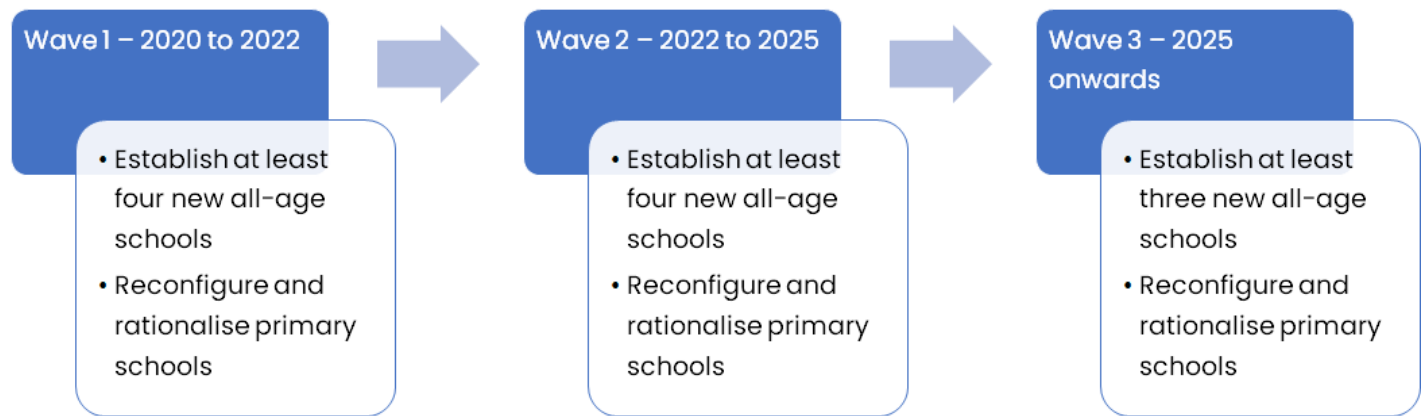
E.A.3 – The transformation of the Council's Schools Service to ensure a professional and forward-looking service that can provide high quality support for learners, parents/carers, and schools.

E.A.4 – A revision of the Council's Home to School Transport Policy to ensure full alignment with this Strategy.

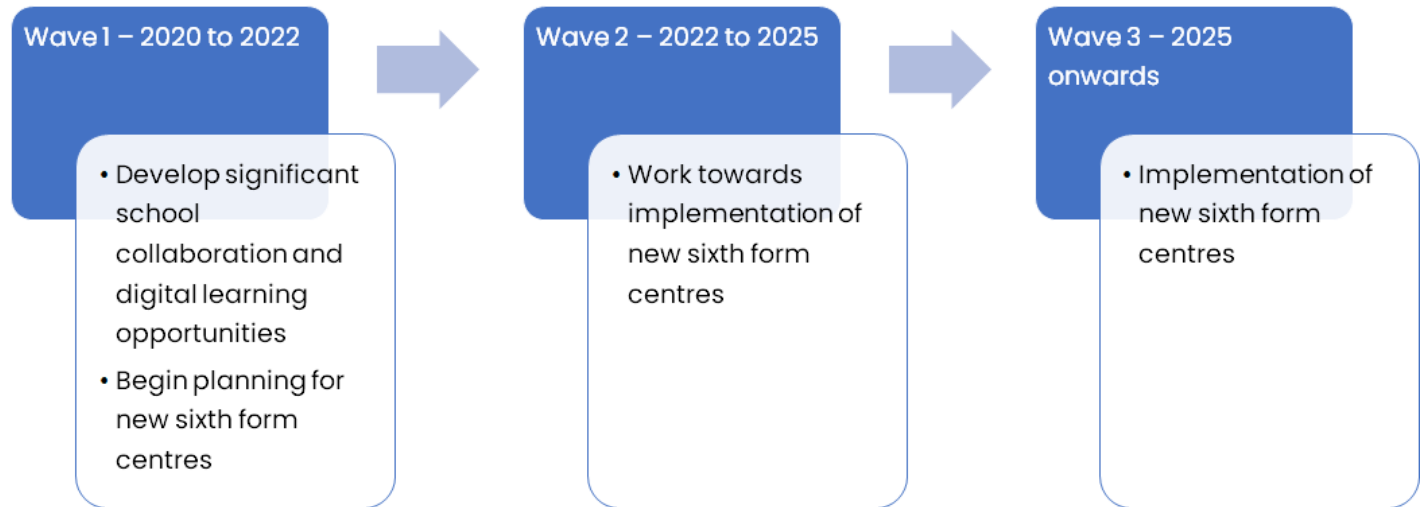
Programme of Activity

The Strategic Objectives outlined above will be taken forward in 3 waves as outlined below. Detailed programme plans will be prepared for each of these Strategic Aims.

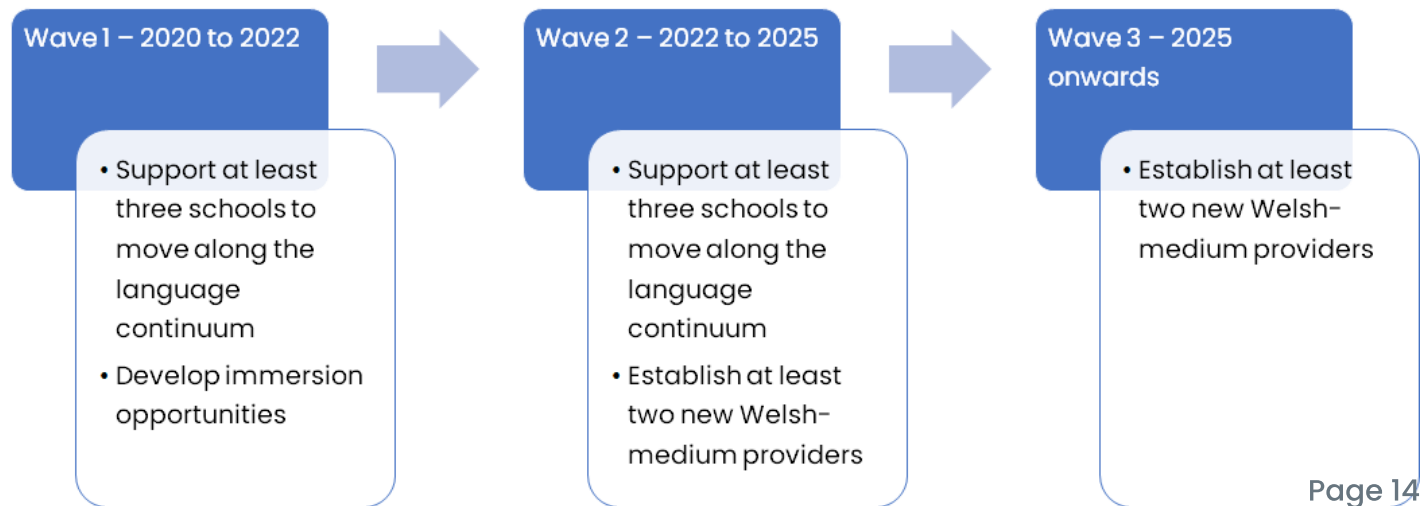
Strategic Aim 1: Learner Entitlement and Experience



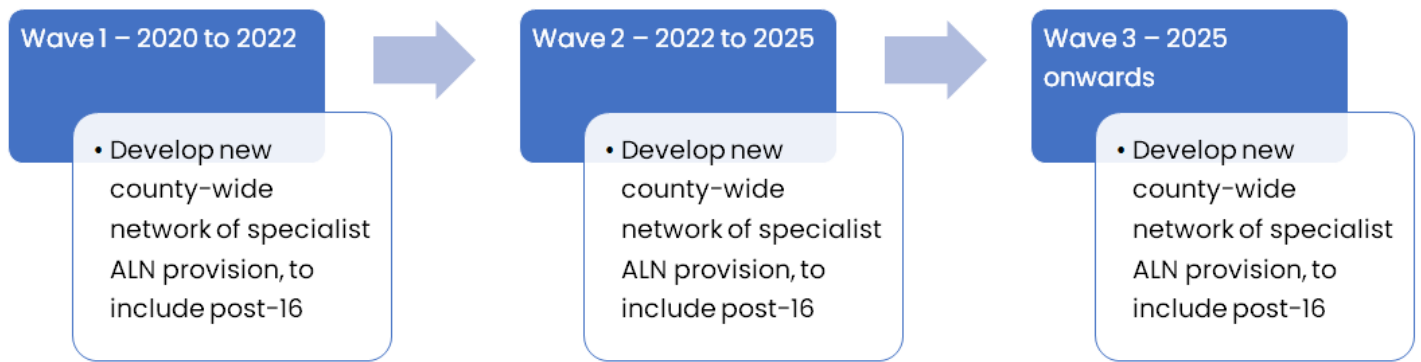
Strategic Aim 2: Post-16



Strategic Aim 3: Welsh-medium



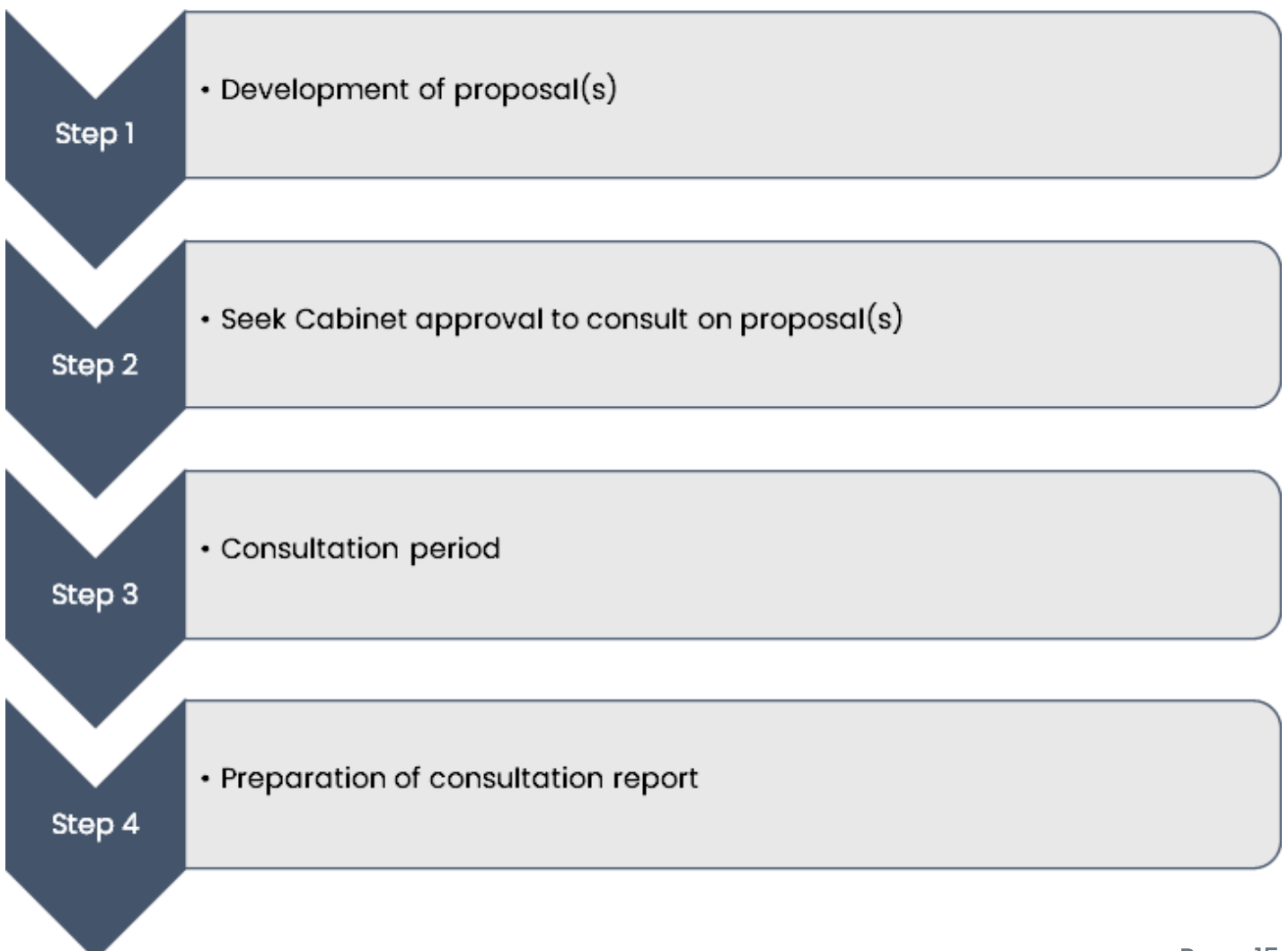
Strategic Aim 4: SEN/ALN

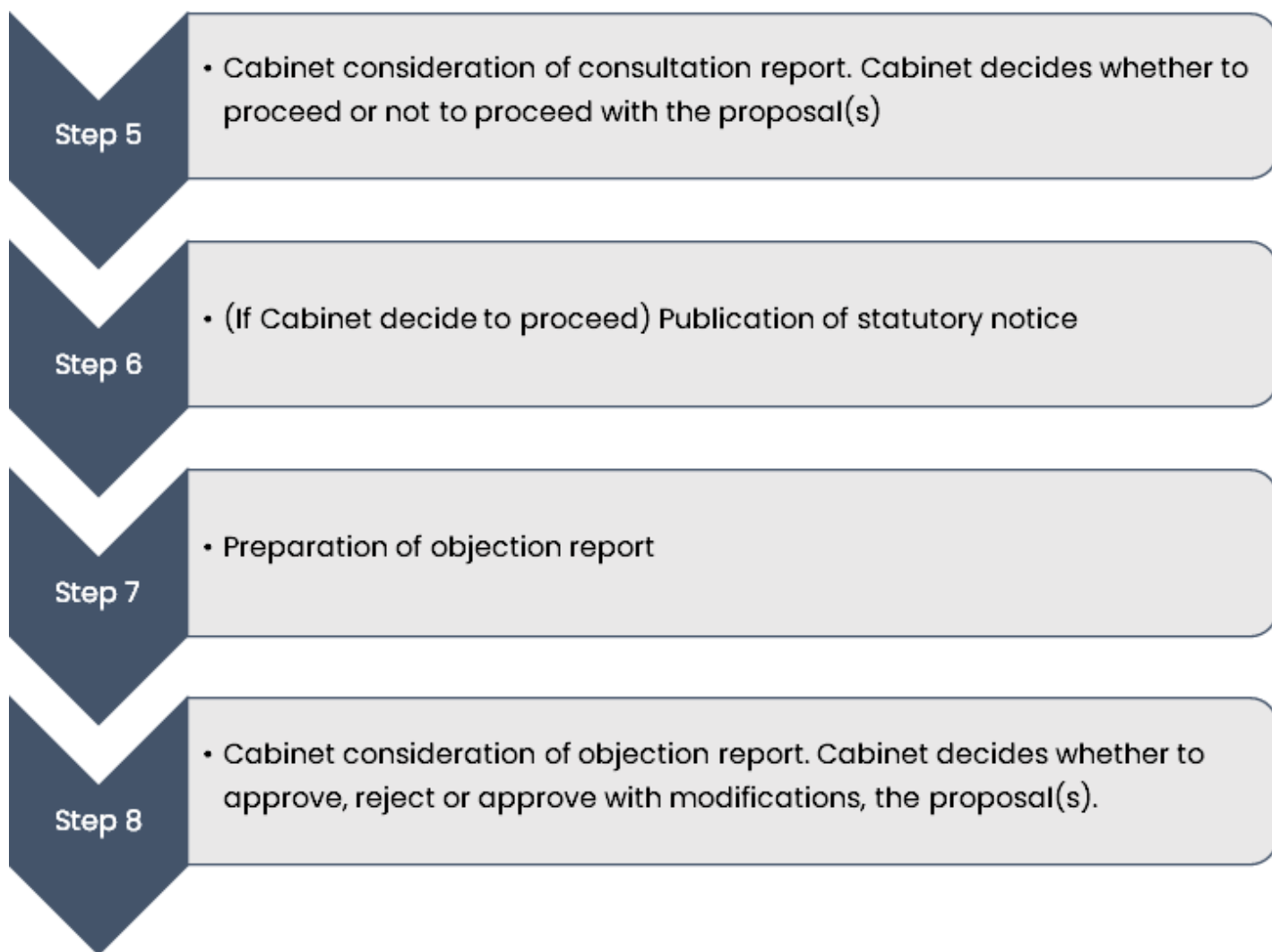


Legislative Process

In order to achieve the Strategic Aims, it will be necessary to bring forward proposals for the reorganisation of schools, as defined in the Welsh Government’s School Organisation Code 2018. The process will be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Code.

This will include the following steps:





If the proposal(s) are approved, the process will move to the implementation phase.

- Any proposal(s) to federate schools must comply with the process as set out in the Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014.
- Any projects that require capital funding will be developed in accordance with the requirements of the 21st Century Schools Programme (or any other grant) and Cabinet will be required to approve the initial business case for each capital project.

Monitoring

The Council's Transformation Delivery Board is responsible for monitoring the outcomes of this Strategy. This will be reported quarterly as part of V2025 Transformation Programme Performance reporting.

The Council's Schools Transformation Programme Board is responsible for the delivery and monitoring of progress against the agreed Strategic Aims and Objectives and delivery plan.