



Irfon Valley C.P. School

Options Appraisal

September 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

Following a significant decrease in pupil numbers, the governing body of Irfon Valley C.P. School contacted the Council in the Summer of 2023, requesting a discussion on future options for the school.

Following this conversation, it was agreed that the Council would carry out an options appraisal exercise, to consider future options for the school.

The purpose of this paper is to consider options for Irfon Valley C.P. School, and to identify a preferred option.

Current pupil numbers¹ at the school are as follows:

| | R | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Total |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 1 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 19 |

¹ Teacher Centre, 19th September 2023

PART A – THE CASE FOR CHANGE

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 POLICY CONTEXT

Following the inspection of Powys Education Services carried out by Estyn in the summer of 2019, the Council carried out a strategic review of schools during 2019-20, which led to the development of a new Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys. The strategy, which was developed following engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, was approved in April 2020 and updated following the Council elections held in May 2022.

The strategy sets out a Vision Statement and Guiding Principles which will underpin the Council's work to transform the Powys education system over the coming years. The Vision Statement is as follows:

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.

In addition, the strategy outlines a number of aims and objectives, which include an objective to 'Reconfigure and rationalise primary provision' in order to improve overall learner entitlement and experience in Powys.

To take forward this objective, the Council is reviewing the smallest schools in Powys, with the aim of identifying solutions for these schools which will meet the objective to 'Reconfigure and rationalise primary provision', in order to ensure that education in Powys is delivered through an affordable, resilient infrastructure which provides the best possible opportunities to learners, now and in the future.

2.2 WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED IN POWYS

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.

The Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys outlines a number of challenges facing education in Powys, which were identified following engagement with key stakeholders during the autumn term 2019 and spring term 2020.

The following is a summary of the main challenges facing the Council, as outlined in the Strategy:

i) High proportion of small schools

Based on PLASC 2021 figures, there were 33 small primary schools in Powys – this is approximately 43% of the primary provision in the county. 15 schools had fewer than 50 pupils, and for those schools the budget share per pupil is generally higher than the Powys average for primary schools.

ii) Decreasing pupil numbers

Pupil numbers have decreased over the past decade, and are expected to decrease further over the next five years. Pupil numbers in the primary sector in Powys are expected to decrease by approximately 5% by 2026.

iii) High number of surplus places

Based on PLASC 2021 figures, there was 14% surplus capacity in Powys primary 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.

iv) 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.

v) Financial pressures

The Council is currently facing significant financial pressures in general. This is affecting all service areas, including the schools' sector. There are significant variations in the budget share per pupil across Powys schools, ranging from £3,512 to £11,689 in the primary sector in 2022-23.

vi) Inequality in access to Welsh-medium education

In contrast to other areas of Wales, there has been no growth in Welsh-medium pupil numbers in Powys over recent years. Significant changes are needed to the Welsh-medium offer in Powys 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.

vii) 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.

viii) 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.

Currently, not all pupils are educated in the setting that meets their needs best, and depending on where pupils live, they have access to a different quality and type of provision.

ix) Historical lack of political decision making

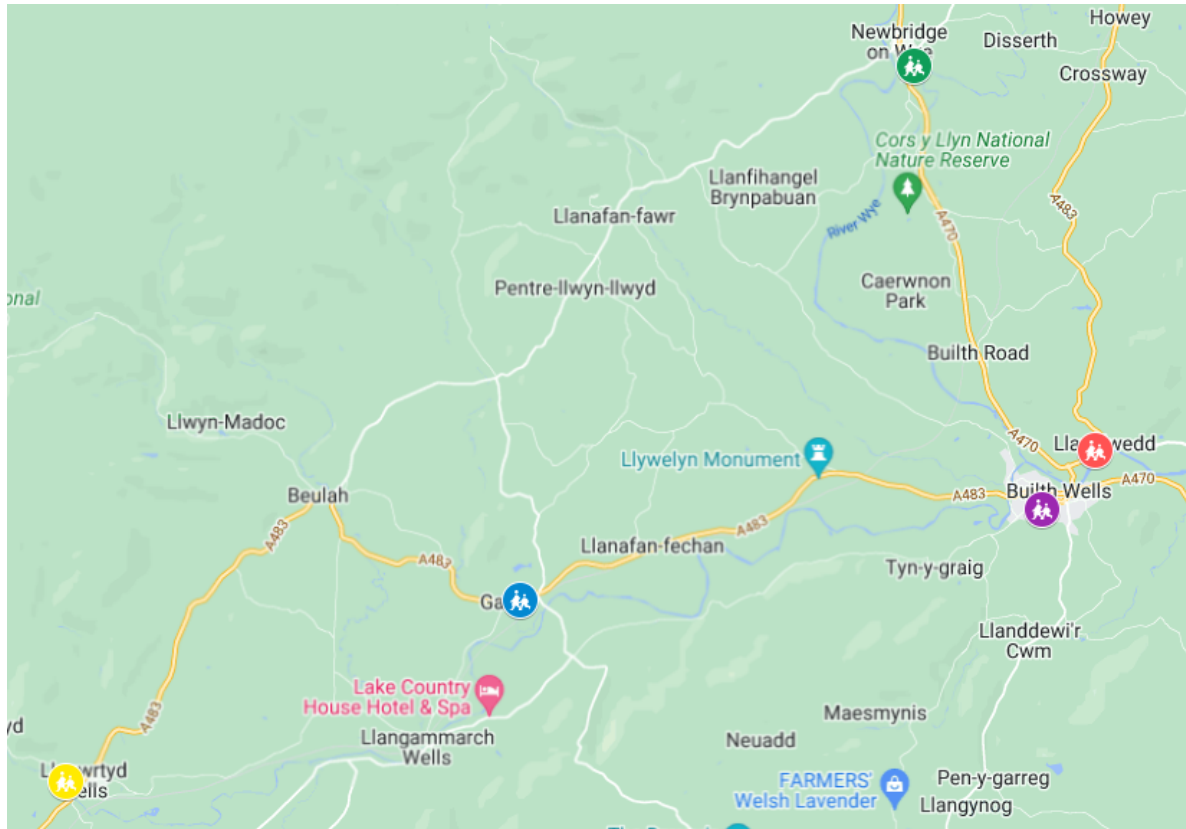
The Council's failure to implement a number of high-profile proposals in the past left a legacy in Powys.

3. WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED AT IRFON VALLEY C.P. SCHOOL

3.1 THE CURRENT SITUATION

Irfon Valley C.P. School is a small English-medium primary school, located in the Builth Wells catchment in Mid-Powys. Irfon Valley C.P. School is located in the village of Garth, and currently shares a headteacher with Ysgol Dolafon.

The following map shows the location of Irfon Valley C.P. School and other nearby schools:



Key – Blue: Irfon Valley C.P. School; Red: Llanellwedd C. in W. School; Green: Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School; Yellow: Ysgol Dolafon; Purple: Builth Wells C.P. School.

The following primary schools are located within 10 miles of Irfon Valley C.P. School²:

² School Distances by Road - Council's Business Intelligence Team

| School | Distance from Irfon Valley C.P. School by road (miles) |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Builth Wells C.P. School | 6 |
| Llanelwedd C. in W. School | 6.8 |
| Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School | 8.8 |
| Ysgol Dolafon | 6 |

The following is a summary of key data relating to Irfon Valley C.P. School:

| | School Type | Language Category | Admission Number ³ | Rural School? ⁴ |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | Community Primary School building owned by Powys County Council | English-medium | 8 | Yes |

Pupil Numbers

i) Current pupil numbers⁵

| | R | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Total |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 1 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 19 |

ii) Historical pupil numbers⁶

| | Jan. 2016 | Jan. 2017 | Jan. 2018 | Jan. 2019 | Jan. 2020 | Jan. 2021 | Jan. 2022 | Jan. 2023 |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 55 | 52 | 50 | 46 | 45 | 45 | 42 | 43 |

³ Powys County Council's Admissions Information and Arrangements 2024-25

⁴ Annex F of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018)

(<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/school-organisation-code-second-edition.pdf>) includes a list of 'rural schools', to which the 'Presumption against the closure of rural schools' applies.

⁵ Teacher Centre, 19th September 2023

⁶ PLASC

iii) **Projected pupil numbers (Birth rate)⁷**

| | Jan. 2023 | Jan. 2024 | Jan. 2025 | Jan. 2026 | Jan. 2027 |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 39 | 42 | 41 | 41 | 44 |

i) **Projected pupil numbers (Finance projections)⁸**

| | Jan. 2023 | Jan. 2024 | Jan. 2025 |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 33 | 19 | 17 |

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

The following table provides information about the current capacities of school and the capacity:

| | Capacity ⁹ | Currently Filled ¹⁰ | Surplus Capacity ¹¹ |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 60 | 19 (31.6%) | 41 (68.3%) |

ii) **Building condition¹²**

| | Condition | Suitability | Sufficient |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | C Poor | B/C Satisfactory/Poor | Yes |

⁷ Powys Schools Service Projections based on PLASC & Birth Rates

⁸ Powys Finance Projections based on data provided by the school. Provided by the Finance team in September 2023

⁹ MSCW Capacity Jan. 2022 from the Welsh Government Planning of School Places Return – October 2022

¹⁰ Based on current pupil numbers – September 2023

¹¹ Based on current pupil numbers – September 2023

¹² Condition, Suitability and Sufficiency – The Transforming Education PowerBI Dashboard – 2022

Standards of Education

i) Estyn

Irfon Valley C.P. School was inspected by Estyn in June 2022.

The recommendations were as follows:

- R1 Address the health and safety issue identified by the school
- R2 Ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced, and that it meets pupils' needs
- R3 Provide regular opportunities for all pupils to write creatively, at length, across a broad range of genres
- R4 Strengthen the governance of the school, to ensure that the governing body fulfils the statutory requirements and develops its role as a critical friend

Financial information

i) Cost per pupil¹³

| | Budget share per school | Budget share per pupil | Notional SEN budget | Non ISB funds devolved to the school |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | £242,000 | £7,346 | £7,000 | £0 |

Home to school travel

i) Closest school

An analysis of pupil travel patterns has been carried out based on the 19 pupils that were attending Irfon Valley according to Teacher Centre in September 2023. The closest provider for these pupils is as follows:

| Closest school | Pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School |
|--------------------------|---|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 89.5% |

¹³ Section 52 Budget Statement, 2023/24

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| | |
| Builth Wells C.P. School | 5.3% |
| Ysgol Dolafon | 5.3% |

Based on this information, Irfon Valley C.P. Schools is the closest school for 89.5% of the school's pupils on roll in September 2023.

If there were no school in Garth, the closest school for the pupils on roll in September 2023 would be as follows:

| | Pupils' closest school should there be no school in Garth |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Ysgol Dolafon | 52.6% |
| Builth Wells C.P. School | 36.8% |
| Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School | 10.5% |

ii) Average travel distance

The average travel distance for all pupils on roll in September 2023 at Irfon Valley C.P. School is 2.23 miles.

If there were no school in Garth, the average travel distance for all pupils attending the school in September 2023 to attend alternative provision would be 4.97 miles.

iii) Furthest travel distance

Of the pupils that attended Irfon Valley C.P. School in September 2023, the furthest travel distance to the school for those pupils for whom Irfon Valley C.P. School is the closest provider is 5.39 miles.

If there were no school in Garth, the furthest distance to these pupils' nearest alternative provision would be 6.82 miles.

Equalities Information

i) Free School Meals¹⁴

¹⁴ PLASC 2023

| | Total % Eligible |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 17.6% |

ii) **Pupils in care¹⁵**

| | Number of pupils in care |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 0% |

iii) **SEN/ALN¹⁶**

| | School Action | School Action Plus | Statement | IDP School | IDP LA |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|--------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 11.6% | 4.7% | 0.0% | 2.3% | 0.0% |

Early Years Provision

Funded early years provision is available on the school site at Irfon Valley Rainbow Tots.

3.2 WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED AT IRFON VALLEY C.P. SCHOOL

The following is a summary of the main challenges facing Irfon Valley C.P. School:

i) **Low pupil numbers**

Current pupil numbers¹⁷ at Irfon Valley C.P. School are as follows:

| | R | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Total |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Irfon Valley C.P. School | 1 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 19 |

¹⁵ PLASC 2023

¹⁶ PLASC 2023

¹⁷ Teacher Centre, 23rd June 2023

The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school with less than 91 pupils. Pupil numbers are significantly lower than this, and have decreased significantly over the last few months.

ii) Budget difficulties

The significant reduction in pupil numbers at the school over a relatively short period has caused significant budgetary pressures at the school.

iii) High budget share per pupil

Based on the Council's Section 52 Budget Statement for 2023-24, the school's budget share per pupil during 2022-23 was £7,346. This is higher than the Powys primary school average of £4,821. Irfon Valley C.P. Primary School is ranked the 4th highest primary school in Powys by budget share per pupil.¹⁸

iv) Combined age classes

The small pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes, with foundation phase learners in one class and older learners in another. Because pupil numbers in each year group are small, it is more difficult to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged.

iv) Lack of wraparound provision

The school is currently unable to offer provision before or after school. Parents have transferred to alternative schools to be able to access this type of provision.

¹⁸ Section 52 Budget Statement 2023/2024

PART B – OPTIONS FOR IRFON VALLEY C.P. SCHOOL

4. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

The following options have been identified which could potentially provide a solution.

| Option | Description |
|--------|---|
| 1 | Status quo – continue as a standalone school |
| 2 | Federate Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon |
| 3 | Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on two sites |
| 4 | Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Irfon Valley site |
| 5 | Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Dolafon site |
| 6 | Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Ysgol Dolafon |
| 7 | Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools |

5. SWOT ANALYSIS OF EACH OPTION

SWOT analyses for each of the five options are provided below.

Option 1: Status quo – continue as a standalone school

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would retain provision in Garth - There would be no additional transport costs - No requirement for a reorganisation process - No change for staff - No impact on pupils | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School would continue to be low - Would not lead to a rationalisation of primary provision - Would still need to maintain the Irfon Valley building - Would not reduce surplus places - Would not lead to a financial saving |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would not address the high budget per pupil |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for further collaboration with Ysgol Dolafon to provide increased opportunities for pupils | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupils numbers at the school could continue to decrease |

Option 2: Federate Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon

| | |
|---|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would retain provision in both locations - There would be no additional transport costs - More opportunities could be provided to pupils and staff - Pupils at both schools would continue to attend school in the same location | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School would continue to be low - Pupils would still be taught separately - Would not lead to a rationalisation of primary provision - Would still need to maintain the two buildings - Would not reduce surplus places - Would not lead to a financial saving - Would not address the high budget per pupil at Irfon Valley |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for further collaboration between the two schools to provide increased opportunities for pupils - More opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff - Opportunity for shared staffing across the federation - Opportunity to realise some financial efficiencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School could continue to decrease |

Option 3: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on two sites

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would retain provision in both locations – More opportunities could be provided to the pupils – There would be no additional transport costs – Could provide a financial saving to the Council – Opportunity for all staff to secure positions in the new school – More opportunities for staff from working in a larger school – Opportunity to develop a new identity for the new school, bringing together the two communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School would continue to be low – Pupils would still be taught separately – Would still need to maintain two buildings – Would not reduce surplus places – Would not lead to a financial saving – Both schools would lose their identity – Would impact on staff at both schools |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opportunities for further collaboration across the sites – More opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff – Opportunity to realise some financial efficiencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers on the Irfon Valley site could continue to decrease |

Option 4: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Irfon Valley site

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would result in the establishment of one larger school – Would retain provision in Garth – All pupils would attend school in the same location – A larger school would mean that more opportunities could be provided to pupils | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Loss of provision in Llanwrtyd – Impact on the Llanwrtyd community – Possible impact on co-located community facilities in Llanwrtyd – Additional travel for pupils currently attending Ysgol Dolafon – Additional transport costs |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No additional travel for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley – Could provide a financial saving to the Council – Opportunity for all staff to secure positions in the new school – More opportunities for staff from working in a larger school – Opportunity to develop a new identity for the new school, bringing together the two communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Less convenient for the majority of pupils currently attending the two schools – Pupils currently attending Ysgol Dolafon would have to transfer to a new site – The Irfon Valley building does not currently have capacity to accommodate Dolafon pupils – The new school would still be a ‘small school’ based on the Welsh Government definition – Would not be attractive to Ysgol Dolafon |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unpopular with the Llanwrtyd community |

Option 5: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Dolafon site

| | |
|---|--|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would result in the establishment of one larger school – Would retain provision in Llanwrtyd – All pupils would attend school in the same location – A larger school would mean that more opportunities could be provided to pupils – No additional travel for pupils currently attending Ysgol Dolafon – Could provide a financial saving to the Council – Opportunity for all staff to secure positions in the new school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Loss of provision in Garth – Additional travel for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School – Additional transport costs – Pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School would have to transfer to a new site – Loss of provision from Garth – Impact on the Garth community – May not be attractive to Irfon Valley C.P. School – The new school would still be a ‘small school’ based on the Welsh Government definition |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More opportunities for staff from working in a larger school - Opportunity to develop a new identity for the new school, bringing the two communities together - More convenient for the majority of pupils currently attending the two schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inconvenient location for Irfon Valley pupils - Some Irfon Valley pupils would be closer to other schools |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unpopular with the Garth community - Irfon Valley pupils may choose to transfer to alternative schools instead of travelling to Llanwrtyd |

Option 6: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Ysgol Dolafon

| | |
|--|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would retain provision in Irfon Valley - Would build on the collaboration that is already in place thanks to the shared Headteacher - There would be no additional transport costs - Pupils would continue to attend school in the same location - Minimal impact on staff employed at Ysgol Dolafon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small numbers would remain at the Irfon Valley site - Irfon Valley pupils would still be taught separately - Would still need to maintain the Irfon Valley building - Would not reduce surplus places - Staff employed at Irfon Valley School would have to go through a Management of Change process |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring equal opportunities to all pupils due to age range of pupils in mixed age classes |

Option 7: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would address the issue of low pupil numbers at Irfon Valley – Would reduce the Council’s overall surplus capacity in primary schools – Revenue saving to the Council – Pupils would attend larger schools, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum – Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities – Pupils would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages – Minimal impact on any other schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Additional travel for those pupils for whom Irfon Valley is currently the closest school – Additional transport costs – Pupils currently attending Irfon Valley School would have to transfer to alternative provision – Loss of provision from Garth – Impact on the current staff of Irfon Valley School – Impact on the Garth community |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Likely to be unpopular with the Garth community |

6. IMPACT OF EACH OPTION

The likely impact of each option on quality and standards, the community and travelling arrangements is considered below:

| Option | Likely impact on quality and standards | Likely impact on the community | Likely impact of different travelling arrangements |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Option 1: Status quo – | There would be no impact on quality and | There would be no impact on the | There would be no impact on travel |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>continue as a standalone school</p> | <p>standards – pupils would continue to access the current provision at Irfon Valley.</p> | <p>community – provision would continue to be available in Garth.</p> | <p>arrangements – pupils would continue to attend Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> |
| <p>Option 2: Federate Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon</p> | <p>There would be very little impact on quality and standards – pupils would continue to access the current provision at Irfon Valley. Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley would continue to be low, however, more opportunities may be provided for collaboration between the schools.</p> | <p>The impact on the community would be minimal – provision would continue to be available in Garth.</p> | <p>Pupils would continue to attend school in the same location, thus there would be no additional transport costs.</p> <p>Some additional travel may be required between schools in order to access activities and events.</p> |
| <p>Option 3: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on two sites</p> | <p>This option would retain provision in Garth, as both sites would be retained as part of the merger.</p> <p>There would be enhanced opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff, however, ensuring equal opportunities to all pupils in mixed age range classes would continue to be difficult.</p> <p>Merging the two schools to establish a new school is likely to result in a school where the quality and standards are at least as good as the current provision.</p> | <p>The impact on the community would be minimal – provision would continue to be available in Garth. However, one new governing body would be responsible for both sites, therefore there may be a perceived reduction in community involvement in management of the school, depending on the make-up of the new governing body.</p> | <p>Pupils would continue to attend school on the current site of Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> <p>Some additional travel may be required between schools in order to access activities and events.</p> |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Option 4: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Irfon Valley site</p> | <p>This option would retain provision in Garth, as both sites would be retained as part of the merger.</p> <p>There would be enhanced opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff, however, ensuring equal opportunities to all pupils in mixed age range classes would continue to be difficult.</p> <p>Merging the two schools to establish a new school is likely to result in a school where the quality and standards are at least as good as the current provision.</p> | <p>The impact on the community would be minimal – provision would continue to be available in Garth. However, one new governing body would be responsible for both sites, therefore there may be a perceived reduction in community involvement in management of the school, depending on the make-up of the new governing body.</p> | <p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Ysgol Dolafon, particularly those for whom Dolafon is currently the closest school.</p> <p>Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy, there would also be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities/events.</p> |
| <p>Option 5: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Dolafon site</p> | <p>This option would remove provision from Garth, with pupils to attend school on the Dolafon site.</p> <p>There would be enhanced opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff, however, ensuring equal opportunities to all pupils in mixed age range classes would continue to be difficult.</p> <p>Merging the two schools to establish a new school is likely to result in a school where the</p> | <p>There would be a significant impact on the community of Garth as there would no longer be provision in Garth.</p> | <p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> <p>Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy, there would also be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities/events.</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | <p>quality and standards are at least as good as the current provision.</p> | | |
| <p>Option 6: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Ysgol Dolafon</p> | <p>This option would retain provision in Garth, building upon the relationship that is already in existence with Ysgol Dolafon.</p> <p>There would be enhanced opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between staff, however, ensuring equal opportunities to all pupils in mixed age range age classes would continue to be difficult.</p> <p>It is anticipated that implementation of this option would mean that pupils attend provision where the quality and standards are at least as good as the current provision.</p> | <p>The impact on the community would be minimal. Provision would continue to be available in Garth. However, the site would be managed by Ysgol Dolafon, so there could be a perceived reduction in community involvement in the management of the school.</p> <p>In addition, it is possible that joint school activities would take place on the larger Ysgol Dolafon site, which could lead to a reduction in activity on the Irfon Valley site.</p> | <p>Pupils would continue to attend school on the current site of Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> <p>Some additional travel may be required between schools in order to access activities and events.</p> |
| <p>Option 7: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools</p> | <p>The nearest schools to Irfon Valley are Ysgol Dolafon and Builth Wells C.P. School. Some pupils would also live closer to Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School. Should pupils transfer to any of these schools, it would mean that pupils would be attending provision where the quality and standards are at least</p> | <p>There would be a significant impact on the community of Garth, as provision would no longer be run within the village.</p> | <p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> <p>Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, there would</p> |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | as good as the current provision at Irfon Valley. | | also be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities/events. |
|--|---|--|---|

7. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The options have also been assessed against the following Critical Success Factors:

| Critical Success Factor | Description |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 – Strategic fit and business needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The option must align with the Council’s Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-2030, to include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address the challenges facing education in Powys, as outlined in the Council’s Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-2030 - Align with the Vision and Guiding Principles outlined in the Council’s Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-2030 - Align with the Strategic Aims and Objectives outlined in the Council’s Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-2030 ● The option must optimise the benefits of the Council’s Transforming Education Programme |
| 2 – Value for money | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The option must optimise the resources available for the delivery of learning ● The option must provide value for money in the delivery of learning |
| 3 – Potential achievability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The option must be achievable within current legislation ● The option must be operationally achievable ● The option must be physically achievable |
| 4 – Potential affordability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The extent to which the option is affordable within the Council’s forecasted revenue ● The extent to which the option is affordable within the forecasted capital funding available to the Council |

Each option has been assessed against the Critical Success Factors based on the following criteria:

✓ – Meets ? – Could meet x – Does not meet

The assessment for each option is as follows:

| | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 | Option 4 | Option 5 | Option 6 | Option 7 |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|------------------|
| 1 – Strategic fit and business needs | x | x | x | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| 2 – Value for money | x | x | x | ? | ? | x | ✓ |
| 3 – Potential achievability | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4 – Potential affordability | x | x | x | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| Total ✓ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Total x | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Outcome | Discount | Discount | Discount | Discount | Possible | Discount | Preferred |

8. EMERGING PREFERRED OPTION

Based on the work carried out, the emerging preferred option for Irfon Valley C.P. School is:

Option 7: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools

The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School
- Would reduce the Council’s overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council

- Pupils would attend larger schools, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
- Pupils would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages
- Minimal impact on any other schools
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

Further consideration of the emerging preferred option will be carried out, to include consideration of the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code.

PART C – FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF PREFERRED OPTION

The Welsh Government's School Organisation Code outlines factors to be considered when developing school organisation proposals. Consideration is given below to the impact of the preferred option, closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools, on the factors outlined in the Code.

9. QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

9.1 Likely impact on standards and progress overall, of specific groups and in skills

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools. Should the school close, the nearest schools for most pupils would be Ysgol Dolafon or Builth Wells C.P. School, however some pupils would also be closer to Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School, and pupils may also choose to transfer to Llanelwedd C. in W. School. The Council's view is that all of these schools would provide education for pupils which is of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Irfon Valley C.P. School, so it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on standards and progress overall.

This would also apply in respect of pupils belonging to specific groups, such as pupils eligible for Free School Meals, pupils for whom English is an Additional Language, Looked after Children and pupils with Additional Learning Needs. There are small numbers of pupils with Additional Learning Needs, who are in receipt of free school meals, or who have English as an additional language at Irfon Valley. It is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on the standards and progress of these pupils. There are currently no Looked after Children or pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School.

This is also the case in respect of the impact on the skills of all pupils, including literacy, numeracy and ICT. Pupils would transfer to a larger school, which would provide improved opportunities to share staff expertise and resources, and which have an improved ability to monitor pupil progress in these aspects.

9.2 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In the short term, it is possible that there would be an impact on pupils' wellbeing, as they would need to transfer from Irfon Valley C.P. School to alternative schools in the area. However, the receiving school(s) would provide full support to the pupils during the transition period in order to minimise any negative impact on them.

Closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School could result in additional travel for some pupils, particularly those for whom Irfon Valley is currently the closest school. Irfon Valley is currently the closest school for the majority of pupils attending the school, however, the additional travel time to alternative provision would likely not be excessive.

In the longer term, the intention is that implementation of the preferred option would have a positive impact on pupil wellbeing and attitudes to learning as they would transfer to a larger school with a larger cohort of pupils, providing improved social and extra-curricular opportunities, as well as better access to the new curriculum.

9.3 Teaching and learning experiences

9.3.1 Quality of teaching

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

Should the school close, the nearest schools for most pupils would be Ysgol Dolafon or Builth Wells C.P. School, however some pupils would also be closer to Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School, and pupils may also choose to transfer to Llanelwedd C. in W. School. The Council has no concerns about the quality of teaching at the nearest alternative schools, therefore it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on the quality of teaching experienced by pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.

9.3.2 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

Should the school close, the nearest schools for most pupils would be Ysgol Dolafon or Builth Wells C.P. School, however some pupils would also be closer to Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School, and pupils may also choose to transfer to Llanelwedd C. in W. School. The Council's view is that the nearest alternative schools would provide a curriculum which is at least equivalent to that currently provided at Irfon Valley C.P. School. Pupils would be transferring to larger school, therefore the expectation would be that there would be an improvement in the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum provided to pupils. Pupils would also be able to work in groups of similar ability pupils. However, it is acknowledged that some of the schools pupil may transfer to also meet the Welsh Government definition of a small school.

9.3.3 The provision of skills

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

Should the school close, the nearest schools for most pupils would be Ysgol Dolafon or Builth Wells C.P. School, however some pupils would also be closer to Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School, and pupils may also choose to transfer to Llanelwedd C. in W. School. The Council has no concerns about the provision of skills at these alternative schools, therefore it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on the provision of skills for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.

9.4 Care, support and guidance

9.4.1 Tracking, monitoring and the provision of learning support, personal development and safeguarding

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

It is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on tracking, monitoring, the provision of learning support, personal development, or safeguarding for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.

9.5 Leadership and Management

9.5.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers, self evaluation processes and improvement planning

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

The headteacher of Irfon Valley C.P. School is also headteacher of Ysgol Dolafon, therefore there would be continuity in leadership for pupils who choose to transfer to Ysgol Dolafon. The Council's view is that leadership and management at Ysgol Dolafon, as well as the other alternative schools, would be at least as good as the current arrangements at Irfon Valley C.P. School.

9.5.2 Professional learning

It is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would impact on professional learning opportunities.

Staff currently employed at Irfon Valley C.P. School would be subject to a management of change process.

9.5.3 Use of Resources

The school is currently projecting a carry forward surplus of £31k at the end of financial year 2023-24 decreasing to a cumulative deficit of £122k by 31 March 2026. Finance and school improvement officers are working with the school to identify ways to reduce the deficit, but this is increasingly challenging due to the combination of low pupil numbers and high inflation on running costs the school is experiencing. When small schools encounter any unexpected pressures such as long-term sickness or building maintenance issues, then the risk of falling into a deficit is higher as they have more limited scope to reduce costs in other areas to compensate.

One of the main challenges facing the Powys schools infrastructure is the proportion of small schools in the county coupled with significant surplus places, resulting in higher premises related costs per pupil. Irfon Valley C.P. School is one of the smallest schools in the county in terms of numbers on roll, and the budget share per pupil at the school is therefore significantly higher than the Powys primary school average.

Should the preferred option be implemented, pupils would transfer to a larger school, ensuring a more effective use of both schools' and the Council's resources.

9.6 Impact on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Implementation of the emerging preferred option would impact on any vulnerable pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, including any pupils with ALN/SEN.

Based on PLASC 2023 data, 20.8% of pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School had additional learning needs.

Whilst the emerging preferred option would impact on these pupils, as they would be required to move to an alternative school, there is no reason to believe that the alternative schools would not be able to meet their needs.

Should the option be implemented, the Council would work with Irfon Valley C.P. School and any schools receiving transferring pupils to ensure an effective transition for any vulnerable children, including children with ALN/SEN and their families.

9.7 Ability of the school/schools which are the subject of the proposals to deliver the full curriculum at the foundation phase and each key stage of education, including the quality of curriculum delivery and the extent to which the structure or size of the school is impacting on this

Should the emerging preferred option be implemented, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools, therefore Irfon Valley C.P. School would no longer need to deliver the curriculum to any key stages.

This could result in an increase in pupil numbers at nearby schools, which could improve their ability to deliver the curriculum in all key stages. However, depending on the class structure and current breakdown of pupils at these schools, it is possible that some adjustments would be needed to accommodate additional pupils.

It is possible that some pupils could choose to transfer to alternative schools rather than Irfon Valley C.P. School. However, the number of pupils transferring to any school is likely to be very small, so it is not anticipated that this would impact on the ability of these schools to deliver the full curriculum to pupils.

10 NEED FOR PLACES AND IMPACT ON ACCESSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS

10.1 Will the alternative provision have sufficient capacity and provide accommodation of at least equivalent quality for existing and projected pupil numbers?

The preferred option is for pupils to transfer from Irfon Valley C.P. School to their nearest alternative schools.

The following table provides information on the number of spaces available and building condition of the nearest alternative schools:

| School | Capacity | Current pupil numbers¹⁹ | Available spaces | Available capacity | Building Condition | Building Suitability |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Builth Wells C.P. School | 249 | 205 | 44 | 17.7% | B | A/B |
| Ysgol Dolafon | 69 | 57 | 12 | 17.39% | B | B/C |

¹⁹ Teacher Centre, September 2023

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|----|-------|---|-----|
| Llanelwedd C. in W. School | 103 | 102 | 1 | 1% | C | B/C |
| Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School | 107 | 116 | -9 | -8.4% | A | A |

This shows that, whilst there is pressure on places at Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School and Llanelwedd C. in W. School, there are sufficient places available at Builth Wells C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to accommodate pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.

However, it is acknowledged that Builth Wells C.P. School is a dual stream school, so the available places would be split across the two streams.

Irfon Valley C.P. School's building is categorised as Condition C. The quality of accommodation at the alternative schools is categorised as Condition C or better.

10.2 Is the alternative provision sufficient to meet existing and projected demand for schools of the same language category and (if relevant) designated religious character?

As indicated in section 10.1, there are sufficient places of the same language category available in the local area to accommodate Irfon Valley C.P. School's current and projected pupil numbers.

Irfon Valley is a community primary school. Alternative community primary provision is available at Ysgol Dolafon and Builth Wells C.P. School.

10.3 What will be the nature of journeys to alternative provision and resulting journey times for pupils including SEN pupils?

Alternative provision is available within approximately 6 miles of Irfon Valley C.P. School, so it is not considered that the length and nature of journeys for pupils to alternative provision would be excessive. This includes journeys for ALN/SEN pupils.

One-way journeys to alternative provision would not be in excess of 45 minutes.

11 RESOURCING OF EDUCATION AND OTHER FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 What effect will the proposals have on surplus places in the area?

Implementation of the preferred option would lead to an overall reduction in surplus places in the area.

11.2 Do the proposals form part of the local authority's 21st Century Schools Investment Programme and contribute to the delivery of sustainable schools for the 21st Century and to the better strategic management of the school estate?

The review of Irfon Valley C.P. School does not form part of the local authority's Sustainable Communities for Learning (formerly 21st Century Schools) Investment Programme.

11.3 What are the recurrent costs of proposals over a period of at least 3 years and is the necessary recurrent funding available?

The recurrent costs of this proposal would be the potential increased transport costs which are currently estimated to be an additional £46k per annum based on current prices. This has been included in the revenue costing and is funded through savings in other areas of the formula in relation to this proposal.

11.4 Will additional transport costs be incurred as a result of the proposal?

It is estimated there would be additional transport costs of £46k per annum, based on current prices and pupils' current location, assuming the pupils transfer to their closest alternative schools.

11.5 What are the capital costs of the proposal and is the necessary capital funding available?

It is not anticipated that capital funding would be required in order to implement the emerging preferred option.

11.6 What is the scale of any projected net savings (taking into account school revenue, transport and capital costs)

It is estimated that this would result in annual revenue savings to the Council of around £75k. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of £121k, there are no projected savings from catering functions and estimated additional transport costs of £46k. There would be a further saving of £10k in Rates and Statutory Testing should the building be disposed of. The estimated back log maintenance costs of £347k to bring the building up to current standards would also be avoided if the proposal was implemented.

11.7 Without the proposals, would the affected schools face budget deficits?

The school is currently projecting a carry forward surplus of £31k at the end of financial year 2023-24 rising to a cumulative deficit of £122k by 31 March 2026.

11.8 Will any savings in recurrent costs be retained in the local authority's local schools budget?

Any savings would be available for reinvestment as part of the Council's corporate budget process and any reinvestment in the schools system would be agreed as part of the annual budget planning cycle.

11.9 Will the proceeds from sales (capital receipts) of redundant sites be made available to meet the costs of the proposal or contribute to the costs of future proposals which will promote effective management of school places?

Irfon Valley C.P. School is owned by the council, meaning that there is the opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site.

12 OTHER GENERAL FACTORS

12.1 What impact will the proposals have on educational attainment among children from economically deprived backgrounds?

Implementation of the preferred option would impact on any pupils from economically deprived backgrounds currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. All pupils currently attending the school, including any from economically deprived backgrounds, would need to transfer to alternative schools. However, transferring pupils, including those from economically deprived backgrounds, would be well supported to in order to mitigate any adverse impacts that may arise from transferring to a new school.

Free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's home to school transport policy, however it is acknowledged that there would be an impact on families due to the requirement to travel to school events, which could have a greater impact on children from economically deprived backgrounds.

Based on PLASC 2023 figures, 17.6% of pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School were eligible for FSM, so it is acknowledged that there would be an impact on some pupils from economically deprived backgrounds that may be affected is very small.

12.2 Any equality issues, including those identified through equality impact assessments

Initial consideration of equalities information recorded through PLASC suggests that there are no significant equality issues in respect of pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. Should the Council proceed with the statutory process in respect of the preferred option, equality impact assessments will be

carried out and regularly reviewed throughout the process to ensure that any issues are identified and fully considered.

12.3 Whether the school / schools involved are subject to any trust or charitable interests which might be affected by the proposals, for example in relation to the use or disposal of land.

Irfon Valley C.P. School is / is not subject to any trust which may be affected in relation to the use or disposal of land.

13. SPECIFIC FACTORS IN THE CONSIDERATION OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

13.1 Whether the establishment of multi-site schools might be considered as a means of retaining buildings, or the reasons for not pursuing this option

A range of options have been considered in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School, these are outlined in section 4 of this document, as well as an assessment of each option which includes a summary of the weaknesses / threats associated with each.

Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School are very low, and are not projected to increase significantly in coming years. Establishing a multi-site school would not address this issue.

13.2 Whether alternatives to closure, such as clustering, collaboration or federation with other schools, might be considered or the reasons for not pursuing these as an alternative

Federating Irfon Valley with Ysgol Dolafon is one of the options that has been considered earlier in this document. An assessment of this option has been carried out, which includes a summary of the weaknesses / threats associated with this option.

Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School are very low, and are not projected to increase significantly in the coming years; clustering, collaboration or federation would not address this issue.

13.3 Whether the possibility of making fuller use of the existing buildings as a community or educational resource could be explored

The Council's view is that making more use of the existing building as a community or educational resource would not address the issues identified in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School.

Pupil numbers at the school are very low, and are not projected to increase significantly over the coming years.

13.4 The overall effect of closure on the local community (including the loss of school-based facilities which are used by the local community)

Implementation of the preferred option would mean that there would no longer be provision in Garth. It is acknowledged that this would have a negative impact on the Irfon Valley community, including the loss of primary provision from the village of Garth, and a possible loss of any community facilities associated with the school from the village.

A draft community impact assessment, with input from the school, has been carried out. Should the Council proceed with the statutory process in respect of the preferred option, this draft community impact assessment would be published as part of the consultation documentation. This would be updated throughout the process to reflect any feedback received, and would be considered by the Council's Cabinet as part of the decision making process.

13.5 How parents' and pupils' engagement with the alternative school and any facilities it may offer could be supported

Should the Council proceed with the statutory process and eventual implementation of the preferred option, support would be provided to pupils and their parents as part of the transition process, thereby ensuring full engagement with their new schools. The nature of this support will depend on the needs of the parents/pupils; however, this could include effective transition arrangements with the receiving school to ensure pupils transition is positive.

The preferred option is for pupils to transfer nearest alternative schools, which will be supported in order to provide continuity to pupils and their families, ease transition arrangements, and support parents' engagement with their children's new school.

14. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the options appraisal carried out and further consideration of the preferred option against the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code, the preferred option is as follows:

Option 6: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools

The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers at Irfon Valley

- Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
- Pupils would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages
- Minimal impact on any other schools
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

Further consideration of the emerging preferred option will be carried out, to include consideration of the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code.

It is recommended that a paper is considered by the Council's Cabinet, requesting approval to commence consultation on a proposal to close Irfon valley C.P. School, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.