

Appendix C – Minutes of meetings with School Council, Staff, Governors and Parents / Community – Llanbister

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**Report on meeting with the School Council of
Llanbister C.P. School**

8th March 2016

Meeting with the School Council of Llanbister C.P. School

Officers in attendance:

Marianne Evans, Senior Manager School Transformation
Sarah Astley, Project Manager, School Transformation Team
Jade Clay, Schools Transformation Programme Support Officer

School representative:

Erena Kolano Rogers, Acting Headteacher, Llanbister C.P. School

A meeting with the School Council of Llanbister School was held on the 8th March 2016.

Sarah Astley, Project Manager explained the proposal to close Llanbister C.P. School. Pupils were then asked a number of questions. Their responses are summarised below:

1. What do you like about Llanbister C.P. School?

- There are lots of toys
- The classrooms are nice and colourful
- They learn lots of stuff
- It's a small school so they all know each other
- There isn't many people in the school so they get more attention, more help and more opportunities
- They like the P.E. lessons
- They like the sports they do after school
- They have a big yard so there is more space to play
- The food is nice

2. What don't you like about Llanbister C.P. School?

- Welsh classes
- It is noisy at dinner time

3. What would be worse if you had to move to a different school?

- They would have further to travel
- Some people will go to different schools so they may be split up from their friends
- They may not be able to see their friends every day
- They will have to get used to different teachers and a new school lay-out
- They will have to move in the middle of the school year
- Crossgates C.P. School will be overcrowded
- They may get muddy from the field

4. Is there anything that would be better if you had to move schools?

- Would have more friends
- Might have a better teacher
- There is a field at Crossgates C.P. School but there isn't here
- Because the school is lower down there may have less snow

5. What do you think the impact of closure of the school would be on pupils that have additional needs?

- It might be more difficult for them to travel
- The school may not have the right teachers to help them
- It might be harder for them to move around if they are in a wheelchair and the school is busy
- They might get made fun of

6. Pupils were asked whether they had any further comments or concerns to raise. The following questions were raised?

- How would the transport work?

Pupil debates

The pupils had taken part in a debate about the closure of Llanbister C.P. School as part of a P.S.E. lesson. Two pupils read out their statements against the closure of the school. These statements included the following points:

- Pupils will have to change schools half way through the school year which will affect their education and the teachers in the new school won't know what they have covered
- It will be hard to make new friends if they are shy which could make them feel sad and could ruin their education
- It will affect the community because the hall will shut and then the activities will not carry on
- Crossgates CP School will be overcrowded
- They will get new friends and may forget their old friends
- Being compact into tight spaces will increase the chance of germs being passed on
- Money will be spent on building more classrooms
- Parents will have to spend more money on new uniforms
- A new playground might be needed for Crossgates C.P. School
- There will be more transport on the roads and more fumes damaging the environment
- The children get a better education because there is more time to have one to one support
- It will cost more money to transport pupils to Crossgates C.P. School

- The impact of the petrol station being close to the school on the children's health
- The number of pupils attending Llanbister C.P. School is due to rise
- The portable cabins are too small and will be far away from the school

Minutes of a meeting with staff of Llanbister C P School, held at Llanbister School on 10th March, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Gareth Jones, Senior Manager, School Central Support Services
Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, Schools Transformation
Catherine Cottle, Human Resources Business Partner

E Kolano-Rogers, Acting Headteacher
Kay Hughes, member of staff
Liz Brown, member of staff
Sarah Hammond, member of staff
Lyn Davies, member of staff
Sara Wilson, member of staff
Paula Kemp, member of staff

Members of staff and officers introduced themselves.

Gareth Jones explained the purpose of the meeting was to receive the views of members of staff and to answer any questions they may have on the proposal to close Llanbister CP School from 31st December, 2016. Staff members were informed that if they were governors or members of the community they would be welcome to attend the consultation meetings with governors and parents/community members to be held later that evening.

Gareth Jones informed staff members about the reasons for the proposal. It was noted that, in line with the Schools Transformation Policy, 2014, the School Organisation Review Panel, chaired by Cllr Arwel Jones, Portfolio Holder for Education, had identified criteria by which to measure and identify schools for review. The criteria relate to standards, pupil numbers (number of pupils on roll less than 50 over 3 previous years), capacity (where surplus capacity is over 15%), building condition (building condition C/D) and cost per pupil (cost per pupil more than 120% of county average). Members of the School Organisation Review Panel had met with governors of the school on several occasions between February and December, 2015, in order to discuss data in respect of the school. Following consideration of a report in January, 2016, the Council's Cabinet took a decision to proceed with formal consultation on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016, with Crossgates CP School being named as the receiving school.

Members of staff were informed that a written record would be made of the meeting and this would be shared with the headteacher.

Gareth Jones invited members of staff to comment and ask questions in relation to the proposal.

1. Question

Why are you closing all the small schools in Radnorshire? There are schools in Montgomeryshire with fewer pupils which have not been closed. There are only 3 councillors on the Cabinet who are not from Montgomeryshire.

Response

There are a number of key criteria against which all Powys schools were measured as part of the review process. It was the view of officers and Councillor Arwel Jones that a number of schools

should be reviewed. The majority of those schools are in the Brecon and Radnor area. You are correct in what you say about the make-up of the Cabinet. A number of primary schools in Montgomeryshire have been closed - Aberhafesp C W School, Dolfor C P School, Llangurig Church in Wales School and Ysgol Efrnwy in Llanwyddyn. 10 primary schools were closed in the Ystradgynlais area. Gwernyfed catchment area is still going through the modernisation process. Tonight's meeting will be attended by the Cabinet Leader and the Portfolio Holder for schools so you can put the question directly to the Cabinet members if you wish to do that.

Response

No decisions have been taken to close any of the 3 schools under review. The Cabinet has only taken a decision to consult on the proposal to close the school. All issues raised during the consultation period will be analysed and included in a report for the Council Cabinet. The Cabinet members have a duty to consider all the issues raised during the consultation and have to take a decision based on the issues raised and the Authority's response to them.

2. Comment

It is probably a closed case anyway.

Response

In the past, proposals have been changed following consultation.

The impact of rural school reorganisation on the community is acknowledged. The Cabinet will have a copy of the Community Impact Assessment. Cabinet had draft version of the Community Impact Assessment in January. All the views heard in relation to the impact on the community will be included in the Community Impact Assessment and the Cabinet will have to take these into account.

3. Comment

This school is projected to have a very good intake of pupils in the next few years. Where are we going to put these pupils? Crossgates School will be overcrowded and the pupils will be in bigger class sizes. That is not good for the children. We could have up to 60 children in next 3 or 4 years. Bigger classes are not good for children. You have got to think of the future. There are a lot of children in this community.

4. Comment

I used to work in Newbridge on Wye School. When Howey Church in Wales School closed the pupils transferred to Newbridge and parents had to go to appeal for places at the school.

Response

As part of the Schools Service Asset Management Plan pupil numbers over the next 15 years need to be projected. Consideration is given to the Local Development Plan and the number of houses planned for the Llandrindod area in order to assess what impact that will have and to ensure that there are sufficient pupil places in the receiving school. Class sizes will be 25+. Schools are currently funded for 1 teacher per 26 or 27 pupils.

5. Comment

Children will find it hard going to a bigger school. Many of the younger children will not cope well as they would get "lost in the system". Some children do not cope well in larger classes.

Response

That point has been noted.

6. Comment

There will be an impact on families who already have one sibling in school. For those families the child who is already in Llanbister School is guaranteed a place at Crossgates School but if they have a sibling and Crossgates is not their closest school then some parents could have children in different schools.

Response

The School Transport Policy states qualifying pupils will have free school transport to the closest or allocated school. Consideration could be given to including the whole of Llanbister catchment into a single school catchment area.

7. Question

What if the class size is full to capacity and a family already has one child in Crossgates School and the sibling cannot get a place in the school?

Response

We need to ensure that there are places available for children who live in the catchment area of the school. If parents are applying for a school place at the right time, it is unlikely that a place would be refused.

8. Question

What do parents do if they can't get siblings into that school? Parents need a guarantee that siblings can get a place in the school if the older child is in Crossgates School.

Response

If a school is oversubscribed there is no guarantee that a place would be available for a sibling of a child already in the school but school places are allocated according to criteria set out in the Schools Admission Policy.

9. Comment

Parents will be disadvantaged if they have children in two different schools.

Response

Priority for school places is given to looked after children, then children who live in the catchment area of the school and then to children who already have a sibling in the school.

10. Question

If Crossgates School is projected to be near capacity would it not be sensible to keep this school open so siblings can attend the same school?

Response

That would be something for the Cabinet to consider.

Comment

This school already works closely with Crossgates School and there are 3 members of staff at this school, who have already worked at Crossgates. Couldn't this site be kept open as part of Crossgates School?

Response

If Crossgates School was made a dual-sited school with the Llanbister site the funding arrangement works out as 1 teacher for 25 pupils so the second site would need at least 50 children before it became self-sustaining and that is not projected to happen over next few years.

11. Comment

The number of pupils at Crossgates School is going to grow very quickly. Are there any plans to increase capacity at Crossgates?

Response

Crossgates School currently has a capacity of 210. The school's capacity can be increased by use of the mobile. The roof of the mobile needs re-felting but that work has already been planned.

12. Comment

The mobile classroom is not fit for purpose. A roof job is not going to suffice. You are going to be transferring the children from a permanent building to a portacabin.

Response

The mobile classroom is currently being used for a breakfast and after school club.

13. Comment

A lot of work needs to be done to bring the mobile up to standard.

Response

The Authority has just completed consultation around a proposal to change the age of primary school admission and, if that proposal is approved, it may change the admission number and capacity of Crossgates School.

14. Comment

The biggest year group at Llanbister School is the nursery age group and they will be in reception by the time the proposal to change the school admission age is implemented.

Response

They would be in Year 1.

15. Question

What about the toilet facilities in the mobile? You can't expect 30 children to use 2 toilets. More toilets will need to be included in the mobile.

Response

The mobile has capacity for 28 children. For infants the recommended ratio for the number of toilets per child is 1 toilet for 10 children.

16. Comment

If there was a need to increase the number of toilets, that would reduce the capacity of the mobile classroom.

17. Comment

You will need capacity for ICT too.

Question

In your opinion what do you think the Authority should do?

18. Comment

It is not my decision but I think you need to keep provision here. Crossgates School is going to get bigger. Affordable housing is planned and that is going to encourage more young families to come to the area. The provision here is perfectly acceptable. The pupils are happy and learning.

Comment

In relation to building condition, colleagues in Property have informed us that if the roof of the mobile classroom at Crossgates School is re-felted the mobile would be condition "B".

19. Question

How can Llanbister School building be rated as C/D? It is either one or the other.

Response

Llanbister School building has been rated as "C" for condition, "B" for suitability and "C" for sustainability.

20. Comment

The toilet area has been refurbished since the survey was completed. There are no leaking roofs at this school.

21. Comment

And we can provide our own school dinners here.

Response

I think a revised survey of the Llanbister School building needs to be completed. The aspiration is to get all our schools to condition "A" or "B".

22. Comment

I think the condition of the building is better than "C"

Response

Another property survey needs to be completed. One aspect is DDA compliance. That is measurable based on individual children coming into the school.

23. Comment

If children have to travel to Crossgates School they are going to be tired when they arrive at school. They are going to be a long time on the transport. It is dreadful to put little children on school transport to Crossgates. Some of our pupils are already travelling from Felindre. Those children will have to go on two different lots of transport.

Will Powys change the goalposts? Currently, the Authority is saying the school transport will be provided to Crossgates School should Llanbister School close but would the Authority provide transport for the Felindre children to Knighton School?

Response

The policy is that school transport would be provided for qualifying pupils to the named receiving school or to the closest school to the child's home address.

If the closest school to the children's home address is currently Llanbister School then the Authority has a duty to transport those children to the named, receiving school. The proposal is that the named receiving school will be Crossgates C P School and the Authority has a duty to ensure that there are places available in the named, receiving school but parents may choose to send children to alternative schools.

Comment

To summarise the points you have made:

- If there was no school in Llanbister that would have a big impact on the community.
- Pupil numbers at Llanbister School are projected to grow.
- There is concern about the impact on pupils of transferring them from a small to larger classes.
- There are concerns about splitting children from their siblings if they need to attend different schools if the receiving school is full.
- There are concerns about pupils being transferred from a permanent school building to a mobile classroom.

24. Comment

I am concerned about the impact longer school journey times may have on the children.

25. Comment

Closing Llanbister School will also impact on the children's friendship groups.

26. Comment

Closure of the school would impact on the community. Extra-curricular activities and community groups take place in the school buildings. There is an art club, sports club, football club, netball club, breakfast and after school club, gardening club and other extra-curricular activities throughout the day. The playgroup meets every Friday morning and the Young Farmers Club.

Response Question

Are those extra-curricular activities currently accessed by pupils from across the catchment?

Response

Yes

27. Question

Why waste money on refurbishing the mobile when there is a good building here?

28. Comment

Parents of pupils at this school and at Crossgates School will not want their children taught in a mobile classroom.

29. Comment

There are safety issues at Crossgates School in relation to car parking. There is also parking allocated for the “Little Acorns” pre-school setting.

30. Question

If a decision is taken to close the school will there be a separate meeting for staff?

Response

No decision has been taken to close the school but I can answer questions in relation to staff matters if you wish me to do so.

Response

The consultation closes on 24.3.2016. Following closure of the consultation period a report, including all the issues raised during the consultation and the Authority’s response to them, will be prepared for the Council’s Cabinet. The Cabinet has a duty to take into account all issues raised during the consultation and will then take a decision on the next steps. The report will not be considered by the Cabinet until after the Welsh Assembly elections. This will probably be in May or June. If Cabinet decides, following consideration of the outcome of consultation, to proceed with the proposal, a statutory notice of closure will be published for a period of 28 days of which 15 days must be in the school term. Any objections to the proposal submitted during the consultation period would need to be resubmitted during the objection period in order to be considered as an objection. At the end of the objection period another report, including an analysis of the responses received during the objection period, will be considered by the Cabinet and members will take the final decision on the proposal to close the school. If the final decision is to close the school then the formal statutory process with staff can begin. It is anticipated that if a decision is taken to close the school the HR process would begin in the autumn term. It is expected that all staff would remain in post until the end of December. There would be discussion with the governing body in relation to which staff would need to be retained to deal with the formal closure process.

31. Question

If a decision was taken to close the school and staff were given notice would they be invited to put their names on the redeployment register?

32. Question

Where are you with the Redeployment Policy? It was not good when I was given notice when St Joseph’s School closed.

Response

It is recognised that the Redeployment Policy needs to be reviewed.

33. Comment

The Redeployment Policy should have been revised years ago. School closures are impacting on the lives of many school staff.

Response

There have been examples when staff have been redeployed following school closures.

34. Comment

If heads are told they have to interview redeployees they are not going to take kindly to that. They feel they have been forced into that interview process. Preparing for interviews involves a lot of work but do redeployees have chance of employment? There can be a perception that if staff have been made redundant that there may be an issue

with their performance. I now have a contract but I am concerned about other staff who may be affected by future school closures.

Response

The view of headteachers is now changing. Headteachers now understand now that staff are not on the redeployment list through any fault of their own. I understand what you mean that heads may feel they are interviewing redeployees because they have to but there is so much change headteachers now understand that.

35. Question

Could you explain the redeployment process?

Response

The governing body would have to sign off a business case to say what they were going to consult with staff on. At the end of the consultation process with staff, staff would be put at risk of redundancy and given notice. Staff would be in a redeployment position until the end of their notice. During this time staff would be supported by the Authority to identify suitable alternative employment but it would be up to staff to look for alternative posts too.

Response

If the redeployment process works properly we should be asking schools to interview staff at risk of redundancy prior to the end of their notice period.

36. Comment

The redeployment policy is not working properly.

Response

There is a need to bring schools in line with rest of authority in terms of the redeployment process. The issue is that although Powys is the employer there is the middle role of the governing body. There is likely to be significant management of change around the age of admission and something which needs to be considered is to open up a voluntary redundancy scheme for all school staff.

37. Comment

How long is that going to take? I know a teacher who was made redundant 3 years ago who is still finding it difficult to find a job. The process needs to move faster.

38. Question

My contract ceases at the end of August. What happens to me after Christmas?

39. Comment

The staff at this school are dedicated. You could have members of staff at some schools who would want to look for alternative jobs as soon as they were aware the school was at risk of closure but the staff at this school are dedicated to the pupils.

Response

The position for staff with fixed term contracts is complex but, by law, staff on fixed term contracts cannot be treated less favourably than staff who are on permanent contracts.

40. Question

Would I be dismissed because, technically, my contract finishes in August?

Response

The governing body would have to have a fair reason for not renewing your contract. You cannot be treated any less favourably because you are on a fixed term contract due to the Fixed Term Worker Regulations and, if you have 2 years continuous service with the Local Authority you would be entitled to redundancy pay.

41. Question

If a decision is taken to close the school, pupils transfer to Crossgates CP School, and there is a need for additional Teaching Assistants at Crossgates School would the governing body of that school need to give staff from this school priority?

Response

I would hope so because children would benefit from the continuity but there is no guarantee.

42. Question

If we were made redundant and have worked in different schools would we get redundancy pay based on the 8 years we have worked?

Response

If you hold multiple posts the situation is complex. If you are only made redundant from one post then the redundancy payment would be based on your length of service in that one post. If you have multiple posts and were made redundant from them all then redundancy would be based on your length of service in all those posts.

Response

If you were redeployed to a post with fewer hours or less pay you may be entitled to a compensatory payment but that would be treated differently to redundancy pay for tax purposes. A compensatory payment would be liable for tax whereas redundancy pay up to £30K is not.

Response

If a decision is taken to close the school we will collate information on staff service details.

43. Question

Is it because the school is under threat of closure that we have only been given temporary contracts to August?

Response

Although your contract is with Powys County Council, the decision regarding the length of the contract is up to the governing body of the school.

Response

If a decision is taken to close the school any issues relating to individual circumstances can be raised in 1:1 meetings during the staff employment process.

44. Question

I have been employed as a cleaner at this school for 25 years. What hope do I have of finding another cleaning job in Crossgates? Crossgates School will already employ cleaners.

Response

That is the problem with the school closures. Most of the staff in those schools will be looking for redeployment in other schools. There may be jobs in other council buildings.

45. Comment

I would not be prepared to travel a round trip of 20 miles for a cleaning job.

Response

When considering redeployment, individual circumstances would be taken into consideration.

46. Comment

There is a good family atmosphere at this school and staff work well as a team.

Gareth Jones reminded staff how to respond to the consultation. It was noted that minutes of the meeting would be typed up and sent to the Headteacher.

GJ thanked staff for the questions raised and requested updated data in relation to projected pupil numbers.

Minutes of a meeting with governors of Llanbister C P School, held at Llanbister School on 10th March, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Ian Roberts, Head of Schools Service
Gareth Jones, Senior Manager, School Central Support Service
Jane Thomas, Professional Lead Finance
Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, Schools Transformation

Darren Ivey, Opinion Research Services
Kelly Lock, Opinion Research Services

E Howells, Governor
E Kolano-Rogers, Headteacher
Peter Thomas, Chair of Governors
Cllr John Brunt, Governor
Gareth Evans, Governor
Sue Meeke, Governor
Mandy Gerrard, Vice Chair of Governors
Julie Rees, Governor
Kay Hughes, Governor

Apologies – Jennifer Lewis, Governor

Ian Roberts welcomed governors to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He informed them that the meeting was part of a formal consultation on a proposal to close Llanbister School from 31.12.16. He explained the purpose of the meeting was for governors to present their views on the proposal. Governors were informed that minutes would be taken of the meeting and every issue raised would be contained in a report to be considered by the Council's Cabinet. Cabinet members would consider the report and decide on the next steps.

Copies of an agenda for the meeting prepared by governors were circulated. (attached below)



Agenda for
Governors Consulta

1. Welcome

Peter Thomas extended a welcome, on behalf of the governing body, to officers from Powys County Council and said he hoped officers would leave the meeting with a clear understanding of a better way forward than closure of the school.

2. Children or Statistics?

Governors presented a short video clip made by local people in the Llanbister to illustrate the value of the school to its pupils and to the community as a whole.

It was noted that the community is united in its support of the school.

Governors pointed out that in a photograph of all the children in the school and playgroup, included within the video clip there were 69 children. (current and potential pupils)

3. Standards

Sue Meeke presented the attached paper on standards on behalf of governors.



Governors
presentation standa

4. Condition of Building

Peter Thomas presented the attached paper on the condition of the Llanbister School building.



Llanbister School
building condition p

Governors were informed that officers from the Authority's Property Service had been asked to carry out a high level survey in order to update the data on the condition of the Llanbister School building.

5. Pupil Numbers and Capacity

Julie Rees and Mandy Gerrard gave a presentation on pupil numbers and capacity (attached below)



Governors
presentation pupil r

Governors were informed that the points raised and the Authority's response to them would be included in the Cabinet report. The Cabinet would take the final decision as to whether to proceed with, amend or reject the proposal.

In response to the presentation on pupil numbers and capacity governors were informed that class sizes of 30 are a guide but not unlawful. Schools cannot plan for Early Years and Key Stage 1 classes over 30.

Ian Roberts thanked governors for clarifying data on projected pupil numbers for Llanbister CP School. In response to a question, governors were informed that the Authority would not support class sizes of 50 and it was noted that the Authority provides class size support funding where schools cannot structure an infant class for below 30 or a junior class below 33.

The following additional comments were received and responses given.

Comment

The capacity figures you have quoted are based on using this room as a single classroom and there is a divide. If used as 2 teaching spaces the total capacity would be 71.

Response

I think it is 66.

Comment

Governors have concerns about the future capacity of Crossgates School to accommodate the projected pupil numbers in January 2017. Your figures do not take into account the children transferring from Nantmel School. Pupil numbers will greatly increase in the next few years which could result in Crossgates School being required to accommodate up to 250 pupils in next 4 years if the Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposals for Llanbister, Nantmel and Llanfihangel Rhydithon Schools. Llandewi, Llanbadarn, Crossgates and Llandrindod Wells all have projected housing development. Ysgol Trefonnen is full to capacity and children are being transported to Crossgates School. If Llanbister School was to close it would mean that that Crossgates School could not be earmarked for surplus capacity for pupils from Llandrindod. How would you deal with a projected 50 over capacity? The mobile will only accommodate 28 pupils. The mobile will not provide sufficient capacity for the projected number of pupils in 3 years' time. You need Llanbister School in January, 2017 to ensure that additional capacity is available when the 4 primary schools in Llandrindod Wells area are at capacity.

6. Finance

Sue Meeke presented a Powerpoint presentation in support of governors view that merger with Crossgates CP School would be a more viable option than closure of the Llanbister School site. (Copy of presentation attached)



Comment

Governors consider that there has been misrepresentation of savings from closure of Llanbister School quoted in the consultation document. Governors dispute the costs of additional school transport required if Llanbister School is closed. Some children may require transport to Knighton or Newtown. The figures need further investigation. If Llanbister School closes it is going to cost £21,333 to transport the pupils from the Llanbister site to Crossgates. There will be one-off costs to refurbish the mobile classroom in the first year of £6K. The roof of the mobile will need to be re-felted and the floor structure will need to be repaired. In addition, there will be a need to update the heating system in the mobile classroom and to install a fire and security alarm system. The CCTV system would need to be relocated. There will be a need to install ICT facilities and furniture. (estimated total costs £50K). Governors consider that with future increased pupil numbers in Crossgates School a second mobile would be needed at the cost of £120K. To relocate a mobile will mean crane lifting is required at a cost of £15K per mobile. Fitting out a second mobile would cost an additional £10K. It may be possible for the Authority to apply for 21st Century Schools Funding to extend Crossgates School but this would be at a cost to the taxpayer and Powys County Council would have to match fund Welsh Government funding. There is no sound financial business case for closure because the County Council will need to invest more money in transport. Merger is the only financial solution. All the above costs would be savings under merger and the added cost of transport would not be needed.

Governors expressed concern about impact of closure on the school on the pupils:

- pupils would spend more time on school transport than at home with their families
- Pupils would be losing out on educational resources because more money would need to be spent on school transport.
- Pupils would miss out on the opportunity to attend extra-curricular activities because extra-curricular activities at Crossgates School do not take place during lunchtimes as is stated in the consultation document. Transported pupils will not be able to access daily extra-curricular activities as the current pupils of Crossgates School do.

7. Summary

Cllr J Brunt summarised the key message on behalf of governors. It was noted that governors acknowledge savings need to be made and are not against closure of Llanbister School providing that it can be merged with Crossgates CP School and education remains on the Llanbister School site.

Cllr Brunt presented points in favour of merger in response to the Schools Organisation Review Panel's reasons for discounting the merger option (summary attached).



Governors
summary.pdf

IR thanked Cllr Brunt for his summary and thanked governors for the time and effort they had taken in presenting their case for merger in a sequenced way.

In response to the financial information presented by governors, Jane Thomas informed them that the cost per pupil calculation in the not method used for calculating the cost for schools. When pupils transfer to another school there are elements of funding such as building costs which do not transfer with the pupil. She agreed to provide governors with a breakdown of the figures.

Minutes of a meeting with parents and community of Llanbister C P School, held at Llanbister Community Hall on 10th March, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Barry Thomas, Leader of Powys County Council
Cllr A Jones, Portfolio Holder for Education
Ian Roberts, Head of Schools Service
Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, School Transformation
Jane Thomas, Professional Lead Finance
Gareth Jones, Senior Manager, School Central Support Services

Darren Ivey, Opinion Research Services
Kelly Lock, Opinion Research Services

137 parents/members of the Llanbister Community attended the meeting

Cllr Arwel Jones welcomed parents and members of the community to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He explained that the meeting was part of the formal consultation process on the proposal to close Llanbister CP School from 31st December, 2016.

Darren Ivey of Opinion Research Services welcomed all to the meeting and explained his role as an independent facilitator and the proposed format and structure of the meeting. Attendees were informed that the Cabinet had only taken a decision to carry out consultation on the proposal to close the school and that no decision had been taken to close the school. It was explained that the purpose of consultation is to inform the Cabinet decision. Parents and community members were invited to use the meeting as an opportunity to present their views and to ask questions in a constructive manner. It was noted that a written record would be made of the all issues raised during the meeting and that these would be included in the report presented to the Council's Cabinet.

Marianne Evans explained the background leading up to the proposal. It was noted that the council had published a new School Transformation Policy in 2014, which set out a range of criteria against which all Powys schools were evaluated. Following this process a decision was taken to review Llanbister CP School. A number of meetings with the governing body had taken place during 2015 to discuss options. In January, 2016, the Cabinet had considered a report including a recommendation to close Llanbister CP School from 31st December, 2016, with Crossgates CP School being named as the receiving school. The Cabinet had taken as decision to formally consult on closure of the school.

Marianne Evans advised that the reasons for the proposal to close Llanbister CP School were as follows:

- The school is currently in Special Measures
- The school has had fewer than 50 pupils on roll for the three previous years
- There are more than 15% surplus places at the school
- The funding per pupil is more than 120% of the council's average

Parents and community members were informed that every issue raised during the consultation would be included in the report for the Council's Cabinet which has a duty to consider all the issues before considering the next steps. Following consideration of the report, Cabinet members could decide to amend or reject the proposal or to take it forward.

The following comments, questions were received from parents and community members:

1. Comment/Question

We are all here tonight for our sons, daughters and grandchildren, the current and future children of our school. I have names and dates of birth of prospective pupils. In the next 4 years, pupil numbers in the school are projected to increase by 82%. This year there will be 11 children starting in Llanbister Primary. Next year there will 9 new pupils, the year after that there will be 10 and the following year, 15 new pupils. Llanbister CP School has a future. In the consultation document on page 4-7 it states that a weakness is that numbers would continue below 50 in the short term. Could you clarify how long short term is?

Response

According to our pupil projections the number of pupils in the school is projected to increase to 42 in 2019. However, we have heard at today's meetings that the number of projected pupils is significantly more than this.

Response

If anyone does have any additional evidence in terms of projected pupil numbers, I would encourage you to submit this as part of the consultation process.

The figures for the projected number of pupils for 2020 included in the consultation document is 54. I would suggest short term is up to 2020.

Response

The figures quoted in documentation are based on the number of projected pupils in Reception to year 6.

2. Comment

Our figures are too.

3. Comment/Question

I have one child who is already in Llanbister School and my daughter will be starting at the school in September. *The questioner held up a picture of the prospective pupils of Llanbister School.* This picture shows the bumps and babies (future pupils of the school) the hub of our community.

Could you tell me what is current number of pupils on roll at Crossgates CP School?

Response

On P 18 of the consultation document it states the number of pupils from Reception to Year 6 in Crossgates CP School in January, 2016, was 140. There are also 17 children in the nursery class.

4. Question

You have confirmed there are 17 children in the nursery age class. Where are these children currently taught?

Response

In the main school.

5. Question

Why are those children not included in the data on pupil numbers within the consultation document?

Response

The data included in the consultation document is based on the PLASC return. For that return Welsh Government requests data on the number of pupils from Reception to Year 6, which relates to the statutory age groups. The authority has recently completed consultation on changing the age of admission to primary schools. If that proposal goes ahead, children would start school in Reception.

6. Question

The capacity of Crossgates is currently 210. What is the capacity per class in Crossgates and what would be acceptable?

Response

210 divided by 7 is 30 per class. The capacity calculation is based on 2.3 square metres of space per nursery age pupil and 1.86 square meters of space per pupil for those pupils between Reception and Year 6. In terms of class sizes, Welsh Government states that numbers in nursery and reception age classes should not normally be over 30, the exception is if children are admitted to school outside the normal admission round. This also excludes pupils that spend part of their education in a special unit. There are no statutory guidelines for junior classes but the Authority ensures that all junior classes are kept below 33 by providing additional funding.

7. Comment

These are the children who will be attending Llanbister C P School in the next 5 years. *The list of prospective pupils was passed to a member of the Panel.*

8. Comment/Question

The consultation document is misleading. There has been no formal change to the age of admission yet. The Nursery needs to be account for. In January, 2017, when you are proposing to close Dolau and Llanbister Schools the total number of children in Crossgates CP School will be 231. You have not factored in some children from Nantmel Church in Wales School who will transfer to Crossgates School - around 20. Some year groups in Llandrindod Church in Wales School are full and children are being transported to Crossgates. Where do you plan to put all these children?

Response

There is a mobile classroom on site which I have been informed is condition standard B and, in terms of the County Council's aspirations for all school buildings these should be A or B. There are some issues with the condition of the roof but that work has already been factored into the Council's programme and once the work has been completed it is considered that the condition of the mobile will be condition standard B. If the mobile is included that will bring the capacity of Crossgates School to 238. If the change to school admission age goes forward the admission number for Crossgates School would be 34.

9. Comment

Page 5 section 2 of the consultation document states one of the strengths of closure of Llanbister school would be that it would reduce the Authority's overall surplus capacity in primary schools, but at the same time, it states that one of the weaknesses of merger would be that there would be no reduction in the Authority's overall surplus capacity in primary schools. The capacity at Crossgates CP School will be exceeded. By keeping the school in Llanbister you would be able to provide education in the community and ensure that capacity at Crossgates is not exceeded. A mobile should not be an acceptable alternative to a permanent school building for Powys County Council.

10. Question

I am a parent of 3 children with one in Llanbister School and one keen to join.

Page 3 of the consultation document states that the overall condition of the Llanbister CP School building is categorised as D or C. Cllr Arwel Jones could you explain how you have assessed /categorised this property and how you have reached this conclusion?

Response

A high level assessment of the school buildings was completed by Welsh Government 6 years ago. The building was then categorised as "B" for suitability and "C" for condition and sustainability. The Authority will arrange for that survey to be updated so that the updated information can be included within the Cabinet report.

11. Comment

On page 19 Section 3.4 you have classified the school building as "C". There is no mention of "D" on page 3.

Response

The information from the Welsh Government survey of the school buildings will be checked and I will feed that information back to the school. On information presented in the consultation document on page 19, the school building is condition "C" but that information will be clarified. The Welsh Government assessment would have been done on each of the blocks but the details in relation to the condition of the school building will be clarified.

Response

Page 3 of the consultation document outlines the criteria included in the School Transformation Policy which was used to identify schools for review. As stated in the document, the criteria in the Policy is 'The overall building condition is categorised as category D or C based on the Welsh Government's assessment of building condition.' Any school that was condition C or D met the criteria – the condition D doesn't refer to Llanbister.

12. Question

What is sustainability?

Response

Sustainability relates to environmental condition – for instance whether windows are single or double glazed.

13. Comment/Question

The consultation document refers to the Welsh Government 21st Schools survey. Despite 3 different FOI requests we are still waiting for information as to how the building has been assessed. Would you consider this building to be in a bad condition?

Response

I can give you assurance that a building survey will be completed before the report is considered by Cabinet.

14. Comment/Question

The school governors commissioned an independent structural survey of the school buildings and that the surveyor stated that all the buildings forming the school are structurally sound and there is no evidence to suggest subsidence or any structural problems with the building. How has the school building graded as poor when £120K was spent on the school buildings 6 years ago?

Response

The condition survey was undertaken by Welsh Government 6 years ago and that survey has not been updated but it is something that is planned. We have also had a commitment from the governing body that they will share their survey with us. We will be instigating a rolling programme of school surveys as part of a review of the Schools Service's Asset Management Plan to ensure that information is kept up to date.

15. Comment/Question

You have said the school buildings were categorised as "B" and 2 "Cs" 6 years ago. How can you now rate the school buildings overall as C/D?

Response

It has been explained that the reference to category C/D was a reference to the criteria that triggered a review. In terms of overall assessment, the emphasis is on the condition of a building. We have already clarified that Llanbister School was not classified as condition D.

16. Question

Why is the school building C/D?

Response

The condition of the school building was assessed as being "C". Of our 100 schools we have one or two which are condition "D" and 50 that are condition "C".

17. Question

Are you seriously using 2009 reports, having spent £120K since, to consider that this is a D rated building? Why has £120K been spent on the building? That should have been included in the report as to why £120K was spent in the first place.

Response

The condition assessment was a condition "C" and not condition "D". We recognise that if there has been money spent, you would expect that element of the condition survey to improve to an A or a B.

18. Comment

It is important that an updated survey is in place before decisions are taken.

19. Question

Can we have clarification that the information reported in the document was based on the classification of the building before investment of £120K?

Response

Yes

20. Comment

So you published a consultation document based on information on the school building's condition before £120K was spent on it. I think that was disgraceful!

21. Question

I am a former pupil of Llanbister School, parent of a future pupil and Vice Chair of the Community Council. The numbers at Crossgates School will go up if you make all the closures you are proposing. You mention that the capacity of Crossgates CP School can be increased by using a mobile classroom. Is using a mobile a viable option and how much will it cost to bring the mobile up to a fit for purpose standard?

Response

The figure quoted in relation to work needed to the roof is between £6.5K and £7.5K.

22. Question

Do you think it will be possible to maintain a suitable temperature in the mobile classroom?

Response

Obviously there are heating temperatures that schools need to maintain. Powys has many schools with mobile classrooms. Ysgol Carno is made up of mobile classrooms.

23. Question

Are they as old as the one at Crossgates School?

Response

We have been informed that the roof of the mobile at Crossgates School is re-felted it will be up to condition "B".

24. Comment/Question

There is poor ventilation in the mobile classroom and there are problems with vermin. Parents are concerned that their children are going to be taught in a mobile. The children in the mobile will feel isolated from the main school. Access in bad weather is an issue for small children. Is this acceptable after children being in a good permanent school building? It seems to be a backward step for pupils to go from a good permanent school building to a mobile.

Response

Most of Crossgates School building is condition "A". If a mobile was used, this would be one classroom within the school. If Llanbister School was to close, we would need to ensure that suitable accommodation would be available.

25. Question

Do you think it would be backward move for pupils to go from a good building here to a mobile?

Response

There are 3 mobile classrooms in my local school. I give you my assurance that the mobile at Crossgates School will be fit for purpose.

26. Question

Have you factored in the costs of bringing the mobile up to standard?

Response

The savings quoted are the revenue savings. The costs quoted do not include the cost of refurbishing the mobile classroom.

Response

It is important that the report that goes back to Cabinet contains all these details. Officers will be expected to provide accurate costs for refurbishing the mobile in addition to arranging for an up to date survey of the school building to be completed before the Cabinet meeting.

27. Question

In 2005, the elected body of the County Council decided to invest substantial money in extending the school in Crossgates. £2.2m was spent on that school at that point and now you are proposing to have children taught in mobiles. At that time, the Board decided that mobiles should not be regarded as a permanent solution. If they decided then that mobiles should not be used as a permanent feature, what has changed? Would you agree that it would be acceptable to put all council officers in mobiles instead of County Hall?

Response

As I said previously, all mobiles at Crossgates School will be fit for purpose.

28. Comment

You mentioned the school at Carno as having mobiles but that is because they are building a new school.

Response

The old school building at Carno was condemned in 1996 and the authority had to put alternative provision in place.

29. Comment

Welsh Government guidelines said mobiles should only be used for 3 years.

Response

Welsh Government guidelines state if a mobile classroom is used for 3 years or longer it has to be included in capacity calculations.

30. Question

How long have pupils at Ysgol Carno been taught in mobile classrooms?

Response

20 years.

It was decided to put mobile classrooms at Ysgol Carno because there was an emergency due to the old school building being condemned but a community group is now supporting the establishment of a new school build at Carno.

31. Comment

We need to hear that there are some long term plans. A mobile classroom does not fit the bill.

Response

It is an aspiration of the Schools Service Asset Management Plan not to use mobiles as a permanent solution. Likewise the aspiration is not to have pupils taught in buildings that are category C or D. The focus of investment as part of Band B of the 21st Century Schools programme will be on improving the quality of category C or D buildings.

32. Question

As Council Leader, do you think it is acceptable for children to continue to be taught in mobile classrooms in the 21st Century - yes or no?

Response

You have been told that the mobile will be a condition "B standard" and that it will be fit for purpose. I am listening closely to every comment made. All Cabinet members will look at the report when it comes to Cabinet. Cabinet members will also be visiting the schools that are being reviewed to see the schools.

33. Question

Is it acceptable for children to be taught in mobile classrooms?

Response

If that building is brought up to condition "B" standard then that would be acceptable.

34. Comment /Question

I am a parent of 2 children currently in Llanbister School. Powys County Council has proposed to close Llanbister School for financial reasons and I am here tonight to present concerns about the negative impact of requiring young children to attend a school a long way from their homes. There are major concerns about inaccuracies in the method used in the Community Impact Assessment to determine closest schools and the computation of distances and travelling times. There is also a lack of assessment of cognitive damage which will have an impact on the children.

Although the Community Impact Assessment states that closure of the school would lead to an increase in travel it did not consider the significance of this increase or consider a weighting. It identified an impact on pupil travel and extra-curricular activities. In determining schools and resultant travel times the table in the document is based on January 2015 figures and will be two years out of date at the time of the proposed closure of the school. A valid assessment can only be based on school attendance figures at the time of proposed closure. School transport distance travelled by the shortest walking distance to Llanbister does not fit easily with the statement that the rural catchment area of Llanbister School has been significantly increased following the closure of Beguildy School. Determining the next nearest school is not straightforward in a rural, hilly area. You have calculated the next closest school by the nearest but not the most practicable route. The B4355 is repeatedly closed because of snow and the roads to Newcastle are dangerous in winter. There were 20 days this winter when travel on local roads has been disrupted by floods or snow. You need to take into account local circumstances and context. The consultation document assumes that pupils will relocate to their closest schools and does not take into account that parents may opt for Welsh medium education.

We do not want children separated and placed in separate schools because of the transport policy. We want assurance that all children in Llanbister School will be entitled to free transport to Crossgates.

Response

All children who live in the current catchment of Llanbister School will be entitled to school transport to Crossgates.

35. Comment

We need to have assurance that siblings will be entitled to transport even if Crossgates is not their nearest school. Parents would be reluctant to separate children from their social groupings. We need assurance that all children will be accommodated in Crossgates School so that they can maintain their friendships.

Response

Transport would be provided to the nearest or allocated school. If all pupils went to one school, there would be economic advantages to the authority. If the authority names a receiving school, it has agreed to provide places at that school.

36. Question

What about the children who are not yet on the roll of Llanbister School?

Response

It would be for the County Council to determine what the allocation area is for Crossgates School.

37. Question

What if Crossgates School was full?

Response

In terms of criteria for admission to Crossgates School there is a ranking. Looked after children are given priority, followed by children who have siblings already in the school and children who live in the catchment area of the school.

38. Question

I have 3 children. By September 2 of my children will be in Llanbister School so my eldest two children will get a place at Crossgates School should Llanbister School close but what will happen to my third child?

Response

That would depend on whether or not you live in part of the normal allocation area of the school.

39. Comment

Can we clarify that if Cabinet agree, all children could be transported including future pupils, but if there was no capacity at Crossgates, future children could be refused admission.

40. Comment

You cannot guarantee that all our children will go to same school. You are splitting the community and you will be splitting families.

41. Comment

The consultation document does not assess the impact of closing Dolau and Nantmel School and that is an omission.

42. Comment

You quote Newcastle as being one of the nearest alternative schools but that school in England. Pupils are entitled to be educated in Wales.

43. Comment

The figures quoted for distances to the nearest alternative schools are inaccurate. The road route does not take account of the fact that some of those roads will be closed due to the construction of the Newtown by pass.

44. Comment/Question

All pupils will experience a 50% increase in distances to be travelled to school. The figures for distances to the nearest alternative schools are inaccurate. The maximum shortest journey to Crossgates is over 16 miles. What is the recommended travelling time for children to get to school?

Response

When we brought forward the travel measure clarification was sought around the Authority's responsibility to transport children to schools in England if a parent chose a school in England but Welsh Government decided that all children in Wales should have the opportunity to attend a school in Wales. We note the comment around the roads in relation to the bypass and will go back and look at that.

45. Question

What is the recommended traveling time for children to go to school?

Response

It would not normally be expected that a primary school pupil should have to travel more than 45 minutes each way.

46. Question

What is the recommended travelling time one way to school?

Response

Not normally more than 45 minutes.

47. Comment

You said 30 minutes before. It has been noted.

48. Comment/Question

There are pupils in Llanbister School who travel from Felindre and who have a journey time of 50 minutes already. The journey from Felindre to Llanbister and from Llanbister to Crossgates by the shortest route will take at least 60 minutes and, in poor weather conditions, this journey time would be increased. Why are some children travelling more than the recommended journey time and why are you recommending a proposal which will mean children will be travelling longer than the recommended journey time?

49. Comment

The journey time from Felindre to Llanbister takes 50 minutes and Llanbister is the closest school for children living in Felindre because you closed the closest school in 2013. The journey time from Llanbister to Crossgates is 10 minutes according to your timetables.

Response

If this proposal goes through would Crossgates be the closest school to Felindre?

50. Comment

Yes

Response

Please submit a copy of that information. It is essential that this information is captured so the Cabinet can see it.

51. Comment

The assessment document does not make any mention of emotional and cognitive impact on pupils. Educational psychologists have referred us to the work of John Bowlby which suggests that there is a high probability that pupils will be emotionally impacted by long journeys. For children of 4 years of age, separation anxiety is a key consideration. Children aged 5 and younger have little understanding of time. Their understanding and control of emotions is difficult. A long journey particularly if there is shared transport with older children is likely to have an effect. Longer journey times may mean parents may not be immediately available to attend if their child is taken ill at school and longer journey times can have a detrimental effect on children's ability and willingness to learn. Closure of Llanbister School will mean extra costs for families. The consultation document claims that activities at Crossgates School happen during the school day, however there are activities on 4 out of 5 evenings. The consultation document is based on out of date data. There is a lack of transparency in terms of negative impacts on the children of the proposal. There are significant omissions.

52. Comment

In Llanbister School Powys has a wonderful, well-supported, community school in the heart of the community. It is understood that savings have to be made and the school community is willing to work with you. You have heard about the potential impact to young children's learning of spending up to 2 hours a day commuting to school and the financial saving from the proposal, stated in document, has been question. We ask you to assist the children in achieving their futures. You need accurate data to calculate distances.

Response

Thank you for well researched information. I would be grateful if you could provide a copy as evidence.

53. Comment

School attendance is very important. For us families in a farming area it's a busy time – if there was bad weather and school transport didn't run, children wouldn't be going to school if they went to Crossgates as we wouldn't have time to take them, therefore attendance would drop. There is rural life to be taken into consideration and how school fits in around that.

54. Comment/Question

I speak as a parent of children at Llanbister School. You have already heard parents' concerns in relation to capacity at Crossgates School. The problem with the consultation document is that it does not give a full picture of the financial costs of closing Llanbister School. Powys County Council has deliberately excluded financial information. The financial costs of closing the school have been underestimated. The transport costs of transport the pupils of Llanbister to Crossgates School will be excessive. At Llanbister there are already sizeable transport costs due to the size of the catchment area and the children living miles from main "A" roads.

Table A shows the actual costs of transporting the current 32 children to Llanbister School. These costs are just over £68K. The estimated costs of transporting these children in January, 2017, to Crossgates will be increased according to the greater mileage travelled. We estimate the costs will be £142K for future transport provision to Crossgates and my method for calculating the cost is generous as routes have been amalgamated. Consultation document already quotes additional costs of £32K but these costs are underestimated. Are you willing to spend £142K on school transport provision which equates to a school's delegated budget? Children as young as 4 will be travelling on a school bus. It would be better value to spend the money on education rather than school transport. The School Organisation Code states that 'it is important that funding for education is cost effective'. I would question whether £142K for school transport is cost effective.

We asked a current transport provider for a verbal quote for transport costs – the quote received was £39K for a bus from Llaithddu to Crossgates. The same provider was not interested in quoting for link transport due to the rural nature of roads. Our estimated school transport costs have been based on 37 pupils in January, 2017. Those transport costs could double as the number of pupils is projected to increase to 64 pupils in 2019.

If Llanbister School closes children who live in the catchment of Llanbister but already travel to Crossgates would be eligible for transport – do the estimated costs include these pupils? This would incur an additional £13K in school transport costs for Powys.

Powys County Council pays huge variances to different transport school providers. The costs for school transport are annual costs, not one off payments. Table C suggests that the additional transport costs would be £74K, not £30,400 as stated in the consultation document. This will have an impact on overall savings, which would decrease significantly

The transport costs quoted in consultation document are inaccurate. This does not take into account other inaccurate information in the consultation document – concerns have been raised in the governors meeting about the other quoted savings, therefore there may be no savings at all from closing Llanbister School. Do not put these children's education at risk and prevent them from reaching their potential due to being tired as a result of additional school transport journey times. Please read all the additional information that has been presented to you. The data in the consultation document is not correct and does not explain the full impact closure of the school would have on the community or the financial impact. Please do not close our school based on unrealistic and inaccurate calculations. I have worked within the audit profession for the last 26 years and part of my job involves auditing local government information. I personally believe there would be financial discrepancy if the proposal to close Llanbister School goes ahead.

Response

There are huge differences between the figures you have provided and the Authority's figures. Based on the information you have presented today we will relook at those figures. The governors did present some additional information also. We have agreed to provide more detail to the governing body around how the costings have been calculated.

55. Comment

Governors showed there was no saving to the Authority by closure of Llanbister School but a cost of £122,000. You challenged one point. There are still £112K costs for you to transport the children to Crossgates School.

56. Comment (former pupil of Llanbister School and parent of pupil)

You have implied that high school and primary school children could travel together on school transport.

Response

The Council's policy is that we do transport primary and secondary pupils on the same bus where practical and feasible. There are about 40-50 shared school transport routes across the county.

57. Comment

I am concerned about the wellbeing of young children sharing school transport with secondary school aged children. I don't think my four year old daughter should be seeing the poor behaviour of secondary school children. The wellbeing of under 4s needs to be factored in. Young children may need the toilet when travelling on long journeys on school transport.

Response

Joint transport is usually a consideration where buses are running into towns where high schools are situated. The proposal under consideration is not to transport pupils to Llandrindod but to Crossgates School. Looking at the numbers projected, I don't think we would be looking at joint transport, but I can't say for definite that that wouldn't be the case.

58. Question

Would there be another adult on the school transport with the children other than the driver?

Response

In normal circumstances the Authority does not provide escorts on transport to/from mainstream schools.

59. Comment/Question

I am the parent of a child in the Ti a Fi playgroup. When I first moved to the area I found attendance at the group meant that I was no longer isolated and I found other parents at the playgroup to be very supportive. I am concerned about parents being isolated if the playgroup closes. The community has funded equipment for the group which is widely accessed by mothers and fathers in the community of Llanbister. There are regular opportunities for parents of children in the playgroup to meet and talk to teachers in the school which assists the children with transition to school. I plan for my child to attend Llanbister School in future. Please keep education in the community where it belongs.

60. Question

Page 35 of the consultation document states that if Llanbister School were to close, a transition programme would be put in place to aid pupils with their transfer to Crossgates. Please clarify what the transition process would be and where it would be held.

Response

Thank you for drawing attention to the impact closure of Llanbister School would have on parents and the children in the community. In terms of transition, where there is school closure there is normally 1 term's notice and, during that time, staff of the closing and the receiving school work closely together. School visits are arranged for staff to go into closing school and arrangements are put in place for the children to spend time at their new school. This is facilitated by the Council, but done in discussion between the staff of the two schools.

61. Comment/Question

Your response does not address the transition process for children in the playgroup. What provision is there for the playgroup?

Response

There is currently an early years setting on the Crossgates School site, which is run by a management committee. This is partly funded by the Authority. One of the aspects we need to look at as part of the proposed change to the age of admission is around transition from early years settings into school. We need to ensure all children have access to a funded 3 year-old place.

62. Comment

The setting on the Crossgates School site is for 2 year olds and 3 years olds, not a mothers and babies group.

Response

Should Llanbister School close, there is no reason why the early years provision couldn't remain in the community.

63. Question

How has Welsh language provision been factored in?

Response

The School Transport Policy states that the Authority will provide transport to the closest school delivering provision through the language of choice. There are some children from this area that attend Ysgol Trefonnen, there may be some that would want to attend Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd.

64. Comment

We have "Ti a Fi" in Llanbister. There is no playgroup in Crossgates. The children will not have the same ease of transition to school.

65. Comment

I am concerned about the impact on the wider community if Llanbister School closes. I am the Chair of Llanbadarn YFC. There is concern that closure of the school will have detrimental effect on Cantal and Llanbadran YFC. The clubs currently have 52 members but if Llanbister School was to close, children will travel to other schools and use youth services in other areas. The YFC would close in this area. If the Llanbister School site was

to remain open this would maintain and uphold the identity of the school in the community. There is a strong community spirit here. The YFC offers a local service which is very important to the community and I would not like to see this diminish. It would not diminish if the Llanbister School site was kept open.

66. Comment

My parents run the Lion Hotel in Llanbister village. The school and “The Lion” play an important part in community life. If the school closes it will impact on our family business. As a family, we have supported the school and have attended fund raising events. Any event at the school means the pub is busy. The school playground is used by the pub when there are weddings and funerals. The pub provides a service to the community. The majority of those buying papers and provisions from the pub parents of pupils in the school. The school and the pub are an essential part of community life. Llanbister has already lost the shop and no more must be lost. We need to keep the school open. It’s not the case that Llanbister School would lose it’s identity if it became a site of another school. If the school site closed, the identity of the community would be lost. We need the school to stay open and our family’s livelihood to continue. Closure of the school site will be a potential catastrophe for village life. The school needs to stay open.

67. Question

Will the community be able to use car parking on the school site if the school closes?

Response

The authority would need to go through the asset management process around disposal of the school site. There have been school closures where the Authority has given consideration to community requests to retain part of the site as an amenity for the community.

68. Question

How will Powys County Council help our businesses and community to survive if you close this school?

Response

No decision has yet been made. You will need to make representations to us about your concerns and these will be considered.

69. Comment

The community is in favour of retaining the school site, this is more important than retaining the school name.

70. Comment

I manage Llanbadarn community shop. What a huge loss it would be to the community it serves if the school closes. My grandchildren attended Llanbister School and received a fantastic education. Page 5 section 3 1.3 states one of the strengths of merging with Crossgates would be maintaining educational provision in Llanbister. People have said education needs to remain in Llanbister. The community is supportive of a merger with Crossgates School if education was retained on the Llanbister School site. We must nurture our children and encourage them to put down roots so that there is a future for this area.

71. Comment/Question

I am a former student of Llanbister CP School and I am here tonight to represent the Llanbister Hall Committee. Llanbister School currently pays the Hall Committee approximately £3K a year for use of the hall for school activities during the day. The Hall Committee also receives additional funding for school concerts and events held by the school. If the school was to close those income streams would be at threat. The hall is well used by all members of the community, both young and old. The hall is used by the community for a range of activities – YFC meetings, coffee mornings, parties and family gatherings, parent toddler groups, “Flix in the Stix”. What will Powys County Council do to help our hall survive if the primary school closes? An estimated 50% funding for the hall comes from the school.

72. Question

Will siblings of current pupils at Llanbister School be guaranteed a place at Crossgates School? I have 3 children, 1 in Llandrindod High School, 1 in Year 6 in Llanbister School and 1-year-old who won't be entitled to a place at Crossgates School because it is not our nearest school. There is difference of 30 miles between Llandrindod High School and our nearest primary school (Ladywell Green / Hafren). Our children may need to be educated in two different shires with all the impact that would have on their social lives. Is that acceptable?

Response

The current School Transport Policy states that qualifying pupils are entitled to school transport to their closest or allocated school which offers education through the language medium of choice. If Llanbister School was to close we would be asking the Cabinet to decide on the allocation area for Crossgates. I'm picking up that if the school were to close, the community would prefer all pupils from the catchment area to be transported to a single school. There are advantages to that for the authority e.g. it would mean a single bus.

73. Comment

If Llanbister School closes what steps have you taken, as our Local Authority, that there will teachers to run the school from September to December as I understand there will be two teachers out of contract at the end of August.

Response

There will be discussion with Peter Thomas, Chair of Governors, regarding that next week. He will also be discussing this with the staff. Governors will aim to secure staff for the autumn term. Discussion will take place without prejudice to any decision on the future of the school.

74. Comment

I am a community councillor for Llanbadarn. Llanbister School serves the Upper Ithon Valley involving 3 community councils. Page 23 4.1 of the School Organisation Code states that the Authority will consult according to the School Organisation Code. Llanbadarn Community Council has not been formally informed of this process nor has Abbeycwmhir Community Council. As many pupils in Llanbister School come from the upper end of the Ithon Valley, do you not agree that Llanbadarn Community Council should have been informed of the consultation on the proposal to close the school in a timely manner? The actual number of residents in the Upper Ithon Valley impacted by the proposal would be

in excess of 1300. Llanbister School has many extra curricular activities which are open to parents and community members to attend. There are a number of extract curricular activities for the children at the school including gardening club, netball and football club. If the school closes the children would have to travel to Crossgates to take part in those activities and general sports activities for those children would be in jeopardy if they have to travel. Out of school clubs are held after school at Crossgates Schol and children from Llanbister would not be able to access these. The consultation document is inaccurate. On page 36 it states that the majority of extra-curricular activities at Crossgates School take place during the day and that is not true. The consultation document is not reliable or fit for purpose. I would suggest that the consultation process is suspended until residents of the Upper Ithon Valley and community councils are notified of the process in a timely manner. This school has given a good foundation for education for many years to enable children to become useful members of society and the school has strong community support.

Response

Every community council in the catchment area of Llanbister School should have received copy of the consultation document.

75. Comment

I am a mother of a 6 year old pupil at Llanbister School and a G.P. I am concerned about the Council's attitude to an issue raised at the Cabinet meeting. Exposure to benzene is a major public health concern. I hope council has had time to reflect on an international WHO paper about this. Parents are alarmed that it is proposed to send children to Crossgates School which lies within 100 m of a petrol station. Benzene is a carcinogen and children could be at risk of exposure to benzene which has been associated with leukaemia. The WHO paper recommends reducing exposure to children to benzene. Only basic tests have been undertaken at Crossgates School. I have spoken to the Consultant for Public Health medicine for Powys and he felt inadequately qualified to allay parents' concerns on this matter but parents were told by the Council not to be concerned. How can council members say we have no need for concern when not no evidence/data has been presented to back this up? Parents are entitled to a risk assessment of the situation. We need to know what the risks are and certainly there are risks. Provide us with some evidence from those who have assessed the risks properly.

Response

LLANBISTER – PETROLEUM/BENZENE

I can confirm that under the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010, that Crossgates garage holds a part B Environmental Permit that includes conditions in respect of preventing vapour release.

The site has been assessed as being in the lowest category in terms of regulatory effort due to its high level of compliance with the environmental requirements of the permit.

The area has been tested for the presence of hydrocarbon in the atmosphere by Officers from the Council's Environmental Protection section, who are qualified and competent in such issues. A

Photoionization detector was used which is an industry recognised method for testing for leakage from fuel storage areas. The tests were negative.

In addition Powys County Council has also sought the advice of Public Health Wales who are of the view that given the set of circumstances there is no public health concern linked to benzene emissions on local air quality.

76. Comment/Question

I take offence to the statement that no children who attend Llanbister School were directly affected by closure of Beguildy School. My children attended the playgroup in Beguildy and were familiar with the school surroundings there. They were young but understood what was going to happen to the school. The closure of Beguildy School had a devastating effect on the community. Although close neighbours, the children are growing up as strangers as they now attend 7 different schools in Wales and England and there is a fear that the community will be lost altogether in 10 – 15 years time. Community events in Beguildy have reduced by 50% since the school closed. The playgroup and clubs will find it difficult to continue and local businesses are suffering. Young families do not want to move into the area. The economy of Powys will grind to a halt. All parents will be keeping their children at Llanbister School until the end of December. What has happened at Beguildy should be a lesson learnt. How does it fit in with the Council’s slogan “strong communities in the green heart of Wales”?

77. Comment

The purpose of consultation is to identify facts and information which have not so far been considered to enable the Panel to review information in order to reach a decision. Thank you for the information provided this evening which should enable the Panel to review and reach different recommendation. The whole matter rests on in the short term. What should short-term mean? Pupil numbers will double and surplus places will not be an issue. Education standards have never been a cause for concern and the leadership issues will be resolved. The school buildings are not a problem. To merge with Crossgates School would achieve aims identified and would achieve savings. It has to be accepted that Crossgates School does not have sufficient capacity in the long term to accommodate all the pupils. Parents will not accept education for their children in a substandard accommodation at Crossgates School. If 21st Century Schools funding is needed when would it be available? 5 reasons for recommending closure in School Organisation Review Panel report have been discounted. Recommending closure will cost substantially more than merger with the receiving school. We need to keep education based at this site in Llanbister.

Ian Roberts thanked Cllr John Brunt, Local Member, parents and community members for their contributions to the meeting and for the quality of the work they had undertaken in order to support their arguments, which had been delivered with passion and strong feeling. He stressed that the School Organisation Review Panel would not be taking the decision on the future of the school and that it would be the Council’s Cabinet which would consider the report and decide on the next steps.

Cllr Barry Thomas thanked everyone for the professional and courteous way in which they had presented their views.

78. Question

Will the Cabinet report be publicly available and will the Cabinet meeting be public?

Response

Yes

79. Comment

At the beginning of the meeting you asked for cogent arguments and the arguments presented tonight have been cogent and forensic in analysis. The community is willing to work with the Council in order to achieve the goal that the children continue be educated in their community. I urge the council to work with the community in order to achieve that goal.

80. Comment

The School Organisation Code states bodies should follow the guidance unless it can be demonstrated they are justified in not doing so. If you fail to follow guidance then your procedure is defective. One of the points you should take into account is to ensure there are enough places available to cope with fluctuations in the number of pupils. If the three schools under review are to close you are proposing that pupils would go to Rhayader and Crossgates School. If I add up the total capacity of schools in North Radnorshire and your projected pupils numbers in 2020 the capacity of those four schools is 892 and the pupils you expect from those communities is 870. You are going up to 98% of the receiving schools capacity. In the short term you should be looking at the period up to 2021. How many children on your figures are going to be at this school? The capacity of this school, according to your figures is 45 and the number of projected pupils is 54. How are you going to be able to deal with that capacity? You will fail to have a surplus capacity 10% in North Radnorshire and yet you talk about falling school numbers in justification of this proposal. The Powys School Transformation policy document on the the next page shows a total number of the projected pupils in 2018 – 9603. The numbers going up. Do not justify you proposal by falling school numbers in Powys because it doesn't add up.

The consultation process should provide plenty of time for intelligent consideration and response and include sufficient reasons for particular proposals and response. Has anyone considered that the consultation document has provided sufficient information for intelligent consideration and response? We are here to give you intelligent consideration and response to your documentation. We should not be telling you what to put in it. Did you consult with the Regional Transport Consortium? Have you come forward with the transport problems the children are likely to face? Have you given notice of the consultation to all the community and town councils of the area? Why did you fail to serve them?

Page 26 of the School Organisation Code says you should put forward descriptions of the benefits of each option – closure, merger or amalgamation. In you documentation you have only talked about closure not about merger.

Page 27 of the School Organisation Code states that you are expected to discuss standards of quality of education. I read your consultation document in which you say there will be an impact. What is the impact that is what your consultation should be discussing at the

time of the proposal? It should be in the proposal stage for you to come back to this community so that the community can come back to you with intelligent consideration and response to your proposals.

The capacity you have talked about in North Radnorshire area is not adequate. Buildings - Why did you not state in your proposal that you were intending to use a mobile classroom and why not? We had to work out that you were talking about a portacabin. Building / planning conditions state that you will demolish portacabins, so why have you not removed the portacabin? Are you in breach of your own building regulations?

You say children should not be traveling for more than 45 minutes each way to school. If a child is likely to be travelling for 60 minutes is that going to be within the code? The estimated additional transport costs in the Nantmel document are the same as Llanbister, however the average additional travelling for pupil transferring from Nantmel School is 3 miles but for pupils from Llanbister it is more than 7 miles. Those figures don't add up. You are going to have to look at the figures in relation to the cost of school transport presented to you tonight. Your officer said some of the figures were not accurate. If the figures are not accurate what effect can that have on consultation process? Can there be any intelligent response to inaccurate figures? You have taken on a number of points from the community. You have made assurance that there would be staff in place in the autumn term. How will you accommodate pupils in a school with a capacity of 210? How will staff be expected to teach children from Crossgates and the other schools you propose to close? I urge you to go away with the question about recommencing consultation and giving us the information. Powys County Council will face the criticism that it is the prosecutor, judge and jury. Under Appendix E of the School Organisation Code there is a process where you could appoint an independent body to look at your proposal and give you a fair and reasoned argument but you decided that your process would be for the Cabinet to take the decision. Why did you not follow appendix E of the School Organisation Code?

Darren Ivey thanked all parents and community members for points made and evidence presented and members and officers for their time and responding to the questions.

Marianne Evans explained the next steps in the statutory process. Parents and community members were informed that formal consultation closes on 24th March and were invited to send in written responses to the consultation (information on how to respond to the consultation is included on page 24 of the consultation document.) It was noted that following closure of the formal consultation period, all issues raised during the consultation would be analysed and a consultation report would be presented to the Council's Cabinet at the end of May/early June.

Cllr Arwel Jones thanked all for attending and expressed his appreciation for the information presented. He stated that the main purpose of public consultation is to improve transparency and to enable public involvement.