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Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

Os yn galw gofynnwch am - If calling please ask for
Stephen Boyd

Ffôn / Tel: 01597 826374

Ffôn Symudol / Mobile:

Llythyru Electronig / E-mail: steve.boyd@powys.gov.uk

CABINET

Tuesday, 23rd January, 2024

S U P P L E M E N T A R Y P A C K

1.	IRFON VALLEY C.P. SCHOOL - CONSULTATION REPORT
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To consider a report by County Councillor Pete Roberts Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys.

(Pages 3 - 204)

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CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**CABINET EXECUTIVE****23 January 2024**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Pete Roberts
Portfolio Holder for a Learning Powys

REPORT TITLE: Irfon Valley C.P. School – Consultation Report

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Further to the decision made by Cabinet on the 24th October 2023, the Council has carried out consultation on the following proposal:
- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet members of the responses received to the consultation and to determine whether or not to proceed with the statutory process to close the school.
- 1.3 The report is supported by the following appendices:
- Appendix A – Consultation Document
 - Appendix B – Consultation Report
 - Appendix C – Minutes of meetings with Governors and Staff
 - Appendix D – Updated Impact Assessments

2. Background

- 2.1 Irfon Valley C.P. School is a small English-medium primary school, located in the village of Garth in the Builth Wells catchment in Mid-Powys.
- 2.2 Irfon Valley C.P. School has a formal Collaborative Partnership Agreement with Ysgol Dolafon, Llanwrtyd, based on the Collaboration between Maintained Schools in Wales (2008) Act. This means that there is a formal agreement between the schools to share a headteacher. This agreement comes to an end this academic year.
- 2.3 Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School have decreased significantly over recent years. Current pupil numbers at the school are as follows¹:

¹ Teacher Centre, September 2023

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

2.4 In the Summer of 2022, the Council updated and relaunched its Strategy for Transforming Education. In July 2023, the school's governing body wrote to the Council, outlining their concerns about the impact of the decrease in pupil numbers on the school's educational and financial sustainability. Following the initial communication with the governing body, the Council carried out an options appraisal exercise to consider options for the school and identify a preferred option.

2.7 On the 24th October 2023, Cabinet considered a proposal paper in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School and agreed to commence consultation on the following:

'To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.'

2.8 Consultation has subsequently been carried out, as agreed by Cabinet.

The Consultation Period

2.9 Consultation on the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School commenced on the 26th of October 2023 and ended on the 7th of December 2023.

2.10 The consultation document was available on the Council's website throughout the consultation period. The document was also distributed to stakeholders as required by the School Organisation Code (2018). The consultation document that was issued is attached as Appendix A.

2.11 Consultees were asked to respond to the consultation by either completing the online consultation form, filling in a paper copy of the form and returning it to the Transforming Education Team, or by writing to the Transforming Education Team.

2.12 During the consultation period, meetings were held with staff and governors of Irfon Valley C.P. School. The minutes of these meetings are attached as Appendix C, and the issues raised in the meetings are included in the Consultation Report (Appendix B).

2.13 In addition, the Headteacher of Irfon Valley C.P. School spoke with pupils about the proposal. Their comments are included in the Consultation Report (Appendix B).

Consultation Responses

- 2.14 45 respondents completed the online response form which was available on the Council's website. In addition, 1 respondent completed a paper version of the response form. 2 other written responses were received, including a response from Estyn.
- 2.15 Estyn's response to the consultation is provided on page 14 of the Consultation Report (Appendix B).

Consultation Findings

- 2.17 The findings of the consultation are provided in full in the Consultation Report (Appendix B) and are summarised below.
- 2.18 Of the 46 respondents that completed the online and paper version of the response form, 78.26% indicated that they were associated with Irfon Valley C.P. School.
- 2.19 The issues raised in the written responses to the consultation and those raised in the consultation meetings are listed in the Consultation Report (Appendix B), from page 18 onwards, along with the Council's response to those issues.
- 2.20 The issues raised relate to the following headings:
1. Comments about Irfon Valley C.P. School
 - 1.1 General positive comments about the school
 - 1.2 Comments about quality of provision at Irfon Valley C.P. School
 - 1.3 Comments about extra-curricular activities available at the school
 - 1.4 Comments about the staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School
 - 1.5 Comments about the school's role in the community
 - 1.6 Comments about the school's small size
 - 1.7 Other comments
 2. Comments about the impact on pupils
 3. Comments about the impact on pupils belonging to protected characteristic groups
 4. Impact on staff
 5. Impact on the community
 6. Impact on families
 7. Impact on early years provision
 8. Comments about housing developments in the local area
 9. Comments about travel/transport arrangements
 - 9.1 Concern about additional travel
 - 9.2 Comments about the Council's Transport Policy
 10. Comments about other schools

11. Comments about small/rural schools

- 11.1 Positive comments about small / rural schools
- 11.2 Concerns about larger schools

12. Criticism of the council

13. Comments about the process

- 13.1 Comments about the timing
- 13.2 Comments about consultation meetings
- 13.3 Comments about consultation with pupils
- 13.4 Other comments

14. Comments about the documentation

15. Alternative options

- 15.1 Keep the school open
- 15.2 Develop the provision at the school
- 15.3 Federation
- 15.4 Merge with another school
- 15.5 Establish a Welsh-medium school
- 15.6 Close a different school
- 15.7 Other suggestions

16. Comments in support of the proposal

3. Advice

- 3.1 Based on the findings of the consultation, and further assessment of the options in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code in terms of the Presumption Against Closure of Rural Schools, the advice of officers is that the Council should proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School by publishing a Statutory Notice.
- 3.2 The reasons for the proposal 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 a larger school where they would be part of a larger cohort of pupils
- 3.3 It is anticipated that the Statutory Notice would be published in February 2024, and that a further report, summarising any objections received, would be considered by Cabinet in March / April 2024.

3.4 The target date to implement the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School is 31st August 2024.

4. Resource Implications

4.1 The amount of funding provided to schools is driven by the funding formula. Any change to the formula funding provided will impact on the Council's revenue budget. Based on the current formula, it is estimated that implementation of the proposal would result in annual revenue savings to the Council of around £75k. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of over £121k and estimated additional transport costs of £46k. The proposal is expected to have no impact on the costs of delivering a catering service.

4.2 Irfon Valley C.P. School is currently projecting a carry forward surplus of £30.6k at the end of financial year 2023-24, which changes to an escalating cumulative deficit, projected to be £121.5k by 31 March 2026, if the school remains open.

4.3 The Scheme for Financing Schools also states the following in section 3.7.2:

'In order to ensure effective stewardship of the resources available to schools, the Authority may impose additional restrictions on a school scheduled to close, including but not limited to:

- Restriction of expenditure to agreed plans
- Removal of powers of virement'

The Council and the governing body of the school have been working on a draft agreement which includes spending restrictions. The budget position by 31 August 2024 is estimated to be as follows:

	2023-24 £	2024-25 £
In year Surplus/(Deficit)	(25,151)	(29,188)
Bfwd Balance	55,573	30,602
Cfwd Balance	30,602	1,414

4.4 Should the school remain open beyond 31 August 2024, then it will move into the escalating cumulative deficit position set out in paragraph 4.2 above.

4.5 Based on the current school condition data report it would cost approximately £248,520 plus VAT to bring the building up to current standards, however this figure is expected to rise due to construction industry inflation experienced. If the proposal is implemented this cost would be avoided.

- 4.6 Implementation of the proposal would require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, Finance, HR and ICT. These service areas will be kept informed of the development of the proposal throughout the statutory process.
- 4.7 Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report and supports the recommendation.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: To follow.
- 5.2 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer has commented as follows: To follow.

6. Climate Change & Nature Implications

- 6.1 Implementation of the proposal would impact on travel arrangements for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. This could have a negative environmental impact, as additional home to school transport would need to be provided to transport pupils to their nearest alternative school. However, implementation of the proposal would also mean that the Council would no longer need to run the Irfon Valley school site. This would result in a reduction in the use of heating and electricity amongst other factors.

7. Data Protection

N/A

8. Comment from local member(s)

Cllr Bryan Davies (Llanafanfawr with Garth):

'I was disappointed that the pupil numbers in the school fell so quickly over the summer period causing the authority to undertake a review of the schools viability.

During the consultation period I had discussions with members of the community who in general were very disappointing but understanding of the Councils proposal to close the school at the end of the current school year.

The staff at the school are excellent as detailed in the last Estyn report and I hope that the authority will support the staff in gaining new positions in other schools / services.'

9. Impact Assessment

- 9.1 An initial impact assessment was considered by Cabinet on the 24th of October 2023.
- 9.2 In addition, a range of draft impact assessments were produced as part of the consultation documentation. These included an Integrated Impact Assessment, an Equalities Impact Assessment, and a Community Impact Assessment.
- 9.3 These draft impact assessments have been updated to reflect issues raised during the consultation period, and are attached in Appendix D.
- 9.4 The Overall Summary from the Impact Assessment is as follows:

The aim of the proposal is to improve the educational provision for learners. However, whilst this impact assessment has identified some positive aspects, in particular relating to ensuring the best strategic management of the Powys schools estate, the assessment has also identified some negative aspects. These primarily relate to the impact on the community of Garth due to loss of educational provision from the village.

10. **Recommendation**

- i) To receive the Consultation Report in respect of the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School.
- ii) To approve the publication of a statutory notice proposing closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.
- iii) To ensure that the school complies with section 3.7.2 of the Scheme for Financing Schools as follows:

'In order to ensure effective stewardship of the resources available to schools, the Authority may impose additional restrictions on a school scheduled to close, including but not limited to:

- *Restriction of expenditure to agreed plans*
- *Removal of powers of virement'*

Contact Officer:	Sarah Astley / Marianne Evans
Tel:	01597 826265 / 01597 826155
Email:	sarah.astley@powys.gov.uk / marianne.evans@powys.gov.uk
Head of Service:	Georgie Bevan
Corporate Director:	Lynette Lovell

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Proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School Consultation Document

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

If you require a paper copy of this document, or a copy of
the document in a different format, please contact the
Transforming Education Team on 01686 611553, or e-mail
transforming.education@powys.gov.uk.

Consultation on the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School

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Consultation on the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School

OVERVIEW

1. The Proposal

Powys County Council is consulting on a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal is as follows:

- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

2. How to respond to the consultation

You can respond to this consultation by completing the online questionnaire which is available on our website:

<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/14958/Irfon-Valley-C.P-School>

A paper copy of the questionnaire is also available at the back of this document. Alternatively, you can respond in writing using the contact details below.

All responses must be received by the **7th December 2023**.

3. Contact details

All responses should be sent to the following address:

Transforming Education Team
Powys County Council
County Hall
Llandrindod Wells
Powys
LD1 5LG

E-mail: school.consultation@powys.gov.uk

Phone: 01686 611553

4. What will happen next

Once the consultation period has ended, a consultation report will be produced which will outline the feedback received. The Council's Cabinet will consider the consultation report and will consider whether or not they wish to proceed with the proposals outlined in the consultation document. This is expected to happen early in 2024.

If the Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposals, a statutory notice would be published, and there would be a period of 28 days for people to submit objections. The Cabinet would then need to consider another report summarising any objections received and decide whether or not to proceed with implementation.

The following is a summary of key data relating to the school:

	School Type	Language Category	Admission Number ¹	Rural School ²
Irfon Valley C.P. School, Garth, Llangammarch Wells LD4 4AT	Community Primary School building owned by the council	English-medium	11	Yes

Current pupil numbers³ 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

There has recently been a significantly decrease in pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School. In July 2023, the school's governing body wrote to the Council, outlining their concerns about the impact of the decrease in pupil numbers on the school's educational and financial sustainability. The governors stated that the lack of wraparound provision at the school, such as an after-school club, was a key factor in some parents' decision to move their children to other schools, along with concern about the small numbers in year groups and the impact of this on their children's education and wellbeing.

Following the communication with the governing body, the Council has carried out an options appraisal exercise to consider options for the school and identify a preferred option for Irfon Valley C.P. School.

The following steps have been undertaken:

- Options appraisal exercise
- Recommendation considered by Transforming Education Officer Group
- Recommendation considered by the Cabinet

On the 24th October 2023, the Council's Cabinet considered a report in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School, and agreed to commence consultation on the following:

'To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.'

¹ Powys County Council's Admissions Information and Arrangements 2023-24

² 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>)

³ Teacher Centre, September 2023

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 new 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 school's 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 ALN/SEN provision

Within Powys, pupils with special education needs (SEN/ALN) 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. THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In the summer of 2019, Powys Education Services were inspected by Estyn. The report published by Estyn following the inspection outlined significant concerns regarding the Council's progress on school reorganisation, and includes a recommendation to 'Ensure that the organisation of provision for non-maintained, post-16, Welsh-medium education and secondary education meets the needs of children and young people of Powys.'

Following the publication of the inspection report, 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 was updated and relaunched in July 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 order to achieve the vision and guiding principles, the strategy outlines a number of aims and objectives to transform the Powys education system over the next few years, in order to provide the best possible opportunities to Powys learners now and in the future. One of these aims is to 'improve learner entitlement and experience' and this aim includes an objective to 'rationalise primary provision'.

The current proposal in respect of Lrfon Valley C.P. School is in line with these priorities.

4. WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED AT IRFON VALLEY

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

i) Low pupil numbers

Current pupil numbers⁴ 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

The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school with less than 91 pupils. Pupil numbers are significantly lower than this, and the latest projected pupil numbers suggest that pupil numbers are not expected to increase significantly over the coming years.

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 2023-24 was £7,346. This is higher than the Powys primary school average of £4,729. Irfon Valley C.P. Primary School is ranked the 4th highest primary school in Powys by budget share per pupil.⁵

iv) Combined age classes

The small pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes, with foundation 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.

5. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

Option	Description
1	Status quo – continue as a standalone school

⁴ Teacher Centre, September 2023

⁵ Section 52 Budget Statement 2023/2024

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

SWOT analyses have been carried out for each of these options. In addition, the options have been assessed against a number of Critical Success Factors, and the likely impact of each option on quality and standards, the community and travelling arrangements was also considered. These can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C of this document.

6. PREFERRED OPTION

Based on the SWOT analyses, the assessment against the Critical Success Factors, the consideration of the likely impact of each option on quality and standards, the community, and travelling arrangements, the preferred option is as follows:

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 other schools compared with other options
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

This is the basis for the current proposal on which the Council is consulting.

The proposal is further explored in the following section. The reasons why the other options considered have not been taken forward are summarised in Appendix D of this document.

PART B – THE PROPOSAL

7. OVERVIEW

Powys County Council is consulting on a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal is as follows:

- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer their nearest alternative schools

8. REASONS FOR THE PROPOSAL

The Council is proposing to close Irfon Valley C.P. School for the following reasons:

- 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 other schools compared with other options
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

9. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The advantages and disadvantages of the current proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. are summarised below:

Advantages	Disadvantages
<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 C.P. School is currently the closest school- Additional travel costs- Pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School would have to transfer to alternative provision- Loss of provision from Garth- Impact on the current staff of Irfon Valley C.P. School- Impact on the Garth community

– Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site	
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10. RISKS

As with all school reorganisation proposals, there are some risks associated with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School.

These are outlined below, along with suggested mitigating actions:

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating Actions
Period of uncertainty for Irfon Valley C.P. School if a statutory process is carried out and implemented which might have a negative effect on standards at the school	Medium	Medium	The Council to provide advice and support to the school and governing body to ensure that standards and performance do not deteriorate during the transition period
Uncertainty for staff whilst the process is ongoing	Medium	Medium	Engagement with staff to take place throughout the process and staff to be kept informed of developments

11. POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION TIMESCALE

Should Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposals, potential implementation timescales are as follows:

Formal Consultation	26 th October 2023 to 7 th December 2023
Consultation Report to be published, and considered by Cabinet	February 2024

If Cabinet decide to proceed:

Publish Statutory Notice (28 days objection period)	February / March 2024
Objection Report to be published and considered by Cabinet	April / May 2024

If Cabinet approves implementation:

School closes	31 st August 2024
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PART C – LIKELY IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

12. IMPACT ON PUPILS

i) Pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools. It is acknowledged that this would have an impact on pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, as they would need to transfer to an alternative school. Should the proposal be implemented, the Council would work closely with the current school and the alternative schools to ensure a smooth transition.

As Irfon Valley C.P. School would close and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative provision, additional transport would be required for pupils for whom Irfon Valley C.P. School is currently the closest school. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with Council's home to school transport policy, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on pupils' ability to access after-school activities, and that there could be increased travelling times to school for some pupils.

ii) Pupils attending other schools

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

Should Irfon Valley C.P. School close, pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools. It is expected that this would include Ysgol Dolafon, Builth Wells C.P. School, Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School and Llanelwedd C. in W. School, however some pupils may choose to transfer to other schools. The proposal could also impact on pupils at these schools as they would receive additional pupils. However, the total number of pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School is relatively small, therefore it is not anticipated that this would have a significant impact on pupils attending neighbouring schools. The numbers admitted to neighbouring schools would be in line with the admissions number for each school.

13. IMPACT ON STAFF

Should the proposal be implemented, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close. A staff redundancy process would be necessary for staff currently employed at Irfon Valley C.P. School. This would be conducted in line with the relevant HR policies for teaching and support staff. All cleaning and catering staff that are currently employed centrally by the Council would be supported by the relevant HR policies for Council employees.

14. IMPACT ON NURSERY / EARLY YEARS PROVISION

In September 2017, the Council changed the age of admission to primary schools in Powys from “at the start of the term in which they attain their fourth birthday” to “at the start of the school year following his/her fourth birthday”. Following this change, there are no nursery aged pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.

Funded early years provision is provided for pupils at a number of locations across Powys. This includes Rainbow Tots, which is located on the site of Irfon Valley C.P. School. However, Rainbow Tots isn't currently funded for the full 10 hours a week. Due to low numbers at Rainbow Tots and Dolafon Ducklings, both settings offer 7.5 hours a week.

Should the Council proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School, it is unlikely that the provision at Rainbow Tots would continue to be viable.

Access to alternative funded early years provision would be available at other providers in the area. This would include the following providers:

Dolafon Ducklings (Llanwrtyd Wells)

Dolafon Ducklings is a non-maintained school run setting, which operates from the site of Ysgol Dolafon in Llanwrtyd Wells. They do not provide the Childcare Offer for Wales. Standards of nursery education and sufficiency of accommodation at this provider are good.

There are 12 seven and a half hours early years education places available at this provider which currently meet the need for early years education in the area.

Cylch yn yr Ysgol (Builth Wells)

Cylch yn yr Ysgol is a non-maintained community run setting which operates from the site of Builth Wells C.P School. They do not provide the Childcare Offer for Wales.

There are 24 ten hours early years education places available at this provider which are currently sufficient to meet the need for early years education in the area.

Llanelwedd Little Learners (Llanelwedd)

Llanelwedd Little Learners is a non-maintained school run setting which operates from the site of Llanelwedd Church in Wales School.

There are 16 ten hours early years education places available at this provider which are currently sufficient to meet the need for early years education in the area.

Newbridge-on-Wye 3 Year Old Setting (Newbridge-on-Wye)

Newbridge-on-Wye 3 year old setting is a non-maintained school run setting which operates from the site of Newbridge Church in Wales School. They also provide the Childcare Offer for Wales.

There are 16 ten hours early years education places available at this provider which are currently sufficient to meet the need for early years education in the area.

15. IMPACT ON GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Implementation of the proposal would result in the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School and the Governing Body of Irfon Valley C.P. School would be dissolved.

16. IMPACT ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

i) Standards, wellbeing and attitudes to learning

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.

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.

ii) Teaching and learning experiences

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.

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.

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.

iii) Care support and guidance

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.

iv) Leadership and management

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.

Professional learning

It is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would impact on professional learning opportunities at the school. Staff currently employed at Irfon Valley C.P. School would be subject to a management of change process.

Use of resources

Irfon Valley 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. This, coupled with significant surplus places, results in higher premises related costs per pupil. Irfon Valley C.P. School is one 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.

v) Impact on vulnerable groups, including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) / Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

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 information, 18.6% 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 Irfon Valley C.P. School would not be able to meet their needs.

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

vi) Impact on the schools' ability to deliver the full curriculum in the foundation stage and each key stage, 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 their nearest alternative schools, therefore Irfon Valley C.P. School would no longer need to deliver the curriculum to any key stages.

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

The number of pupils transferring to alternative schools 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.

vii) Impact on other schools

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.

Whilst it is possible that this could have some impact on receiving schools, particularly upon receiving additional pupils in the short term, the total number of pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School is relatively small. Therefore, it is not anticipated that this would have a negative impact on the quality and standards in education (to include standards, wellbeing and attitudes to learning, teaching and learning experiences, care support and guidance, and leadership and management) at neighbouring schools. In some cases, it is possible that implementation of the proposal would have a positive impact on quality and standards in education at the alternative schools, as it would lead to an increase in pupil numbers and the opportunity to provide enhanced opportunities to pupils.

17. NEED FOR PLACES AND IMPACT ON AVAILABILITY OF PLACES AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS

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 numbers ⁶	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
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.

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

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.

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

For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative schools would be:

School	Distance from Irfon Valley	Approx. travel time
Ysgol Dolafon	6.5 miles	12 minutes
Builth Wells C.P. School	6.0 miles	10 minutes

⁶ Teacher Centre, September 2023

Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	9.1 miles	17 minutes
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	6.8 miles	12 minutes

The travel times above are the approximate travel times from Irfon Valley C.P. School to the alternative schools, however the distance and travel time from individual pupils' homes to alternative schools would be different.

Analysis has shown that the distances and travel times to alternative provision would not be in excess of 45 minutes for primary pupils. This includes journeys for ALN/SEN pupils.

18. RESOURCING OF EDUCATION AND OTHER FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

i) 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.

ii) 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 21st Century Schools Investment Programme.

However, the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys identifies a number of issues relating to the overall Powys schools' estate, including a high proportion of small schools, a high number of surplus places and issues with building condition. The Strategy includes a strategic objective to 'Reconfigure and rationalise primary provision', which aims to address these issues, to ensure better strategic management of the Powys school estate. The review of Irfon Valley C.P. School is being carried out in order to meet this objective.

iii) 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 increased transport costs, which are currently estimated to be an additional £46k per annum as detailed in section (iv) below. This has been included in the delegated revenue costing and is funded through savings in other areas of the formula in relation to this proposal.

iv) 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 pupils' current location and assuming that pupils will transfer to the next nearest school.

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

It is not anticipated that capital funding would be required in order to implement the emerging preferred option. As indicated in the table in section 17 (i) above, there are sufficient places at neighbouring schools to accommodate all current and projected pupils.

vi) 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 and estimated additional transport costs of £46k.

vii) 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.

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

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

ix) Will the proceeds of 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, therefore there is the opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from the sale of the school site.

19. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

i) Impact 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. Free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with 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 information, 17.6% of pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School were eligible for free school meals, therefore it is likely that implementation of the proposal would impact on some pupils from economically deprived backgrounds, however the number of pupils is likely to be small.

The Council's view is that Irfon Valley's neighbouring schools would provide education for pupils which is of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Irfon Valley C.P. School, therefore it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on educational attainment, including for any children from economically deprived backgrounds.

i) Land and Buildings

Comparison of the quality of accommodation at the school from which pupils would be transferred

Information about the quality of accommodation at Irfon Valley C.P. School and other schools to which pupils may transfer is provided in Appendix B.

Information on any building works necessary to ensure that transferred children can be accommodated

No building works are necessary as there is sufficient capacity at nearby schools to accommodate all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.

Details of any potential transfer or disposal of land or buildings that may need to occur as a result of the proposals

Irfon Valley C.P. School building is owned by the Council, therefore no transfer or disposal of buildings is necessary.

Is/are the school/schools involved 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 not subject to any trust which may be affected in relation to the use or disposal of land.

ii) Walking routes to school

Should the proposal be implemented, walking routes which are currently established for Irfon Valley C.P. School would no longer be required.

For those pupils for whom Irfon Valley C.P. School is currently the closest school, additional travel would be required to access alternative provision. For these pupils, it is unlikely that walking or cycling to the alternative school would be possible.

iii) School Admissions

Should the proposal be implemented, admissions to nearest alternative schools in Powys would continue to be administered by the Council in accordance with the Council's Admissions Policy, which is available on-line at: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/1158/Applying-for-a-School-Place>.

iv) Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

The proposal is to close an English-medium school. The proposal is not linked to the targets in the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

The proposal would not expand or reduce the availability of Welsh language provision.

20. SPECIFIC FACTORS IN THE CONSIDERATION OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

i) 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 Appendix C 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 low, and are not projected to increase significantly over the coming years. Establishing a multi-site school would not address this issue.

ii) 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

Various alternatives to closure have been considered, however, pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School are very low, and are expected to continue to decrease over the coming years. Clustering, collaboration or federation would not address this.

iii) 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 low and are not projected to increase significantly over the coming years.

iv) 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 Garth 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.

An initial community impact assessment has been carried out, with input from the school to identify the potential impact on the community. This will be updated throughout the process to reflect any feedback received and will be considered by the Council's Cabinet as part of the decision-making process.

v) 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, to ensure 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.

21. EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Draft impact assessments have been carried out in respect of the proposal. These will be updated following the consultation period to reflect any additional issues raised. The assessments are available on the Council's website:

<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/14958/Irfon-Valley-C.P-School>

A summary of the assessments is provided below:

i) Equalities impact assessment

Should the proposal be implemented, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would attend their nearest alternative schools.

This would have a significant impact on pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, including any pupils belonging to the protected characteristic groups that attend that school, as some additional travel would be required in order to attend their nearest alternative school.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal would impact on pupils belonging to the protected characteristic groups that attend the school, it is to be noted that alternative schools, being larger than Irfon Valley, should be able to deliver the new curriculum more effectively, offer more extra-curricular activities for pupils, and also offer a greater amount of wraparound care to support parents. Therefore, the negative impacts of additional travel are likely to be mitigated by the benefits of attending a larger school. In addition, there is no reason to believe that alternative schools would not be equipped to meet the needs of pupils belonging to the protected characteristic groups that would be affected, including pupils with Additional Learning Needs, pupils eligible for Free School Meals, and Looked After Children.

ii) Impact on the community

Should there be no school in Garth, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. These would be larger schools, and the expectation is that an increased number of activities would be available to pupils. However, it is acknowledged that pupils would need to travel to the alternative schools, which could impact on their ability to access activities, particularly where these take place after school.

Should the proposal be implemented, there would be no school provision in the village of Garth. The information provided above indicates that there is some community use of the Irfon Valley School building, including as a meeting place for parents. There is, however, a village hall located in Garth, therefore community events and activities could continue to take place in the village.

It is also acknowledged that implementation of the proposal would result in additional travel to school for pupils for whom Garth is currently their closest school. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the home to school transport policy, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc.

PART D – CONSULTATION DETAILS

Who will we consult with?

The Council will consult with a range of stakeholders as required by the School Organisation Code, which include the following:

- Parents, carers and guardians at Irfon Valley C.P. School and other schools which may be affected by the proposal
- Governors at Irfon Valley C.P. School and other schools which may be affected by the proposal
- Staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School and other schools which may be affected by the proposal
- Pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School and other schools which may be affected by the proposal
- The Welsh Minister for Education
- Local Powys Councillors
- Town and Community Councils in the local area
- The Senedd Members for Brecon and Radnorshire and for the Mid & West Wales region
- The MP for Brecon and Radnorshire
- Estyn
- Teaching and staff trade unions
- Mid Wales Education Partnership
- The Police & Crime Commissioner for Dyfed Powys
- Nursery providers in the local area
- Mudiad Meithrin
- The Powys Children and Young People's Partnership

Consultation with pupils will take place in accordance with the Welsh children and young people's national participation standards⁷.

The consultation period

The consultation period will commence on the 26th October 2023 and will end on the 7th December 2023.

The statutory process

Consultation on this proposal will follow the guidelines set out by the Welsh Government in the revised School Organisation Code which became operational on the 1st November 2018. The process is summarised below:

i) Consultation

⁷ <https://gov.wales/children-and-young-peoples-national-participation-standards>

Consultation will start on the 26th October 2023 and end on the 7th December 2023. Feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a consultation report will be produced and shared with stakeholders.

It is important to note that responses made to the consultation will not be counted as objections to the proposal, and that only objections can be registered following publication of a statutory notice.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the consultation report and the feedback received during the consultation period, and will decide whether to proceed with the proposal, to make changes to the proposal, or to not proceed with the proposal. If the Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of this proposal.

It is anticipated that the Consultation Report will be considered by the Cabinet early in 2024.

ii) Statutory notice

If the Cabinet decides to proceed with the proposal, statutory notices would be published after the Cabinet meeting. There would then be a period of 28 days for people to submit written objections.

If there were objections, the Council would publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and the Council's response to them before the end of 7 days beginning with the day of the local authority's determination. Only written objections submitted during the statutory notice period will be considered as objections and included in this report. Comments submitted as part of the consultation period would not be counted as objections. Should stakeholders wish their consultation responses to be considered as objections, they would need to be re-submitted in writing during the statutory notice period.

A further report would be presented to the Council's Cabinet, which they would consider alongside the objection report, in order to decide whether or not to approve the proposal.

It is anticipated that a final decision would be made by April/May 2024.

iii) Implementation

If the Council's Cabinet were to approve the proposal, it would be implemented in accordance with the date given in the statutory notice or any subsequently modified date.

How to respond to the consultation

A consultation response form is attached to this document. An online version is also available on the Council's website:

<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/14958/Irfon-Valley-C.P-School>

Alternatively, you can respond in writing.

Completed forms and other written responses should be sent to the following address:

*Transforming Education Team, Powys County Council, County Hall, Llandrindod Wells,
LD1 5LG*

E-mail: school.consultation@powys.gov.uk

All correspondence should be received by the **7th December 2023**.

If you have any further questions about this proposal, you can contact the Transforming Education Team using the above contact details, or by phoning (01686) 611553.

APPENDIX A – KEY DATA

Key data about the affected schools is provided below:

1. Irfon Valley C.P. School

General information

	School Type	Language Category	Admission Number ⁸	Rural School? ⁹
Irfon Valley C.P. School	Community Primary School building owned by the Council	English medium	11	Yes

Pupil numbers

i) Current pupil numbers¹⁰

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

ii) Historical pupil numbers¹¹

	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	34

iii) Projected pupil numbers¹²

	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027
Irfon Valley C.P. School	30	33	33	33	36

⁸ Powys Admissions Information and Arrangements 2023-24

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Teacher Centre, September 2023

¹¹ PLASC

¹² Powys Schools Service Projections based on PLASC 2022 & Birth Rates. 2023 projections are not yet available.

iv) **Projected pupil numbers (Finance projections)¹³**

	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027
Irfon Valley C.P. School	33	19	17	N/A	N/A

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

	Current Capacity ¹⁴	Currently Filled	Surplus Capacity
Irfon Valley C.P. School	60	19	41 (68%)

ii) **Building condition¹⁵**

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

Quality and 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

¹³ Powys Finance Projections based on data provided by the schools. Provided by the Finance team in September 2023.

¹⁴ Welsh Government School Places Return – August 2022

¹⁵ Premises Data Return to Welsh Government – 2022

Cost per pupil¹⁶

	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

Equalities information

i) National identity¹⁷

	British	English	Irish	Scottish	Welsh	Other	Not supplied	Refused
Irfon Valley C.P. School	32.6%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	53.5%	2.3%	7%	0%

ii) Ethnic Group¹⁸

	White British	Other known ethnicity	Information not yet obtained
Irfon Valley C.P. School	95.3%	4.7%	0.0%

iii) English as an Additional Language¹⁹

	% EAL	% EAL A/B/C
Irfon Valley C.P. School	2.3%	2.3% A 0% B 0% C

iv) Free School Meals²⁰

	% Eligible for FSM
Irfon Valley C.P. School	17.6%

¹⁶ Section 52 Budget Statement, 2023/24

¹⁷ PLASC 2023

¹⁸ PLASC 2023

¹⁹ PLASC 2023

²⁰ PLASC 2023

v) **Looked after children²¹**

	Looked after children
Irfon Valley C.P. School	0.0%

vi) **Additional Learning Needs (ALN)²²**

	None	School Action	School Action Plus	Statement	School IDP	LA IDP	% ALN
Irfon Valley C.P. School	81.4%	11.6%	4.7%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	18.6%

2. Other schools that could be affected

Should the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School be implemented, pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative school.

The expectation is that the number of pupils transferring to each school would be small, and therefore the impact on these schools would not be significant. However, information about schools to which pupils may transfer is provided below:

	School Type	Language Category	Admission Number ²³
Builth Wells C.P. School	Community Primary School	Dual stream	40
Ysgol Dolafon	Community Primary School	English medium	9
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	Church in Wales Primary School	English medium	14
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	Church in Wales Primary School	English medium	17

Pupil Numbers

i) **Current pupil numbers²⁴**

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total

²¹ PLASC 2023

²² PLASC 2023

²³ Powys Schools – Powys County Council Admission Arrangements and Information 2024/25

²⁴ Teacher Centre, October 2023

Builth Wells C.P. School	25	33	31	31	28	35	22	205
Ysgol Dolafon	6	8	7	7	8	6	10	52
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	9	9	13	15	20	17	10	93
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	15	17	20	16	12	17	10	107

ii) **Historical pupil numbers²⁵**

	Jan. 2016	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020	Jan. 2021	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023
Builth Wells C.P. School	262	255	227	220	206	201	207	209
Ysgol Dolafon	77	67	65	55	54	57	60	49
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	85	92	105	102	108	117	109	93
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	121	132	129	122	126	129	118	100

iii) **Projected pupil numbers (Birth rate)²⁶**

	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Jan. 2027
Builth Wells C.P. School	203	190	193	178	168
Ysgol Dolafon	45	48	48	49	52
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	97	95	97	97	88
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	103	97	96	87	88

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

²⁵ PLASC 2023

²⁶ Powys Schools Service Projections (R – Yr6) based on PLASC 2022 & Birth Rates. 2023 projections are not yet available.

	Current Capacity²⁷	Currently Filled²⁸	Surplus Capacity
Builth Wells C.P. School	249	205	17.7%
Ysgol Dolafon	69	57	17.39%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	103	102	1%
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	107	116	-8.4%

ii) **Building condition²⁹**

	Condition	Suitability
Builth Wells C.P. School	B	A/B
Ysgol Dolafon	B	B/C
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	C	B/C
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	A	A

Standards of Education

i) **Estyn³⁰**

	Builth Wells C.P. School
Date of Inspection	March 2017
The School's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Adequate
How good are outcomes?	Adequate
How good is provision?	Adequate
How good are leadership and management?	Adequate
Outcome of Estyn review, November 2018	The school is judged to have made sufficient progress in addressing the

²⁷ Powys Welsh Government School Places Return, 2022

²⁸ Teacher Centre, September 2023

²⁹ Premises Data Return to Welsh Government – 2022

³⁰ Estyn website

	recommendations from the Section 28 inspection. The school has been removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn review. There will be no further monitoring activity in relation to this inspection.
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Ysgol Dolafon	
Date of Inspection	February 2017
The School's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good
How good are outcomes?	Good
How good is provision?	Good
How good are leadership and management?	Good
What happens next?	The school will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

Llanelwedd C. in W. School	
Date of Inspection	November 2022
Recommendation 1	Address the health and safety issue raised during the inspection
Recommendation 2	Increase leadership capacity by devolving responsibilities across all levels of staff
Recommendation 3	Ensure that teachers provide sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities
Recommendation 4	Improve pupils' Welsh oracy skills
What happens next?	The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	
Date of Inspection	June 2018
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support, and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good
What happens next?	The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection

Financial information

i) Cost per pupil³¹

³¹ Section 52 Budget Statement 2023/2024

	Budget share per school	Budget share per pupil	Notional SEN budget	Non ISB funds devolved to the school
Builth Wells C.P. School	£280,000	£4,470	£30,000	£0
Ysgol Dolafon	£280,000	£5,709	£13,000	£0
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	£432,000	£4,496	£15,000	£0
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	£468,000	£4,103	£50,000	£0

Equalities Information³²

i) National identity

	British	English	Irish	Scottish	Welsh	Other	Not supplied	Refused
Builth Wells C.P. School	20.6%	14.4%	1.4%	0.0%	62.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Ysgol Dolafon	75.9%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	12.1%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	89.8%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	30.1%	18.6%	0.0%	0.0%	34.5%	1.8%	1.8%	0.9%

ii) Ethnic Group

	White British	Other known ethnicity	Refused/Information not yet obtained
Builth Wells C.P. School	98.1%	1.4%	0.5%
Ysgol Dolafon	91.4%	1.7%	6.9%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	98.1%	1.9%	0.0%
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	78.8%	6.2%	15.1%

iii) English as an Additional Language

	% EAL	% EAL A/B/C
Builth Wells C.P. School	0.0%	N/A
Ysgol Dolafon	8.6%	3.4%/0.0%/3.4%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	1.9%	0.9%/0.9%

³² PLASC 2023

Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	0.0%	N/A
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iv) Free School Meals

	Number of pupils who had a free school meal on Census day
Builth Wells C.P. School	12.4%
Ysgol Dolafon	24.5%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	16.1%
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	12.0%

v) Pupils in care

	Number of pupils in care
Builth Wells C.P. School	0.0%
Ysgol Dolafon	3.7%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	0.0%
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	0.9%

vi) SEN/ALN

	School Action	School Action Plus	IDP
Builth Wells C.P. School	13.4%	4.8%	6.7%
Ysgol Dolafon	20.7%	8.6%	0.0%
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	8.3%	7.4%	3.0%
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	2.7%	0.0%	0.9%

APPENDIX B – SWOT ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

1. SWOT ANALYSES

SWOT analyses for each of the options identified in section 5 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 - 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
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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 – 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"> – 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 – 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 	<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

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 the two communities together - More convenient for the majority of pupils currently attending the two schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The new school would still be a 'small school' based on the Welsh Government definition - 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

2. 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
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1 – Strategic fit and business needs	x	x	x	✓	✓
2 – Value for money	x	x	x	?	?
3 – Potential achievability	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
4 – Potential affordability	x	x	x	✓	✓
Total ✓	1	1	1	2	3
Total x	3	3	3	1	0
Outcome	Discount	Discount	Discount	Discount	Preferred

APPENDIX C – IMPACT OF EACH OPTION ON RURAL SCHOOLS CRITERIA

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
<p>Option 1: Status quo – continue as a standalone school</p>	<p>There would be no impact on quality and standards – pupils would continue to access the current provision at Irfon Valley.</p>	<p>There would be no impact on the community – provision would continue to be available in Garth.</p>	<p>There would be no impact on travel 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>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>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>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</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</p>

	<p>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>parents in order to access school activities/events.</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</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</p>

	these schools, it would mean that pupils would be attending provision where the quality and standards are at least as good as the current provision at Irfon Valley.		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.
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APPENDIX D – REASONS WHY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN TAKEN FORWARD

Option	Description	Reason for discounting
1	Status quo – continue as a standalone school	<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 - Would not address the high budget per pupil - Does not meet all the Critical Success Factors
2	Federate Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley would continue to be low - Irfon Valley pupils would still be taught separately - Would not lead to a rationalisation of primary provision - Would still be required to maintain the Irfon Valley building - Would not reduce surplus places - Would not lead to a financial saving - Would not address the high budget per pupil - Does not meet all the Critical Success Factors
3	Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on two sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at the Irfon Valley site would continue to be low - Irfon Valley pupils would still be taught separately - Would still need to maintain the Irfon Valley building - Both schools would lose their identity - Would also impact on staff at Ysgol Dolafon - Does not meet all the Critical Success Factors
4	Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Irfon Valley site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible impact on co-located community facilities in Llanwrtyd - Less convenient for the majority of pupils currently attending the two schools - 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 - Does not meet all the Critical Success Factors
5	Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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

	school on the Dolafon site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inconvenient location for Irfon Valley pupils - Some Irfon Valley pupils would live closer to other schools - Does not meet the Critical Success Factors
6	Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Ysgol Dolafon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Numbers on the Irfon Valley site would remain low - Irfon Valley pupils would still be taught separately - Irfon Valley pupils would still be taught in classes with a wide age range - The Irfon Valley building would still need to be maintained - Would not reduce surplus places - Staff employed at Irfon Valley School would have to go through a Management of Change process

APPENDIX E – RESPONSE FORM

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE IRFON VALLEY C.P. SCHOOL

Powys County Council is consulting on a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal is as follows:

- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools

A consultation document which provides more information about the proposals is available on the Council's website at <https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/14958/Irfon-Valley-C.P-School>. This consultation response form gives you the opportunity to let us know your view on the Council's proposal. The response form can also be completed online – a link to the online form is available by following the link above.

The closing date for this consultation is **7th December 2023**. All responses must be received by this date.

For information on how the Transforming Education Team protects and uses personal information collected during consultation processes, please see the Transforming Education privacy notice, which is available via the following link:
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/9803/Transforming-Education-Privacy-Notice>

Part 1 – About You

1. Please indicate how you are associated with the schools affected by this consultation:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Parent, carer, or guardian | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prospective parent, carer, or guardian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Governor | <input type="checkbox"/> | Member of staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Member of the community | <input type="checkbox"/> | Organisation e.g. Community Council |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No association | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other |

If you said 'Other' or are responding on behalf of an organisation, please specify:

2. Please specify which school you are associated with:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Irfon Valley C.P. School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Another school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No association | | |

If you are associated another school, please specify which school:

3. Please provide your postcode: _____

Part 2 – Consultation Response

4. Please provide any comments you have on the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School:

5. Are there any other options you think the Council should be considering for Irfon Valley C.P. School?

Please outline any alternative options below, including a description of the option(s) you think the Council should be considering:

Impact on people with protected characteristics

6. Do you have any comments or concerns about the impact of the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Copy of Consultation Report

7. **At the end of the Consultation Period, the Council will publish a Consultation Report, summarising the issues raised in the consultation responses received and providing the Council's response to these issues.**

Would you like to be informed of the publication of the consultation report?

 Yes No

If you answered 'Yes', please provide an e-mail address or postal address:

Part 3 – Equalities Information (Optional)

We want to ensure that we include all sectors of the community in our consultation, and are requesting that you provide this information to enable us to identify whether the consultation has been inclusive. However, these questions are optional.

8. How old are you?

 Under 16 16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65-74 75-84 85+ Prefer not to say

9. What is your gender?

 Male Female Gender Fluid Non-Binary Gender neutral Prefer not to say

10. Can you understand, speak, or write Welsh?

 Yes No Prefer not to say

11. If you have school-aged children, are they entitled to receive free school meals?

 Yes No Prefer not to say

12. If you have school-aged children, do they have any additional learning needs?

 Yes No Prefer not to say

13. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

14. What is your ethnic group?

White

Asian

Black, African or Caribbean

Mixed

Gypsy/Traveller

Other

Prefer not to say

Part 4 - Impact on the Welsh language

We are required by the Welsh Language Standards to consider the effects of any policy decisions on the Welsh Language. Please note these questions are optional.

15. In your opinion, what positive or adverse effects would the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School have on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

16. How do you think the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School could be formulated or revised so that it would have positive / more positive effects, or so that it would not have adverse effects / less adverse effects on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires should be sent to the following address, to arrive **no later than the 7TH December 2023.**

Transforming Education Team, Powys County Council, County Hall, Llandrindod Wells, LD1 5LG

E-mail: school.consultation@powys.gov.uk



Closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School
Consultation Report



Consultation on the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School

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Consultation on the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CONSULTATION

Powys County Council consulted on a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal is as follows:

- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools

The consultation took place from the 26th of October 2023 to the 7th of December 2023.

i) Consultation methods

The consultation documentation was available on the Council's website throughout the consultation period, and was distributed to stakeholders, as required by the School Organisation Code (2018). A separate version for pupils was also available on the Council's website throughout the consultation period.

Consultees were invited to respond to the consultation by either completing an online consultation form, filling in a paper copy of the form and returning it to the Transforming Education Team at County Hall, or by e-mailing / writing to the Transforming Education Team.

Meetings were held with the following:

- Staff of Irfon Valley C.P. School – 23rd November 2023
- Governors of Irfon Valley C.P. School – 23rd November 2023

In addition, the school's Headteacher spoke with pupils about the proposal.

ii) Responses received

A total of 46 respondents completed the consultation response form which was included in the consultation document. This included paper copies as well as responses submitted using the online response form.

In addition, two written responses were received, which included a response from Estyn. The response received from Estyn is provided on page 17, in-line with the requirements of the School Organisation Code.

iii) Summary of issues raised

The issues raised in the consultation responses are listed in detail in section 6, on page 18 onwards. This includes the Council's response to each issue. The following is a summary of the issues raised:

1. Comments about Irfon Valley C.P. School
 - 1.1 General positive comments about the school
 - 1.2 Comments about quality of provision at Irfon Valley C.P. School
 - 1.3 Comments about extra-curricular activities available at the school
 - 1.4 Comments about the staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School
 - 1.5 Comments about the school's role in the community
 - 1.6 Comments about the school's small size
 - 1.7 Other comments
2. Comments about the impact on pupils
3. Comments about the impact on pupils belonging to protected characteristic groups
4. Impact on staff
5. Impact on the community
6. Impact on families
7. Impact on early years provision
8. Comments about housing developments in the local area
9. Comments about travel/transport arrangements
 - 9.1 Concern about additional travel
 - 9.2 Comments about the Council's Transport Policy
10. Comments about other schools
11. Comments about small/rural schools
 - 11.1 Positive comments about small / rural schools
 - 11.2 Concerns about larger schools
12. Criticism of the council
13. Comments about the process
 - 13.1 Comments about the timing
 - 13.2 Comments about consultation meetings
 - 13.3 Comments about consultation with pupils
 - 13.4 Other comments
14. Comments about the documentation
15. Alternative options
 - 15.1 Keep the school open
 - 15.2 Develop the provision at the school
 - 15.3 Federation
 - 15.4 Merge with another school

- 15.5 Establish a Welsh-medium school
- 15.6 Close a different school
- 15.7 Other suggestions

16. Comments in support of the proposal

2. CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

43 respondents completed the English language consultation response form, which was available online. 3 respondents sent the consultation response form by email in English. No responses were received in Welsh.

The quantitative findings of the questionnaire are summarised below. Written comments were also provided in the consultation response forms. The issues raised in these comments are included in Section 6 of this report.

Part 1 – About you

- Please indicate how you are associated with the schools affected by this consultation:

Response	No.	%
Parent, carer or guardian	18	39.13%
Prospective parent, carer, or guardian	1	2.17%
Governor	2	4.34%
Member of staff	7	15.22%
Member of the community	18	39.13%
Organisation	4	8.69%
Pupil	0	0.00%
No association	2	4.34%
Other	0	0.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%
Total responses	52	100%

- Please specify which school you are associated with:

Response	No.	%
Irfon Valley C.P. School	36	78.26%
Another school	3	6.52%
No association with any school	7	15.22%
Not Answered	0	0.0%
Total responses	46	100%

- Please provide your postcode:

Response	No.	%
Llandrindod Wells	2	4.34%
Builth Wells	7	15.22%
Beulah	1	2.17%
Llanafan-Fawr	1	2.17%
Sennybridge	1	2.17%
Garth	26	56.53%

Llanwrtyd Wells	4	8.69%
Abergavenny	1	2.17%
Newtown	1	2.17%
Not supplied	2	4.34%
Total responses	46	100%

Part 3 – About you

12. How old are you?

Response	No.	%
Under 16	0	0.00%
16-23	0	0.00%
25-34	6	13.04%
35-44	14	30.43%
45-54	6	13.04%
55-64	6	13.04%
65-74	1	2.17%
75-84	0	0.00%
85+	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	4	8.69%
Not answered	9	19.56%
Total responses	46	100%

13. What is your gender?

Response	No.	%
Male	6	13.04%
Female	29	63.04%
Gender Fluid	0	0.00%
Non-Binary	0	0.00%
Gender neutral	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	2	4.34%
Not answered	9	19.56%
Total responses	46	100%

14. Can you understand, speak, or write Welsh?

Response	No.	%
Yes	11	23.91%
No	18	39.14%
Prefer not to say	8	17.39%
Not answered	9	19.56%
Total responses	46	100%

15. If you have school-aged children, are they entitled to receive free school meals?

Response	No.	%
Yes	11	23.91%
No	12	26.09%
Prefer not to say	10	21.74%
Not answered	13	28.26%
Total responses	46	100%

16. If you have school-aged children, do they have any additional learning needs?

Response	No.	%
Yes	5	10.87%
No	18	39.13%
Prefer not to say	9	19.56%
Not answered	14	30.43%
Total responses	46	100%

17. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

Response	No.	%
Yes	3	6.52%
No	31	67.39%
Prefer not to say	3	6.52%
Not answered	9	19.56%
Total responses	46	100%

18. What is your ethnic group?

Response	No.	%
White	34	73.91%
Asian	0	0.00%
Black, African or Caribbean	0	0.00%
Mixed	0	0.00%
Gypsy/Traveller	0	0.00%
Other	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	2	4.35%
Not Answered	10	21.74%
Total	46	100%

3. CONSULTATION WITH PUPILS

The Headteacher of Irfon Valley CP School held a discussion with pupils at the school on the 30th of November 2023. The following is a summary of the discussion:

What do you like about Irfon Valley School?

- Playing on the computer and with all the toys in pre-school.
- Like how the teachers help me with my work and everyone is kind to me and kind to others in this school.
- Maths, computers, get to play in pre-school area.
- Teachers are all kind and lovely.
- Big play area, lots of space.
- Obstacle course, lots of equipment and variety of things you can do.
- Pond area.
- Play space for little ones.
- Like the learning & lessons, especially cooking. Fun lessons, even Maths.
- Cooking & crafts.
- Art lessons – sketching, painting.
- Football & basketball.
- Really like being in plays.
- Good playground games in Class 1 yard e.g. hopscotch.

Is there anything you don't like about Irfon Valley School, or that could be better?

- Don't like how sometimes people are bossy to me such as when tidying up.
- Sometimes get a little bit tired.
- Sometimes feel there's some favouritism from some staff towards some pupils.
- It's a little school (but I like that).
- Don't like being indoors for PE lessons – prefer to be outside like we used to.
- Don't like that there are no playground markings on Class 2 yard e.g. no hopscotch.
- Maths & English.
- Gravel on Class 2 yard.

If the school closed, you would need to move to different schools. What do you think about this?

- If I go to a big school, loads of people are going to be there that I don't know.
- Sometimes my ears hurt if it is too noisy with lots of people, so I'd need to wear my ear defenders all the time.
- If I wasn't in Y6, I'd be quite nervous about moving to a new school. If I only had one more year, I'd prefer to stay here as I've been here so long (since I started).
- Other schools are much bigger in size – nerve-wracking.
- Terrible. Where would we go?

Is there anything you think would be bad about this?

- I'd miss my teachers and miss the school.
- I'd just miss school because I like being with my friends.
- I don't want to move to a different school because I like how teachers help me with my learning.
- I'd miss my friends if they all went to different school. Other schools might have about 100 pupils in so it would be very different.
- It would be bad because of all the people there and I wouldn't see my friends as much because they might have to go to a different school.

Is there anything you think would be good about this?

- I'd get to see some of friends again who have already left the school and who I really miss.
- Meeting new friends.
- More kids to interact with.
- Seeing new teachers.
- More kids to do sport with.

If the school closed, you would probably need to go to a bigger school. Is there anything you think would be better about being in a bigger school?

- Nothing.
- Building might be bigger so I might need to go to top floor and could get nose bleeds as I go upstairs.
- More people to play sports with.
- Bigger football matches and basketball games. More people to make friends with.

Is there anything you think would be worse about going to a bigger school?

- Not knowing which room I'd have to go in.
- When fire alarm goes off, not knowing which way to go or how to find a teacher.

- No cloakroom.
- Lots more people so they might hurt me.
- Probably half the kids I wouldn't get to know and there might be some mean kids, but not scared about this.
- Maybe more homework.
- Won't get as much chance to do things (Christmas play) as there would be so many others there. Also, might not get to even touch the ball in games of football as so many other players.

What do you think the impact would be on the community if Irfon Valley School closed?

- People wouldn't be able to come and meet all their lovely friends/teachers or see everything that's lovely about the school.
- They won't hear the lovely sound of people playing outside at playtimes.
- It's the only proper community thing in the village, except for the village hall. If school closes, there would be nothing here but houses.
- Everybody is going to be sad, especially the old man who lives across the road who I wave to at the end of each day. I would miss the bus drivers.

Do you have any other questions or comments on the plans?

- If I went to a big school, all the coats might be thrown on top of each other, and I wouldn't be able to find mine.
- Where would we put our wellies?
- I just love this school so much; I just don't want to leave it.
- I love everyone here.
- I want to stay in Irfon Valley.
- I'd be sad and miss all my friends here.
- Teachers will be sad without us.
- They shouldn't close down the school.
- If they do close the school, nobody will like Powys (the Council). I feel like making a YouTube video about it to tell people we need to keep the school open.

4. CONSULTATION MEETINGS WITH STAFF AND GOVERNORS

Consultation meetings were held with the staff and governors of the school.

The issues raised at these meetings are summarised below:

i) Consultation meeting with Staff of Irfon Valley C.P. School

- Concern about the process for conducting the consultation with pupils
- Concern about the impact of the process on staff
- Fielding questions from parents and trying to explain what is happening to younger pupils has been difficult for staff
- It might be easier for school staff to conduct the consultation with pupils, rather than council employees
- Parents are unhappy with the idea of pupils being consulted with
- Will there be a meeting with parents?
- Given the “nearest school” wording, will parents have a choice about where their children will move to?
- Queries about admissions and transport policies
- Concern about parents being panicked at suggestions of closure, and that this is what led to shrinking numbers of pupils at the school
- How many responses have been received as part of the consultation?
- Why did the proposal to close Irfon Valley come around so suddenly?
- Why was nothing done to prevent school numbers from dropping
- What will happen to the setting at Irfon Valley?
- Are there long-term plans for a larger primary in the area
- Parents may apply to Welsh units as free transport would be available
- Staff are very concerned about how unsettling everything is for the pupils
- Some pupils are likely to struggle with transition, especially ALN and EAL pupils
- The process is likely to be difficult for EAL families
- Would the closure date change if pupil numbers were to change between now and then?
- Some parents would like to keep their children at the school, but “book a place” with a new school for when the time for Irfon Valley to close comes
- Some families may decide to move away from the area
- What would happen to the school’s resources should the school close?

ii) Consultation meeting with Governors of Irfon Valley C.P. School

- A request for confirmation of the timelines for the consultation period and report

- Why are no public meetings scheduled? Is this in line with statutory expectations?
- A request for clarification around the way in which pupils contribute to the consultation process
- Governors emphasise that they wish to support the staff and minimise any negative impact of the process upon pupils
- What processes are in place to support school staff? A request for clear timescales for the support which is on offer to be provided is made
- The school is nurturing, and achieving excellent standards
- Governors are saddened by the shrinking numbers of pupils at the school
- The loss of the school will be significant to the community, including future generations
- Governors express thanks for the work of school staff, both teaching and non-teaching
- A request for more honesty in communication from the council is made. Whilst it is understood that schools with small numbers are unsustainable, there is a feeling that the impact of changing schools on Irfon Valley's pupils has been under-emphasised by the council
- Council press releases have had a negative impact on individuals involved with the school, especially in suggesting that greater opportunities are available at larger schools
- Governors mention the school's positive Estyn report, and emphasise that staff knowing individual pupils is a particular strength of Irfon Valley
- Anecdotally, some parents who have left the school feel that Irfon Valley offered a better standard of education than their new school
- Governors feel that suggesting that larger schools may offer a better standard of education than smaller schools on the back of the school's positive Estyn report was difficult to hear for parents/staff/governors
- Research proves that small schools are better than larger schools, and that this isn't being addressed by the council
- An acknowledgement that shrinking school numbers has led to a greater workload for school staff
- It would be helpful to receive more information from the council about nearest schools, and where pupils are likely to move to
- Governors ask for clarification about transport policies and nearest schools
- The difficulties of application processes and appeals should be looked into by the council, and that extra support and exemptions should be offered to parents of children at schools which are closing
- Face-to-face meetings with parents should be offered by the council to support with admissions processes

- Governors ask about implications of closure to the school budget, and how the situation should be navigated in conjunction with the council

5. ESTYN

Estyn's response to the consultation is provided below:

Estyn's response to the proposal to close Irfon Valley Community Primary School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest available schools.

Introduction

This report has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer.

Summary/Conclusion

Powys local authority is consulting on their proposal to close Irfon Valley Community Primary School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest available schools.

It is Estyn's view that this proposal is likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The local authority has presented a clear rationale outlining the reasons for the proposal. The school's governing body has raised concerns with the local authority regarding declining pupil numbers at the school. The governing body report that this has put significant pressure on the school's finances, and they have shared concerns about the school's ability to continue to provide an appropriate standard of education with only a small number of pupils. In response to this, the local authority has carried out an options appraisal exercise which concludes that their preferred proposal is to close the school.

The local authority has provided a suitably detailed description of the proposal along with an estimated timetable for statutory procedures. The local authority states that as there are alternative schools in the area with sufficient surplus places, there would be no requirement for any interim arrangements. This appears to be reasonable.

The local authority has included a useful video on its website that provides a clear overview of the proposal. The local authority has also included accessible consultation documents for children and young people. Both appear to be clear and useful documents.

The main consultation compares the proposal against the current arrangements in appropriate detail, outlining several advantages for pupils. These include access to wider opportunities in a larger primary provision along with greater opportunities to learn in classes with children of a similar age. In addition, the consultation outlines how the proposal aligns with the local authority's own strategy for transforming education in the county.

The local authority has identified risks to the quality of education standards due to what would be perceived as a period of uncertainty for pupils and for staff. The consultation document proposes suitable mitigation against these potential risks.

The local authority has considered a range of alternative options to closure. These include a possible federation or merger with another local school on one or both existing school sites. The local authority appears to have carried out a thorough analysis of each option and has provided what seems to be a reasonable justification for favouring school closure. However, the local authority's assessment against critical factors (appendix c), does not appear to consider all of the options.

The proposal has identified that there will be a requirement for additional transport should closure go ahead. The local authority has provided a calculation outlining the difference in average journey time for all pupils concerned. The proposal states that free home to school transport will be available in accordance with the local authority's home to school transport policy. However, there could be an impact on pupils' ability to access after-school activities. The consultation does not provide an indication about how the local authority will seek to address this issue.

The local authority seems to have demonstrated effectively the impact of the proposal on surplus places. There are currently 19 pupils attending Irfon Valley Community Primary School and 47 surplus places across neighbouring schools. Should the closure go ahead, it is reasonable for the local authority to suggest that surplus places will be reduced.

The local authority has taken account of the impact of the proposal on Welsh medium provision within the local authority. The proposal concludes simply that as Irfon Valley Community Primary School is an English medium provision, closure would neither expand or reduce the availability of Welsh language provision in the area. The local authority states that the proposal is not linked to the targets in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

The local authority has considered the financial costs of the proposal appropriately. As neighbouring schools have existing capacity to accommodate all pupils from Irfon Valley Community Primary School, buildings will not require additional capital investment. The consultation document provides an estimation of the cost for any necessary additional transport. The proposal states that this cost would be met through savings from the school's delegated budget. In addition, sale of the school building and school site would provide an opportunity to raise additional capital.

The local authority has provided a Welsh Language Impact Assessment as part of this proposal.

The local authority has provided a Community Impact Assessment as part of this proposal.

NB. Estyn provides their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals and does not evaluate the Welsh Language Impact Assessment or the Community Impact Assessment.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The local authority appears to have considered the impact of the proposal on the quality and standards of education carefully. The consultation includes the outcomes from the most recent Estyn inspection report for Irfon Valley Community Primary School and for each neighbouring school. The proposal seems to outline the anticipated impact on wellbeing and attitudes to learning appropriately, balancing the short-term implications of a change of school against longer term benefits such as a wider range of social and educational opportunities.

The local authority states that it has no concerns with the quality of teaching or provision for skills development in each of the neighbouring schools. The proposal outlines a range of perceived benefits to learning in a larger school. These include access to a broader curriculum along with increased opportunities to learn alongside peers of a similar age and ability. However, the local authority also acknowledges that some of the neighbouring schools also meet the Welsh Government definition of a small school.

The proposal states that as pupils would transfer to neighbouring schools that do not cause concern, there would be no perceived impact on the quality of care, support and guidance offered to pupils and their families. The same is stated for the quality of leadership and management. The local authority notes that under the current arrangements, Irfon Valley Community Primary School shares a headteacher with a neighbouring school. Pupils who choose to attend that school would benefit from some consistency. The local authority asserts that the quality of leadership would be at least as good in neighbouring schools, but doesn't include the supporting evidence in this proposal.

The proposal has suitably considered the impact of the closure on the delivery of the curriculum. In the local authority's opinion, the curriculum will benefit from wider staff expertise and resources. The local authority also anticipates that a larger school can provide improved provision for pupils to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

The local authority's view is that neighbouring schools would provide education for pupils which is of at least equivalent quality to that provided at Irfon Valley Community Primary School. Considering the outcome of the inspection reports and any additional monitoring carried out by Estyn, the local authority's appraisal of the impact this proposal will have on the quality of education appears to be fair and reasonable.

The local authority outlines a desire to provide ongoing support to all affected schools in ensuring that transition arrangements are effective. The consultation document includes a detailed impact equality assessment which reports that this proposal will affect all pupils, not just those with protected characteristics. However, the consultation document specifies that increased travel requirements for school events could have a greater impact on learners affected by socio-economic disadvantage. Whilst the proposal states there would be ongoing support for pupils with additional learning needs, the support to be provided for learners affected by socio-economic disadvantage is not clear.

Irfon Valley Community Primary School is a rural school and therefore the proposer is required to make additional considerations in line with the School Organisation code. The local authority appears to have carefully considered and outlined the reasons as to why the proposal to seek closure is viable. The proposal has explored a range of alternative options including partnerships with other neighbouring schools well. The local authority's decision to proceed with a proposal to close the school seems to be reasonable.

The local authority has suitably considered the impact of this closure on the local community. The proposal concludes that the limited demand for use of the school building could be accommodated in the local village hall. This appears to be a reasonable suggestion. The local authority notes that there is currently a funded early years provision operating from the school and should the proposal go ahead, the local authority anticipates that this provision will no longer be viable. The proposal provides a list of alternative funded early years providers. However, the proposal does not make clear whether all providers are able to provide the Childcare Offer for Wales.

6. ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONSULTATION PERIOD

The following tables list the issues raised during the consultation period and provide the local authority's response to these issues.

1. COMMENTS ABOUT IRFON VALLEY C.P. SCHOOL

1.1 General positive comments about the school

Ref	Comment	Council Response
1.1.1	Irfon Valley has always been a very open and welcoming school to all.	The council notes these positive comments about Irfon Valley C.P. School.
1.1.2	Parents have said that they have chosen for their children to attend Irfon Valley School because of its nurturing nature, and the closer attention to the education their children will receive.	As above.
1.1.3	The children are happy and confident learners. If you were to visit the school, this would be evident from the moment you step through the door.	As above.
1.1.4	Irfon Valley C.P. school is a little gem of a school with a very inclusive and nurturing environment and excellent teaching in a lovely rural setting.	As above.
1.1.5	The children are able to express themselves and have a lot of involvement in the day to day running of the school.	As above.
1.1.6	Irfon Valley C.P. School is a fantastic, rural school which caters for all pupils' needs.	As above.
1.1.7	The pupils are all happy and have first class teaching.	As above.

1.2 Comments about quality of provision at Irfon Valley C.P. School

1.2.1	The education provided is of excellent quality, as evidenced in the recent Estyn inspection.	<p>The Council notes these comments about the quality of provision at Irfon Valley C.P. School. Information about Irfon Valley C.P. School's latest Estyn inspection was included in the Consultation Document published in respect of this proposal, as well as the outcome of the most recent inspections of the alternative schools in the area.</p> <p>Estyn's response to the consultation is provided on page 14 of this report. Estyn's view is that the proposal is likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area.</p>
1.2.2	The Estyn inspection that the school had in the summer term 2022 was excellent – surely the high end education and support these children are receiving at Irfon Valley rises above just being a number in a bigger school.	As above.
1.2.3	Irfon Valley is a school with an exceptionally high standard of teaching following its last Estyn inspection in June 2022 where it received a glowing report and was quoted 'This is a caring and nurturing small school that knows its pupils well'. Words well fitted to Irfon Valley CP School.	As above.
1.2.4	The following comments have been taken from our ESTYN inspection in June 2022. I am sure you will agree the comments speak for themselves: 'This is a caring and nurturing small school that knows its pupils well. Pupils feel safe and happy at the school'; 'Staff care for each pupil as an individual and support them all to make progress and achieve. Teachers provide engaging activities for their pupils that interest them, including a wealth of trips and visitors in school'; 'The few staff	As above.

	work very well together to create the inclusive ethos that pervades all aspects of school life'; 'Over their time at Irfon Valley Primary School, most pupils make strong progress from their starting points. They leave the school with standards at least in line with, and often above, those expected for their age'; 'Across the school, strong teaching is underpinned by warm, respectful professional relationships between adults and pupils. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and provide appropriate support and challenge where it is needed'; 'The school is an inclusive, nurturing community that provides for each pupil as an individual. The very small class and cohort sizes mean that adults know the pupils very well and tailor the provision to meet their needs.'	
1.2.5	The education in Irfon Valley is fantastic and had a great Estyn report last year. Especially when compared to other local schools.	As above.
1.2.6	The Council's Vision Statement states that "all children and young people in Powys will experience a high-quality, inspiring education" – they already experience this in Irfon Valley C.P. School.	As above.
1.2.7	Staff at the school work extremely hard to provide a rich curriculum full of meaningful activities and real-life problem-solving skills, which is at the heart of the new curriculum for Wales.	As above.
1.2.8	The school works extremely hard to meet the needs of our pupils, providing a rich curriculum full of meaningful activities and real-life problem-solving tasks. We are more than equipped to deliver the new curriculum, having attended the same courses as other schools in the area. We have excellent resources and wonderful grounds that allow the children to play, develop their imagination and learn. Because we teach the same children for	As above.

	several years, we are already skilled in thinking of new ideas so that teaching remains fresh, and the children are engaged.	
1.2.9	The school has been praised over the years for its academic and caring attitude to all learners including and especially ALN learners from varying backgrounds and its overall nurturing ethos to all its pupils.	As above.
1.2.10	Anecdotally, some parents whose children have left the school feel that Irfon Valley offered a better standard of education than their new school.	As above.

1.3 Comments about extra-curricular activities available at the school

1.3.1	The school participates in a number of extra-curricular activities including the local Eisteddfod in Llanwrtyd Wells, swimming galas, football/hockey/rugby competitions and cross country.	<p>The Council notes these comments about the extra-curricular activities available at Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> <p>Should the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal, pupils would transfer to larger schools, which would also offer a range of extra-curricular activities for pupils, so these types of opportunities would continue to be available to pupils, although the actual activities offered may be different.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that pupils would live further away from the alternative schools, which may impact on their ability to access activities that take place after school. However, all of the alternative schools serve rural communities, so are experienced in meeting the needs of pupils who travel to school.</p>
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1.3.2	The children have lots of opportunities and always take part in school tournaments for sports as well as stuff for the Urdd and local eisteddfods.	As above.
1.3.3	The school provides the same opportunities during school time as larger schools however more children can participate. For example, whereas in a larger school auditions may take place for a choir, or the very best sports-players may be picked for a football competition, in Irfon Valley C.P. School, the children are all able to get involved due to the smaller numbers.	It is acknowledged that there may be more opportunity for pupils in a smaller school to participate in all activities that take place, due to the fact that there are fewer pupils at the school to take part in such activities. However, all schools, regardless of size, have a range of activities, and are expected to ensure that pupils can participate fully in these.
1.3.4	In the school's annual Christmas concert, all children have the opportunity to have a speaking part, with all children in Class Two taking bigger parts. This wouldn't happen in a larger school.	As above.
1.3.5	They are given more opportunities to be part of school groups such as School Council and Criw Cymraeg.	As above.
1.3.6	My children have had experiences at Irfon Valley School that children in larger schools would not have, from gardening to helping serve refreshments at the Macmillan coffee morning.	As above.
1.3.7	Whilst we might not have the staff to provide extra-curricular opportunities after school many of our children attend clubs locally which provide them with opportunities outside of school such as judo, football, rugby, hockey, piano and horse riding.	Comment noted. Pupils would continue to be able to access these activities should the proposal be implemented.

1.4 Comments about the staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School

1.4.1	The school staff are a very close-knit group, who work tirelessly and endlessly to ensure each child is taught and cared for with the upmost support.	The council notes these positive comments about the school staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School.
1.4.2	The staff in the school are welcoming and friendly, they are always willing to help out with both each other and the pupils.	As above.

1.4.3	Staff at the school know each and every individual child/children and their families, which has always helped make the transitioning process so much easier, and comfortable for everyone.	As above.
1.4.4	The school has experienced staff including HLTA's who are confident in delivering the curriculum and supporting the children's learning needs.	As above.
1.4.5	The Teaching staff and non-teaching staff at the school today are exceptional and are a credit to the school.	As above.
1.4.6	The Head, teaching staff and non-teaching staff are exceptional in their professions.	As above.
1.4.7	The staff know each and every child as an individual. They know their families and backgrounds, their interests, which is so important in understanding the child as a whole. They know when something isn't quite right them and this allows them to offer the support they need.	As above.

1.5 Comments about the school's role in the community

1.5.1	Even with low numbers of pupils, Irfon Valley CP School has been at the heart of this community for many years.	The Council fully acknowledges the school's role within the local community. A Community Impact Assessment has been prepared which considers the proposal's impact on the community, this will be updated to reflect information received during the consultation and will be considered by Cabinet when deciding whether or not to proceed.
1.5.2	Several schools were previously closed (Llanafan Fawr, Beulah, Llangammarch Wells) to join together to form Irfon Valley and it has very much felt like the hub of the community ever since. We have had generations of families attend this school - which goes to show how much the school is thought of in people's hearts.	As above.

1.5.3	The school plays an important role in the community – the Christmas Concert is held in the village hall and the elderly are invited to attend; the school holds MacMillan Coffee Mornings and invites the locals; the school has participated in events with Beulah Music Festival and supported local charities, and has even performed a play in front of the then Prince Charles at the request of the Village Hall Committee.	As above.
1.5.4	The school is at the heart of the Garth community, and the school regularly invites the local community into school for charity events, which include a diverse range of people.	As above.
1.5.5	The school provides a place of belonging, it is a place that is familiar to our children (and many for the children’s parents who also attended the school). It is a place that offers historical, cultural and social relevance and shapes and continues to shape our community.	As above.

1.6 Comments about the school’s small size

1.6.1	Children have moved to the school from larger schools where they found it difficult to cope with the large numbers and the size of the building, but who are now thriving in this smaller, nurturing school.	<p>The Council notes these comments about the benefits of small and rural schools.</p> <p>However, as stated in the Council’s Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2022-32, the Council faces a challenge due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools. Irfon Valley C.P. School currently has only 18 pupils, which means that it is increasingly difficult for the school to deliver education. The teacher-pupil ratio at the school is notably different to many other schools in the area, and due to the Council’s funding formula, the school’s funding per pupil is higher than the</p>
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		<p>Council's average. This does not provide equity across the education system – teachers in larger schools are required to provide the same education as smaller schools for less funding per pupil.</p> <p>As pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School have decreased, it has been increasingly difficult for the school to provide education within the funding allocated to it by the funding formula.</p> <p>All schools, regardless of size, are required to meet the needs of all children and to support and challenge them to fulfil their potential. Smaller schools and smaller class sizes do not necessarily mean that pupils receive a more individual education, as there are a number of year groups and a wider age range of pupils in the class. This adds a challenge for teachers in small schools: they need to plan, implement and assess for the needs of up to four year groups within one class, and within each of those year groups plan, implement and assess for up to several ability groups, some with complex needs, thereby ensuring that the planning is differentiated for each child's needs. Larger schools usually have a greater level of staffing and single year group classes or a mixed year class of no more than 2 years.</p>
1.6.2	Because the school is small, staff know the pupils very well and the fact that they are in small mixed-aged classes means they have more adult attention. Staff are able to easily identify those who need additional challenge and those who need additional	As above.

	support. The fact that they are in mixed aged classes means that they can work at their ability level whether that is within their year group or with children in the year above if they are considered MAT or the year below if they require additional support.	
1.6.3	The staff are able to support pupils better due to smaller class sizes as they know the pupils' academic skills and capabilities extremely well. Each lesson, staff know exactly what each pupil has achieved and have provided feedback to each child, which is often difficult to achieve in a larger school.	As above.
1.6.4	Staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School know the children's abilities inside out due to teaching them for up to four years. In a larger school where a teacher has a completely new class each year, it takes several weeks to discover what the pupils already know and what they can do.	As above.
1.6.5	As it is a small school staff all provide a variety of roles i.e some TAs are also Mid-day supervisors, admin is also breakfast club leader etc. All staff are with the same children throughout the day and are also able to speak to each other about any concerns that are seen throughout the day.	As above.
1.6.6	As it is a small school, staff have been able to identify and help children with any behavioural or additional learning needs they may have from a younger age than is mostly recognised in a bigger school, and with the referrals now taking at least 18months, this is crucial.	As above.

1.7 Other comments

1.7.1	The older children in school are very caring of our younger learners. We do a range of activities in school where the older children work and support the younger children such as 'buddy',	The Council notes these comments about the support provided to younger children at Irfon Valley C.P. School by the older pupils.
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	cooking and leading well-being activities. The children really feel like they are part of one big family.	
1.7.2	The happiness on each child's face when they leave school is plain for everyone to see when they leave school.	Comment noted.
1.7.3	It is a great asset to Lrfon Valley School that meals are still cooked on site by an invaluable staff member who ensures children do not leave school hungry. This is not the case at many other local schools.	The Council notes these comments about the provision of school meals at Lrfon Valley C.P. School. It is correct that school meals are cooked on site at Lrfon Valley. This is not currently the case at Builth Wells C.P. School or Llanelwedd C. in W. School, however both Ysgol Dolafon and Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School have their own cooking kitchens.
1.7.4	If local children HAD to go their nearest primary school, then the school would have sufficient numbers to be viable.	Parents are entitled to apply for a place for their children at any school they choose. All applications are dealt with in accordance with the Council's Admissions arrangements. If parents apply for a place at a school which isn't their closest school and there are places available, then the place would be allocated to the pupil.

2. COMMENTS ABOUT THE IMPACT ON PUPILS

2.1	The impact of school closure has the potential to create considerable anxiety, distress and disruption for the pupils affected.	The Council recognises that any school reorganisation process creates a period of uncertainty for all involved, including children. The Council is committed to supporting schools and learners, including through periods of change. An experienced member of staff from the Council is supporting school leaders effectively to help them manage possible changes for their learners.
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		<p>It is also expected that school governors, staff, and parents support the children to ensure that there isn't a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.</p> <p>Schools receiving pupils as a result of a school closure are expected to work with the closing school, the pupils, and their families to provide full support to pupils to ensure a smooth transition.</p>
2.2	The children in Garth school are from the local mainly agricultural community - it will be great shame for them to be transferred to the local town where it's a completely different environment for them to learn in. I'm confident they won't thrive in this vastly different environment.	As above.
2.3	Pupils have developed great friendship groups in the nurturing environment of Irfon Valley these groups will be broken up whilst they are relocated to the alternative schools. Causing further distress and unnecessary anxiety to each pupil.	As above.
2.4	With mental health issues becoming more of an issue in children as well as for adults I feel this is not going to be helpful for future generations.	As above.
2.5	Pupils have already suffered enough through the pandemic.	As above.
2.6	Bigger schools and longer bus journeys are not better for young children.	As above. It is acknowledged that implementation of the proposal could result in additional travel for some pupils, however the additional distance / journey time to the alternative schools is not considered to be excessive.
2.7	Some of the school's pupils already spend a considerable time travelling to school by bus in the morning due to the bus route and remoteness of where they live. It is a concern that they will have to spend longer on the bus getting to school	As above.

2.8	There will be anxiety caused to pupils who will be forced to now take school transport who previously have walked / or had parental transport.	As above.
2.9	I worry that children who need extra support will be completely lost in a larger school where there are many more children. How are staff in a larger school going to give the same care and attention that we do in a smaller school? I have concerns that children will not be encouraged to reach their full potential.	All schools, regardless of size, are required to meet the needs of all children and to support and challenge them to fulfil their potential. Smaller schools and smaller class sizes do not necessarily mean that pupils receive a more individual education, as there are a number of year groups and a wider age range of pupils in the class. This adds a challenge for teachers in small schools: they need to plan, implement and assess for the needs of up to four year groups within one class, and within each of those year groups plan, implement and assess for up to several ability groups, some with complex needs, thereby ensuring that the planning is differentiated for each child's needs. Larger schools usually have a greater level of staffing and single year group classes or a mixed year class of no more than usually 2 years.

3. COMMENTS ABOUT THE IMPACT ON PUPILS BELONGING TO PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC GROUPS

3.1	Some children with particular ALN will find it difficult to cope in larger schools particularly with the greater number of people, increased noise levels, the size of the building etc. Some children will feel overwhelmed by this.	<p>The Council notes these concerns about the potential impact of the proposal on pupils with ALN that currently attend Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p> <p>The Council recognises that any school reorganisation process creates a period of uncertainty for all involved, including any pupils with ALN. The Council is committed to supporting schools and learners, including through periods of</p>
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		<p>change. An experienced member of staff from the Council is supporting school leaders effectively to help them manage possible changes for their learners, including any learners with ALN.</p> <p>It is also expected that school governors, staff, and parents support the children to ensure that there isn't a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.</p> <p>Schools receiving pupils as a result of a school closure are expected to work with the closing school, the pupils, and their families to provide full support to pupils to ensure a smooth transition. This would particularly be the case for any schools receiving pupils with ALN.</p>
3.2	Concern that it will be more difficult for pupils with additional needs to make new friends and to adapt to changes.	As above.
3.3	Concern about the impact on pupils with autism and ALN pupils of transitioning to a larger / noisier school/	As above.
3.4	Concern about the impact on the families of pupils belonging to protected characteristic groups, who will have to deal with the upheaval in moving their child, possibly creating an issue with behaviour and their mental well-being. This is something that is meant to be high on the priorities but seems to have been pushed aside at the current time.	As above.
3.5	Children with ASD diagnosis find it incredibly difficult to come to terms with change. Moving to a bigger school will have a negative effect on them.	As above.
3.6	The proposal will greatly impact people with protected characteristics	<p>As above.</p> <p>An equality impact assessment has been carried out which considers the impact of the proposal on</p>

		pupils belonging to protected characteristic groups. This will be updated to reflect comments received as part of the consultation, and an updated version will be considered by Cabinet when deciding whether or not to proceed with implementation of the proposal.
3.7	Concern about the impact on EAL pupils and their families.	As above.
3.8	Transgender pupils have been welcomed into the school and felt safe.	Comment noted.

4. IMPACT ON STAFF

4.1	I'm sure this whole situation has had a major impact on the staff. Please support them as much as you can going forward to find new jobs if the school is to close.	The Council recognises that any school reorganisation proposal creates a period of uncertainty for staff. A consultation meeting was held with staff as part of the consultation, and the HR team is providing to support to staff throughout the process.
4.2	The potential closure of the school means that all staff employed at the school face the prospect of future job losses whilst continuing to maintain the excellent standards of education and support for pupils at the school. Every effort should be made by PCC to offer support to school staff through this difficult period.	As above.
4.3	The members of staff who work tirelessly to ensure the children get the same opportunities as they do in other schools will miss attending Irfon Valley massively	As above.
4.4	No one has considered how many of the staff will lose their jobs and the impact it will have on them.	As above.
4.5	It's been difficult for staff as they have been fielding questions from both parents and pupils.	As above.

5. IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

5.1	Closure of Irfon Valley School will have a detrimental effect on the whole community.	The Council recognises that closure of any school has an impact on the local community. A draft Community Impact Assessment has been prepared with input from the school, which considers the impact of the proposal on the community. This will be updated to reflect feedback received during the consultation period, and will be considered by Cabinet when deciding whether or not to proceed with implementation of the proposal.
5.2	A village school is at the heart of the community, closing the school would have a detrimental effect on the community.	As above.
5.3	It would be a shame to lose such a valuable asset to the community.	As above.
5.4	Closing the school will have a huge impact on the village, it's only the school that keeps it alive.	As above.
5.5	There is no other amenity in the village, so removing the school would be incredibly detrimental to the immediate and wider community.	As above.
5.6	The closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School has shown the devastation that closing a thriving school has on pupils, parents, staff and community.	As above.
5.7	Concern about the impact on other resources in the area, such as shops close by.	As above.
5.8	What is the Council intending to do with the school site/building? This isn't outlined fully in the consultation document – more details should have been provided on this. Is the intention to sell the site and building for development? Who is going to buy the building if it is sold? It's not in a town where it could be used for other community purposes.	Irfon Valley C.P. School building is owned by Powys County Council. If it is decided to close the school, the Council's Corporate Asset Policy would be followed in respect of disposal of the site / building. This would include opportunities for other Council services to express interest in the site, consideration of a community asset transfer or sale on the open market via different methods.

5.9	It would be a shame to see the school building to be left empty (like other empty school buildings in Powys) or to be bulldozed to make space for houses, which won't attract families as there isn't a school to attract them to the area, and then become an eye sore.	As above.
5.10	Garth already has a successful Village Hall so there would be no need to use the building as a community facility.	The Council notes that Garth has a successful Village Hall. The proposal to close the school would not impact on the Village Hall.
5.11	There is a Hall in Garth, however this is not used for events similar to those held at the school, so closure of the school would mean a great loss for the local ageing community.	As above.
5.12	Closure of the school could put people off buying houses in the village and locally especially those with young families.	The Council notes this concern that pupils would not want to live in the area should there be no school in Garth. However, pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School have decreased significantly in recent years, as families currently living in the area have chosen for their children to attend other schools in the area instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School.
5.13	Not having a local school close by could put off people moving to the area and this would have a huge effect on the community.	As above.
5.14	Without the school less people will want to live near Garth.	As above.
5.15	Houses are being built in the area, but having no school in the local area limits the chances of these houses being sold to families, who would perhaps prefer to live closer to schools and towns.	As above.

6. IMPACT ON FAMILIES

6.1	Parents are worried about where their children will end up if the school closes – Irfon Valley is their first choice, but they would be unable to choose this school, and many other schools are full	The Council recognises that any school reorganisation process creates a period of
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	to capacity in some year groups, which makes it more difficult for parents to make a decision.	<p>uncertainty for all involved, including the families of pupils affected by any proposals.</p> <p>Whilst Irfon Valley C.P. School may be the first choice for some parents in the area, in particular those whose pupils continue to attend the school, many parents in the area are already choosing for their children to attend alternative schools.</p> <p>Parents are entitled to apply for a place for their children at any school they choose. All applications are dealt with in accordance with the Council's Admissions arrangements. Should the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School, parents would still be able to apply for a place at any alternative school they choose, so they would have a choice in terms of which school their child attends.</p>
6.2	The idea of shutting the school removes parental choice with the education of their children. The parents will be forced to move their child to a school they simply are not happy with them to attend.	As above.
6.3	Parents / families who want their children to be able to attend this school are facing having to make several life choices so that their children can attend a school of their choice.	As above.
6.4	The Council is forcing children to schools the parents have previously considered and discounted for individual reasons as not good enough for their children. Parents are now being forced to send their children to schools which are not as good as Irfon Valley. Where is parental choice when you are forced to send your child to a school you categorically don't want them to attend?	As above.

6.5	Proposal is for pupils to transfer to the 'nearest alternative school'. This is at odds with the broader commitment to provide Parents with choice over the school that their children attend. Commitment should be to work with parents to find a suitable alternative school for children to attend in the event that the IV School closes.	Whilst the wording in the proposal is for pupils 'to transfer to their nearest alternative school', in practice parents would be able to apply for a place at any alternative school they choose.
6.6	There will be extra cost implications on parents if the school closes, such as school uniform, bags, P.E. Kit. Are Powys able to provide financial support to pupils currently in the school to purchase the items needed to move to another school?	If the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School is agreed, it is recognised that there would be an additional cost to parents for school uniforms etc. Funding is currently available to support low income families with support for uniform costs. In addition, many schools offer the opportunity for parents / families to purchase second hand uniforms.

7. IMPACT ON EARLY YEARS PROVISION

7.1	There would be an impact on the provision at Rainbow Tots, which has been a great resource used in recent years.	It is acknowledged that should the Council proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School, it is likely that there would be an impact on Rainbow Tots. As stated in the Consultation Document in respect of this proposal: <i>'Should the Council proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School, it is unlikely that the provision at Rainbow Tots would continue to be viable.'</i>
7.2	Closure of the school would also mean closure of the very well-run pre-school. This would most definitely be a huge loss to the area.	As above.
7.3	The early years provision offered in alternative schools would increase the travel time for nursery age children, meaning parents would not have reasonable access to the 3 year old funding.	As stated in the Consultation Document, should the Council proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School, <i>'access to alternative funded early years provision would be available at other providers in the area.'</i>

7.4	At Irfon Valley we pride ourselves for having an excellent transition from the pre-school into the school, are they going to be able to get this same transition when transitioning with many other children?	The alternative providers of early years provision, which are listed in the Consultation Document (Dolafon Ducklings, Cylch yn yr Ysgol, Llanelwedd Little Learners, Newbridge-on-Wye 3 Year Old Setting), are all located on school sites, so there is no reason to believe that transition arrangements for pupils from pre-school into school would not continue to be effective should pupils attend alternative provision.
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8. COMMENTS ABOUT HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LOCAL AREA

8.1	New houses are being built in Beulah and Llangammarch Wells, however new families moving there would not have the option to attend their village school if we were to close.	Comment noted. However, families living in the area are currently choosing for their children to attend alternative provision instead of attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. Should there be no school in Garth, parents would be able to apply for a place for their children at any other school in the area.
8.2	The proposal is short sighted in view of extensive building in the area and likelihood of young families moving into the area.	As above.
8.3	Once the houses in Beulah and Llangammarch Wells are completed they will not be able to send any children who live there to a nurturing small rural school to help develop their confidence but rather to travel further on a unsupervised bus to a bigger school in a town.	As above.
8.4	There are houses being built in Beulah, Llangammarch and Llanwrtyd, this could affect the number of children coming to the school.	As above.
8.5	There are several local housing developments in the surrounding area such as Llangammarch Wells, Cilmery, Beulah. These houses have not yet been sold and if young families with children of school age move into the area it would	As above.

	add to the pressure to the local schools and exceed the capacity in schools such as Builth and Ysgol Dolafon. Where are you expecting these children to be educated locally?	
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9. COMMENTS ABOUT TRAVEL/TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS

9.1 Concern about additional travel

9.1.1	Additional travel would be needed to alternative schools, and surely this would be an additional cost to the county.	<p>It is correct that additional transport would need to be provided to enable pupils for whom Irfon Valley C.P. School is currently their closest school to access alternative provision. This has been reflected in the Consultation Document which states:</p> <p><i>'It is estimated there would be additional transport costs of £46k per annum, based on pupils' current location and assuming that pupils will transfer to the next nearest school.'</i></p>
9.1.2	There would an increase in travel costs.	As above.
9.1.3	There would be a massive environmental impact due to additional travel.	<p>It is acknowledged that that the additional travel required would have an environmental impact. As stated in the impact assessment document which was published as part of the Consultation Documentation:</p> <p><i>'Implementation of the proposal would require additional travel for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School for whom this is their closest school. This would have a negative environmental impact as more home to school transport would</i></p>

		<p><i>need to be provided to transport pupils to their nearest alternative school.</i></p> <p><i>Implementation of the proposal would mean that the Council would no longer need to run the Irfon Valley school site. This would result in a reduction in the use of heating and electricity amongst other factors.'</i></p>
9.1.4	Concern about the impact on parents being able to attend school events if they have to travel further – this would limit parents ability to attend events at school.	<p>The impact on parents being able to attend school events is acknowledged in the impact assessment document which was published as part of the consultation documentation, which states:</p> <p><i>'Whilst free transport would be provided to eligible pupils, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc.'</i></p>
9.1.5	Concern about the impact of additional travel on parents, grandparents and others in the wider support network.	As above.

9.2 Comments about the Council's Transport Policy

9.2.1	There is no indication of any flexibility in the established PCC school transport policy. The parents of children at Irfon Valley School have remained supportive and committed to the school despite reducing pupil numbers that clearly place the school's viability at risk. Parents' commitment and support for IV School should be recognised and endeavours made to assist with	These concerns are noted. Should the Council proceed with the proposal in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School, transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.
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	transport provision even where the choice of school is not the 'nearest alternative school'.	
9.2.2	I do not believe it is appropriate to have school transport where primary and secondary school pupils travel together, conversations which 16 year olds have during these bus journeys are certainly not to be overheard by Key Stage one pupils. What provision is being put in place to provide transport separately for primary & secondary school pupils?	The concerns about primary and secondary aged pupils travelling on the same transport are noted. However, the Council has no intention to introduce any alternative arrangements which would mean that separate transport would be provided for primary and secondary pupils. This would have significant financial implications and is therefore unaffordable at this time.
9.2.3	The council has attracted children away by providing free school transport to Builth to the detriment of Irfon valley school.	All local authorities are expected to promote access to Welsh-medium education. This is in-line with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure.
9.2.4	The Welsh unit in Builth Wells CP School has had an effect on pupil numbers at Irfon Valley School. Local families are sending their children there now and previously, passing by Irfon Valley CP School as free transport is provided to the Welsh unit in Builth Wells.	As above.

10. COMMENTS ABOUT OTHER SCHOOLS

10.1	Pupils will not necessarily have any choice of which school they go to. There is currently no space in Newbridge and Llanelwedd, with limited spaces in Builth as that includes space in the Welsh stream too.	Information about the capacity and pupil numbers at Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School and Llanelwedd C. in W. School was provided in the consultation document, as well as Builth Wells C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is pressure on places at Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School and Llanelwedd C. in W. School in particular, there are sufficient places at Builth Wells C. in W. School and
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		Ysgol Dolafon to accommodate all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.
10.2	Most of the other schools are full so the school has to stay open for the children to still have an education.	As above.
10.3	What happens when these schools get full? Where do the pupils go then?	As above. The Council is already planning to review primary provision in the area as part of the plans for Ysgol Calon Cymru. This review will need to ensure sufficient places are required to accommodate current and future pupil numbers in the area.
10.4	A major concern that has been mentioned to myself is the lack of places in other local school as well as transport to the schools, the nearest school to some pupils are full which may mean that they may have to go to another school and then lose out on free school transport through no fault of their own.	As above. Should a pupil be refused a place at their nearest alternative school as part of the Admissions process, transport would be provided to the next nearest school.
10.5	Builth primary is going to be overpopulated and some children will be forgotten.	Information about the capacity and current pupil numbers at Builth Wells C.P. School is provided in the Consultation Document published as part of this proposal. This shows that there are currently 44 available places, which is more than sufficient to accommodate all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.
10.6	Some of the alternative schools haven't had such a glowing Estyn Inspection as Irfon Valley.	Information about the latest Estyn inspections of Irfon Valley C.P. School and the alternative schools pupils may choose to transfer to was provided in the Consultation Document. Estyn's response to the consultation is provided on page 14 of this report. Estyn's view is that the

		proposal is likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area.
10.7	You state that pupils would have a better education in bigger schools in the area which is completely not true. In one of the local schools that you recommend, one of their recommendations from their recent Estyn inspection is to "ensure that teachers provide sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities", which implies that not all teachers are currently doing so. However, you state that bigger schools are more equipped at meeting the needs of all pupils!	As above.
10.8	Llanelwedd have 4 recommendations in their report including "Ensure that teachers provide sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities " which I believe is something that we do really well at in Irfon Valley.	As above.
10.9	Irfon valley provides excellent school meals cooked on site (which appears to be unusual for Powys CC Schools) which is an invaluable asset to the school. At other schools, meals are transported and held at temperature for a long time. This is not something I want my grandchild to eat, and I am sure they will choose not to eat it either as it's so unpleasant.	<p>It is correct that school meals are cooked on site at Irfon Valley C.P. School. This is not currently the case at Builth Wells C.P. School or Llanelwedd C. in W. School, however both Ysgol Dolafon and Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School have their own cooking kitchens.</p> <p>There are many examples across Powys where meals are transported from one school to another. Whilst acknowledging that this is not the preferred way of providing access to school meals, and that this method does pose some challenges, all meals served meet the required guidelines.</p>
	The Consultation Document states that Builth Wells School has building suitability of A/B. I cannot fathom how the building is suitable when it does not have adequate cooking facilities to provide fresh hot meals to its pupils. The meals are transported	It is correct that Builth Wells C.P. School does not have a cooking kitchen. Meals are supplied to Builth Wells C.P. School from the Builth Wells site of Ysgol Calon Cymru.

	<p>and kept warm for a prolonged period of time before the pupils are offered them. With the increased uptake of free school meals and likelihood of this offer being extended to older years, I would like Powys to outline if it has any plans to return adequate cooking facilities to the local schools listed below which do not have them. It's a fundamental requirement outlined by the Welsh Government that no child should ever be at school hungry, surely the common practice within Powys of cooking and transporting meals, results in sub-standard food offered to the children most in need which in turn they refuse to eat and therefore leave school hungry. Talking to parents of school children in Builth Wells Primary this is a common occurrence, what measures are being put in place by Powys to counteract this? They are not being offered freshly cooked meals.</p>	<p>There are many examples across Powys where meals are transported from one school to another. Whilst acknowledging that this is not the preferred way of providing access to school meals, and that this method does pose some challenges, all meals served meet the required guidelines.</p> <p>The catering department is currently looking to reinstate a cooking kitchen at Builth Wells C.P. School, by expanding the kitchen and locating a kitchen pod attached to the existing kitchen, which would ensure that in the future, meals would be prepared on site at Builth Wells C.P. School.</p>
10.11	<p>Hopeful that the proposal would result in an increase in pupil numbers at Ysgol Dolafon, however a request for assurance that Ysgol Dolafon will be safe from the same fate – concern that there is a long term plan to close all local schools and expand Builth.</p>	<p>The Council is unable to provide any assurance regarding the future of Ysgol Dolafon – pupil numbers at all schools are regularly reviewed, and sometimes there is a requirement to review provision at a school. However, should a review of Ysgol Dolafon be carried out, there would be a need to consider the impact on pupils, including any pupils who had transferred to the school from Irfon Valley C.P. School, should the Council proceed with the current proposal.</p>

11. COMMENTS ABOUT SMALL/ RURAL SCHOOLS

11.1 Positive comments about small / rural schools

11.1.1	<p>We think the children will be better study in a small school where they are can get more attention and be more happy.</p>	<p>The Council notes these comments about the benefits of small and rural schools. However, as</p>
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		<p>stated in the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2022-32, the Council faces a challenge due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools. Irfon Valley C.P. School has seen a significant decrease in pupil numbers over recent years and currently has just 18 pupils, which is causing challenges.</p> <p>Should the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. This includes Ysgol Dolafon, which is also a small school with around 50 pupils. Pupils wishing to continue to attend a smaller school could choose to transfer here.</p> <p>The Council's view is that the alternative schools in the area which pupils may choose to transfer to would enable pupils to access education which is of at least equivalent quality to the education they currently receive.</p>
11.1.2	It has been proven that lower numbers in a classroom can stem better results.	As above.
11.1.3	In smaller local schools the number of children per teacher is reduced. This means the child gets more opportunity to express themselves and receive a far more tailored learning environment.	As above.
11.1.4	Village schools are very important for quieter children.	As above.
11.1.5	In smaller schools staff are more able to cater to differing learning abilities, and to pick up on whether a child is feeling down or unwell or if something is bothering them, and because	As above.

	of this things are picked up on quicker and can be dealt with quicker.	
11.1.6	In small schools, staff have an in-depth knowledge of every child. Knowing the child means that teaching can be pitched to ensure all children feel supported but also challenged. Parental contact is nurtured, with a collaborative approach between school, teacher and parent. Having reliable access to in-depth knowledge about your child's individual progress becomes incredibly reassuring for parents.	As above.
11.1.7	There are clear benefits to smaller schools, not only for academic progress, but also for pastoral care and a child's development. Their social, emotional, and medical needs are known by all staff, and their individual characteristics are encouraged and thrive, rather than having to fit a mould to survive.	As above.
11.1.8	Significant Research tells us that belonging to a close-knit community is vitally important in developing a child's resilience. It is also a protective factor for mental health and bullying issues. Small schools are leading the way in tailored and flexible learning programs. In my experience they offer an environment that fosters empathy and positive wellbeing in a way that a large school never could. Small schools are more conducive to individual care, whilst still achieving excellent academic outcomes	As above.
11.1.9	It is disappointing to see that small schools are not valued in small communities. Local schools offer a convenient hub in the community for more than just educational purposes and everything should be done to protect these assets.	The Council fully acknowledges the role and value of small schools in rural communities. However, as stated in the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2022-32, the Council faces a challenge due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools.

		A draft Community Impact Assessment has been prepared with input from the school, which considers the impact of the proposal on the community. This will be updated to reflect feedback received during the consultation period, and will be considered by Cabinet when deciding whether or not to proceed with implementation of the proposal.
11.1.10	There is significant and extensive research from the US which supports the case for smaller schools. Has this research been read and considered in the decision-making process?	Research from the US has not been considered in the decision-making process. The process is being carried out in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code, and all documentation has been prepared in accordance with the Code's requirements.
11.1.11	In 1999, after inspecting every primary school in England, Ofsted reported on the comparative performance of small schools, which it defined as those with fewer than 100 pupils. It found that small primary schools achieved markedly better test results. However, there was much else that was positive for small schools. Ofsted argued "the quality of teaching in small schools is generally better than in larger schools". Inspectors concluded that their "positive ethos" and "important place in the community" meant there was "a good case" for small schools. In short, they tick all the Every Child Matters boxes. Has this been considered as part of the consultation? You are forcing the pupils to move to larger schools where they will not thrive in the manner each pupil does in Irfon Valley.	Ofsted's report has not been considered as part of the consultation. Schools in Wales are inspected by Estyn, not Ofsted. Estyn's response to the consultation is provided on page 14 of this report. Estyn's view is that the proposal is likely to at least maintain the standard of education provision in the area.

11.2 Concerns about larger schools

11.2.1	Concern that pupils will become 'just a number' in larger schools.	The Council notes these concerns about pupils attending larger schools. However, as stated in the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in
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		<p>Powys 2022-32, the Council faces a challenge due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools. Irfon Valley C.P. School has seen a significant decrease in pupil numbers over recent years and currently has just 18 pupils, which is causing challenges for the school.</p> <p>Should the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. This includes Ysgol Dolafon, which is also a small school with around 50 pupils. Pupils wishing to continue to attend a smaller school could choose to transfer here.</p> <p>The Council's view is that the alternative schools in the area which pupils may choose to transfer to would enable pupils to access education which is of at least equivalent quality to the education they currently receive, regardless of their size, and that pupils would continue to receive the care and attention they need to enable them to meet their full potential.</p>
11.2.2	When in a larger school, pupils are 'just a number' and don't get the individual care they do in a smaller school like Irfon Valley.	As above.
11.2.3	I worry that in a larger school some children may fly under the radar and may not have certain issues picked up on.	As above.
11.2.4	Sending children from small local schools to larger hub schools can be daunting, less empowering and cause children at a vital age for progressing to go into their shell, hindering their progress and damaging their opportunity to learn in a more open environment.	As above.

11.2.5	My biggest concern of moving my child to another larger school is that their individual characteristics will be diminished as part of a larger class.	As above.
11.2.6	There are lots of bad things in a bigger school such as bullying and attention deficit to children. The teacher can't get attention for all pupils who study in the class where 30 or more children.	As above. Issues such as bullying can occur in all schools, regardless of its size.

12. CRITICISM OF THE COUNCIL

12.1	The Authority should have engaged more with the school and Governors on all options on the table. Perhaps the Authority should have stepped in sooner with support when the pupil numbers began to fall.	The process has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code, and support has been provided to the school in line with the support provided to all schools. It is not the Council's responsibility to step in to support schools in increase numbers when pupil numbers begin to fall.
12.2	It is clear from the evidence given that Irfon Valley school governors contacted Powys County Council a few months ago for help in regards to the small amount of pupils, I am not sure the beginning of the process to close the school would be considered the help the governing body was after. It is appalling that Powys have moved so fast in wishing to close the school.	Comment noted. After the governing body contacted the Council regarding the decrease in pupil numbers at the school, the Council carried out an options appraisal exercise in respect of the school. This is the Council's usual process when reviewing schools. The preferred option identified by this options appraisal was to close the school.
12.3	I am mortified that the council want to close this lovely local school, whilst the force the agenda that larger schools are better. This is simply not the case and this is proof that the council do not value all the work the staff, pupils and parents put in to make the school such a success.	The Council is not forcing the agenda that larger schools are better. However, it is a fact that the cost per pupil at Irfon Valley C.P. School is significantly higher than the Powys average, and this tends to the be the case for all small schools. As stated in the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2022-32, the Council faces a challenge

		due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools.
12.4	I do strongly believe that the way the council have approached this idea of closure, has scared several members of the community already with them being told the decision has already been made.	No decision has been made. The Council's Cabinet will consider this Consultation Report and will decide whether or not to continue with the process.
12.5	It seems to me that the decision has already been made and we're just riding the storm and ticking boxes before it can be done officially.	As above.
12.6	It is of great sadness that the school system to Powys Council is purely a numbers game where the balance sheet becomes of greater importance than a child's education, mental wellbeing, happiness and all the other aspects that a small local school supports.	It is not 'purely a numbers game', however it is a fact that the cost per pupil at Irfon Valley C.P. School is significantly higher than the Powys average. The Council has a duty to ensure the best possible provision for all pupils across Powys. There is currently a lack of equity amongst schools.
12.7	The closure of Irfon Valley school is purely financial and does not take into consideration the plentiful other reasons a small community based school is beneficial to all.	The proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School is not 'purely financial'.
12.8	The other local schools are already either full or nearly full, and with houses being built in the local area this seems like an ill thought out money saving exercise	Information about the capacity and pupil numbers at Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School and Llanelwedd C. in W. School was provided in the consultation document, as well as Builth Wells C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is pressure on places at Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School and Llanelwedd C. in W. School in particular, there are sufficient places at Builth Wells C. in W. School and Ysgol Dolafon to accommodate all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.
12.9	Powys are purely looking to line their own pockets, as closing a school brings great financial gain to PCC. The site can be sold which is the initial short term capital outlined in the consultation	Whilst it is possible that the Council could realise a capital receipt from sale of the site should Irfon

	document as a advantage to closing the school. Once a developer purchases the site, Powys CC then receive further money through the costs associated with planning permissions and once completed the ongoing income received from Council Tax etc. This further compounds the fact that Powys are only looking to close the school for financial reasons and have not fully considered any other options.	Valley C.P. School close, no decisions about the site's possible future use have not yet been made.
12.10	As a county decisions are being made that are against the general consensus – local people want a local school that has local values	The proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School is being taken forward due to the significant decrease in pupil numbers at the school recently. This decrease is because families currently living in the area have chosen for their children to attend other schools in the area instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School. This does not support the statement that 'local people want a local school that has local values'.
12.11	Powys CC and the Transforming Education Team are pushing the narrative that larger schools are better, what factual research is this based on? There is clear research, academic articles etc that states that small schools are better than large schools where has this research been considered. There is no evidence this has been considered although Powys should be aware of the research otherwise how can they make an informed proposal if it is not based on evidence based research? I would suggest therefore that Powys are not making decisions on evidence and facts which is greatly concerning.	It is not correct that the Council is pushing a narrative that 'larger schools are better'. The Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2022-32, the Council faces a challenge due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools. Irfon Valley C.P. School has seen a significant decrease in pupil numbers over recent years and currently has just 18 pupils, which is causing challenges for the school. The cost per pupil at Irfon Valley C.P. School is significantly higher than the Powys average, and this tends to be the case for all small schools, meaning that there is currently a lack of equity amongst schools. The Council has a duty to ensure the best possible provision for all pupils across Powys.

12.12	<p>The need to consider closure is a fiscal matter. Communications around the proposed closure have suggested that closure could result in at least or better standards of education provision for the children impacted. Without doubt, smaller schools face administration and compliance related challenges. However, these have all been maintained well at IV School, alongside the continued high levels of education. The requirement for IV School pupils to attend a different school will be disruptive in itself and will involve most pupils facing longer journey times and reduced ability to partake in activities outside of school hours. Parents and other stakeholders understand that where a School has experienced significant reductions in pupil numbers, such as those experienced by IV School. And where school funding allocations are largely based on pupil numbers, the longer-term viability of a school is likely to be placed in jeopardy. Instead of “dressing up:” the proposals in terms of education provision, a more honest and transparent approach to future communications is requested. Can future communications explain the position as it is, and be frank and honest about the limited viability of a School with such small pupil numbers within the current policy and funding regime.</p>	This comment is noted.
12.13	<p>Press releases issued by the Council have had a negative impact on individuals involved with the school, as they have suggested that greater opportunities are available at larger schools.</p>	Comment noted.

13. COMMENTS ABOUT THE PROCESS

13.1 Comments about the timing

13.1.1	The process appears to have come about very quickly and has not given the school, community, governors, parents and pupils time to develop a plan to keep the school open.	The process is being taken forward in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code. This has included a 6 week consultation period which has given all stakeholders the opportunity to let the Council know their views on the proposal.
13.1.2	I believe that the proposal to close Lrfon Valley CP School in such a short space of time has not given parents, staff or other members of the community time to process what a loss the school closing will have on the community.	As above.
13.1.3	I believe the council should consider giving more time for this decision to be made.	As above.
13.1.4	The consultation period does not co-incide with the school application closing dates. Who is to say we won't have a pick up on children wanting to begin their educational journey at Lrfon Valley which given a few years may bounce back!!!	It is acknowledged that school reorganisation processes and admissions arrangements could be better aligned. However, even if there were a number of applications for places in Reception at the school from September 2024, this would take many years to impact on overall pupil numbers at the school, and the school would remain a very small school, at least in the short term. There are currently no applications to join the school's 'Reception' year group in September 2024.
13.1.5	PCC School Application Policy requires Parents to apply to preferred choice of school by January (two terms in advance) ahead of the next School year commencing. There is a risk that pupils of IV School are placed at the back of the list when choosing an alternative suitable school for their children due to the timing of any announcements on the future of IV School. Given the small numbers of children impacted by the proposals (13 in total) commitments should be given by PCC to work with all local schools identified to earmark places for children at preferred schools to minimise the impact of changing school and	This concern is noted. It is acknowledged that school reorganisation processes and admissions arrangements could be better aligned.

	the associated disruption. Moreover, the current approach encourages parents to move children to their preferred school during the year, itself a more disruptive approach for the pupils, in order to “jump the queue”.	
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13.2 Comments about consultation meetings

13.2.1	I'm very disappointed that there has not been any attempt by the Council to hold any open/public meetings where parents, staff, community members could all come together to be spoken too and informed about the situation.	<p>Consultation meetings were held with staff and governors, which include community representatives. The School Organisation Code does not require public meetings to be held as part of school reorganisation processes.</p> <p>The Council has not held public meetings as part of school reorganisation proposals for a number of years.</p>
13.2.2	I am also baffled as to why the authority didn't engage in person with the local community. Can you explain why you failed to do this and solely relied on online forms for members of the community to complete? Not everyone is online. How can everyone have their views noted and opportunity to voice their concerns?	As above.

13.3 Comments about consultation with pupils

13.3.1	Whilst it is acknowledged that the statutory process makes provision for consultation with children on proposals, this is not always appropriate. The language of the children and young persons consultation documents were not age appropriate for younger pupils. It is accepted that in this instance, for IV School, arrangements were made to allow Parents to opt their children	Comment noted. Whilst it is important that pupil voice is heard as part of any school reorganisation proposal, concerns were raised during the consultation meetings with staff and governors at Irfon Valley about pupils meeting with Council
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	out of the consultation process, and for teachers instead of PCC Officers to undertake the consultation with pupils that took place. This flexibility should be a standard part of a flexible approach applied to other schools facing potential closure, especially for younger children. In some instances, asking children about “potential” school closure can be counter-productive, particularly where the position such as that faced by IV School is so stark in terms of the financial impact of such considerable loss of pupil numbers (given the funding formula is based predominantly on pupil numbers). Where the decision remains to proceed with closure, it suggests to children that their voices do not matter.	officers as part of the proposal, so alternative arrangements were made.
13.3.2	Concern about the process for carrying out consultation with pupils.	As above.

13.4 Other comments

13.4.1	I feel this is a 'done deal' and that no matter what other options are available there is no way it will be considered or listened to.	It is not a 'done deal'. The process is being carried out in accordance with the School Organisation Code. Cabinet will consider this Consultation Report, and will decide whether or not to proceed with the process.
13.4.2	As the potential school closure date approaches, it is inevitable that the school may face additional challenges, as for instance, staff find new / alternative employment. This is likely to have an impact on the school's budget which would not have otherwise arisen had a review of the future of the school not been taken. PCC are requested to consider the need for additional financial support for the school should that be required through the period of disruption.	Should the Council proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. Schol, we would work with the school throughout the period leading up to its closure to support with any issues which may arise.
13.4.3	Would the closure date change if pupil numbers were to drop again between now and the final decision?	No, the closure date would remain as per the proposal.

13.4.4	What would happen to the school's resources should the school close?	Resources would be distributed to other schools and the community where possible.
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14. COMMENTS ABOUT THE DOCUMENTATION

14.1	The numbers quoted in the consultation document do not include the number of pupils likely to start Reception in September as the window of applying for reception places is open for the duration of the consultation process. It also does not consider the pupils who are not yet in Rainbow tots which would like to use Garth school from September 2025.	The consultation document includes the actual pupil numbers that were attending the school in September 2023, as well as the latest projected numbers available.
14.2	It's disappointing that the local housing developments being built in the area have not been acknowledged in the Consultation Document. With 25 properties being currently built in Llangammarch Wells and a further 20+ in Beulah, this could possibly bring more children into the school.	As above.
14.3	The document itself was littered with basic errors. We are entrusting Powys County Council to make a major decision with an impact that will ripple throughout the community, and they are not able to get basic facts correct in a consultation document.	The Council does not agree that 'the document was littered with basic errors'.
14.4	The video presented on the Powys website did not show Irfon Valley C.P School. It is of great disappointment, that the Transforming Education Team cannot identify the school itself, and to get such a basic detail incorrect is an insult.	It is acknowledged that initially a document was published which included an incorrect photograph. The Council apologises for this. This was corrected immediately once the Council became aware of this error.
14.5	Before you leave the first page of the Consultation Document the beginning of the factual inaccuracies begins, a phone number which no longer works. Secondly the distance from Irfon Valley is inaccurate.	The phone number included in the consultation document is correct. The distances from Irfon Valley C.P. School to alternative schools which are provided on pages 22-23 of the Consultation Document are also correct.

14.6	Why is the building condition stated as poor and satisfactory? The school was built in 1980, yes is 43 years old but its not old as other school buildings around.	The assessments of Irfon Valley C.P. School's building condition and suitability are based on the latest assessments of the school building which have been carried out.
14.7	In the disadvantages compiled in the consultation document there has not been consideration of the pupils moving to larger class sizes and the disadvantages this brings. Of which there is multiple reasons. These have not been considered let alone explored.	Comment noted. The advantages and disadvantages listed in the document are based on the Council's view of the proposal, and reflect the views of a cross section of professionals from across the Council, e.g. School Improvement, Finance, Transforming Education.
14.8	The reasons in the consultation document are particularly poor and unconsidered.	The reasons for the proposal reflect the views of a cross section of professionals from across the Council, e.g. School Improvement, Finance, Transforming Education.
14.9	You state that "because pupil numbers in each year group are small, it is more difficult to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged." I wholeheartedly disagree with this. Due to our small class sizes, we get to know each and every pupil extremely well and can cater to their needs, ensuring they are suitably challenged at their own level. This is an enormous benefit to small schools, and larger schools simply cannot know their pupils as well.	Comment noted.
14.10	The devastation caused by closing Irfon Valley school has not been outlined in enough detail within the consultation document. It does not consider the social, emotional, and general well being of the pupils who would be forced to transfer to a larger school and the impact it has on their daily lives.	The Consultation Document has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code.
14.11	There is an overall disingenuous theme to the consultation document and associated communications.	As above.
14.12	In section 17 the capacity for Builth CP is stated as being 249, which with 7 year groups would give an admissions number of 35.57 rounded down to 35, but in Appendix A the admission	The comments about the relationship between the admission number and the capacity are noted. The information provided is as per the sources which

	number is given as 40, which would mean the school has a total capacity of between 280 and 286.	are identified in the consultation document, however the figure of 249 which is provided should be 246, according to the Council's capacity information submitted to Welsh Government in 2022.
14.13	In the finance section of Appendix A, Builth CP is stated to have an annual budget of £280,000 with a per pupil funding figure of £4,470 per pupil, so if the per pupil figure is correct then the annual budget is above £900,000.	The figure provided for Builth Wells C.P. School is an error – the figure of £280,000 is the figure for Ysgol Dolafon in the row below. The correct figure for Builth Wells C.P. School is £914,153.
14.14	In Appendix A the pupil numbers for January 23 are shown as both 34 and 30 and I know the one is actual and the other is a previous year estimate, this then goes on to give different sets of projected pupil numbers for future years, one from the same source as above and the other from finance.	The data shown in Appendix A includes the actual pupil numbers at the school in January 2023 which were 34, as well as projected pupil numbers based on January 2022 information – this is because updated projections based on January 2023 PLASC were not yet available when the document was published. This is why there are two pupil number figures for January 2023 – one is actual pupil numbers, the other is a projection. A footnote is included in the document to explain that the figures are based on PLASC 2022 as PLASC 2023 information was not available.
14.15	In the section on equalities the percentages given against each group in relation to Ysgol Dolafon only adds up to 93.1% and not 100%. I assume that if you look at the following table the missing 6.9% relates to the same 6.9% as shown in the second table.	Information about the remaining 6.9% was not provided, and should have been shown as such in the table.
14.16	However, the local authority's assessment against critical factors (Appendix C), does not appear to consider all of the options.	Options 6 and 7 were omitted from the critical success factors table, however they were included in the SWOT assessments carried out which were included in the papers considered by Cabinet in October 2023.

	There could be an impact on pupils' ability to access after-school activities. The consultation does not provide an indication about how the local authority will seek to address this issue.	It is acknowledged that pupils would live further away from the alternative schools, which may impact on their ability to access activities that take place after school. However, all of the alternative schools serve rural communities, so are experienced in meeting the needs of pupils who travel to school.
14.17	The local authority asserts that the quality of leadership would be at least as good in neighbouring schools, but doesn't include the supporting evidence in this proposal.	The Council holds termly meetings with schools to monitor progress in learning, provision and leadership. The information in the Consultation Document is based on the findings of these meetings.
14.18	The consultation document specifies that increased travel requirements for school events could have a greater impact on learners affected by socio-economic disadvantage. Whilst the proposal states there would be ongoing support for pupils with additional learning needs, the support to be provided for learners affected by socio-economic disadvantage is not clear.	<p>The Council recognises that any school reorganisation process creates a period of uncertainty for all involved, including any pupils with ALN, or pupils affected by socio-economic disadvantage. The Council is committed to supporting schools and all learners, including through periods of change. An experienced member of staff from the Council is supporting school leaders effectively to help them manage possible changes for their learners, including any learners affected by socio-economic disadvantage.</p> <p>It is also expected that school governors, staff, and parents support the children to ensure that there isn't a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.</p> <p>Schools receiving pupils as a result of a school closure are expected to work with the closing school, the pupils, and their families to provide full support to pupils to ensure a smooth transition. This</p>

		would particularly be the case for any schools receiving pupils affected by socio-economic disadvantage.
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15. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

15.1 Keep the school open

15.1.1	Don't close it	Status quo is one of the options considered in the options appraisal carried out in respect of Lrfon Valley C.P. School, however this option would not address the challenges identified. As explained in the Consultation Document, pupil numbers at Lrfon Valley C.P. School have decreased significantly over recent years to 18 pupils, 5 of whom are in Year 6. This is because parents have chosen for their children to attend alternative schools in the area.
15.1.2	Keep the school open	As above.
15.1.3	Because of all the new builds in the area you should keep the school open another year or so, the houses are family homes and lots of children would need a school that's close by, I'm sure the school will fill up quickly.	As above.

15.2 Develop the provision at the school

15.2.1	Provide after school provision	It is not the authority's role to provide after school provision at the school.
15.2.2	Most of the drop in pupil numbers could be fixed by the provision of an after school club or organised clubs after school by contacting local sports clubs to run coaching sessions.	As above.

15.2.3	Ask the local community to help in running lunch time or after school support alongside parents and teachers	It is not the authority's role to take forward these activities.
15.2.4	Run a nursery from the Lrfon valley site alongside the school to offer care from babies to Year 6.	There is already access to pre-school provision on the school site.
15.2.5	Fund additional hours for the pre-school, 7.5 hours a week is not enough, children are entitled to more funding than that.	As stated in the Consultation Document, ' <i>Rainbow Tots isn't currently funded for the full 10 hours a week. Due to low numbers at Rainbow Tots and Dolafon Ducklings, both settings offer 7.5 hours a week.</i> '
15.2.6	Increase fund raising to close the financial deficit	Funding is provided to the school in accordance with the funding formula, in the same way that it is provided to all other schools. It is not the Council's responsibility to arrange for increased fund raising to support the school.
15.2.7	The council should support the school and local community to raise the extra funds to make the financial aspect of the school viable. I am not aware the school has been given the chance to raise any more funds or explore the financial options to keep the school open.	Funding is provided to the school in accordance with the funding formula, in the same way that it is provided to all other schools. The Council is not in a position to 'support the school and local community to raise extra funds' to support the school.
15.2.8	They should be looking at doing more fundraising to get the community more involved or linking the school to others to help with funds and advertising the school for more children to attend there. Doing open days for the area so people can see what the school is about.	The Council is not responsible for fundraising, promoting the school or arranging open days.
15.2.9	The school should be looking at the reasons why numbers at the school are low and encouraging/making the school an attractive option for education as well as extra curricular activities in the community.	Numbers at the school are low because parents in the area are choosing for their children to attend alternative provision elsewhere.
15.2.10	The Council should provide support for the school and suggest ways in which the school numbers can be increased.	Support is provided to the school in-line with the support which is provided to all other schools. It is not the Council's responsibility to 'suggest ways in which the school numbers can be increased'.

15.2.11	The council could consider promoting the school and its benefits of being a smaller rural school rather than proposing its closure would potentially make parents understand that their child is lucky to have such an education and its not all about saving money.	It is not the Council's responsibility to promote the school.
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15.3 Federate Irfon Valley and Ysgol Dolafon

15.3.1	Federating Irfon Valley C.P. School with Dolafon would make complete sense, especially as there is a shared headteacher across the two schools which is working well.	Federating Irfon Valley C.P. School with Ysgol Dolafon is one of the options considered in the options appraisal carried out in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School, however this option would not address the challenges identified. As explained in the Consultation Document, pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School have decreased significantly over recent years to 18 pupils, 5 of whom are in Year 6. This is because parents have chosen for their children to attend alternative schools in the area.
15.3.2	Federate with Ysgol Dolafon.	As above.
15.3.3	Why did the council not federate Ysgol Dolafon and Irfon Valley as proposed several years ago? Joining the Governing bodies etc to make it one school on two sites, where was the support from the LA to do this?	As above.

15.4 Merge with another school

15.4.1	Why hasn't a merger been put in place with another school, i.e. Llanwrtyd?	Options involving merging Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon were considered in the options appraisal exercise carried out, and are outlined in the Consultation Document. The reasons why each
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		of these options were discounted are outlined in Appendix D of the Consultation Document.
15.4.2	I would like to see a provisional plan put in place to see whether the merging of Irfon Valley would benefit us and the children in a better way than closing us down, and the children all being separated and sent in different directions to different.	As above.
15.4.3	Options of merging with another local school could be an option to be considered, rather than 'getting rid' of Irfon Valley altogether.	As above.
15.4.4	What are the reasonings behind not looking further into merging to keep more continuity for the children in our school?	As above.

15.5 Establish a Welsh-medium school

15.5.1	Has consideration been given to it being a Welsh-medium school? The majority of pupils have been lost to Builth Welsh Stream, the Welsh unit in Llanwrtyd was too far out for a lot of people yet Garth is more central.	The Council has not considered establishing a Welsh-medium school here. Welsh-medium provision is currently available in the area at Builth Wells C.P. School, however the Council is currently working on future plans for Ysgol Calon Cymru which aims to establish a Welsh-medium all-age school in Builth Wells, which would provide enhanced access to Welsh-medium provision in the area.
15.5.2	Consider making the school a Welsh-medium school	As above.
15.5.3	Have Garth as a Welsh primary school for those who currently travel further and past Garth to go to a Welsh primary school use the facilities in Garth instead	As above.
15.5.4	Make it a Welsh medium primary school or give it a Welsh medium department as that is where a lot of local parents seem have decided to send their children, meaning Irfon Valley CP School's numbers are currently low.	As above.

15.6 Close Ysgol Dolafon instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School

15.6.1	Close the Llanwrtyd school which is on the extreme boundary of Powys and maintain Irfon Valley which is more central and could have a larger catchment area.	There are currently 52 pupils attending Ysgol Dolafon, which is nearly 3 times as many as the number of pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, so it would be very difficult to justify closing Ysgol Dolafon and retaining Irfon Valley C.P. School. In addition, there would be significant additional transport costs, as the Council would need to provide transport to enable pupils currently attending Ysgol Dolafon to attend Irfon Valley C.P. School.
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15.7 Other suggestions

15.7.1	Provisions should be put in place for the whole school or at the very minimum year groups to move to the same school. They should all be allocated spaces in the school and transport provision should be provided irrelevant of where the child lives. There should be no barriers put in place to this. Parents should not have to fight / use exception rules or appeal for this.	Comment noted. Should the Council proceed with the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School, officers will endeavour to work with parents to understand their preferences.
15.7.2	Perhaps closer working with Ysgol Dolafon should have happened a long time ago with 'shared' activities and events along with more shared working which would have seen the 2 schools worked collaboratively and perhaps that route could have been followed to save Irfon valley now.	Comment noted.
15.7.3	Amend policies to ensure children are taught within their local community and not schooled in out of catchment schools.	Parents are entitled to apply for a place for their children at any school they choose. All applications are dealt with in accordance with the Council's Admissions arrangements. If parents apply for a place at a school which isn't their closest school and there are places available, then the place

		would be allocated to the pupil. However, they would not be entitled to transport – this is only to their nearest suitable school.
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16. COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSAL

16.1	It will be extremely sad however I do believe that closure is the best way forward for the children. They will have more opportunities, friendships and a better level of teaching at alternative schools.	Comment noted.
16.2	I don't want the school to close, but I understand that financially the school budget ultimately won't allow the school to go on as it is due to the low pupil numbers.	Comment noted.
16.3	I believe the school needs to close. The standard of teaching and level of child protection knowledge is low.	Comment noted.
16.4	I appreciate that this is down to money at the end of the day and that is why it feels like a futile box ticking exercise for myself and others to have to give their time and energy to this consultation. No amount of heartfelt opinion is going to balance the books, pay for new roofing tiles or replace the flat roof which are no longer fit for purpose.	Comment noted.
16.5	This is a common sense proposal.	Comment noted.
16.6	It is not sustainable to maintain a school for so few pupils. Staffing and maintenance costs for such few students is a drain of limited and previous resources.	Comment noted.
16.7	Classes taught across more than 2 years fail to provide a fair curriculum to students, and are unable to provide them with the highest level of education needed for each stage of their development.	Comment noted.

7. FURTHER ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

The School Organisation Code includes some additional steps to be undertaken in respect of the consultation report for proposals relating to the closure of rural schools. This section addresses these requirements.

7.1 Further assessment of the proposal and alternatives

Following consultation, the Council has carried out a further assessment of the proposal and the alternatives identified in the proposal paper on the likely impact on quality and standards in education, the likely impact on the community and the likely effect of different travelling arrangements.

The revised assessments, which take account of further information that has come forward through the consultation or otherwise, are provided in the table below:

Option	Likely impact on quality and standards	Likely impact on the community	Likely impact of different travelling arrangements
Option 1: Status quo – continue as a standalone school	There would be no impact on quality and standards – pupils would continue to access the current provision at Irfon Valley.	There would be no impact on the community – provision would continue to be available in Garth.	There would be no impact on travel arrangements – pupils would continue to attend Irfon Valley C.P. School.
Option 2: Federate Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon	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	The impact on the community would be minimal – provision would continue to be available in Garth.	Pupils would continue to attend school in the same location, thus there would be no additional transport costs. Some additional travel may be required between schools in order to access activities and events.

	provided for collaboration between the schools.		
Option 3: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on two sites	<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>
Option 4: Merge Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon to establish a new school on the Irfon Valley site	<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</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</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</p>

	<p>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>school, depending on the make-up of the new governing body.</p>	<p>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 quality and standards are at least as good as the current provision.</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>Option 6: Close Irfon Valley C.P. School, but retain</p>	<p>This option would retain provision in Garth, building upon the</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 on the current site of Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p>

<p>the site as part of Ysgol Dolafon</p>	<p>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>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>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 as good as the current provision at Irfon Valley.</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 also be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities/events.</p>

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7.2 Further reasonable alternatives

The other alternatives which were suggested in the consultation responses received are outlined in section 15 of the 'issues raised in the consultation period' section of this report, including the Council's response to these alternatives. These are as follows:

- i) Keep the school open
- ii) Develop the provision at the school
- iii) Federate Irfon Valley and Ysgol Dolafon
- iv) Merge with another school
- v) Establish a Welsh-medium school
- vi) Close Ysgol Dolafon instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School

i) and ii) are included within Option 1 – Status Quo in the above table, and are therefore not subject to a separate assessment.

iii) Federate Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon is included as option 2 in the table above, and is therefore not subject to a separate assessment.

iv) Merging Irfon Valley C.P. School and Ysgol Dolafon are considered in options 3, 4 and 5 in the table above, and is therefore not subject to a separate assessment.

v) Establish a Welsh-medium school – this will be subject to a further assessment.

vi) Close Ysgol Dolafon instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School – this will be subject to a further assessment

The reasonable alternatives that will be subject to further consideration against the factors outlined in the School Organisation Code for rural schools are:

v) Establish a Welsh-medium school

vi) Close Ysgol Dolafon instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School

These reasonable alternatives are considered in the following table:

Option	Likely impact on quality and standards	Likely impact on the community	Likely impact of different travelling arrangements
<p>v) Establish a Welsh-medium school</p>	<p>Irfon Valley C.P. School is currently an English-medium school with no experience of providing Welsh-medium education, so it is likely that there would be a negative impact on quality and standards of education.</p> <p>It is unclear whether staff at the school have the appropriate language skills to deliver the curriculum through the medium of Welsh. If they don't have the necessary skills and experience, this could have a negative impact on quality and standards of education.</p>	<p>The impact on the community would be minimal – provision would continue to be available in Garth.</p>	<p>Pupils living in the area currently served by Irfon Valley C.P. School would continue to attend school on the current site, where they would access Welsh-medium education. There would be no impact on travel arrangements for these pupils.</p> <p>Some pupils may choose to access English-medium provision at an alternative location, so additional travel would be required for these pupils.</p> <p>In the longer term, it is possible that there would be a reduction in travel, should pupils in the area currently served by Irfon Valley C.P. School access Welsh-medium provision here instead of Builth Wells C.P. School's Welsh-medium stream.</p>
<p>vi)</p>	<p>Pupils attending Ysgol Dolafon would transfer to alternative</p>	<p>There would be a significant impact on the Llanwrtyd Wells</p>	<p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently</p>

<p>Close Ysgol Dolafon instead of Irfon Valley C.P. School</p>	<p>schools, which would provide an opportunity to increase pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. Schools. However, it is possible that some pupils would choose to attend other schools.</p> <p>Implementation of this option would mean that pupils could continue to be able to access education which is of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Ysgol Dolafon.</p>	<p>community as there would be no provision in Llanwrtyd Wells. There is also a library co-located with the school in Llanwrtyd Wells. Depending on the future use of the school building, it is possible that there could be an impact on the library.</p>	<p>attending Ysgol Dolafon. Ysgol Dolafon currently has significantly more pupils than Irfon Valley C.P. School, so this option would have a significant impact on travel for the majority of pupils. This would impact on their ability to access any after-school activities, and would also have an impact on parents in terms of their ability to access to school activities.</p> <p>There would also be a significant additional cost to the Council in order to transport pupils from Llanwrtyd Wells to Garth.</p>
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7.3 Conclusion

The Council has considered the issues raised in the consultation exercise and has also carried out a further assessment of the proposal, the original options and alternative options identified during the consultation with consideration of the likely impact on quality and standards in education, the likely impact on the community and the likely effect of different travelling arrangements. The Council's view is that none of the other original options or the alternative options address the challenges facing Irfon Valley C.P. School, which are:

- Low pupil numbers
- Budget difficulties
- High budget per pupil
- Combined age classes

As outlined in the Consultation Document, the reasons for the proposal are as follows:

- 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 other schools compared with other options
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

The reasoning for this conclusion is that implementation of the proposal will ensure improved management of the Powys schools estate, ensuring that the best possible educational opportunities can be provided to pupils living in the area currently served by Irfon Valley C.P. School and across Powys in the future.

As stated in the Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys 2020-30, the Council faces a challenge due to the high proportion of small schools in the county and the lack of equity amongst schools. Irfon Valley C.P. School has seen a significant decrease in pupil numbers in recent years, and currently has only 18 pupils. With such low pupil numbers the teacher-pupil ratio is notably different to many other schools in the area, and due to the Council's funding formula, the school's funding per pupil is significantly higher than the Council's average. This does not provide equity across the education system – teachers in larger schools are required to provide the same education as smaller schools for less funding per pupil.

The Council's Strategy is intended to improve equity across the education system and to ensure an improvement for every pupil's learning entitlement and experience.

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Appendix C – Minutes of meetings with Staff and Governors

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Consultation meeting with Staff of Irfon Valley CP School

23 November 2023

Present:

Staff:

Rhoanne Clark, Executive Head Teacher
Clare Anthony, Assistant Head / Class Teacher
Becca Price, TA
Julie Grannell, Cook
Carys Lawrence, TA / SA
Halimah Lord, HLTA / Admin

Officers:

Lynette Lovell, Director of Education and Children
Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation
Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education
Amy Radford, Transforming Education Programme Officer
Sharon Nicholls, HR Business Partner

Lynette Lovell welcomed all to the meeting. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Lynette Lovell explained that there would be a brief presentation with an opportunity for discussion, followed by comments and questions to the officers. It was explained that the meeting would be recorded for minuting purposes, but the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been typed up and agreed.

Sarah Astley gave a Powerpoint presentation which outlined the background to the current proposal and explained that in October 2023, the Council's Cabinet gave approval to proceed with a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The consultation commenced on the 26th October 2023, and will continue until the 7th December 2023.

The proposal is:

- To close Irfon Valley CP School from the 31st August 2024 with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative school.

Following the presentation, staff were given the opportunity to ask any questions or to make any comments in relation to the matter.

Member of Staff: You mentioned that someone is coming into school to speak to the children. How does that work? Will it be individually or as a class?

Marianne Evans: It will be either Sarah or myself or both of us. We'll need to discuss the date. Normally we meet with the school council, but it can be a selection of pupils across the whole school. Given that there are only 19 pupils, it may be that we speak to all of them. It's a session where we explain to them what the proposal is, explain the process and then listen to them, their questions, and their concerns. We start off by asking what's good about this school, then take the discussion down further to get their views. In most situations the teachers have worked with pupils beforehand, so sometimes they come with questions already prepared.

Member of Staff: It's difficult for us because there are only 7 children in Class 2, our Key Stage 2 class. 5 of those 7 children are Year 6 so would be leaving us in the summer term anyway. 1 pupil is Ukrainian. As a teacher, and probably similarly to the other staff, I feel this overriding sense of guilt and responsibility at the moment, especially after having parents evening last week and listening to parents concerns. At parents evening, parents were asking where they should take their children instead, they were saying they don't want to leave this school. Children are saying they're worried about moving to a different school. Some have visited other schools, and have said they didn't like them.

I'm quite disappointed with the presentation for the children that has been published, I don't think it's aimed at our younger children at all.

A lot of parents have told us that they don't want their children to be questioned because they think it's going to cause more anxiety, and they're already anxious.

Marianne Evans: We have to follow the process, which states that we must hear the voice of pupils. However, we understand the sensitivities around this. In another school, the headteacher spoke to the children and sent their views on to us, so that could be an option.

Member of Staff: Also, I don't think the pupils completely understand when the school is closing. They think it's happening tomorrow. They don't realise it may be a few months down the road, or if it's going to close and then open again. It's hard to explain to them, especially the youngest pupils.

Member of Staff: Parents are concerned as well about whether their five-year olds are going to give a good input. You never know, they might say they don't like the school at all!

Member of Staff: Also if they have in-depth discussions with people they don't know at all at this stage, when they're 5 and 6, will they have anxiety about it for the rest of the year? It's a long time for a very small child.

Lynette Lovell: We would really like to get the children's views. It's really important to hear learner voice. What would you suggest we do? We'd like to be able to hear from them, it's really important, but you're the ones that have the relationship with

them, you're the ones that know the children really well. We want to do what's best for the children.

Member of staff: It might be better for us to have the questions you would ask. I think parents would feel happier about that as well.

Marianne Evans: It's been interesting this year, we've been consulting on school organisation changes for many years, however this year for the first time we've had parents refusing to let us come and talk to the children, or raising concerns about it all. This hasn't happened before, I wonder if that's a sign of the times?

If you can facilitate a conversation with the pupils, we'll send you the questions. You can then have the discussion with them, and if you can feed that back to us that would be great.

Member of staff: Our parents have shown that much concern, they're going to want to know and give permission for the children to be involved.

Member of staff: We've had parents tell us they would remove their child on the day you're coming in, that's how strongly they feel. I think also, and I know the decision hasn't been made, but from having seen what's happened in other parts of Powys, they think the decision has already been made. And they're questioning why are you causing this further anxiety for our children, asking whether they like the school or not. They've seen what's happened in other places and they've seen the fight that the community have put up and I think they know what will happen in the end.

Member of staff: Will you be meeting with parents?

Marianne Evans: We don't have meetings with parents or public meetings as part of school reorganisation processes, however we do meet with staff and governors as part of the process. The governing body includes parent representatives, and obviously there are other ways of feeding in as well. We're happy for you to take forward the meeting with pupils though.

Sarah Astley: You can either speak with the pupils, or in the past we've had submissions from pupils on paper, either written responses or pictures, so that's a possibility too – either instead of speaking with them, or as well as. We're more than happy to take a steer from you in terms of what would work best.

Member of staff: The children aren't actually going to be able to influence the decision making much because it's down to money at the end of the day, isn't it? If they say they love the school, it doesn't mean the school's going to stay open for them, so it's just a bit disheartening for them really, it would stir up their emotions.

Member of staff: And it's harder because if the Year 6's say they love the school, well they're not going to be here anyway as they will be going.

Sarah Astley: I'll send on what we have sent to other schools recently to use as a basis for a meeting with pupils, and would be happy to speak with you about how to approach consultation with pupils.

Member of staff: I presume we would have somebody asking the questions, and somebody scribing so that we get it recorded exactly as the children say, rather than paraphrasing? Or would we just record it?

Sarah Astley: Yes, whatever works best – you could record it and send us the recording.

Member of staff: We'll have a little think about what would be less daunting for them.

Member of staff: The other thing parents are concerned about is that this is taking away their first choice of where they want their child to be. They feel they're being almost dictated to because it's the closest school they have to go to rather than having a choice, and because other schools are oversubscribed or full, they haven't got a choice of putting them into those schools. And I think they're really quite concerned. They want to know where they're going to have transport to, transport is quite a big issue.

Marianne Evans: In terms of the 'closest school', parental preference comes in anyway. They could choose any school, and if there's space in the school, then they can have a place. However, we know there is pressure on places in Llanelwedd and Newbridge.

In terms of transport, we would only provide transport to the closest school, that's what the Transport policy states.

Member of staff: Is it as the crow flies? The road distance?

Marianne Evans: It's road distance, which you can work out, or maybe we can send it to you.

Member of staff: I'm sure parents just want to know.

Member of staff: Some schools are full through, like Newbridge.

Marianne Evans: It depends if the year group is full. Parents would need to submit an application. Then if the year group is full, if the admissions process says no and we can't give you a place, you can appeal. We've just had this situation with another school.

However, with the admissions code, which is the guidance around admissions, there is some leeway for exceptional circumstances. When the Council is proposing to close a school, and then not allowing them into another school, in my view that is an exceptional circumstance.

Member of staff: With transport, if they couldn't go to say Newbridge, they had to go to Llanelwedd, how would transport work? They would be missing out on transport, but it's not their choice.

Marianne Evans: That's something we'd have to look at when they're applying for a place. We'll see if we can get you a list of current pupils and their closest schools if that helps, and then you can share that with each individual family.

Member of staff: I think so. Lack of information is the biggest thing we're hearing. We need to be making an informed choice and although it might not happen, actually we need to be thinking now and preparing ourselves.

Member of staff: The reason why numbers dropped so quickly was that parents were panicking. They heard a rumour the school was going to close, they were trying to find a place quickly so they could go where they wanted.

Also going back to parents not wanting their child to be spoken to, I think this is partly because they don't know the information themselves, so they can't answer themselves. They don't want children coming home and saying this, that and the other when they don't know the information themselves. They don't know what school they're going to. They don't know if they can get transport.

Member of staff: I think that's the parents overriding feeling. They're extremely worried about where their children are going to go and they think the Council will ultimately take away their first choice of school, and they might not want to go to another particular school but that would be their closest. They feel they're being manipulated, as you're taking away their village school. I think that's the frustrating thing for them.

Member of staff: Especially when the catchment area is Llangammarch, and they've got loads of houses going up at the moment. Some of the schools are already full, so where are children going to go once this site is sold off and turned into more houses?

Sarah Astley: Housing developments has come through already in the consultation responses, so it's something we'll have to look into.

Member of staff: Can you tell us how many responses you've had?

Sarah Astley: We'd had about 18 online responses when I looked earlier today.

Member of staff: We're really aware that there are people within the community and further afield who can't access the online consultation, and would actually rather come and air their views. Could we get paper copies out to Llangammarch, to the post office there and the village hall?

Sarah Astley: Often we have a bit of a flurry of responses towards the end of a consultation. It may be that we get more responses as we get to the end of the consultation – responses tend to come in early or late, and there are another couple of weeks left.

And if there is anything we can do to help in terms of paper copies or anything, please let us know – we can print copies and arrange to get them to you.

Member of staff: It's difficult if people in the community haven't still got children in the school, they feel like they haven't really got a right to have an opinion about it all. But I know there is a lot of feeling locally that it's a very sad thing. It's been a really lovely school for such a long time. It's still a lovely school but it does just feel like the decision has already been made.

Member of staff: It is really hard. I've had people say to me, well, I know the decision has been made and that's it.

Member of staff: If the Transformation Strategy has been in place for a number of years as you mentioned in the presentation, why is it only now that we've become aware that we're on a list? A lot of schools used to be on a list for closure for a good few years, but we seem to have been really fast tracked compared to other schools.

Marianne Evans: It's because your numbers fell so dramatically, so quickly. There is a published work programme for the transformation programme and Irfon Valley wasn't on it. It was added because, as we say in the documents, your pupil numbers fell so dramatically, which has had a significant financial impact.

Member of staff: They fell because people already heard that it was shutting anyway. Am I right in thinking we would have been part of the next phase, which was 24/25?

Marianne Evans: We are looking at Ysgol Calon Cymru, and part of that work would have included looking at the primaries in the area.

Sarah Astley: Even if something isn't on the work programme it doesn't mean it can't be added into the work programme. There are some other things that have come through recently that have happened more quickly than we thought they would because of certain circumstances. So although there's a work programme it's still subject to other changes.

Member of staff: Is it to do with the roof, possibly, the fact that that's going to need a lot of money to fix, which doesn't give time to build the numbers?

Member of staff: The numbers have been dropping for a while, but nothing has been done beforehand. Why was nothing done when the numbers started dropping? The numbers went from 50 to 40 fairly quickly. And then obviously they have dropped again. But why was nothing done 4 years ago when the numbers started declining? Why weren't you able to help then? Then this might have been prevented. It wasn't that long ago that there were 100 pupils here...

Marianne Evans: If you look across the county, the pattern is that pupil numbers are decreasing, and the projections are still heading that way. It's happening in rural areas, but pupil numbers are dropping in the towns as well.

Lynette Lovell: Back to the children, you've got five Year 6 pupils leaving in the summer. In terms of year groups, you were talking about places earlier, and the groups. Some families would probably prefer their children to go together to a school. What are your year groups in the other years?

Member of staff: We have one in Reception, 6 in year 1, 4 in year 2, then 2 in year 5. Some of the pupils have younger siblings too.

Lynette Lovell: That's something for us to consider as well in terms of admissions. I know that it's a difficult process. We recognise the difficulty. But when you put those cohorts together, we need to look at how we can help facilitate them staying together.

Teacher: The pupils didn't want to leave. However, there were situations where the sibling wouldn't have another girl in that year, so the parents took her sibling out and then there was a gap in another year. You could see who was going to go and who the next one was going to be.

Lynette Lovell: Those cohorts in year 1 and year 2, the 6 and the 5. Where do you think their preference would be for alternative schools? Do you have any idea where parents might want their children to go?

Member of staff: Newbridge. They seem to want to go to Newbridge.

Lynette Lovell: So not down to Ysgol Dolafon?

Member of staff: Most parents don't work that way.

Member of staff: If they're not going to get transport they've got to work it out family-wise. How they would manage pick up and drop offs.

Lynette Lovell: Have you had anyone come to Ysgol Dolafon to look at the school?

Member of staff: Not from Irfon Valley, no. Other people have been, but not from here.

Member of staff: They tend to head the other way.

Marianne Evans: So they're working in Llandod or Builth?

Teacher: Yes.

Marianne Evans: Llanelwedd is full. But there are places in Builth, Newbridge is full.

Member of staff: The admissions for next year for reception children, does that get taken into account? If we did happen to have a magical number of children wanting to come...

Member of staff: Finance said we would need to find between 20 and 25.

Member of staff: But what if we had 6 or something similar for the infants?

Marianne Evans: When that happens, the admissions team would have to inform them that the school is under review when they put in their application. The two processes are difficult to align sometimes.

Lynette Lovell: Sometimes you've got an idea anyway of the number of applications that are likely to come in. People have been around to see the school.

What are the numbers in your setting?

Member of staff: We've got a pretty good setting here at the school. Numbers have dropped to four at the moment because we had a big influx go to school. We have a few more due to join throughout the year, but some people have obviously been put off coming because of the rumour that we're shutting. They're automatically presuming that's us gone as well.

Lynette Lovell: What are your numbers normally in the setting?

Member of staff: We were up to about 10. We run three mornings a week.

Member of staff: Llanelwedd school actually floods quite often. Where are the children going to go if the school's full and it floods?

Marianne Evans: Llanelwedd has flooded twice since we've been involved, but it wasn't due to the river. It was a blocked culvert apparently which has been fixed. But who knows when Llanelwedd will flood again?

Member of staff: Are they planning to build a super primary around here? Or no, just muddle along with what we've got?

Marianne Evans: If we could afford to build new primaries everywhere, then we would.

Member of staff: What about the Welsh all through school?

Marianne Evans: The plans for Ysgol Calon Cymru are the same, we're just working on them. It takes time to work through.

Member of staff: That's another thing that parents have been talking about, whether they put them in the Welsh stream or English Stream.

Member of staff: Yes, because they would get free transport to the Welsh unit.

Marianne Evans: Have pupils stayed in the Welsh unit once they've gone there, do you know?

Teacher: I don't know, but I've also heard that some pupils that have been in the Welsh unit since the start have had support taken away from them to help the children that have now gone in at a later date.

Marianne Evans: Going back to you as a group of staff. Is there anything you want to ask HR, to help you understand what will happen should the proposal go forward and what it means for you?

Sharon Nicholls: We can only talk about the principles at the moment because no decisions have been made yet. In theory, HR wouldn't get involved until we have a final decision, then we would become involved in a formal capacity. However, we will support and help you, because we appreciate that this is an unsettling time.

If the Council was to proceed as proposed at the moment, then we'd be looking at a management of change process. Usually this involves consulting with staff for 30 days for feedback to consider the proposal. However, in a school closure environment that decision has been made, so the management of change process is more about you as individuals – there would be discussions about the impact on you, what you're thinking, redeployment, support with CV or interview techniques, where you are if you were considering redundancy. It's more about the impact on you personally and what we can do to support you going through the process.

You saw from the timeline that we're currently looking at implementation on the 31st August 2024. However, we have a legal obligation to give notice correctly, so our timeframes within the HR world may not align with the timeline for the reorganisation proposal in terms of notice periods, depending on when any final decision is made.

In the past we've had situations where schools have closed but there wasn't time to give staff the required notice period after the final decision was made. However, we've still got to give you that notice period. In that situation, we redeployed some staff to other areas for that notice period. Alternatively, we can pay a payment in lieu of notice, which is paying you for your notice period. It's about having those discussions all the way through the process.

We're not quite there yet though because we need decisions to be made so we know how to navigate our way through this.

Member of staff: We're really concerned about how unsettling everything is for the children at the moment. If anything changes in school over the next few months, that would have an impact on them. The children are going to be really unsettled. I've already got little ones talking about it and being worried about moving to new schools and being anxious and frightened. If other things change in the meantime, it will add to this.

Member of staff: It is difficult at the moment, even just for health and safety, if someone has an accident or something, there's only one member of staff. It's not only the impact on children, it's also the impact on staff because we've got to think about our wellbeing, and it's really difficult when things change. We are very, very close here. We're a very close-knit team, a very nurturing school.

Marianne Evans: So two things are coming out here: staff wellbeing and pupil wellbeing. In terms of pupil wellbeing, there are things we can do to help.

Lynette Lovell: Yes, there are. There are a couple of things we can do. We've got a really good team of educational psychologists in the local authority. We don't want to bring them in to cause any further upset though – it's a measured approach, because in my opinion as a teacher myself, the best people to deal with the children's wellbeing are the teachers and teaching assistants as you are the ones that know them. But if there were huge concerns around anything, then we have got the Ed Psych team that may be able to support if you.

For the children though, I do think you are the best people to support them. So then it's about us providing you with the support you need to be able to work with the children. We do have an independent ex-headteacher who was involved in transformation of her own school when she was working here in the local authority. She's independent of us and we buy her in, if you like, to work with schools. I know she's already been in touch with the Headteacher, but she's available to support you too. And then there are HR as well.

Sharon Nicholls: We are available to support you, and also there is the employee assistance programme, Vivup. That's accessible at any time. It's private and confidential, it's not shared with anyone. It has a whole range of things, including things like money matters and things like that because we realise it is an uncertain,

unsettling time. There's a lot of really good financial support as well if you were looking at a redundancy element or a pension element, I could signpost you to that. I will ensure that my email address is shared with you all so that you have that contact if you want to ask any generic questions.

Lynette Lovell: Also, most of you are probably in unions as well. I'm in a union, I need support from my union when I'm going through things. Your teaching unions, your non-teaching unions, you can have those discussions with them as well. That's really important too.

Marianne Evans: Even though we're still in the process, Sharon could come and spend some time here and do individual one to ones with you.

Sharon Nicholls: Yes, going forward I can come down again.

Member of staff: It's going to be a really busy year. It's going to be really difficult. We're not going to have much time to be thinking about applying for jobs and we don't want to abandon ship.

Lynette Lovell: Going back to what Sharon said, it is difficult. We know that it is difficult. But in terms of staff and processes, it has to follow a set timeline, as Sharon said earlier. If the school closes, it isn't necessarily the fact that your job would finish at that time. There have been times when a school has closed and the staff have had another term working, up to Christmas, and a lot of the clearing is done at that point. We don't even know what the decision is going to be yet, which is why we can't provide more detail on this.

Marianne Evans: This is the issue. Without wanting to rush the process, we know that the best way for anybody going through this is to make sure the decisions can come quickly so that there is some direction, because it's this, it's this limbo land. So obviously we can prioritise that.

Sarah Astley: We can do what we can to make sure that the decisions are made as soon as possible.

Member of staff: There are going to be a couple of children that are really going to struggle with transition due to ALN issues and English as an additional language and it does take a long time for the process of Tyfu applications and so on to go through. We've started processes, but are they actually going to get the support they need in the time they are here? They are going to need somebody to hold their hand to get into that new school. They're going to need the support there. So, it would be helpful if the ALN issues that we have get fast tracked as well so that those children have got some support moving on.

Lynette Lovell: For the transition, and particularly for those pupils with ALN, there would need to be extra arrangements in place to ensure everything is right for them

wherever they may go and to make sure that, if the school closes, the receiving school, is prepared. This is essential, particularly around ALN. Even for Year 6 pupils going to secondary school, it's really important to have that extra transition in place for the ALN pupils. I used to do it myself, I'd make sure I had extra meetings to ensure those transitions are right. Everything's on the system, so we'll need to ensure that we have the right arrangements in place.

Member of staff: It's so difficult to get hold of people. Every year it's like you get further away, they never seem to come to schools anymore. You never seem to get the extra funding for children with ALN needs. It can be quite a battle these days.

Lynette Lovell: I understand that, however the reason is that we've got increased demand and it's really difficult to try and recruit educational psychologists. They're not coming through, even though we have been advertising for a long time.

Member of staff: We've also got things like English as an additional language, where parents don't speak English or speak very little English. I don't know if they understand the process.

Lynette Lovell: How are you communicating currently with these parents? Do you have anybody translating?

Member of staff: We use Google Translate.

Lynette Lovell: Some schools with more EAL pupils have LSAs that can speak the other language, which is working well. I'm wondering if we can ask one of those teaching assistants to come and speak to the parents to help them understand. I'm just wondering what you do normally at school?

Member of staff: We're trying to explain it's not definite that the school will close and the pupils will have to move. However even trying to explain this is difficult.

Lynette Lovell: Welshpool Church in Wales for example have got a number of pupils, and they have teaching assistants, who are Ukrainian, Polish etc. I think with Teams we could see if we could arrange some kind of meeting.

Member of staff: What happens if the decision is made and the children that are already here frantically leave because they want to make sure they get a place in their year group in February? And we end up with hardly any children again. Would the closure be brought forward?

Marianne Evans: No, we would have to stick with the proposed date regardless of how many pupils would be left in school should pupils leave.

Member of staff: Another thing with parents is that they would like to be able to 'book a space', so to speak, in a different school for September, because they don't want to dump us now and leave us in the lurch.

Member of staff: Obviously numbers are quite restricted in other schools. They said they don't want to leave us and be like the parents that have already done that. But they don't want to lose their chance to secure a place in the school they choose.

Marianne Evans: I don't think there's a way around it actually, until the decision is made.

Member of staff: That should be allowed. There are extenuating circumstances, surely.

Sarah Astley: We can look into whether or not anything would be possible.

Marianne Evans: Once the final decision is made, should we get to that point, then admissions officers and officers dealing with home to school transport could come to meet with parents and do an information sharing session. But we wouldn't be able to do that until after a final decision. That used to happen, but hasn't happened recently, however it is something we need to bring back.

Member of staff: At parents evening I felt this huge sense of guilt and responsibility that these parents are really struggling with this, their children are really going to struggle with it, and I've got no answers for them.

Marianne Evans: We'll see if we can get information to you about the closest schools, what the current situation is in terms of capacity, and if they are eligible for transport.

Member of staff: Some families might decide to move from the area.

Marianne Evans: To finish the meeting, we'll just recap on how to respond and timescales. The minutes will then come out to you, and you can share them with the staff who have been unable to attend this evening. We would also encourage you to respond to the consultation.

Member of staff: What about all the resources that are in the school? A lot of them have been brought by parents and children. Or even given by the local community. Are we able to make a decision about where some of that's able to go? Could we donate to the village hall where the children in the community will still benefit from things that have been here.

Sarah Astley: If it belongs to the school, it's part of the school. In these kinds of situation, there's a process we go through to redistribute equipment. We try and redistribute as much as we can, in many cases resources go with pupils, they follow

the pupils to the schools they transfer to. That's generally the starting point, but if there's anything specific, then we can look at that at the time, if we get there, and work with you to do what we can.

We do what we can to redistribute as much as we can, whether to other schools or the local community. In many cases a lot of the resources do follow the children wherever they've gone, and normally the first opportunity for resources is given to the schools the children have gone to, so it would be those nearby schools initially.

Marianne Evans: The other thing is the packing up and all of that would happen after the school is closed, should the decision be to close. There wouldn't be a situation where you would need to pack up before the end of the summer term.

Sarah Astley: In the past the approach was to get everything cleared by the end of term, which was difficult for everybody. We've moved away from that now. Normally we ask the school to deal with personal information, archiving of personal information and that sort of thing.

Member of staff: Would there be some support with that, as current staff wouldn't have the time to do this?

Sarah Astley: Yes, we'd fund additional hours if that would work here. However, there are a number of different ways we've done it and again, if we get there, we'll talk about it at that time.

Apart from the archiving, we generally wait until the following term, the September, to redistribute other resources, so that things stay as normal as possible for pupils and for you as staff.

Marianne Evans: Thank you for your time this evening. Just to reiterate, you can respond to the consultation by emailing us, filling in the form or writing to us. It's important that we hear everybody's views, so please send them through before the 7th December.

Consultation meeting with Governors of Irfon Valley CP School

23 November 2023

Present:

Staff:

Rhoanne Clark, Executive Head Teacher
Clare Anthony, Assistant Head / Class Teacher / Teacher Governor
Nina Davies, Chair of Governors and LEA Governor
Sophie Tranter, Parent Governor
Darren Hartley, Parent Governor and Vice Chair
Claire Jones, Clerk

Officers:

Lynette Lovell, Director of Education and Children
Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation
Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education
Amy Radford, Transforming Education Programme Officer
Mari Thomas, Finance Business Partner (on Teams)

Lynette Lovell welcomed everyone to the meeting. She explained that a meeting had already taken place with staff, during which the arrangements for consulting with pupils had been discussed. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Lynette Lovell explained that there would be a brief presentation, followed by an opportunity for discussion, comments, and questions to the officers. Sarah Astley explained that the meeting would be recorded for minuting purposes but the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been typed up and agreed.

Sarah Astley gave a Powerpoint presentation which outlined the background to the current proposal and explained that in October 2023, Powys County Council's Cabinet gave approval to proceed with a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The consultation commenced on the 26th October 2023 and will continue until the 7th December 2023.

The proposal is:

- To close Irfon Valley CP School from the 31st August 2024 with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative school.

Following the presentation, governors were given the opportunity to ask any questions or to make any comments in relation to the matter.

Governor: On the timelines, you say that you expect the Consultation Report is to be considered in February. In your experience do they usually go back on time or do you ever move it forward? I'm just mindful that there isn't much time between the

expected final decision date and the proposed closure date. Is there a chance that it would be considered sooner?

Sarah Astley: It depends on the level of response. Often if there's less responses that we expected when we started to work through the timeline, we can bring the report back quicker. However, in some situations we've had many more responses than we had anticipated, in which case it takes longer. I don't think we can say one way or another until we've got to the end of the consultation.

This came up with staff as well, they wanted some certainty about the way forward. We did assure them that we would do all we could to take the process forward as quickly as we could to minimise the uncertainty.

Governor: With the size of the school relative to others, it's likely that there will be a lower level of responses.

Sarah Astley: We've had about 18 responses to the online questionnaire so far. But we do often see a bit of a flurry towards the end of a consultation period, so until we get to that 7th December we won't really know.

Chair: Can I ask why there isn't a meeting offered with parents and members of the community?

Marianne Evans: We haven't been holding public meetings or meetings with parents as part of school consultations for a number of years now. We meet with governing bodies which include parent representatives, we meet with staff and we meet with pupils. We've had legal challenges previously, so this approach has been tested. In previous consultations the fact that we didn't have public meetings or meetings with parents didn't stop parents or anybody in the community from responding in their hundreds to the consultation. This is the approach we've taken for a number of years.

Chair: Is that a Powys approach or a Welsh Government approach? It is in line with, or contrary to the statutory expectations?

Marianne Evans: This is a Powys approach, however it's in-line with the expectations. Other authorities do the same, some don't have public meetings, some do. We did have public meetings in the past, and their effectiveness could be questioned in terms of how effective they were for the public or parents, and how effective it was for the authority. We haven't found any issues by not having consultation meetings because the information still comes through to us.

Chair: I think it's not about whether it works for you. I'm thinking about whether it works for parents and members of the community.

As a governing body, we are concerned about the consultation with pupils. I think it would be helpful if you could fill us in with the discussion that's happened with staff and where you are with that.

Lynette Lovell: In the staff meeting earlier some concerns were expressed around the effect discussing the issues would have on some of the learners. We asked them to suggest the best way of doing this.

For me, the staff here, teachers, teaching assistants know the children best. So we're looking to work with the school so that they can facilitate consultation with pupils in the way they think is best. We do want to hear from the pupils, so we're going to provide the staff with the questions Marianne and Sarah normally ask when they speak to pupils, so that they can choose what they think is right to ask the children, then they can provide the information to us. So we won't come in to speak to the children as we normally do. We'll work with the school, so that the school can facilitate this and provide us with the feedback.

Chair: So, there wouldn't be anybody from the team coming in? It would just be the members of staff known to the pupils who would be asking the questions?

Marianne Evans: Yes.

Governor: I still think we'd have to offer that opt out clause because some parents might not want their children to be involved.

Vice Chair: I have concerns about the impact on pupils who are already upset about the school possibly closing. I'd be concerned about a stranger coming in to ask them about this, and I would question the utility of that approach, particularly for very young children. Perhaps it's different for older children, but realistically what we've gained? 'Do you like your school?' Yes. 'Do you like your teachers?' Yes. 'Do you want the school to close?' No. What do you get out of that? You're not going to get any meaningful feedback. And I know there was some suggestion of older children being involved, but actually 5 out of the 7 are about to leave to go to high school anyway and will not be impacted.

Marianne Evans: That's what we heard at the staff meeting. It's raising the anxiety levels of the children who are already anxious. The School Organisation Code does require us to consult with pupils, and says that governors should help facilitate this. We have issued published information for pupils and think it's really important to hear the pupil voice. But as you say, how relevant would that be?

Sarah Astley: There are different ways of pupils providing feedback. Speaking with them is one way, it could be in writing, it could be drawings. We've had a variety of different things that have been submitted in the past. Whatever you, as a governing body and staff think is appropriate and would work here, then we're happy to work with you on this.

Lynette Lovell: And there isn't a problem at all with anybody wanting to opt out. There's not a problem with that at all.

Chair: Thank you for that. That's really important isn't it? As a governing body it's one of our agreed principles, to make sure we do all we can to work with the staff to minimise the impact on the children throughout this consultation and any potential future process regarding the school. That's our priority.

Marianne Evans: We discussed pupil wellbeing in the meeting with staff, but also staff wellbeing, and there are a few things we can offer to help with this.

Lynette Lovell: In terms of pupil wellbeing first. We do have a team of educational psychologists who can support. However, for me the best people to be with the children and young people are the staff here who they know and trust.

But we need to make sure the staff wellbeing is catered for, so that they are able to work with the children as we move through this process. In terms of staff wellbeing, we have an ex-headteacher who is independent of the local authority that we employ to come in and work with schools if they are going through transformation, to work on wellbeing, have conversations with staff. She herself has been through a transformation process, so has a full understanding of what it is, what it means and has that independent voice. She's available and has been in touch with the school, and would be available as much as the school wants or as little.

We've also got HR support. Sharon Nicholls was here for the staff meeting and she's going to make herself available. She shared general information with the staff today, we don't have the detail yet as the decision hasn't been made, it will be up to Cabinet. But whatever decision Cabinet makes, if it's to close the school, then Sharon will work with individual staff, teachers, etc on a one-to-one basis to provide that support for them, which includes wellbeing but also looking, with them, around options etc moving forward. There will be a full suite of support and also we have an employee assistance programme called Viv Up to support staff and wellbeing.

So that's a suite of support that we have available for staff as they go through the process, before the decision is made. The consultation process is difficult, we know that, but support is available.

Chair: Thank you. I think that's really important and appreciated. Support for staff was one of the next points on my list, because obviously it's a very anxious time for everybody, and it's very important that they all have the chance to discuss what it means for them individually – what the process will be, what the timescales will be, and just having the chance to ask those questions, get that clarity so they can understand what's going to happen as well as when.

Governor: And for them to start doing it now. Sharon mentioned she could start the “what if” conversations so that they can plan ahead.

Chair: Thank you.

Lynette Lovell: In the staff meeting, Sharon was here from HR. Whatever the decision from Cabinet, if it is to close the school then in terms of staffing there are processes and timescales to follow as well, and different arrangements that have been made. Depending on the timing of when decisions are made, we have had situations where teachers and staff have been employed for an extra term until Christmas, still working in the local authority. So all of that would be worked through whatever the decision is by Cabinet.

Chair: Does anybody have any more on the consultation process? I think we’ve discussed it at length and we know what will happen and when and everything.

I just want it noted that this is a really good school. It’s a really supportive, loving school that really nurtures our young people and our pupils and our children, with excellent educational attainment and everything.

For me one of the disappointing things at the start of this process was a little bit of miscommunication, and I want it to be made really clear that this potential closure is not about any poor attainment or delivery of education by this school or this set of staff. I’d also like to note as Chair of Governors what an excellent team we have here of teaching staff and non-teaching staff. The whole team is really fantastic at this school.

But I do have to note how sad it has been over the last few months to see the numbers plummet in the school. I think we’re at 18 now, and that’s been really hard as a governor, and the implications of that have been hard for us as a school financially, with moving to one class. As a governor that’s not what we want to see for our school. I don’t know how to express it really, but it’s just really sad because this is such a lovely community school which has delivered fantastic outcomes for our young people and the community. It’s just really sad to be in this position.

Vice Chair: There is a big loss for the community, not just for now, but for generations to come that there won’t be school provision if the outcome of the consultation is as recommended.

Lynette Lovell: It’s really important to say that. Earlier the staff mentioned 3 inspections and they’ve all been good, and that’s important to note. I totally understand that for you as a school going through this consultation process is difficult and expressing the sadness is absolutely pertinent, because it’s not an easy process, we totally understand that. It’s really important to recognise the work the school has done. It’s up to Cabinet to make decisions about the school’s future. You mentioned the numbers, that is a key factor, at one point the school had 100 pupils.

But across the whole of Powys we're seeing numbers in schools going down, it isn't just this school. There are other schools where numbers are reducing, and we have to look at it across the board as Estyn said in 2019. We appreciate how difficult it is for you as governors and staff, but we will do everything as a local authority to be there to support and take you through the process. And then it's up to the Cabinet whatever decision they make based on what comes in through the consultation.

Chair: Could I also say a real massive thank you to the staff again, teaching and non-teaching, because throughout all of this, and it's a massively anxious and unsettling time for the staff, but they are not letting that affect what they're doing, the job they're delivering, the care they're giving to our children and young people, and all credit to them because it's fantastic to be working like that through such an unsettling and really difficult time. I'd just like to register my personal, and on behalf of all the governors, our absolute thanks and acknowledgement of that.

Marianne Evans: I think we recognise that as well. And in the conversations we had with staff earlier, you could really see how much they all cared for the school and the children and our duty is to support you throughout this process and get to that position.

Vice Chair: Could I make a request in terms of the communication in the future, that they could have a degree of honesty? All these things about 'oh we have to think about the education of the children and the best interests of the children'. Actually let's be frank about it, it's a reduction in school numbers and it's just not feasible to be able to do it financially, to maintain a school with 18 pupils. It's not a message that people can't buy into. You've got 18 pupils in the school, you can't sustain the size of the school with that number of pupils. But then to say it's all about their educational interests, well actually, especially for the kids already in the school who are going to have to change. It probably isn't in their educational interests. There's a lot of political rhetoric about trying to pre-empt and be defensive about adverse criticism. I don't know what you can do, but it's a request for a degree of additional honesty in the communications in the future.

Governor: I don't think the press releases helped. It was very upsetting for the staff that the provision of education could be better somewhere else with better opportunities. There are really good opportunities here. They do have a good education. And many people have said to me, oh gosh, we've seen your Facebook page. You do so much stuff in Irfon Valley. And sometimes in smaller schools you can provide those learning opportunities and those experiences better than you can in a big school.

Governor: This was fully recognised in the Estyn report too.

Governor: Staff know every single individual pupil and that counts for an awful lot.

Governor: It might be a wake-up call for other schools. If they start seeing their numbers drop, what can they do to stop it? There's fantastic education.

Marianne Evans: I agree with you. The strapline from the strategy has always been to improve learner entitlement and experience. Fine. But actually the issue is financial sustainability and educational sustainability and people can understand that argument, can't they?

Governor: We thought it was excellent at Irfon Valley. That's why we sent our children there and, lo and behold, it's actually they'll get a better education elsewhere if they go elsewhere. For the staff, it really impacted on us.

Vice Chair: I've had feedback from parents who have taken their kids out of the school and the message is the education is not quite as good elsewhere, they felt their child was ahead of the children in the other schools, but they do have an after-school club or whatever.

Marianne Evans: We'll take that on board, it's something about the messaging, and getting that messaging right on a political level as well.

Governor: It did initially make staff feel like they had failed. And we hadn't. We had a fantastic Estyn report and look at our children, see how happy the children we have got left here, how well they are doing.

Governor: And since then, as we know, our school improvement adviser comes in every term and every term we have good feedback in those termly reports, even since then, subsequently.

Marianne Evans: We'll definitely take that on board.

Governor: I'd like to say that I didn't feel the consultation document produced reflected the positives of the school. It felt like it was pushing a narrative of 'larger schools are better'. I personally don't agree with that narrative. I was in a large primary school and transferred to a very small secondary school in the private sector and I would say that was beneficial. Obviously the private sector is built on small class sizes. That's how that whole system is built. And I don't think Powys recognise the value of any small school. I think that's been a real shame.

Marianne Evans: Within the consultation document, we're required to address a number of different elements, we're required to provide that sort of response. We work with a number of colleagues on these, the school improvement team, the ALN team, finance, HR. There are a lot of people who contribute to the documents. We rely on the views of those professionals in terms of what goes in those consultation documents. Everybody has different experiences of schools and we have excellent small schools, we have excellent large schools. We have less excellent small

schools and less excellent large schools, and the mix in the middle as well. We are not saying that small schools are not delivering a good education.

Governor: Research proves that small schools deliver, in some ways, better than large schools. There's evidence and research out in the public domain that pushes that small schools are perhaps better than large schools for various different reasons. I don't feel like that's being addressed.

Lynette Lovell: That is certainly something that could come in as part of the consultation for us to address. Any question that's asked will need to be responded to. As Marianne said, it varies. You have some larger schools where provision is really good and some small ones are good. However when the numbers are getting lower it becomes more difficult to sustain because of the level of staffing that's required, even for things like safeguarding, you need certain numbers of staffing for various things. And also for headteachers, the workload, the new ALN Act, all of that is quite challenging. Having the staffing numbers to be able to deliver is really important as well. So when the numbers are going quite low, it becomes more of a challenge in terms of workload for staff. That isn't saying anything about the standards, but it does become more difficult the lower the numbers get.

Chair: I understand the feasibility of a school with 18 pupils is difficult obviously. But it doesn't devalue from that quality of education they receive, whether there's 18 or 28.

Marianne Evans: When numbers drop, small schools can become very vulnerable to a staff member being off sick or to cleaners not being in. There are all kinds of things. There is a school that hasn't been able to open for a day because they couldn't staff. You get below a threshold and then it gets really challenging.

Governor: I've been a governor here now for quite a few years and have seen as the numbers have shrunk, the workload on the staff and the head and the teachers is just huge. That is going up and up and up, the ask, the demands, the expectations. And if we were to remain open, going down to a one class school next year, that would be so difficult for staff because, like you said, that resilience isn't there. Because all of those things need to be done, whether you've got one pupil or 100. You're absolutely right in terms of pupils and education and everything but the ask on the staff in very small schools is, for me, really, really unacceptable at times.

Governor: I don't think that's something that the wider public understand. They think that if you've got one pupil to look after you've got one workload. But actually whether you've got one pupil or 10 pupils, the workload is still massive. I don't think the wider public understand that and I've heard comments off the public about it. They've still got to do a certain amount. It doesn't matter how many children there are, there's a certain amount of work however many children there are to a certain extent.

Governor: There's the challenge of Estyn still coming in and wanting to see the books, scrutiny, the monitoring the governors are doing which is expected throughout the year. And the policies. There are still the same amount of policies!

Marianne Evans: One of the other things staff brought up is concerns from parents about where children would go should the school close – is there a place available in alternative schools and what is the transport policy. We've agreed to try to share information about which is the closest school for the children remaining here, and what that looks like in terms of admissions.

Chair: Will that be provided before the end of the consultation?

Marianne Evans: We'll try and get this to you before the end of the consultation.

Chair: That would be really helpful because as a parent, it's where your mind jumps to.

Marianne Evans: Especially as this proposal is to close and pupils to transfer to their closest school. In other cases we've named a receiving school and that's different.

Vice Chair: I had a specific question about that, so it's probably timely. The proposal says the nearest alternative school, so I guess the question is, if the school closes, would there be a degree of parental choice, or parental choice subject to availability? I appreciate that two of the schools are probably at full capacity and there are two schools which are not. But at the moment, you have to go to the nearest one. As a parent, when I was choosing which school we go to, we had a choice. So actually you have choice when you go in and then these events happen and then there isn't choice. So we're disadvantaged through the process.

Sarah Astley: In terms of the practicalities, the wording in the proposal is the nearest alternative school, but in practice parents would choose whichever school they wanted to apply for a place at, and then that would be dealt with through the admissions arrangements. Transport is the issue, isn't it, because the transport entitlement would be to the nearest school.

Vice Chair: But it wouldn't necessarily, that's why I'm saying this, because transport only to your nearest school would have been the policy anyway. So when I was choosing the school my child went to, I knew if I chose the school that wasn't the nearest, I wouldn't get transport, but I chose to make that decision. So if the school that is the nearest available one is made unavailable to you, there is a separate issue about whether places are available and the process through which is followed to that. As I understand the applications policy is that you would do that two terms in advance to choose your school. But that's not going to happen. So anybody else who's applying or moving will have been able to go through that process and make an application and maybe secure a place, if there was a place in that year, whereas

our children won't be able to do that because we're going to be too late in the process so we'll be at the back of the queue. There is a question as to whether there are going to be places that would be made available to facilitate parent choice? The alternative is I could say, actually I'll ring the school up now and they've got a place now. So we'll move the child now.

Sarah Astley: Yes, this did come up in the staff meetings too, the same points around booking places.

Marianne Evans: The process would be an in-year transfer, which you make any time to any school and if there's a place then you get allocated the place. There is a slight disconnect between this process and the admissions process. And what we are trying to do is make sure they are better aligned. We're a bit out of sync with the timings of both. And the other thing is parents can choose. Parental preference is still a right. Maybe we need to make that clearer in our consultation documents, rather than parents thinking, oh, we're forced to go to that school because that's my closest school. Maybe we need to look at the wording.

Sarah Astley: Even when there is a named receiving school, it doesn't follow that all pupils will go there. There's still the option. Parents can still choose to apply for a place in a different school.

Marianne Evans: In some schools, some of the year groups are over their admissions number. But there's an exception clause in the Admissions Code which means that exceptional circumstances. We believe that if the Council is proposing to close a school then we must make sure there are no barriers to parents being able to access a place at a receiving school.

Chair: You could give an assurance that our parents could pick any of the schools and you will find them spaces in those schools even if they're oversubscribed in the exceptional rules circumstance.

Marianne Evans: They would have to go through the admissions process, which is a separate process, so there are no guarantees. But what we are saying, and we're making clear to the admissions team, is that there is a clause that can be used.

Chair: That feels like the least you could do, to be honest.

Vice Chair: If there is going to be some communication about the nearest schools, it would be good if there was an explanation that this is the transport policy, and something about the interplay with the admissions policy. As far as I see, the admissions policy is we have to do by the end of term if we want to try and secure a place.

Lynette Lovell: Yes we do need to do some work around all of that because the admissions code and the transformation process are not speaking to each other and

we need to follow both. We do need to make that representation to Welsh Government as well, and we need to work with you to ensure it's the best for the learners. The exceptional circumstances clause in the admissions code, we would need to seek legal advice on this. We've used this in one instance where we have had to have it all written out as to why we think these are exceptional circumstances. That is something we will definitely take away tonight and have a look with our monitoring officer around how we can work to try and bring that alignment. They really are not speaking to each other at the moment, which isn't helpful. There are processes we have to follow by law, and our process of transformation has been tested in the court five or six times so we know that that's right. In terms of admissions we have to follow the guidance there but using that exceptional circumstances we can be taken to court over that too. We've done it in one instance, and it is something we would have to, as a local authority, be able to defend. It's something definitely that we will take away.

Governor: My concern practically on that matter would be, if hypothetically parents decided to try and keep 4-5 children together to make the move easier, as parents if we group together and all move our children to this school then we would all try and choose that school and then, some may not be eligible, or not eligible for transport, or there's only three spaces and you want four. Then the purpose of moving them together would be completely eradicated.

Governor: That's how it would play out practically. It's alright talking about in court, but let's be realistic in a 5-year-old sense. How it plays out for a 5-year-old is different to how it plays out in a court.

Mariane Evans: Do you think that would happen? Is there a feeling that the remaining pupils would want to go together if the school closed?

Governor: There's some parents that would. I don't want to talk on behalf of every parent here, because I wouldn't like to assume, but I've been talking with other parents about if we could keep the children together in their friendship groups, it would ease the anxiety of their moving. But I wouldn't want to think, right, we've all made this big decision for our children and then, when it comes down to it, because of the admissions policy, or you can't get transport, oh actually I don't want to drive my child to that school because it's not our nearest school. Oh, there's only space for three and there's four of you that want to go there. Actually, practically it wouldn't work.

Lynette Lovell: And that's a separate policy again.

Governor: How do we make it coherent?

Chair: Are there exemptions within the transport policy because, again, I feel closing a school, keeping pupils together to aid and assist with the transition, for me feels relevant. Is there an exclusion within there?

Sarah Astley: There's an appeal process.

Governor: It just feels like, why should they appeal? Why should parents battle for something that somebody else has forced on us? That wasn't our choice.

Marianne Evans: In the past, in specific circumstances, we have made special transport arrangements for pupils if a school is closing due to specific circumstances. If this goes forward then we would do that via the statutory notice. We can look at this, but we won't be able to look at that in detail until we know the decision. But it's definitely something we can do, based on what comes through during the consultation.

Lynette Lovell: In one recent situation pupils from a school that closed moved to another school en bloc. There was really good transition work going on once the decision had been made. But we haven't got a decision and whatever decision Cabinet make, if they do make the decision to close, then the admissions team will look at those children and work with the school to try and get them to be altogether somewhere if that's what they want. There may be schools around this area where they could all go en bloc. Certainly we were successful for the other school and that was something that came through in the consultation, that they wanted the children to be together going forward. We were able to work that one through and transition was good. It was a bigger group of pupils than we are talking about here, and they did all go and the transition was really successful.

Chair: If the decision is made, do we have another meeting with you after that? Because I think that for us as a governing body we would be really keen to make sure that it's as smooth and stressless as possible. I think it would be really important for us to make sure we're doing all we can to support our pupils and our staff.

Sarah Astley: We don't normally, but we could.

Marianne Evans: The other part as well once a final decision is made is that we ask the admissions team and the transport team to come and meet parents. That used to happen in the past but hasn't happened more recently – we hit the pandemic so we couldn't have those meetings, but I think this needs to happen. Once a decision is made, as soon as possible the admissions officer and transport officers would meet with parents, discuss individual circumstances and explain what they need to do etc.

Governor: That's really important. I've tried to go on the Powys Council website and find various things and I've just not been able to find a thing, to be really honest with you. I've just struggled to find anything, so a face-to-face conversation is probably quite valuable to parents. To discuss options, not just read a policy that there's this exception or that exception.

Sarah Astley: And everyone's situation is different of course. The admissions arrangements is the first part, and then when we know where pupils are going, the transition arrangements can be looked at.

Marianne Evans: With staff we also discussed what would happen to equipment currently in the school. If it gets to that position and the school is closing then there's a separate process again and Sarah will explain this to you.

Sarah Astley: We try and leave things as normal as they are. If the school is going to close we would leave things until the end of term, whereas in the past there was a push to clear everything from schools before the end of July which was difficult for everybody. And then there's a process of redistributing resources. We try and redistribute as much as we can. Normally we try and ensure that resources go with the pupils as much as possible, so we work with the schools that the pupils transfer to initially. There were some questions earlier about specific things that had been bought through fundraising and we can work with you as a community if and when we get to that stage to see what we can do with those items. But in general we try and redistribute as much as we can. The first choice goes to the schools that the pupils transfer to, so we do try and keep things with the pupils.

Chair: I think it's important to say I don't want any other schools coming in this year, when pupils are still here. We would refuse to allow this.

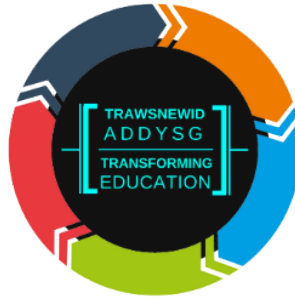
Sarah Astley: Generally we leave that until the September. We ask the school to deal with personal information, archiving, that sort of thing – generally the school deals with that part of it, and there's additional funding we can provide for additional hours to do this, or there are different ways that that's happened in different situations. But again, if we get there, in terms of the resources and so on, we generally leave that until the autumn term.

Governor: Our financial position is such that we have almost run out of money. Even if we keep to a budget on everything, by the end of August, if there are any unexpected costs we have to cover, our budget would go under. So I guess the question is if we maintain a dialogue with you, if any of those events do arise, is there a mechanism through which there might be additional support as part of that process?

Mari Thomas: Certainly we would be more than happy to have an open dialogue with you and be as supportive as we can around that. In terms of additional support that's something we need to discuss with Marianne and Sarah, as the budget holders on the transformation side. So it would all need to be tied up with some of the earlier discussions that you were having around other areas for potential financial support. And we need to consider each request on its own merits really. But yes, more than happy to have that open dialogue with you and we appreciate the way that you are working with us at the moment in terms of trying to manage that budget as well. I know it's a really difficult position to have been in.

Lynette Lovell: It seems like we are coming to the end of the questions. If you do have any other queries, you can always contact us after the meeting tonight and at any point. The consultation will also be open until the 7th December as explained earlier. Thank you for your time and for coming in tonight to meet with us. It's really beneficial for us to be here. We realise how difficult this is for everybody but we do appreciate you coming to meet with us.

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Proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School

Updated Impact Assessments

January 2024



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Proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School

Draft Impact Assessments

1. Introduction

Powys County Council has consulted on a proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal is as follows:

- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools

In line with the Council's policy, an Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out which incorporates the Welsh Language, Equalities, Well-being of Future Generations Act, Sustainable Development Principles, Communication and Engagement, Safeguarding, Corporate Parenting, Community Cohesion and Risk Management.

In addition, the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018) requires local authorities to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment and Community Impact Assessment in relation to all school reorganisation proposals. For proposals which affect teaching through the medium of Welsh, local authorities are also required to carry out a Welsh Language Impact Assessment.

These impact assessments have been updated following the consultation period, and are provided in this document. The Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out based on the latest PLASC information available. The Community Impact Assessment has been carried out with input from the school.

The impact assessments have been updated to incorporate any issues raised during the consultation period. The updated versions, presented here, will be considered by the council's Cabinet when determining how to proceed in relation to this proposal.

2. Integrated Impact Assessment

The Impact Assessment (IA) below incorporates Welsh Language, Equalities, Well-being of Future Generations Act, Sustainable Development Principles, Communication and Engagement, Safeguarding, Corporate Parenting, Community Cohesion and Risk Management, supporting effective decision making and ensuring compliance with respective legislation.

Proposal	Irfon Valley C.P. School Proposal
Outline Summary / Description of Proposal	
The Council has carried out consultation on the following proposal:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools. 	

3. Consultation requirements

Consultation Requirement	Consultation deadline/or justification for no consultation
Public consultation required	Consultation in accordance with the School Organisation Code was conducted from the 26 th of October 2023 to the 7 th of December 2023.

4. Impact on Other Service Areas

Does the proposal have potential to impact on another service area? (Have you considered the implications on Health & Safety and Corporate Parenting?) PLEASE ENSURE YOU INFORM / ENGAGE ANY AFFECTED SERVICE AREAS AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY					
Adult Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Education	✓	Legal and Democratic Services	✓
Children's Services	✓	Finance	✓	Property, Planning and Public Protection	✓
Commissioning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Highways, Transportation and Recycling	✓	Transformation and Communications	✓
Digital Services	✓	Housing and Community Development	✓	Workforce and OD	✓

Data Protection Impact Assessment

Will the proposal involve processing the personal details of individuals? Yes ✓ No

Is Powys County Council the data controller? Yes ✓ No

Personal details will be processed in accordance with the Transforming Education Privacy Notice.

4a Geographical Locations

What geographical area(s) will be impacted by the proposal? (Chose all those applicable)			
Powys	<input type="checkbox"/>	Brecon	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Builth and Llanwrtyd	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
North	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crickhowell	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mid	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hay and Talgarth	<input type="checkbox"/>
South	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knighton and Presteigne	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Llandrindod and Rhayader	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Llanfair Caereinion	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Llanfyllin	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Llanidloes	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Machynlleth	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Newtown	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Welshpool and Montgomery	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Ystradgynlais	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. How does your proposal impact on the Welsh Government's well-being goals?

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<p>A prosperous Wales: An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.</p>	<p>As part of the Council’s Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys, this proposal represents an effort to ‘reconfigure and rationalise primary provision.’ Implementation of this proposal would positively contribute to a Powys that uses resources efficiently, and which produces a skilled and well-educated population.</p>	<p>Good</p>		<p>Choose an item.</p>
<p>A resilient Wales: A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).</p>	<p>Implementation of the proposal would require additional travel for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School for whom this is their closest school. This would have a negative environmental impact as more home to school transport would need to be provided to transport pupils to their nearest alternative school.</p> <p>Implementation of the proposal would mean that the Council would no longer need to run the Irfon Valley school site. This would result in a reduction in the use of heating and electricity amongst other factors.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>		<p>Choose an item.</p>

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<p>A healthier Wales: A society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.</p> <p>Public Health (Wales) Act, 2017: Part 6 of the Act requires for public bodies to undertake a health impact assessment to assess the likely effect of a proposed action or decision on the physical or mental health of the people of Wales.</p>	<p>Implementation of the proposal would result in closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School, with pupils transferring to their nearest alternative schools. It is acknowledged that this could have a negative impact on the mental well-being of pupils, staff, and other stakeholders associated with the school during the transition period, however the long-term aim is to provide improved learning opportunities for all learners.</p> <p>Comments received during the consultation period noted that the transition period is likely to be especially difficult for ALN/EAL learners, who are likely to need additional support.</p>	<p>Poor</p>	<p>Support would be provided to pupils during the transition period to enable them to transfer effectively to their new schools. The council recognises that some learners are likely to require additional support. Powys County Council has a strong track record of supporting schools to deliver high quality ALN provision, and this will continue throughout the transition periods for pupils of Irfon Valley C.P. School should the school close.</p> <p>The process is to be concluded as quickly as possible to minimise the period of uncertainty for pupils, staff, and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<p>A Wales of cohesive communities: Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected Communities.</p>	<p>There would be a significant impact on the community of Garth, as there would no longer be provision in the village, and therefore there could be a potential loss of community facilities associated with the school.</p> <p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, it is acknowledged that this could impact on pupils' ability to access after school activities. There would also be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities / events.</p> <p>A separate community impact assessment has been carried out which includes input from the school. This has been updated following the consultation period.</p> <p>Comments received during the consultation period have emphasised the importance of Irfon Valley C.P. School within the Garth community.</p>	<p>Very Poor</p>	<p>There is a village hall in Garth, which would continue to be available for community activities should the school close.</p>	<p>Very Poor</p>

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<p>A globally responsible Wales: A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.</p> <p>Human Rights - is about being proactive (see guidance)</p> <p>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: The Convention gives rights to everyone under the age of 18, which include the right to be treated fairly and to be protected from discrimination; that organisations act for the best interest of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right to be heard.</p>	<p>The aim of implementing the proposal is to provide the best possible opportunities to learners, enabling them to reach their full potential.</p> <p>Consultation will be carried out on the proposal, which will include consultation with affected pupils, ensuring that all those affected by the plans would have the opportunity to give their views.</p>	Neutral		Choose an item.
<p>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language: A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation. <i>Incorporating requirements under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards</i></p>				

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<i>Opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, and treating the Welsh language no less favourable than the English language</i>	<p>Irfon Valley C.P. School is an English-medium school, therefore it is not anticipated that implementation of the proposal would impact on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, or on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.</p> <p>Should the proposal be implemented, pupils could choose to transfer to Builth Wells C.P. School, which is a dual stream school. This would provide an opportunity for pupils to choose Welsh-medium education and become bilingual, being fluent in Welsh and English.</p>	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Opportunities to promote the Welsh language</i>	<p>Irfon Valley C.P. School and is an English-medium school, therefore it is not anticipated that implementation of the proposal would impact on opportunities to promote the Welsh language.</p> <p>Should the proposal be implemented, pupils could choose to transfer to Builth Wells C.P. School, which is a dual stream school. This would provide an opportunity for pupils to choose Welsh-medium education and become bilingual, fluent in Welsh and English.</p>	Neutral		Choose an item.

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<i>People are encouraged to do sport, art and recreation.</i>	<p>Implementation of the proposal would lead to the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School, with pupils transferring to their nearest alternative schools. The alternative schools would be larger schools, which should be able to offer a greater range of sport, art, and recreation activities for pupils.</p> <p>Implementation of the proposal would also result in increasing pupil numbers at neighbouring schools, which should enable them to provide additional opportunities for pupils to take part in sport, art, and other extra-curricular activities.</p> <p>Comments received during the consultation period have indicated that Irfon Valley offered a broad range of extra-curricular activities. It has been emphasised that the school has worked hard to be inclusive of all pupils in these activities.</p>	<p>Good</p>		<p>Choose an item.</p>
A more equal Wales: A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances). Incorporating requirements under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and the Social Economic duty (2020).				
Age	<p>The proposal would impact on primary aged pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for all affected pupils.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>		<p>Choose an item.</p>
Disability	<p>The proposal would impact on any pupils with disabilities currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for all affected pupils, including any pupils with disabilities.</p>	<p>Neutral</p>		<p>Choose an item.</p>

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<i>Gender reassignment</i>	No impact.	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Marriage or civil partnership</i>	No impact.	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Race</i>	The proposal would impact on all primary aged pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, including pupils belonging to protected characteristic groups. The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for pupils, including those belonging to protected characteristic groups.	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Religion or belief</i>	Irfon Valley is not a church school. The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, regardless of their religion or belief.	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Sex</i>	The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School.	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, regardless of their sexual orientation.	Neutral		Choose an item.
<i>Pregnancy and Maternity</i>	No impact.	Neutral		Choose an item.

Well-being Goal	How does proposal contribute to this goal?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<i>Socio-economic duty</i>	<p>The aim of the proposal is to provide improved educational opportunities for all pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, including those eligible for Free School Meals. PLASC 2023 data indicated that 17.6% of pupils at the school were eligible for Free School Meals, so the proposal would impact on some pupils from lower income homes.</p> <p>Should the proposal be implemented, there would be no school in Garth. This would mean that pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School would need to travel to their nearest alternative schools. Whilst home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils, it is possible that this would impact on pupils' ability to access extra-curricular / after school activities, and that this impact would be greater in respect of pupils from lower income households. There would also be an impact on the parents of these pupils in terms of accessing school activities.</p>	Neutral		Choose an item.
Source of Outline Evidence to support judgements				
PLASC				

6. How does your proposal impact on the council's other key guiding principles?

Principle	How does the proposal impact on this principle?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
Sustainable Development Principle (5 ways of working)				

Principle	How does the proposal impact on this principle?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
Long Term: <i>Looking to the long term so that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.</i>	Pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School are low and are not expected to increase over the coming years. The aim of the proposal to close the school is to ensure the best possible opportunities for learners in the area now and in the future, and to ensure better strategic management of the Powys schools estate.	Good		Choose an item.
Collaboration: <i>Working with others in a collaborative way to find shared sustainable solutions.</i>	Full consultation has been carried out, which has enabled all interested parties to give their views. This has included an opportunity to suggest any alternative options for the school.	Neutral		Choose an item.
Involvement (including Communication and Engagement): <i>Involving a diversity of the population in the decisions that affect them including:</i> Unpaid Carers: <i>Ensuring that unpaid carers views are sought and taken into account</i>	Full consultation has been carried out in accordance with the School Organisation Code. This ensures that all interested parties have had an opportunity to give their views. The findings of this exercise will be reported to Cabinet and will be taken into consideration when determining how to proceed. This impact assessment has been updated throughout the process to reflect any feedback received. All stakeholders have had the opportunity to give their views as part of this process, this includes any unpaid carers in the area.	Good		Choose an item.

Principle	How does the proposal impact on this principle?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<p>Prevention: <i>Understanding the root causes of issues to prevent them from occurring including:</i></p> <p>Safeguarding: <i>Preventing and responding to abuse and neglect of children, young people and adults with health and social care needs who can't protect themselves.</i></p>	<p>The aim of the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School is to ensure the best possible opportunities for learners in the area now and in the future, and to ensure better strategic management of the Powys schools estate.</p> <p>Ensuring appropriate safeguarding arrangements is a key aspect of any school organisation proposal. The intention is that the proposal would maintain or improve the safeguarding arrangements for all pupils.</p>	Good		Choose an item.
<p>Integration: <i>Taking an integrated approach so that public bodies look at all the well-being goals in deciding on their well-being objectives.</i></p>	No impact.	Neutral		Choose an item.

Principle	How does the proposal impact on this principle?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
<p>Powys County Council Workforce: What Impact will this change have on the Workforce?</p>	<p>Implementation of the proposal would impact on all current staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School as there would no longer be a school in Garth, therefore staff would be subject to a Management of Change process.</p> <p>Full consultation has been carried out in accordance with the School Organisation Code. This process is supported by relevant LA teams (e.g. HR). The process has included consultation with staff, ensuring that they have had an opportunity to give their views.</p> <p>Comments received during the consultation period have indicated that staff may require some additional support. Additional support has been offered to school staff by Powys County Council's HR team.</p>	Poor		Poor
<p>Payroll: How will this impact salary, any overtime/enhanced payments etc? Does this affect any particular group of employees? E.g. Male/Female dominated workforce. Does this proposal comply with the Councils Single Status Terms and Conditions?</p>	<p>Implementation of the preferred way forward could impact on salary arrangements for current staff at Irfon Valley C.P. School.</p>	Neutral		Choose an item.
<p>Welsh Language impact on staff</p>	<p>Irfon Valley C.P. School is an English-medium school, therefore it is not anticipated that there would be a Welsh language impact on staff</p>	Neutral		Choose an item.

Principle	How does the proposal impact on this principle?	IMPACT Please select from drop down box below	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION Please select from drop down box below
Apprenticeships: Has consideration been given to whether this change impacts negatively, or positively on Apprenticeships within the service?	No impact	Neutral		Choose an item.
Source of Outline Evidence to support judgements				

7. What is the impact of this proposal on our communities?

Communities	How does the proposal impact on residents and community?	IMPACT See impact definitions in guidance document	What will be done to better contribute to a more positive impact or to mitigate any negative impacts?	IMPACT AFTER MITIGATION See impact definitions in guidance document	Source of Outline Evidence to support judgement

<p>Garth</p>	<p>There would be a significant impact on the community of Garth, as there would no longer be provision in the village, and therefore there could be a potential loss of community facilities associated with the school.</p> <p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, it is acknowledged that this could impact on pupils' ability to access after school activities. There would also be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities / events.</p> <p>A separate community impact assessment has been carried out which includes input from the school. This has been updated as required throughout the process.</p>	<p>Major</p>	<p>There is a village hall in Garth, which would be continue to be available for community activities should the school close.</p>	<p>Major</p>	
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9. What are the risks to service delivery or the council following implementation of this proposal?

Description of risks			
Risk Identified	Inherent Risk Rating Impact X Likelihood (See Risk Matrix in guidance document)	Mitigation	Residual Risk Rating Impact X Likelihood (See Risk Matrix in guidance document)
N/A			

10. Overall Summary and Judgement of this Impact Assessment?

Outline Assessment (to be inserted in cabinet report)**Cabinet Report Reference:**

The aim of the proposal is to improve the educational provision for learners, however the assessment has identified some negative aspects. These primarily relate to the impact on the local community due to loss of educational provision from the village, and the additional travel that would be required for pupils to attend alternative provision and their parents to access school activities.

11. Is there additional evidence to support the Impact Assessment (IA)?

What additional evidence and data has informed the development of your proposal?

Full consultation has been required to implement this proposal, and this has enabled the impact assessment to be further developed from its original draft form.

12. On-going monitoring arrangements?

What arrangements will be put in place to monitor the impact over time?

The Transforming Education Programme Board will continue to monitor impact over time.

Please state when this Impact Assessment will be reviewed.

The impact assessment will be reviewed at all stages of the development.

3. Equality Impact Assessment

Powys County Council

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)



Proposal	To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31 st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.
Service Area	Schools Service
Date of Assessment	October 2023, updated January 2024

The Equality Act 2010, requires that public sector organisations in the exercise of their functions, pay due regard to the following 'general duty':

- (a) Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;**
- (b) Advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;**
- (c) Fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.**

The protected characteristics include: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, sex and sexual orientation. This assessment also includes a consideration of impact upon people and communities whose language of choice is Welsh.

The specific regulations for Wales [Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011] require public sector bodies to monitor relevant policy and practises and then assess and report on the impact based upon an analysis of relevant data and evidence.

1. AIM or PURPOSE

In October 2023, the Council's Cabinet approved carrying out consultation on the following proposal:

- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools

This consultation has subsequently been carried out.

2. OBJECTIVES

Please state the current business objectives of the change proposal.

The Council is proposing to close Irfon Valley C.P. School for the following reasons:

- 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 compared with other options
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

3. BENEFITS and OUTCOMES

i) What are the intended benefits or outcomes from the change proposal?

The benefits of the proposal 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 compared with other options
- Opportunity for the Council to realise a capital receipt from sale of the school site

4. CORPORATE RELEVANCE

How does this change proposal relate to Corporate Improvement Plan?

The proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School is aligned to the Transforming Education Programme and forms part of the Transformation Portfolio, set up to support the priorities and objectives outlined in the Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan.

5. DATA USED

5.1. What data has been used to conduct this assessment?

Tick/shade boxes as appropriate.

Profiling of service users, providing a breakdown of who uses the service by the protected characteristics.	✓
Service user satisfaction rates, broken down by the protected characteristics.	
Qualitative data (analysed against the protected characteristics) which provides evidence about current services users experience accessing the service.	✓
Qualitative data gathered from those that are not currently using the service.	✓
Complaints monitoring against the protected characteristics.	
Wider research reports and findings.	
Relevant service-based Equality Impact Assessment.	

5.2. Are there any gaps in the data?

Yes No

Please state the gaps:

- None

How will the gaps be addressed going forward? N/A

6. DATA ANALYSIS

<p>6.1 Quantitative Summarise the key quantitative data analysis results, providing key headline statistics. Include data that relates to existing provision and also data relating to proposal. E.g. statistics generated from a consultation questionnaire.</p> <p>Key questions:</p> <p>i) Are certain groups currently underrepresented in service user figures? Will a change affect this?</p> <p>ii) How do satisfaction levels compare across the protected characteristic groups? How will a change affect this?</p>	<p><u>PLASC January 2023</u></p> <p>Based on the information provided in the school's PLASC return in January 2023, the following pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School belong to protected characteristic groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free school meals: 17.6% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals. - ALN: 18.6% of pupils have additional educational needs. Of these, 11.6% of pupils are on School Action, 4.7% of pupils are on School Action Plus, 0.0% of pupils have statements, 2.2% of pupils have IDPs issued by the School and 0.0 % of pupils have IDPs issued by the local authority. - Disabilities: 18.6% of pupils have additional learning needs. - English as an Additional Language: 5.3% of pupils with EAL. - Ethnicity: 84.2% of pupils that attend the school are White British, while 15.8% of pupils are of other known ethnicities. - Looked after Children: 0.0% of pupils are looked after. <p>This information shows that a small number of pupils that belong to a protected characteristic group will be affected by this proposal. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 17.6% of pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School are eligible for Free School Meals. This is lower than the Powys average for primary schools (18.8%). However, pupil numbers at Irfon Valley are low, so this percentage translates to a small number of pupils - 18.6% of pupils at Irfon Valley C.P. School have additional learning needs. This is slightly lower than the Powys average for primary schools (20.9%) <p>The proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School would impact on all pupils currently attending the school, including those pupils belonging to protected characteristic groups.</p>
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<p>6.2 Qualitative Summarise the key qualitative data analysis, providing key themes or patterns. Include data that relates to existing provision and also data relating to proposal. E.g. protected characteristics focus group on the proposal.</p> <p>Key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Do certain groups have a different service user experience? How will a change affect this? ii) Have any areas for improvement been communicated by particular groups? Will a change have an impact upon these views? iii) What are the reasons behind some groups not using the service? How will a change affect this position? iv) What has consultation on your proposals revealed about impact on the protected characteristics? 	<p>Full consultation has been carried out on the proposal relating to Irfon Valley C.P. School, including consultation with pupils at the affected schools. This has provided qualitative data in respect of the proposal, and information regarding any additional impact on pupils that belong to protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>Comments received during the course of the consultation indicated concern about the impact on pupils with additional learning needs that currently attend the school, and concern about English as additional language pupils that currently attend the school.</p>
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7. EqIA RESULT

Based on an analysis of the available qualitative and quantitative data, please tick/shade the appropriate box opposite to provide the EqIA assessment result.

<p>The proposal does not present any adverse impact on equality. [Proceed to question 10]</p>	
<p>The proposal presents some adverse impact on equality. [Proceed to question 8]</p>	✓

The proposal presents significant impact on equality

[Proceed to question 8]

8. AREAS for IMPROVEMENT

Please provide detail of weak or sensitive areas of the proposal identified by the assessment.

- i) Which protected characteristic groups are particularly affected?
- ii) Will people on low incomes be affected?
- iii) Will Welsh speakers be affected?

- i) The proposal will impact on pupils that are members of protected characteristic groups. The proportion of pupils with ALN is higher than the Powys average. In addition, some EAL pupils attend the school.
- ii) The proportion of pupils that qualify for Free School Meals is also higher than the Powys average.
- iii) Irfon Valley C.P. School is an English medium school – therefore the proposal will not directly affect Welsh speakers.

9. EQUALITY IMPROVEMENT

9.1 Having identified problematic aspects to the proposal, how will this now be addressed?

i.e. Are you able to involve (in some capacity) people from protected characteristic groups, Welsh Speakers, people on low incomes, to assist you in this process?

- i) Can the impact be mitigated, and how will this be done?
- ii) Does the proposal require modification to reduce or remove this impact?

Should the proposal be implemented, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would attend their nearest alternative schools.

This would have a significant impact on pupils currently attending Irfon Valley C.P. School, including any pupils belonging to the protected characteristic groups that attend that school, as some additional travel would be required in order to attend their nearest alternative school.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal would impact on pupils belonging to the protected characteristic groups that attend the school, it is to be noted that alternative schools, being larger than Irfon Valley, should be able to deliver the new curriculum more effectively, offer more extra-curricular activities for pupils, and also offer a greater amount of wraparound care to support parents. Therefore, the negative impacts of additional travel are likely to be mitigated by the benefits of attending a larger school. In addition, there is no reason to believe that alternative schools would not be equipped to meet the needs of pupils belonging to the protected

<p>iii) Should the proposal be considered for removal, owing to the degree of impact it is likely to have?</p>	<p>characteristic groups that would be affected, including pupils with Additional Learning Needs, pupils eligible for Free School Meals, and Looked After Children.</p>
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9.2 Will the management of the impact as outlined in 9.1, be included in the Service Improvement Plan?

<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Date added.....</p> <p>Reference.....</p>	<p>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If no, please explain why not: Need was not identified at time of writing Service Strategy</p>
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4. Community Impact Assessment – Irfon Valley C.P. School

i) **Information on the proportion of pupils from the catchment area that attend the school**

The closest provider for pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School in September 2023 was as follows:

School	% of Pupils
Irfon Valley C.P. School	89.5%
Builth Wells C.P. School	5.3%
Ysgol Dolafon	5.3%

This suggests that 89.5% of pupils attending the school were attending their closest primary school, whilst 10.6% of pupils attending the school live closer to other primary schools.

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%

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.

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.

ii) **After-school clubs and extra-curricular activities provided by the school**

The after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities provided by the school include the following:

- Hockey club
- Breakfast club

However, the school has indicated that limited pupil numbers/staff have made clubs like after-school club unfeasible

iii) Any other facilities or services the school accommodates or services the school provides

The school accommodates or provides the following other facilities or services:

- The school is the site for the 3+ setting, Rainbow Tots

iv) Other use by the community of the school building

The school building is used by the community to provide the following activities:

- School attends community events at Garth Village Hall
- Joint events run with Ysgol Dolafon

v) Other links between the school and the community

- Community events such as MacMillan Coffee Morning and school concerts
- School attends community events at Garth Village Hall

vi) If accommodation, facilities or services are provided by a school, where would they be provided in the event of closure?

Should the proposal be implemented, there would no longer be a school in Garth, which could result in the potential loss of community facilities associated with the school.

There is a village hall in Garth, therefore should the school no longer be available, community events and activities could be re-located here.

vii) Distance and travelling time involved in attending an alternative school of the same language category

Should the proposal be implemented, Irfon Valley C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative schools would be:

School	Distance from Irfon Valley	Approx. travel time
Ysgol Dolafon	6.5 miles	12 minutes
Builth Wells C.P. School	6.0 miles	10 minutes
Newbridge-on-Wye C. in W. School	9.1 miles	17 minutes
Llanelwedd C. in W. School	6.8 miles	12 minutes

The travel times above are the approximate travel times from Irfon Valley C.P. School to the alternative schools, however the distance from individual pupils' homes to alternative schools would be different.

Analysis has shown that the distances and travel times to alternative provision would not be in excess of 45 minutes for primary pupils.

An analysis of pupils attending Irfon Valley C.P. School in September 2023 suggests that the furthest distance to the new school for pupils for whom Irfon Valley C.P. School is currently the closest school would be 6.8 miles.

Home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the home to school transport which is in operation at that time. Whilst free transport would be provided to eligible pupils, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc.

viii) 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 eventually implementation of the preferred option, support would be provided to pupils and their parents as part of the transition process, to ensure full engagement with their closest alternative schools.

Irfon Valley C.P. School currently shares a Headteacher with Ysgol Dolafon. This would ease transition and support parents' and pupils' engagement for any pupils choosing to transfer to this school.

ix) Any wider implications e.g. impact on public transport provision, wider community safety issues

- At present, very few pupils walk to school, and none use public transport.
- If the school were to close, pupils would need transport to attend their alternative schools. The average travel distance for pupils to their nearest school, should Irfon Valley close, would be 4.97 miles. This would therefore not promote walking/cycling to school as the distance is likely to be too far for most pupils.

x) Additional considerations for rural schools

The School Organisation Code includes a number of additional considerations that are likely to be relevant when carrying out a community impact assessment for a rural school closure. As Irfon Valley C.P. School is identified as a rural school, these factors are considered below:

- **Whether closure would encourage families with school-age children to leave the community or discourage young families from moving to the community**

Information from the school suggests that it is unlikely that the closure of Irfon Valley C.P. School would encourage families to leave the community as travel distances to new schools would not be significantly longer.

While it is certainly possible that the closure of the school may discourage some young families from moving to Garth, the school has also acknowledged that they are currently unable to offer significant wrap-around care through, for example, after school clubs. This may have put off some young families from moving to the area even if the school were to remain open.

- **What impact closure might have on other services provided locally, for instance if the school is the only remaining public building in a community**

Should Irfon Valley C.P. School close, community events and activities could continue to take place at Garth Village Hall.

- **Whether, or not, the school is a real hub of community life, used for other purpose – such as public meetings, local events, fetes surgeries, and other get togethers – which would either cease or be diminished by being required to move elsewhere**

The school is currently not used for any additional purpose other than the pre-school.

- **Whether or not the loss of the school, and potentially families, will have a detrimental effect on the wider economy of the community**

Information received from the school indicates that effects on the wider economy of the community are expected to be minimal.

- **How parents' and pupils' engagement with the alternative school and any facilities it may offer could be supported (e.g. how pupils, (particularly any less advantaged pupils) will be helped to participate in after school activities)**

As indicated in section (viii) above, should the Council proceed with the statutory process and eventually implementation of the preferred option, support would be provided to pupils and their parents as part of the transition process, to ensure full engagement with their closest alternative schools.

Irfon Valley C.P. School currently shares a Headteacher with Ysgol Dolafon. This would ease transition and support parents' and pupils' engagement for any pupils choosing to transfer to this school.

It is acknowledged that there would be an impact on pupils' ability to participate in after school activities as there would be an additional travel requirement for parents to access school activities/events.

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

Should Irfon Valley C.P. School close, Garth would lose a number of community events such as school concerts. The school has also noted that Irfon Valley plays an important role in Garth as a meeting place for parents within the locality.

However, there is a village hall located in Garth where community events and activities could continue to take place.

xi) Issues raised during the consultation period

A number of comments were received during the consultation period which related to the proposal's impact on the community.

These comments are listed in full in the consultation report produced in respect of this proposal, along with the Council's response to the points raised, and are also summarised below:

- **Travel implications**
 - Additional travel time/distance
 - Queries about the Council's Home to School Transport Policy
- **Comments about housing developments in the area**
 - Concerns that there will not be enough pupil places in the area to meet the demand of the new housing developments
- **Impact on early years provision**
 - Concern about the loss of pre-school provision in the area
- **Impact on the community**
 - General concern about the impact on the community
 - The school is an important part of the community
 - The school acts as a central hub for the community

xii) Conclusion

Should there be no school in Garth, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. These would be larger schools, and the expectation is that an increased number of activities would be available to pupils. However, it is acknowledged that pupils would need to travel to the alternative schools, which could impact on their ability to access activities, particularly where these take place after school.

Should the proposal be implemented, there would be no school provision in the village of Garth. The information provided above indicates that there is some community use of the Irfon Valley School building, including as a meeting place for parents. There is, however, a village hall located in Garth, therefore community events and activities could continue to take place in the village.

It is also acknowledged that implementation of the proposal would result in additional travel to school for pupils for whom Garth is currently their closest school. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the home to school transport policy, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc.

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