

Transforming Education in Powys

Options Appraisal

Churchstoke C.P. School

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Council's Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys sets out 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 the objectives included in the strategy is to 'Reconfigure and rationalise primary provision'.

The purpose of this paper is to identify a preferred option for the future of Churchstoke C.P. School.

Current pupil numbers¹ at the school are as follows:

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Churchstoke C.P. School	8	4	5	3	10	2	4	36

¹ Finance NOR – 2020 Pupil Count Day (6th November 2020)

PART A – THE CASE FOR CHANGE

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 POLICY CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED IN POWYS

Powys is a large, rural authority. Covering a quarter of the landmass of Wales, it contains only 4.2% of the population, making it the most sparsely populated county in Wales. Delivering services across such a large, sparsely populated area is challenging and expensive.

Whilst there has been some reorganisation activity in Powys over recent years, the county's schools' infrastructure largely remains similar to that which was in place 20 years ago.

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:

i) High proportion of small schools

Based on PLASC 2019 figures, there were 33 small primary schools in Powys – this is approximately 40% of the primary provision in the county. 21 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 4% by 2025.

iii) High number of surplus places

Based on PLASC 2019 figures, there was 18% 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 £3,276 to £11,912 in the primary sector.

vi) Inequality in access to Welsh-medium education

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

last few years and ensure that all Powys learners can access comprehensive Welsh-medium provision throughout their educational careers.

vii) Limited post-14 and post-16 offer

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

viii) Inequality in access to SEN provision

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

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

ix) Historical lack of political decision making

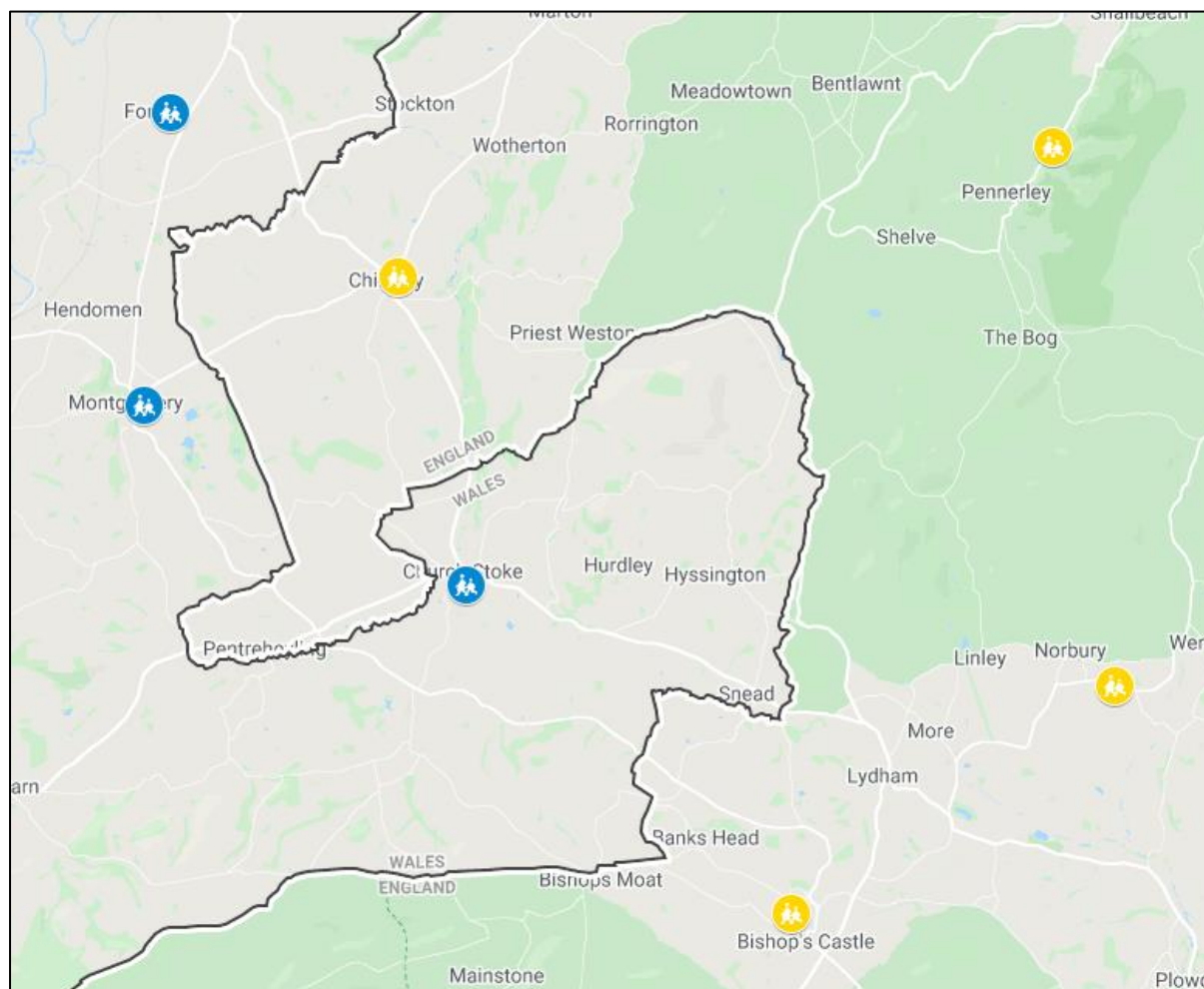
Although there have been some developments in terms of the schools' infrastructure over recent years, the Council's failure to implement a number of high-profile proposals in the last few years has left a legacy in Powys, and there has been a reluctance to embark on large scale reorganisation of education provision since then.

3. WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED IN CHURCHSTOKE

3.1 THE CURRENT SITUATION

Churchstoke C.P. School is a primary school located in the village of Churchstoke in North Powys, which is located near to the border between Wales and England.

The following map shows the location of Churchstoke C.P. School and nearby schools:



Blue – Powys Schools, Yellow – Shropshire Schools

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

School	Distance from Churchstoke C.P. School by road (miles)
Chirbury CofE Primary School	3.274 miles

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

(Shropshire)	
Montgomery C. in W. School	4.651 miles
Bishops Castle Primary School (Shropshire)	5.94 miles
Forden C. in W. School	7.028 miles
Abermule C.P. School	8.759 miles
Leighton C.P. School	8.929 miles
Berriew C.P. School	8.965 miles
St. Michael's C. in W. VA School	9.11 miles

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

	School Type	Language Category	Admission Number	Rural School?³
Churchstoke C.P. School	Community Primary School building owned by Powys County Council	English-medium	12	Yes

Pupil Numbers

i) Current pupil numbers⁴

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Churchstoke C.P. School	8	4	5	3	10	2	4	36

ii) Historical pupil numbers⁵

³ 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.

⁴ Finance NOR – 2020 Pupil Count Day (6th November 2020)

⁵ PLASC

	Jan. 2014	Jan. 2015	Jan. 2016	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020
Churchstoke C.P. School	64	54	53	41	39	28	25

iii) **Projected pupil numbers (Birth rate)⁶**

	Jan. 2021 ⁷	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025
Churchstoke C.P. School	22	21	21	17	16

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

	Jan. 2021	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025
Churchstoke C.P. School	36	39	44	N/A	N/A

Building Capacity and Condition

i) **Capacity**

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

	Current Capacity⁹	Currently Filled	Surplus Capacity
Churchstoke C.P. School	72	36 (50.0%)	36 (50.0%)

ii) **Building condition¹⁰**

In 2009, Welsh Government carried out condition and suitability assessments of the school.

	Condition	Suitability	Access to hall on site
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⁶ Powys Schools Service Projections (R – Yr6) based on PLASC 2020 & Birth Rates

⁷ These are the projected figures based on PLASC 2020 information, therefore include a projection for January 2021. PLASC 2021 information and projected pupil numbers based on PLASC 2021 are not yet available.

⁸ Powys Finance Projections – February 2021

⁹ Welsh Government School Places Return – August 2020

¹⁰ Premises Data Return to Welsh Government – 2020

Churchstoke C.P. School	C Poor	B/C Good to bad	Yes
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Standards of Education

i) Estyn

	Churchstoke C.P. School
Date of Inspection	April 2015
Standards	Good
Wellbeing	Adequate
Learning experiences	Good
Teaching	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Learning environment	Good
Leadership	Adequate
Improving quality	Adequate
Partnership working	Good
Resource management	Adequate
Follow Up	<p>School to draw up action plan. Estyn to monitor progress.</p> <p>The school was removed from Estyn monitoring in November 2016.</p>

ii) School Categorisation¹¹

¹¹ 2019. Categorisations were not carried out in 2020 due to Covid-19.

	Standards Group	Improvement Capacity	Support Capacity
Churchstoke C.P. School	N/A	B	Yellow

Financial information

i) Cost per pupil¹² (Section 52 Budget Statement, 2020/2021)

	Budget share per school	Budget share per pupil	Notional SEN budget	Non ISB funds devolved to the school
Churchstoke C.P. School	£202,000	£7,475	£16,000	£7,000
Powys average (Primary)	N/A	£3,978	N/A	N/A

Home to school travel

i) Closest school

An analysis of pupil travel patterns has been carried out, based on the 25 pupils that were attending Churchstoke in January 2020. The closest provider for all of these pupils is as follows:

	Pupils attending Churchstoke C.P. School
Churchstoke C.P. School	80%
Bishops Castle Primary School (Shropshire)	8%
Long Mountain CofE Primary School (Shropshire)	4%
Montgomery C. in W. School	4%
Penygloddfa C.P. School	4%

¹² Section 52 Budget Statement 2020/2021

Based on this information, Churchstoke C.P. School is the closest school for 80% of the pupils.

If there was no school in Churchstoke, the closest school for the pupils attending the school in January 2020 would be as follows:

	Pupils' closest school should there be no school in Churchstoke
Chirbury CofE Primary School (Shropshire)	72%
Montgomery C. in W. School	12%
Bishop's Castle Primary School (Shropshire)	8%
Long Mountain CofE Primary School (Shropshire)	4%
Penygloddfa C.P. School	4%

ii) Average travel distance

The average travel distance for pupils attending Churchstoke C.P. School, based on the January 2020 PLASC numbers, was 0.9 miles.

If there was no school in Churchstoke, the average travel distance for these pupils to attend alternative provision would be 1.8 miles.

iii) Furthest travel distance

Of the pupils attending Churchstoke C.P. School in January 2020, the furthest travel distance to the school for pupils for whom Churchstoke C.P. School was the closest provider was 4.6 miles.

If there was no school in Churchstoke, the furthest distance to the nearest alternative provision would be 11.9 miles.

Equalities Information

i) Free School Meals¹³

¹³ PLASC 2020

	Number of pupils who had a free school meal on Census day
Churchstoke C.P. School	8.0%

ii) Pupils in care¹⁴

	Number of pupils in care
Churchstoke C.P. School	0.0%

iii) SEN/ALN¹⁵

	School Action	School Action Plus	Statement
Churchstoke C.P. School	16.0%	4.0%	0.0%

Early Years

Non-maintained setting on the school site.

3.2 WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED IN CHURCHSTOKE

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

i) Low pupil numbers

Current pupil numbers¹⁶ at Churchstoke C.P. School are as follows:

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Churchstoke C.P. School	8	4	5	3	10	2	4	36

The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school with less than 91 pupils. Pupil numbers are significantly lower than this. They are not expected to increase significantly for the foreseeable future.

The school's low pupil numbers have also resulted in a high number of surplus places at the school. Based on current pupil numbers, there is currently 50% surplus capacity at the school.

¹⁴ PLASC 2020

¹⁵ PLASC 2020

¹⁶ Finance NOR – 2020 Pupil Count Day (6th November 2020)

ii) High budget per pupil

Based on the Council's Section 52 Budget Statement for 2020-21, the school's budget share per pupil during 2020-21 was £7,475. This is significantly higher than the Powys average of £4,264. Churchstoke is ranked the 2nd highest school in Powys by budget share per pupil.¹⁷

iii) Building condition and suitability

The Welsh Government's survey of school buildings carried out in 2009 identified issues with the building condition and suitability of Churchstoke C.P. School. The building condition was assessed to be condition C – Poor, whilst its suitability was assessed to be condition B/C – Good/Poor.

iv) Leadership

Whilst there is permanent leadership in place in Churchstoke C.P. School, the headteacher has a significant teaching commitment, which limits the time available to focus on leadership of the school.

v) Combined age classes

The small pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes, with Key Stage 2 in one class and Foundation Phase in another class. Because pupil numbers in each year group are small, it is more difficult to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged.

¹⁷ Section 52 Budget Statement 2020/2021

PART B – OPTIONS FOR CHURCHSTOKE C.P. SCHOOL

4. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

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

Option	Description
1	Status quo – continue as a standalone school
2	Federation with another school This is not a viable option as there are no other C.P. schools in the vicinity which Churchstoke C.P. School could federate with, therefore this option is DISCOUNTED
3	Merge with Montgomery C. in W. School to establish a new school on two sites
4	Close Churchstoke C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Montgomery C. in W. School
5	Close Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools in Powys
6	Close Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools

5. SWOT ANALYSIS OF EACH OPTION

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

Option 1: Status quo – continue as a standalone school

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Would retain provision in Churchstoke- There would be no additional transport costs- Would continue to provide access to a community primary school- No requirement for a reorganisation process- No change for staff- No impact on pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pupil numbers at Churchstoke would continue to be low, based on the projections- Would not lead to a rationalisation of primary provision- Would still need to maintain the Churchstoke building- Would not reduce surplus places- Would not lead to a financial saving- Would not address issues with the Churchstoke CP School building

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would not address the high budget per pupil
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for further collaboration with other neighbouring schools to provide increased opportunities for pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not able to secure retention of staff due to small number of pupils

Option 2: Federation with another school

This is not a viable option as there are no other C.P. Schools in the vicinity which Churchstoke C.P. School could federate with, therefore this option is **DISCOUNTED**.

Option 3: Merge with Montgomery C. in W. School to establish a new school on two sites

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would retain provision in Churchstoke - Pupils would continue to attend school on their current site - More opportunities could be provided to pupils from being part of a larger school - 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at Churchstoke would continue to be low, based on the projections - Churchstoke pupils would still be taught separately - Would not reduce surplus places - Would not lead to a rationalisation of primary provision - Would still need to maintain the Churchstoke building - Would also impact on the staff of Montgomery C. in W. School - Different in the size of the two schools – would have a disproportionate impact on Montgomery C. in W. School
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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible tension between Church in Wales status and C.P. status

Option 4: Close Churchstoke C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Montgomery C. in W. School

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would retain provision in Churchstoke - Pupils would continue to attend school on their current site - More opportunities could be provided to the pupils - There would be no additional transport costs - Could provide a financial saving to the Council - Montgomery C. in W. School would retain its identity - Minimal impact on staff at Montgomery C. in W. School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil numbers at Churchstoke would continue to be low, based on the projections - Churchstoke pupils would still be taught separately - Would not lead to a rationalisation of primary provision - Would still need to maintain the Churchstoke building - Would not reduce surplus places - Would not address issues with the Churchstoke building - Churchstoke C.P. School would lose its identity - Possible reduction in staffing requirements - There would be no access to C.P. provision locally
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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible tension between Church in Wales status and C.P. status

Option 5: Close Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools in Powys

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would address the issue of low pupil numbers - Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools - Revenue saving to the Council - Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities - Pupil would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages - Pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional travel for those pupils for whom Churchstoke C.P. School is currently the closest school - Pupils currently attending Churchstoke C.P. School would have to transfer to alternative provision - Loss of provision from Churchstoke - Impact on the current staff of Churchstoke C.P. School - Impact on the Churchstoke community

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal impact on any other schools - Would enable pupils to continue to access provision in Powys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some pupils may choose to transfer to alternative provision in England
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"> - Loss of pupils to England

Option 6: Close Churchstoke 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 - Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools - Revenue saving to the Council - Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities - Pupil would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages - Pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation - Minimal impact on any other schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional travel for those pupils for whom Churchstoke C.P. School is currently the closest school - Pupils currently attending Churchstoke C.P. School would have to transfer to alternative provision - Loss of provision from Churchstoke - Impact on the current staff of Churchstoke C.P. School - Impact on the Churchstoke community - Some pupils may transfer to alternative provision in England
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 the least popular option locally - Loss of pupils to England

6. IMPACT OF EACH OPTION

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

Option	Likely impact on quality and standards	Likely impact on the community	Likely impact of different travelling arrangements
Option 1: Status Quo – continue as a standalone school	There would be no impact on quality and standards – pupils would continue to attend the current provision at Churchstoke.	There would be no impact on the community – provision would continue to be available in Churchstoke.	There would be no impact on travel arrangements – pupils would continue to attend Churchstoke C.P. School.
Option 2: Federation with another school	Discounted – N/A	Discounted – N/A	Discounted – N/A
Option 3: Merge with Montgomery C. in W. School to establish a new school on two sites	<p>It is anticipated that this option would have a positive impact on quality and standards through the establishment of one larger school, with a larger number of pupils and a larger team of staff.</p> <p>Whilst pupils would continue to attend separate sites, therefore would not benefit from all being taught together, this option would provide additional opportunities for staff expertise and resources to be shared across both sites.</p>	<p>The impact on the community would be minimal – provision would continue to be available in Churchstoke.</p> <p>However, one new governing body would be responsible for both sites, therefore there could be a perceived reduction in community involvement in management of the school, depending on the make up of the federated governing body.</p> <p>In addition, it is possible that joint school activities would take place</p>	<p>Pupils would continue to attend school on the current site of Churchstoke C.P. School.</p> <p>However, some additional travel may be required between schools in order to access activities and events.</p>

		on the Montgomery site as more pupils attend this site, which could lead to a reduction in activity on the Churchstoke site.	
Option 4: Close Churchstoke C.P. School, but retain the site as part of Montgomery C. in W. School	<p>Implementation of this option would result in closure of Churchstoke C.P. School, however provision would continue on the current site. Churchstoke C.P. School are both in the yellow support category based on the 2019 categorisations, therefore it is not anticipated that the impact on quality and standards would be negative.</p> <p>The school would be a larger school, with a larger number of pupils and a larger team of staff, which could have a positive impact on the opportunities available for pupils and staff.</p> <p>Whilst pupils would continue to attend separate sites, therefore would not benefit from all being taught together, this option would provide additional opportunities for staff expertise and resources to be shared across both sites.</p>	<p>Provision would continue to be available in Churchstoke. However, the site would be managed by the current governing body of Montgomery C. in W. School, therefore there could be a perceived reduction in community involvement in management of the school.</p> <p>In addition, it is possible that joint school activities would take place on the Montgomery site as more pupils attend this site, which could lead to a reduction in activity on the Churchstoke site.</p>	<p>Pupils would continue to attend school on the current site of Churchstoke C.P. School.</p> <p>However, some additional travel may be required between schools in order to access activities and events.</p>

<p>Option 5: Close Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools in Powys</p>	<p>Implementation of this option would mean that pupils currently attending Churchstoke C.P. School would transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative Powys school would be Montgomery C. in W. School.</p> <p>Based on the latest categorisations carried out in 2019, both Churchstoke C.P. School and Montgomery C. in W. School are categorised as Yellow schools. The Council's view is that quality and standards at Montgomery C. in W. School would be at least as good as the provision at Churchstoke.</p>	<p>There would be a significant impact on the community of Churchstoke as there would be no provision in Churchstoke.</p> <p>Should the school close, the Council would need to determine the future use of the building. Should the Council declare the building to be surplus to requirements and seek to sell the building, this would mean that the school's facilities would no longer be available to the community in Churchstoke.</p> <p>Non-maintained early years provision is currently provided on the school site, closure of the school could also mean that this provision would no longer be available to the community.</p>	<p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Churchstoke 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 Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools</p>	<p>Implementation of this option would mean that pupils currently attending Churchstoke C.P. School would transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative schools would be Chirbury C. of E. School which is located in Shropshire.</p>	<p>There would be a significant impact on the community of Churchstoke as there would be no provision in Churchstoke.</p> <p>Should the school close, the Council would need to determine the future use of the building. Should the Council declare the</p>	<p>Additional travel would be required for pupils currently attending Churchstoke 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</p>

	<p>Chirbury C. of E. School was last inspected by Ofsted in December 2019, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be Good. It is likely therefore that the quality and standards at the school would be comparable to that available in Churchstoke C.P. School.</p>	<p>building to be surplus to requirements and seek to sell the building, this would mean that the school's facilities would no longer be available to the community in Churchstoke.</p> <p>Non-maintained early years provision is currently provided on the school site, closure of the school could also mean that this provision would no longer be available to the community.</p>	<p>be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities / events.</p>
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7. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

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

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

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

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

The assessment for each option is as follows:

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

8. EMERGING PREFERRED OPTION

Based on the SWOT analyses carried out and the financial estimates received so far, the emerging preferred option for Churchstoke CP School is:

Option 5: Close Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools in Powys

The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers
- Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
- Pupil would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages
- Pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation
- Minimal impact on any other schools
- Would enable pupils to continue to access provision in Powys
- Meets all of the Critical Success Factors

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

PART C – FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF PREFERRED OPTION

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

9. QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

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

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Churchstoke C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys would be Montgomery C. in W. School. Some pupils may also choose to attend schools in Shropshire, in particular Chirbury CofE School.

The Council's view is that Montgomery C. in W. School would provide education for pupils which is of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Churchstoke C.P. School, therefore it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on standards and progress overall.

Whilst the Council does not have direct experience of the provision at Chirbury CofE School, the school's last Ofsted inspection which was carried out in December 2019 judged the schools overall effectiveness and quality of education to be Good, therefore it is likely that the provision is of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Churchstoke C.P. School.

This also applies 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. Based on PLASC 2020 information, approximately 10% of pupils at Churchstoke C.P. School are eligible for Free School Meals, and there are a small number of pupils with Additional Learning Needs. However, it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on the standards and progress of these pupils.

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 larger schools, which would provide improved opportunities to share staff expertise and resources, and which have an improved ability to monitor pupil progress in these aspects.

9.2 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In the short term, it is possible that there would be an impact on pupils wellbeing, as they would need to transfer from Churchstoke C.P. School to alternative schools. It is possible that pupils could choose to transfer to different schools, which could have a further impact on their wellbeing. However, the receiving school(s) would provide full support to the pupils during the transition period, to minimise any negative impact on them.

For some pupils, implementation of the preferred option could result in additional travel, which could have an impact on pupil well-being. However, alternative primary provision would be available at a number of other schools located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School, including schools located in Powys and schools located in Shropshire. It is not considered that the additional travel time required to alternative provision would 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 larger schools with larger cohorts of pupils, providing improved social and extra-curricular opportunities.

9.3 Teaching and learning experiences

9.3.1 Quality of teaching

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Churchstoke C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys would be Montgomery C. in W. School. Some pupils may also choose to attend schools in Shropshire, in particular Chirbury CofE School.

The Council has no concerns about the quality of teaching at Montgomery C. in W. School, 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 Churchstoke C.P. School.

Whilst the Council does not have direct experience of the provision at Chirbury CofE School, the school's last Ofsted inspection which was carried out in December 2019 judged the schools overall effectiveness and quality of education to be Good, therefore it is likely that the quality of teaching is of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Churchstoke C.P. School.

9.3.2 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Churchstoke C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative

schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys would be Montgomery C. in W. School. Some pupils may also choose to attend schools in Shropshire, in particular Chirbury CofE School.

The Council's view is that Montgomery C. in W. School would provide a curriculum which is at least equivalent to that currently provided at Churchstoke C.P. School. Pupils would transfer to a 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, and that the alternative school would be better placed to develop provision which meets the requirements of the new curriculum.

Montgomery C. in W. School is a Church in Wales school, whilst Churchstoke C.P. School is a community primary school. This would impact on some aspects of the curriculum should pupils transfer to Montgomery C. in W. School. However, alternative C.P. provision is available within 10 miles of Churchstoke, ensuring that non-Church in Wales provision would continue to be available to those pupils who wished to access it.

Should pupils transfer to Chirbury CofE School, they would access education in England, therefore would receive a different curriculum to that provided in Wales. One significant difference is that Welsh would no longer be a part of their curriculum. Whilst the Council is committed to providing continued access to education in Wales to pupils living in Churchstoke, it is acknowledged that some pupils may choose to transfer to alternative schools, which would impact on the curriculum they receive.

9.3.3 The provision of skills

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Churchstoke C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys would be Montgomery C. in W. School. Some pupils may also choose to attend schools in Shropshire, in particular Chirbury CofE School.

The Council has no concerns about the provision of skills at Montgomery C. in W. School, 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 Churchstoke C.P. School.

Whilst the Council does not have direct experience of the provision at Chirbury CofE School, the school's last Ofsted inspection which was carried out in December 2019 judged the schools overall effectiveness and quality of education to be Good, therefore it is likely that the provision of skills would be of at least equivalent quality as that provided at Churchstoke C.P. School.

9.4 Care, support and guidance

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

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Churchstoke C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys would be Montgomery C. in W. School. Some pupils may also choose to attend schools in Shropshire, in particular Chirbury CofE School.

In general, it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would have a negative impact on tracking, monitoring and the provision of learning support, personal development and safeguarding for pupils currently attending Churchstoke C.P. School. In respect of pupils transferring to Montgomery C. in W. School, it is anticipated that the arrangements would be at least equivalent to the current arrangements at Churchstoke.

For pupils choosing to transfer to schools in Shropshire, it is acknowledged that there could be a greater impact in the short term as it is likely that there would be different systems in place for tracking and monitoring pupils, and the provision of learning support, personal development and safeguarding. However, once the pupils have transferred, there is no reason that the arrangements would not be at least equivalent to the arrangements at Churchstoke. Whilst the Council does not have direct experience of the provision at Chirbury CofE School, the school's last Ofsted inspection which was carried out in December 2019 judged the schools overall effectiveness and personal development to be Good, therefore it is likely that the arrangements would be at least equivalent to the current arrangements at Churchstoke C.P. School.

9.5 Leadership and Management

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

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the preferred option, Churchstoke C.P. School would close, and pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative school in Powys would be Montgomery C. in W. School. Some pupils may also choose to attend schools in Shropshire, in particular Chirbury CofE School.

Both Churchstoke C.P. School and Montgomery C. in W. School have permanent leadership arrangements, and both were categorised in the Yellow support category with an improvement capacity of B in the latest school categorisations carried out in 2019, therefore the Council's view is that leadership and management at the alternative school would be at least as good as the current arrangements at Churchstoke. Montgomery C. in W.

School is larger than Churchstoke C.P. School, therefore it is expected that the headteacher would have more time available to focus on leadership and management.

Whilst the Council does not have direct experience of the provision at Chirbury CofE School, the school's last Ofsted inspection which was carried out in December 2019 judged the school's overall effectiveness and leadership and management to be Good, therefore it is likely that these aspects would be at least equivalent to the current arrangements at Churchstoke C.P. School.

9.5.2 Professional learning

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

9.5.3 Use of Resources

Whilst Churchstoke C.P. School is projecting a very small deficit budget in 2020/21, this is expected to be reversed the following year and the school is projecting a surplus budget for the following years.

Whilst there are no significant concerns about the use of resources within the school, there are concerns about use of resources overall within the Powys schools infrastructure. As indicated on page 5 above, one of the main challenges facing the Powys schools infrastructure is the high proportion of small schools in the county. Churchstoke C.P. School is among the smallest schools in the county, and the budget share per pupil at the school is higher than the Powys average for primary schools. The school also currently has 61% surplus capacity, which is inefficient use of the Council's resources.

Closure of the school would reduce the number of schools in Powys, and would enable the Council to use its resources more effectively for the benefit of all Powys learners.

Should the emerging preferred option be implemented, pupils would transfer to larger schools, ensuring more effective use of the Council's resources. In addition, larger schools often have more resources available in terms of number of staff and educational resources, therefore pupils would benefit from the opportunity to access these resources.

We also need to be mindful that pupil numbers feed into the distribution formula used by Welsh Government to distribute funding to the Council via the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). Should Churchstoke C.P. School close, there

is potential for pupils to opt to go to schools outside of Powys, which may in turn result in a reduction in the RSG to the Council from Welsh Government.

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

Implementation of the emerging preferred option would result in the closure of Churchstoke C.P. School. It is acknowledged that there would be an impact on any pupils belonging to vulnerable groups currently attending the school, including any pupils with SEN, and that in the short term, these pupils would need to transfer to alternative schools.

Based on January 2020 PLASC information, 5 pupils at Churchstoke C.P. School were on School Action, and 1 pupil was on School Action Plus. There were no statemented pupils.

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

Should the option be implemented, the Council would work with Churchstoke C.P. School and the receiving schools to ensure an effective transition for any vulnerable children, including children with SEN, and their families. This would include working with schools located in Shropshire for any pupils choosing to transfer to schools located in Shropshire.

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

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

Should Churchstoke school close, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. This would lead to an increase in pupil numbers at the schools to which the pupils wish to transfer. However current pupil numbers at Churchstoke School are small, and therefore the number of pupils likely to transfer to each year group is low, the impact on alternative schools is not likely to have a significant impact on their ability to deliver the full curriculum at the foundation phase and in each key stage of education.

In some schools, it is possible that an increase in pupil numbers would improve their ability to deliver the curriculum, however depending on the class

structure and current breakdown of pupils, it's likely that some schools would need to make adjustments to their class structure in the short term to accommodate any additional pupils.

10 NEED FOR PLACES AND IMPACT ON ACCESSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS

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

The following table shows the number of spaces available and the building condition of Powys schools providing English-medium education located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School:

School	Capacity ¹⁸	Current pupil numbers ¹⁹	Available spaces	Available capacity	Building Condition	Building Suitability
Montgomery C. in W. School	119	90	29	24.4%	C	B/C
Forden C. in W. School	102	68	34	33.3%	B/C	B
Abermule C.P. School	92	64	28	30.4%	B	C
Leighton C.P. School	91	71	20	22.0%	B/C	B
Berriew C.P. School	106	85	21	19.8%	B	B
St. Michael's C. in W. VA School	140	91	49	35.0%	B	B/C

This suggests that there is sufficient space in Powys schools located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School to accommodate all pupils currently attending the school. The building condition of all the schools in the above table has been assessed as either condition B or condition C. The condition of Churchstoke C.P. School has been assessed as condition C, therefore it is likely that the quality of accommodation at the alternative schools would be at least equivalent to the quality of accommodation at Churchstoke C.P. School.

¹⁸ Welsh Government School Places Return – August 2020

¹⁹ Finance NOR – 2020 Pupil Count Day (6th November 2020)

In addition the Powys schools listed above, Chirbury C of E Primary School and Bishops Castle Primary School are located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School. Whilst the Council is committed to continuing to provide access to Churchstoke pupils in Powys schools, it is possible that some pupils will choose to attend provision in Shropshire. The following table shows the number of spaces available of Shropshire schools providing English-medium education located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School:

School	Capacity ²⁰	Current pupil numbers ²¹	Available spaces	Available capacity	Building Condition	Building Suitability
Chirbury C of E Primary School	84	72	12	14.2%	N/A	N/A
Bishops Castle Primary School	175	144	31	17.7%	N/A	N/A
Long Mountain C of E Primary School	100	129	-29	-29%	N/A	N/A

This suggests that there are some spaces available at Chirbury C of E Primary School and Bishops Castle Primary School.

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

As indicated in section 11.1 above, there is sufficient English-medium capacity within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School to accommodate the school's current and projected pupil numbers.

Churchstoke C.P. School is a community primary school. Whilst the school's neighbouring schools are mainly Church in Wales schools, alternative community primary provision is available within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School at Abermule C.P. School, Forden C.P. School and Berriew C.P. School, as well as at Bishops Castle Primary School in Shropshire, therefore community primary provision is available in the local area for any pupils not wanting to attend a Church in Wales school.

²⁰ Get information about schools via GOV.UK - <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>

²¹ Get information about schools via GOV.UK - <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>

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

As indicated in the table in section 11.1 above, there are alternative primary places available at several other schools located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. school. Should Churchstoke C.P. School close, it is not considered that the length and nature of journeys for pupils to alternative provision would be excessive. This includes journeys for SEN pupils. One-way journeys to alternative provision would not be in excess of 45 minutes.

11 RESOURCING OF EDUCATION AND OTHER FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Churchstoke C.P. School currently has 50% surplus places. Implementation of the preferred option would result in closure of Churchstoke C.P. School, and would therefore lead to a reduction in surplus places in the area, and in the Council's overall surplus places in primary schools.

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

The review of Churchstoke 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 Churchstoke C.P. School is being carried out in order to meet this objective.

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

The recurrent costs of this proposal would be the increased transport costs which are currently estimated to be an additional £19,000 per annum as detailed in 11.4. 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.

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

It is estimated there will be additional transport costs of £19,000 per annum, this is based on pupil's current location and assuming the pupils will go to the next nearest school.

11.5 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 10.1 above, there are sufficient places at schools located within 10 miles of Churchstoke C.P. School to accommodate all current and projected pupils.

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

It is estimated that this would result in annual revenue savings to the Council of around £50,000. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of over £61,000, estimated additional transport costs of £19,000 and savings on catering costs of around £7,500.

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

Churchstoke C.P. School is projecting a very small deficit budget during 2020/21, however this is expected to be addressed in the following years. The school is not projecting a deficit budget from 2021/22 onwards.

11.8 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.

11.9 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?

Any capital receipts received from sale of the Churchstoke C.P. School site would be reinvested into the Schools Transformation programme in order to improve the educational provision across Powys.

12 OTHER GENERAL FACTORS

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

Implementation of the preferred option would impact on any pupils from economically deprived backgrounds currently attending Churchstoke 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 figures from January 2020, approximately 10% of pupils attending Churchstoke C.P. School were eligible for Free School Meals, therefore it is acknowledged that the proposal would impact on some pupils from economically deprived backgrounds. However, whilst there would be an impact on these pupils in the short term as they would need to transfer to alternative schools, it is likely that they would transfer to larger schools, would be able to provide more opportunities to the pupils, therefore having an overall positive impact.

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

Initial consideration of equalities information recorded through PLASC suggests that there are no significant equality issues in respect of pupils currently attending Churchstoke C.P. School. Should the Council proceed with the statutory process in respect of the preferred option, equality impact assessments will be carried out and regularly reviewed throughout the process to ensure that any issues are identified and fully considered.

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

Churchstoke C.P. School is not subject to any trust or charitable interests which might be affected by the proposals.

13. SPECIFIC FACTORS IN THE CONSIDERATION OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

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

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

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

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

Federation of Churchstoke C.P. School with another school was considered, however as the closest schools to Churchstoke are Church in Wales schools, there was no obvious school for the school to federate with.

Pupil numbers at Churchstoke C.P. School are low, and the school has a high level of surplus places. Pupil numbers are projected to remain low over the coming years, and the level of surplus places is expected to remain high. Becoming part of a federation with another school would not address this issue.

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

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

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

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

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

A draft community impact assessment has been carried out, with input from the school. Should the Council proceed with the statutory process in respect of the preferred option, this draft community impact assessment would be published as part of the consultation documentation. This would be updated

throughout the process to reflect any feedback received, and would be considered by the Council's Cabinet as part of the decision making process.

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

Should the Council proceed with the statutory process and 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 new schools. The nature of this support would depend on the needs of the parents / pupils, however this could include meetings with new headteacher and class teachers to ease transition into the new schools for pupils.

14. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

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

Option 5: Close Churchstoke C.P. School, pupils to attend nearest alternative schools in Powys

The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers
- Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
- Pupil would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages
- Pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation
- Minimal impact on any other schools
- Would enable pupils to continue to access provision in Powys
- Meets all of the Critical Success Factors

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