

Appendix C – Minutes of meetings with Staff, Governors and School Council

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Consultation meeting with Staff of Llanbedr C. In W. School

13th May 2021

Present

Staff:

Linda Green, Headteacher

Jo Davies, Teacher

Gavin John, Teacher

Louise Edwards, LSA

Lisa Lewis, LSA

Officers:

Geraint Rees, Strategic Lead for Education

Lynette Lovell, Interim Chief Education Officer

Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation

Eurig Towns, Service Manager for School Improvement

Sarah Christoforou, HR Business Manager (Schools)

Mari Thomas, Interim Schools Finance Manager

Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education

Geraint Rees welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Powys County Council officers attending the meeting.

It was explained that there would be a brief presentation with an opportunity for discussion, comments, and questions to the officers afterwards. Geraint Rees explained that the meeting would be recorded, for minuting purposes but the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been completed.

Marianne Evans gave a Powerpoint presentation and explained that in February 2021, Powys Cabinet gave approval to proceed with a proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School. The consultation commenced on 21 April 2021 and has been extended until 23 June 2021.

The importance of the consultation process as a way for people to make their views known was emphasised.

The specific proposal is:

- To close Llanbedr C. in W. School from 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.

Geraint Rees explained that an addendum to the consultation documents had been published this week, which provided an updated capacity figure for Llangattock School, and the consultation period has been extended.

Staff were then given the opportunity to ask any questions or to make any comments in relation to the matter.

Headteacher: Can I ask Marianne if responses delivered to the school can be sent in the blue bag to County Hall?

Marianne Evans: That will be no problem.

Headteacher: I just want to make it aware that staff will be mainly submitting their views about the proposal in writing, and therefore we do not want to reiterate the points that will be made in our written submissions, but in this meeting we would just like to clarify certain matters. In the same way, the governors also have a few questions and we don't want them to cross over with the points they will make in their meeting.

We have a few questions in this meeting for information purposes. These are based around press releases which have gone out and the consultation document, in which there are inaccuracies.

Geraint Rees: Could I just come back to you quickly? You are saying that there are inaccuracies in the document, but they're not going to be raised tonight, is that what you're saying?

Headteacher: We've got governors afterwards and we don't want to crossover, and we've also made written responses, but there's a few more things that we want to put in our responses, but we just need a bit more information.

Geraint Rees: OK that's fine.

Headteacher: The first question is, you say that pupils would attend larger schools which could provide a wider range of educational and extracurricular activities and opportunities. What evidence do you have to support this statement?

Geraint Rees: The issue around size relates to the number of possibilities that become open for learners in schools where if there are 12 girls in the same school year or likewise boys or even mixed teams then they are able to play in age appropriate teams and develop their skills in that way, or groups that are large enough to hold a significant choir. There is a whole range of things that happen in small schools, but actually there's a greater number of staff in larger schools to be able to provide leadership around different kinds of activities as well.

That's not to say that people in small schools don't make the most heroic efforts to make that provision, they do, but usually there are further opportunities available in an effective large school. I'm using the word effective importantly there because just being larger doesn't make it necessarily any better, it needs to be well run for that to happen.

Headteacher: And it works both ways, an effective small school.

Geraint Rees: Indeed, effective smaller schools end up offering more than a small school that might not be effective, we appreciate that. But the opportunities are generally wider in the larger schools simply because of learners of a similar age in those schools who can take part in activities that are of particular interest. Also I know that an increasing number of activities are not gender specific but some activities traditionally have been, and it provides pupils with an opportunity to coalesce around the groups that they're in to take part in activities like that. Lynette's only experience was as a pupil herself in a small rural school.

Lynette Lovell: In general terms in a larger school there are more opportunities for such things as Geraint has said. You've got a larger number of staff who can share the workload for the new curriculum and things like that. You've got more subject areas. When you look at the extracurricular, what you find in a larger school is that activities can be shared out so that you've got staff who can take one club a week, or one extracurricular, which could be at lunchtime or after school or whatever, so it is shared out and you've got a wider skillset generally to ensure you've got that sort of breadth and there isn't just a weight on a couple of people's shoulders, so there are more opportunities. As Geraint said, I did go to a small school myself, and didn't have the opportunity to be part of larger school productions, larger school team games. All of the things that are more difficult to offer in smaller rural schools. I know many children have them outside of school in separate clubs. In general though it is about the range of skills you have as a larger staff, the sharing of the workload and also the opportunities to further the skill base of the staff. However as Geraint said, it is also about effective leadership in those schools to lead the teaching and learning, but in general there are more opportunities for learners.

Eurig Towns: I think you and Geraint have covered a lot of the reasons why we would put that as a reason there. In a smaller school you have a smaller number of staff, you know they're taking on all those responsibilities and you know that is nothing against the staff at Llanbedr, because I know how much they do give the pupils – over and above what they do in the class. But obviously you want to ensure that there is an even spread of distribution of the support they can give, rather than having a few people doing it. If you had a larger staff, you could share that responsibility more, but again, that is not against anything that you are doing at the school, it is just the number of opportunities that could be available with a larger staff.

Headteacher: Thank you for your comments, I don't agree with what you're saying about clubs in larger schools. I've been the Deputy Head of a school with over 400 pupils and a Headteacher of over 200 pupils. In a larger school you are restricted by numbers, so you have your after school clubs but they are restricted as you can only have 20 or 30 in one club. When you've got two streams in a school, or sometimes three streams in a school, and you've got a Year 5-6 football club, for example, you can only have so many in that club so children do not have full access to all those clubs all the time.

You also have the fact that some clubs are on offer to some year groups, but they're not on offer to all year groups, so it's done on a rota basis. You may have some children that cannot be offered technology in the summer term, whereas it's then art in the autumn term and it's purely because of numbers. So you don't have extracurricular activities available to all the pupils all the time, they don't have that access. When I came to Llanbedr school, it opened my eyes to what extra curricular provision is. The scope that we have at Llanbedr School is not replicated in any of the schools in the cluster, nor is it replicated in the other schools that you've mentioned in the consultation document.

We do 2 clubs every night, so on Monday for example, we have Puppet Club and Welsh Club. Tuesday we have Art and Craft Club, IT Club and Technology Club. I completed a community impact assessment questionnaire and in there it says all the clubs that are on offer. You may not have the staff, but the staff you do have are highly skilled staff. You've also got a huge range of community members and volunteers that come in of their own time running those clubs, you don't get that in larger schools. You don't get that community. Being a rural school, it really opened my eyes to how much the community actually support the school. All our children can attend all the clubs. We also do extracurricular activities during the daytime. And yes, the staff at Llanbedr work hard and they work extra hard in order to ensure that the children do have that provision. And as far as the sports are concerned, I would just like to bring staff here about the success that our children have.

Staff: I disagree with the point made about the opportunities as well. It's quite the opposite actually. Our children have more opportunity to do more sports, the reason being that we've got small numbers, so they get thrown in at the deep end and they have experiences they wouldn't necessarily have in a larger school. I have also taught in a three-form entry 600 pupil school and a two-form entry 400 pupil school and there's nowhere near the opportunities that children at Llanbedr have compared to those schools. You know, just an example is we reached the national finals twice in cricket. We've reached regional finals twice in football. For a small rural school, that is quite outstanding. Pupils get opportunities to do sports they wouldn't ordinarily do – girls get to play football, cricket, rugby and netball. All pupils have an opportunity to attend a residential visit each year in Key Stage 2, taking part in things like coasteering, mountain biking, kayaking, abseiling and they get the opportunity to do those things from the age of seven, from Year 3 and I've watched a Year 3 throw

themselves into the sea in Pembrokeshire and you just don't get those opportunities in a larger school.

Geraint Rees: Your points are well articulated and I think it does come back to something I said earlier which is it's around the quality of a school. A larger school might not do that, but a larger school might do that. It depends on essentially what the staff are prepared to throw in, so we acknowledge that, but it's still a fact that the greater the number of staff in the school, the greater the range of skills at their disposal to be able to use, but you may be in that privileged position of having a small body of staff who are able to turn their hands to a wide range of activities, which is a real benefit to the school. So points made and noted.

Headteacher: I'll go on to the next question. The other statement that was made was pupils would attend larger schools, which would be better equipped to meet the requirements of the new curriculum. So why do you think the six other schools are better equipped than Llanbedr Church School to meet the requirements of the new curriculum?

Geraint Rees: The question around that is about the scale of change. Even for schools that have developed over the last decade quite significantly, the new curriculum does bring with it new challenges and new opportunities. Much of this is down to what exactly can be done for learners in cross age classes, mixed aged classes, in terms of introducing the six areas of learning and experience and the whole range of skills behind them. I'm not a primary specialist and I would be wise to defer to colleagues who are, but it is a question of how do we go through managing that change over the coming years, including what sort of capital equipment do we need, as in educational equipment, in order to support the new curriculum and how that's best delivered across schools as well.

Lynette Lovell: I've just read your Core Visit reports today and I know that you have been working on the four purposes and I know that you've been working as a school on the areas of learning and experience, and that you've been doing a lot of cluster work around all of that to ensure that as a cluster you've been jointly working on that. The new curriculum is going to be a huge change although schools like yourselves have been preparing for that. The biggest change for me is that I remember the time pre-national curriculum and I think that for many of us staff now and teachers, this is the biggest reform since the National Curriculum and there is a lot of work around devising the curriculum, the areas of learning experience. For me, in the smaller schools you've got a smaller number of staff who have got to work on six areas of learning and experience, whereas perhaps in the larger schools you've got those people that take that curriculum area. My own teaching experiences was taking one subject area and not everything. I know that you have been working effectively as a cluster to develop and share that experience within the Crickhowell cluster. But I do think in in general terms, the workload for devising and preparing for the new curriculum, with less people to do it, ensuring you've got that coverage, is a huge undertaking in smaller schools, as it's such a massive curriculum reform.

Headteacher: But why is that? Why is there such a difference? Because at the moment we are coordinating effectively the national curriculum requirements. What's the difference between the new curriculum and the four core purposes, because that is what we're working towards? Why are the six other schools better equipped than we are?

Lynette Lovell: I think in terms of what you said about that we've currently got the national curriculum and it is very prescribed, it's very knowledge based. In terms of the other schools in the cluster, I know you've been working effectively together. They have possibly more staff that can look at those areas of learning and experience, rather than in a smaller school where you have got the weight on a couple of members of staff for all that preparation.

When the national curriculum came in first of all, we even had programmes of work that we could work through. The new curriculum is about ensuring the curriculum is right for the school, and it is a lot of work for the staff. So I think in a larger school it is that ability to be able to share that workload. But I'm not saying that you haven't done work as a cluster, I know you have. I know you're the lead headteacher for the cluster, and I know from your Core Visit reports that you've been working on the four purposes and the areas of learning and experience, but in general terms, I think the bigger the staff you've got in terms of the new curriculum, the better.

Headteacher: So I would say that's more of an opinion, because to embed those four core purposes you need to have that knowledge of all those areas of learning, you need that experience – you don't just want to be working on one area of learning, plus we do have the six members of staff in our school and each of us do have an area of learning, but it's about putting those areas of learning together to encompass your school vision. We have done a lot of work as staff, and we feel if anything, we're sharing what we are doing with the cluster schools. The question was how would the other schools be better equipped? We are sharing what we are doing with other schools, STEM is a very good example of what we've done in our school and how we've shared that with the cluster schools. So how are the schools therefore be better equipped?

Lynette Lovell: I think we are confident that within the cluster, all the schools are good schools. Eurig do you want to come in here and explain where the other schools in the cluster are, in relation to the new curriculum and in terms of providing that provision.

Eurig Towns: We understand that all the schools in the cluster have got a very strong working relationship and all the work you've done together has been a collective, and you've cooperated on that. Each school is strong and they have strengths, and many have different strengths which is good as it contributes to that. It is our view that going forward, which is about what you said about embedding the curriculum, we want to ensure that we have schools that are strong and can embed

the curriculum and we're just looking at it from the point of view that you are going to need the number of people, you are going to need the expertise going forward. If you're in a smaller school it is more difficult to have that because you have less people to share it around.

You're fortunate as you have said about the six members of staff, each leading on an area. You're also teaching across four year groups in the classes as well, or three year groups in the foundation phase, so that is an added pressure as well. So you're looking at other schools who don't necessarily have four year groups across one class or three year groups across the foundation phase. That is where we are coming from in that respect

Headteacher: But there isn't anything in the Donaldson report or the new Curriculum for Wales that says that it can't be delivered in small schools.

Geraint Rees: Absolutely not. However I think everybody acknowledges that the wider the age range that you teach and the fewer the number of colleagues in a school, the more challenging it will be to embrace the breadth of it and to deliver it. It doesn't mean it can't be done, it's a question of how sustainable is the effort that will be needed over the coming years to be able to do it. I think that the collegiality that you are showing across schools is a massive benefit. Schools that are not doing that, I don't know how they will survive the move entirely into the new curriculum if they're working as islands, even if they're moderately sized.

The benefit of being part of a larger group is clearly something you are already getting benefit from. But the question of how do we then configure schools to be equipped fully and to have a range of staff that are working in them that are able to get on with it? The position that's been made is that there are generally benefits. We're not talking even about large schools here, we are just talking about larger schools than some of our schools like Llanbedr which is a small school and is supported as a small school financially, as you know from the budget allocation per learner. But there may be benefits for our future planning to be configured differently in each of the areas.

Schools are often placed in villages where they were back in the 1880s after the Foster Education Act of 1870. We've got quite a legacy of schools that were placed in villages where accessibility and travel times and everything else meant that large workforces on rural farms made for viable but close schools, close to where people live. That's become more challenging now in rural Wales with the population changed from having farms with 14-15 different people involved, they've now become far more singular in terms of employment. Also the ability to travel two to three miles in 10 minutes rather than in an hour and a half has changed.

The change being proposed here is around concentrating learners and staff in fewer numbers of schools with the benefits that we've outlined. We do understand the arguments you're presenting to say that these are not necessarily benefits and we

have to say there are not necessarily benefits when a school is being very well run, you are managing to make up for many things that actually may be harder for you where you are, but that's all we're saying is in general this would apply in terms of the new curriculum – where there is a larger body of staff, it should be far easier to implement and the range of skills that a larger body of staff has is generally wider as well, but not always because you may be exceptional in terms of quality.

Headteacher: So this statement is just in general terms from the meetings of the Transforming Education team?

Can we move on to the next question.

Staff: If any of you were to visit our school and come to see us as you are more than welcome to do so, you'd see that we are very well equipped, very well resourced and ready to embrace the new curriculum. The Headteacher has already mentioned that we are taking large steps towards making that commitment to the new curriculum and actually sharing really good practice within schools in our cluster so what I would like to know is how will this be improved for the pupils transferring to them. In addition, one of the schools in the proposal is out of county, so do you have a good knowledge of the standards within that school and how well will it be beneficial for the pupils moving there.

Eurig Towns: We have confidence in the schools in the Powys cluster and your catchment area that the standard of education that is taking place inside those schools is of a sufficient standard that pupils would not be disadvantaged by moving to those.

Staff: Will it be improved though? Because that is what it says, it will be improved.

Eurig Towns: You have a high standard of education at the school already because as you know, we don't classify schools now, but you know we do place a high value on what you do at the school. The alternatives are of an equal value to what you're having there now, which is a high standard.

Staff: So it's not necessarily going to be improved for the pupils who move to these other settings?

Eurig Towns: They wouldn't be disadvantaged by moving to other settings.

Geraint Rees: And that links with the issue that as the curriculum changes and much else changes, there are opportunities hopefully that those other settings will hopefully be well placed to do that, including well placed to offer staff professional development – that is sometimes easier in settings where people can specialise and develop a range of skills. The amount of work you have to do where you are at the moment, to cover the range of school years in each teachers' care...

Headteacher: Our professional development is very good at the moment and all staff have professional learning logs. The professional development is very good and the cluster working that they have done and with other agencies is very good.

Staff: Could I ask you to explain how closing Llanbedr means that our pupils would be more able to collaborate deeply to take on the challenges of the new curriculum? And the emphasis is on the collaboration.

Geraint Rees: That's often linked to the ability to work with people of the same age and at a similar point of personal development. It's important to say that the new curriculum is not an age defined curriculum. There will be no key stages in it which is important to acknowledge.

Headteacher: Which is why mixed age groups are very good.

Geraint Rees: We also know from the development of children and a range of things associated with child development that there are some benefits as well of collaborating with people close to your own age as there are benefits of working with children of different ages. With the depth of the new curriculum, I think people would generally be saying that large numbers of pupils of a similar age working together poses a different range of challenges.

For more able learners, they are likely to be in a setting where there are similar aged learners who are stretching them as well, so there is a whole range of issues around collaboration. Again, we're back to if a school is doing well, pupils do well. If a school is not doing well, then there are some things that may actually be beneficial. And as Eurig said, the schools in the area where you are located all well thought of and that is helpful, but they would be in more age specific classes and able to develop their learning in a slightly different way. You may argue that it loses something else, but it would gain something.

Staff: But the new curriculum is all about stage, not age.

Geraint Rees: Yes, that's correct. In fact, some of the local schools you have are not big enough to have year group by themselves and will have mixed age classes as well. The question is of the extent of mixed age that's linked to the size of a school.

A school of 50 learners has a larger range of age ranges in each class than, say, a school of 150 learners. So there is a difference, but it's still not to the position where one form of entry school of 210 has essentially an age class for each year group. Some of the schools that you have in the area are not at that scale either, but they are at a different scale from the one that Llanbedr operates at the moment, acknowledging that you've also experienced growth recently as well.

Staff: You've stated that the best interests of the learners are at the forefront of all proposals on decision making. How have you ensured that this is going to be the case for learners in Llanbedr school?

Geraint Rees: The issue around learners is an issue of equity across the whole local authority. It is important to us that people have strong opportunities wherever they are, and that is something that we wouldn't wish to bring forward a proposal that reduces opportunities.

Lynette Lovell: The interest of learners is definitely at the heart of what we are doing. As Geraint said, we are looking at it across the whole of Powys, but in terms of you, or your children specifically at Llanbedr, part of what we'll do as part of this consultation process is to take very seriously what your learners say in regards to this consultation. So, we will listen, there will be a consultation with learners so that we can hear directly from your learners, their thoughts and views, as part of the consultation process. It is a very important part of the process for us to take their interests and concerns forward in the process.

Staff: I'd like to know what is the impact on wellbeing of this proposal amidst the current pandemic, for our pupils, their parents and us as staff. Have you even considered this? And how has this been considered?

Geraint Rees: There's been significant consideration, not just in Powys, but across Wales about the appropriateness of consulting on change during the pandemic. There has been extensive discussions between ourselves and Welsh Government and Welsh Government have issued slight amendments to the guidance around consultation in order to facilitate it during a pandemic.

One of the key issues is that whatever needed to be done in a time when there wasn't a pandemic hasn't gone away. In terms of needing to bring forward organization of schools that is able to deliver the range of things that we want to deliver, including in many cases capital investment as well, that hasn't gone away, nor has the 21st Century School's programme where Welsh Government is upgrading the facilities of schools, including the IT available for learners across schools as well.

So in considering it, we did ask the question, should we go ahead and consult, or should we wait until the pandemic is over and nationally local authorities have determined to go ahead with it, because to lose two or maybe three years of development of the school estate to ensure that learners are in schools that are fit for purpose, and secondly where the spend on learners is more equitable. You'll be aware at the moment that in Powys, in some schools we spend more or less £7000 on a learner. In other schools we spend £3500 on a learner. There's quite a variation in spend and the ambition is, and we're clear about it, that we need to work towards having equity. We need to ensure that we spend well on all our learners and to miss three years of moving ahead at this point would probably be quite a retrograde step.

It's already caused Powys significant problems in the past, that it hasn't gone through change processes and a further couple of years or three years of not planning to move on would just store up some of those problems even further.

In terms of where we are, then we've had to look at the way we consult in order to make sure we reach the people who need to be reached. The level of responses at consultation has actually been very high and the fact that we're not doing meetings in school halls has not affected the contribution that people are making to the dialogue and the points that people raise.

Then we're onto the issues around wellbeing. Staff wellbeing is critical to all of this, because whatever happens at the end of a consultation, the school is there, the learners are there and the staff are working. We realize that this does put pressure on people. There's no avoiding that, but we are seeking to make sure that we can provide that level of care for staff and support.

Staff: Are you doing that at the minute though? I don't particularly feel like you are considering my wellbeing or that of my colleagues. I had an email from Councillor Phyl today, which I actually found quite offensive, saying that he's considering my wellbeing.

Geraint Rees: I think you'll find that in the main, teachers and staff at schools would have been pleased to have an affirmation from him around the commitment.

Inevitably the proposal to change the school so fundamentally is one that is challenging. I'll hand over to Sarah as there is a range of things that would happen should the decision go ahead and Sarah Christoforou from our HR service will be able to advise on this important aspect.

Sarah Christoforou: Just to say that we do understand this is an anxious time. I think I did contact your Headteacher a couple of months ago to ask whether you wanted any pre kind of meetings to discuss anything and we're always there if you feel that you want some additional time or to talk through some of the questions you might have.

What we don't want is people storing up questions for further on in the process, because I know there are lots of what ifs about how it could affect you. We're really happy to provide some additional support or to come down and talk to you as a HR service, not as part of the full transformation panel, and talk you through that. And I can be in touch with your Headteacher and let her have information on what support there is there.

We are aware that it does affect people's anxiety levels. Any change does, but we are very prepared to come down and support you with that. We've also involved trade unions in lots of discussions and they're very well aware of these proposals and also available to support as well. So if you're not feeling just at the moment that

that support is there, then I'll take that away from the meeting. I'll be in touch after this meeting with your Headteacher so that we can see what we can do to support you.

Staff: What about the children and the parents?

Geraint Rees: I'll come back on the children. I will say though, I know Sarah has been into some schools where there have been 1:1's with members of staff around change, so that service has been offered and is offered ongoing.

In terms of children, we are left with either we don't approach change or we do approach change. The evidence is that children are remarkably resilient to change normally, and there are new schools that pop up all over Wales. The area between Talgarth and Hay-on-Wye went from 11 to 5 schools. The area down south near Ystradgynlais in the authority I think went from 12 to 4 schools. They went through significant changes, and what the teachers and headteachers report back is that the children are remarkably buoyant. They take things in their stride, and get on with the change in as much as when a child moves house for example, there's a change of school that goes with it, and within weeks things move on.

That's not to say we should take it for granted, and we don't, but there is a question here that the climate that is set by adults is probably the single biggest impact on children during a change process of any kind, whether it's domestic or school, and I think that's the huge challenge and the one we need to support you with should this go ahead. How would that happen? What are the things that can be done in school to ease it? What are the things to avoid and we will soon have a dedicated member of staff to provide support with Headteachers, to work alongside Headteachers through change processes. Whether or not a decision to go ahead with this proposal happens or not depends on the outcome of the consultation, but should it happen, there will be that support in place to try and network across and make sure that the planning works well for wellbeing as much as it does for the nuts and bolts of changing schools. But we're in consultation mode at the moment rather than anything else, but we'd be mindful of the need for that if it happens.

It may or may not satisfy the question you answered, but it is something that is emerging with this as we go through change.

Staff: In the consultation document with regards to combined age classes, it says that small pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes with Key Stage 2 in one and Foundation another. Because pupil numbers in each year group are small it is more difficult to ensure that all pupils are probably challenged. What evidence do you have to support that statement, which is in the consultation document?

Geraint Rees: I think you'll find that's a position taken through a whole range of tried and tested historical research that's been used around schools that it's only ever

offset by exceptional and outstanding teachers. That's the thing that can make the difference, and I think you may be arguing the case through the headteacher. That's what you've got, but in the main cross age teaching makes it more challenging to have personalized stretching for every learner because of the very nature of it. But I'll call on Lynette or Eurig if they want to comment from the primary perspective. This is something that is widely accepted as providing additional challenge for teachers.

Eurig Towns: Yes I'm happy to come in on that Geraint.

Staff: Before you come in, can I just say with regards to that we're moving towards a new curriculum and as has been mentioned, it's stage, not age. Teaching a whole key stage class actually lends itself towards that. For example, this morning I had year three class pupils rounding numbers to 2 decimal places. If I was teaching a year three class, that scale wouldn't be on the table. There are opportunities within teaching whole key stage classes for children to be stretched and to be supported and scaffolded as well.

Geraint Rees: That's fair enough. I think that goes back to when I said, you know, the one thing that offsets it is exceptional teaching or excellent teaching, and I think we have to take your word for that.

Headteacher: I think the question is what evidence do you have that supports that statement for our pupils at Llanbedr, the statement that you've made – what evidence have you got to support that, and we're also not in two classes, we're in three classes.

Geraint Rees: Were you in two classes prior to the recent growth in numbers?

Headteacher: No, no, we've always been in three small classes.

Geraint Rees: So the average number of learners per classes is 17?

Headteacher: It's small, yes.

Geraint Rees: Fine, I won't say anything more on that, but you know it's part of the consultation.

Headteacher: What is being asked is what evidence do you have that supports that statement? Because it shouldn't be a general statement. It's in the consultation document for our school. So it should relate to what's happening in our school.

Geraint Rees: Well, I think you'd have to say that for any setting, the mixed age classes do pose additional challenges. It is a fact that is articulated frequently, including by teacher unions around the extent of challenge that is faced in smaller schools. That's why the funding that you receive is significantly higher per learner than it would be in other schools in order to try and make sure that they do have a

teacher, and where necessary, teaching assistant to work with them as well, in order to try and offset some of the challenges that you otherwise would have.

It's only a statement of general fact. Whether or not it applies in each instance in a school is a matter that I think we have to hand it to you to take a view, and I think you are taking a view on that, but it's only offset by the fact that your classes are in groups of 17, which is, you know, quite a considerable deviation from what would ordinarily happen across Wales for learners. So the local authority through the funding helps offset that level of what would otherwise be perceived as disadvantage.

Linda Green: No, it's high quality teaching and learning and effective planning.

Staff: So is it a general statement and it doesn't apply to Llanbedr school? There is no evidence for that?

Geraint Rees: No, what we're saying is that the class sizes that are funded for the school help to make it as possible for you to be able to operate without disadvantaging learners through being in such mixed age classes, but it is a significant additional cost that the local authority has put into the budget to make that possible. If you were to be on the average class size of, say, 27 or 28, you extend the age range further in your school, but the local authority has a position on this for many years to try and make sure that it minimizes the numbers where there is an age split the way that you have. So an acknowledgement that it's more challenging is the fact that the budget is given to you to try and make it as operable as possible.

Headteacher: But it's down to building capacity. We know that our cluster schools also have teachers and teaching assistants in their classes. It's how you use those teaching assistants and how highly qualified they are so that they can take groups of children for literacy and numeracy. It is how effectively and efficiently your staff are used.

Geraint Rees: That's a key part of it as well.

Headteacher: It's about building capacity in school. It's about working with what you've got.

Geraint Rees: It's not just about the quantum that you have, it is how you use it as well and which is why I think you're being acknowledged as a school that has made good progress over recent years by deploying things wisely.

Headteacher: It's just that there are few statements in the consultation document that seem to be general statements which are not related to our school yet it's a consultation document for Llanbedr Church in Wales School.

Staff: Previously you've discounted a federation between Crickhowell Primary School because it's not a Church school, but yet you've listed it now as a school for our children to attend. I was just wondering why.

Geraint Rees: I'll ask Marianne to come in in a minute but there are issues of legalities that come into these things as well as anything else.

Marianne Evans: Quite simply, you can't legally federate a Community Primary School and a school with Church in Wales status, so that's why that was discounted. So you could federate with Llangattock, for example because they are a Church in Wales School, or Crickhowell could federate with Llangynidr because they are both community primary schools. That's the reason why.

Staff: If we can't federate, why are our children going to be sent to Crickhowell then? Because that's one of the schools you put down for our children to go to.

Marianne Evans: What we're saying is people can transfer to their closest alternative school, so we're not naming a school. So until the time that parents would make their choice, should the proposal to close Llanbedr go through, once we know what happens, parents would then make a decision about where they would want their children to go so that could be any school and they could choose whichever school. So if there's a place in that school, then there would be accepted into that school.

Headteacher: But the status of our school is a Church in Wales School so families come to us because of the Christian ethos, because we are a Church in Wales School. Then you're saying just to send them to the nearest school. Surely that dismisses that we are a Church school and that's why parents come to us.

Marianne Evans: Parents come to schools for variety of reasons, don't they?

Headteacher: But we know our parents. We know our families. They come to us because of the Christian ethos.

Marianne Evans: And if they wanted access to church places, then there's availability in Llangattock.

Headteacher: So there is availability in Llangattock for our children?

Marianne Evans: There are spaces at Llangattock, but not for the numbers that you have in the whole school, but actually in terms of the local authority and what we are required to do, we are required to consider church places as part of the overall allocation, but actually within the Crickhowell cluster there's over 100 spare places and we know from past experience when schools close, parents don't automatically all choose the same school, and that's been the pattern everywhere. So with that in

mind, that's why we said pupils would transfer to alternative schools. It would be a choice for the parents.

Headteacher: Where is the next Church in Wales School?

Marianne Evans: Priory in Brecon, or Llangorse would be the closest school in Powys.

Headteacher: Ok thank you.

Staff: On Page 9 of the Transforming Education Strategy it states that the highest priority is given to staff wellbeing and professional development. But how have you demonstrated this to us?

Geraint Rees: We're going through a processes of transformation, including a recruitment round going on at the moment to ensure that we have people to lead across the local authority on key areas to do with the new curriculum – with Welsh, digital learning, there's a whole range of things there, and part of our transformation isn't just the fabric of buildings, it's actually going through change processes and about the way we work across the local authority as well, including developing further the model of working in 13 localities, your locality being Crickhowell. We will do all we can over the coming years to encourage deepening any collaboration across all secondaries and across all our primaries to make sure that we support that, and that will be the way of working.

We've also got a range of emerging programmes for improving teaching across the authority as well and leadership development, so there's a whole range of things as part of the transforming education plan. It's not just a matter of reorganizing schools, it's a matter of reorganizing the service as well and collaborating with others to deepen the professional development available for people.

Headteacher: Are there any more questions from staff while the officers are here? Can I just thank the officers for coming here this evening just to answer our questions. Thank you for your time.

Geraint Rees: Thank you. Thank you for the consideration beforehand as well, and the professionalism of coming at this entirely from the angle of learners and wellbeing and quality of education. We do realize that this isn't an easy place for any of you, but we will see what happens next in terms of process and we hugely appreciate the time you have given this and that you give to our learners week in week out.

There will be very careful consideration of all comments and responses received, and a consultation report will be prepared that will reflect everything raised tonight and elsewhere in order to make sure that there's a balanced response and that will

be considered by the Cabinet to make sure that they are as fully informed as possible so as to be able to make a decision.

Consultation meeting with Governors of Llanbedr C. In W. School

13th May 2021

Present

Governors:

Elaine Lusted, Chair of Governors
Malcolm Thomas, Vice Chair of Governors
Linda Green, Headteacher
Gavin John, Teacher Governor
Annabelle Elletson
Dean Christy
Anne Rees
Donna Jones
Dawn Powell
Jenny Parry

Officers:

Geraint Rees, Strategic Lead for Education
Lynette Lovell, Interim Chief Education Officer, Schools Service
Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation
Eurig Towns, Service Manager for School Improvement
Sarah Christoforou, HR Business Manager (Schools)
Mari Thomas, Interim Schools Finance Manager
Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education

Others:

John Meredith, Diocese of Swansea and Brecon

Geraint Rees welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Powys County Council officers attending the meeting.

It was explained that there would be a brief presentation with an opportunity for discussion, comments, and questions to the officers afterwards. Geraint Rees explained that the meeting would be recorded, for minuting purposes but the recording would be deleted once the minutes had been completed.

Marianne Evans gave a Powerpoint presentation and explained that in February 2021, Powys Cabinet gave approval to proceed with a proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School. The consultation commenced on 21 April 2021 and has been extended until 23 June 2021.

The importance of the consultation process as a way for people to make their views known was emphasised.

The specific proposal is:

- To close Llanbedr C. in W. School from 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.

Geraint Rees explained that an addendum to the consultation documents had been published this week, which provided an updated capacity figure for Llangattock School, and the consultation period has been extended.

Governors were then given the opportunity to ask any questions or to make any comments in relation to the matter.

Governor: Can I start off with just a question from me? I really want to know why Powys have proceeded with this proposal during a global pandemic. Considering the wellbeing and mental health of our children is obviously paramount, could you explain?

Geraint Rees: This was given significant consideration as to whether we should proceed with consultations, and this has been something that has been discussed with other local authorities as well. We are in particularly challenging times. Welsh Government gave it consideration as well and at the beginning of the pandemic, we were wondering whether they would actually have a moratorium on consultations or how they would wish to proceed. The lack of clarity around how long this pandemic might last has probably been a big influence on saying there are some things that probably need to proceed despite the circumstances we're in.

Welsh Government issued slightly revised guidance in order to support the process. There are also funding arrangements around 21st century schools, which is the capital programme for school fabric and digital learning. That has carried on, and the expectation is that if local authorities do proceed with consultation, that they're mindful of these things.

Powys has had quite a significant backlog of under investment in schools over an extended period of time. That's the unavoidable truth for Powys. There are areas where primary schools have been through significant change, such as the area between Brecon and Hay-on-wye. The area down near Ystradgynlais where they've gone from a dozen schools down to four in the Ystradgynlais area. But it's not been a consistent process of investment in schools in order to make sure that Powys has a sustainable school estate.

Estyn's inspection in 2019 raised serious concerns about the organization of schools and school places, and around the deployment of budgets, and you'll be very aware that there's a significant inequity around the distribution of budgets across schools.

Some of our learners, we contribute the best part of £7000 for their learning whilst other learners are down to just around the £3500 mark and the decision to carry on with the consultation was to make sure that (a) we didn't miss the investment that was available and (b) to retain the momentum that was emerging through the dialogue with the schools community, including chairs of governors, about the need to do something significant to bring the Powys schools estate into the 21st century that was all agreed before the pandemic. We held events for Chairs that some of you may remember and for headteachers, and there was a strong feeling, including from the trade unions, that if Powys didn't nail it this time, then what did it say about the authority. The pandemic has cut across it, as you say, and we are working to do all we can to proceed but with ensuring the widest engagement possible and that's coming through in terms of the figures – people are engaging with us, but we are aware that it is challenging times and we need to put and we are putting support to work alongside headteachers to manage the change, and they'll be working with chairs of governors I guess as well. So that's the situation. We're not oblivious to it, but it was a challenging decision.

Governor: Following on from that, your Strategic Aim One states that the objective is to develop a network of all age schools around the 13 current Secondary schools. What are the plans for Crickhowell? At the moment it doesn't seem as though Crickhowell is included, but what are the plans for Crickhowell?

Geraint Rees: I'll turn to Marianne who I think probably can talk you through the approach we're taking.

Marianne Evans: Thank you. All catchments will be looked at over the next few years. We've already looked at a couple of catchments, Llanfyllin in the north in particular and Llanfair Caereinion in terms of an all-age school as well. We have to chunk up the work, so we've called them waves. Wave one is where we are at the moment. Crickhowell will come into future waves, so every catchment will be looked at. In terms of plans for the Crickhowell catchment it's difficult to say because we haven't even started any work around it.

Governor: So why are you closing planning to close our school now?

Marianne Evans: The other aim underneath that Strategic Aim One, is establishing all through schools but also rationalizing and reconfiguring primary provision. We're taking a two-pronged approach because one of the key issues that came out in the engagement before the strategy was approved, was the fact that Powys as a whole has too many small schools and that came through very, very clearly. Welsh Government and Estyn were very clear about that as well.

So, we are taking a two-pronged approach. We are looking at the smaller schools, and Llanbedr isn't the only school being looked at. We've got proposals currently for other schools and will have other proposals in the autumn term. If we wait until we do a whole catchment review, it could take years, and in order to get investment to

support these catchments in terms of the all-age proposals, that could take a long time as well. We know what we have currently in our capital programme, and we haven't got the funding yet to roll out the all-age model throughout the County, so it's going to take time. However, there is pressure on us to address the current school infrastructure and that's why we're looking at the smaller schools as well as taking forward further proposals around all-age. I hope that explains it.

Governor: So, do you mean to say then that you are going to close all small schools?

Marianne Evans: We're reviewing all small schools, either individually or as part of catchments. In some areas, we have to look at an area in its entirety as some small schools need to be there because of their geographic locations in far flung places, or there are language issues. So, in terms of are we going to close small schools, I wouldn't say we are going to close all small schools, but we will be reviewing all small schools. Is that fair Geraint?

Geraint Rees: It probably is. I mean, that's the expectation that we at least do that review and there may be different solutions in different places, and some of that will rely on the proximity of a school to a neighbouring school, the availability of surplus places in an area, the quality of buildings, and the need for investment – a whole range of things that come into play, and the depth of rurality probably is something that Powys has to be mindful of as well in terms of population sparsity or density. So, all of those are in the frame, and as you know there are proposals already, as we've been consulting for a few months now around a range of small schools and there'll be more consultation.

The issue around equity is a significant driver. The Powys allocation of funding for the delegated schools budget across all schools is around what you would expect an authority to be spending. The actual funding available for delivering education leaves a good number of our schools hugely stretched because the funding that's available is being spread across so many schools, and some of our secondary schools are amongst the lowest funded in Wales, because the maintenance of the significant estate is actually putting pressure on it. The Council has annually given an uplift to its schools' delegated budget but actually the problem is running more quickly than the resolution of the problem that we have. Other authorities around Wales have been through change more extensively over the last 20 years, because since 1997 there has been a significant amount of money available for developing the school estate. Powys may have been able to take advantage of more than has been taken advantage of over the years is probably a reasonable thing to be saying, and that's why Estyn called time at its inspection, to say you need to sort out a whole range of areas, and that's why this strategy is in place. Mari are you able to exemplify anything around that funding and the inequity and the differences from learner to learner across the local authority?

Mari Thomas: Yes, in terms of average budgeted spend per pupil, I think for Llanbedr it is just over £6,000 per pupil, but some of our larger primary schools, such as Ysgol Dyffryn y Glowyr in Ystradgynlais, are only receiving about £3,390 per pupil – so there's a significant difference in that level. The other thing that's come to the fore lately is that in terms of funding per pupil for primary schools, we have the highest funding level of the nine rural authorities, whereas for secondary schools we're the ninth of the nine, so we're the lowest of the nine rural authorities. So clearly there is need for some rebalancing I think around that.

Governor: Am I not right in saying it Powys set their own funding formula?

Mari Thomas: Yes, in consultation with all the schools, yes.

Governor: Which gave more money to small schools?

Mari Thomas: We did, indeed, set up a formula, I think it's about two or three years ago now, which was needed to stabilize the system.

Governor: So, you've actually given more money to small schools, by the way you funded them, and now you're complaining that they've got more money?

Geraint Rees: No, I think the issue is that if you have the schools, you have to sustain them, and a small school like Llanbedr needs the £6000 funding in order to be able to offer what it does offer. The question is how long can an authority maintain that, whilst the rest of Wales is moving with new capital stock and reconfiguring schools incrementally rather than in rushes, and this is part of what's being attempted now, to have a strategy that people are clear about and know why it's there and will lead to greater equity across the board. That's only part of the message, because there's no ambition here to make any savings from education, the ambition would be that whatever is spent in education will continue to be spent, but there may be at the end of this journey fewer schools, and therefore the average spend in each of those remaining schools rises. So that's only part of the narrative that we have, but we have to be honest about the need for equity across schools.

Governor: I mean the figure you're quoting is actually incorrect because our numbers are incorrect. So, it doesn't actually cost £6000 per pupil, it's less, and it actually brings us down nearer to the rest of the schools to the average of primary schools.

Marianne Evans: Just to say that the figure in the document is based on last year's data. Now we recognise that your pupil numbers have increased since the document is published. Mari, I will look to you, the annual return to Welsh Government around the cost per pupil takes place in the middle of the summer, so we would be updating this one from the figure here. It will be an updated figure that goes forward.

Mari Thomas: Yes.

Governor: Can I first of all, just before I ask my question, just apologize because normally we're used as governors to starting the meeting with a prayer, and that seemed to have somehow not happened. But just to reassure everybody, I prayed for us all quietly here, so I'm sure we can do our best.

I had a nice letter from Lynette today advising me of the addendum to the consultation and the revised figures. I was actually quite surprised by that because I had understood that in your meeting with Llangattock last week, you'd agreed the capacity at Llangattock to be 117...

Marianne Evans: No, 121.

Governor: Well, whatever. I understand that although the current pupil numbers are 101, in September there will be 103. So, can you just tell me – this isn't my question, but it informs the question. Of those 17 or 18 available places, how many of those are in the nursery?

Marianne Evans: Those are the figures for the school. We don't take account of the of the numbers in the early years provision. So, the capacity figure of 121 doesn't include the early years.

Governor: Right, OK, but do you know how they are spread across the year groups?

Marianne Evans: We do, but I haven't got that information to hand now but I could find this out for you.

Governor: Well, I mean, obviously it's fairly crucial. My substantive question is, obviously you're aware of the obligations on the Council under the Organisational Code to guarantee places in alternative church schools if you're closing a church school. I was really pleased to see that the Transforming Education Strategy claims to be answering the call for an increase in faith schools.

What I'm wondering, is given that more than half of the Llanbedr children come from outside the catchment area, it's safe to say pupils want to attend a church school. Can you actually guarantee that a reasonable proportion, or even ideally all of the Llanbedr children are going to be able to be found spaces in alternative church schools?

Marianne Evans: We know that spaces are available in Llangattock, on the data that we have, based on the figures today, 20 places. But that isn't sufficient for all the pupils in Llanbedr. To take you back to the School Organisation Code, it says that local authorities should consider the availability of church places, where provision is being reduced or removed. Alternative school provision of the same nature, wherever possible, should remain available and accessible to pupils in the local

area. But it also states, however, that in some areas it may not be compatible with the cost-effective provision of education to continue to maintain access without the same provision. So, when you say the words “guarantee”, the local authority isn't required to guarantee church places in in an area – just to make that clear.

There are church places available in Llangattock, not enough for everybody, but the other thing we know from previous school organisation proposals, is that if a decision is made to close the school, parents choose other schools, they don't all go en masse to the same school. Parents choose schools for different reasons, and I think it's reasonable to assume that in in the case of this proposal, then parents would act the same. Once a decision has been made, they would consider the best place to put their child, so until that time it's difficult to even estimate how many pupils would transfer into any school.

Governor: Well, obviously they're not going to be able to move them to the same school, because there isn't another school that has the capacity to take them.

Marianne Evans: There are over 100 places in the in the Crickhowell catchment, available for pupils.

Governor: Not in church schools.

Marianne Evans: No, but as I said, we're not required to guarantee church places, but there are places available.

Governor: Well, you haven't got church places for as many as half of them.

Marianne Evans: As I've said, it's not a requirement that we guarantee church places.

Governor: I think I can speak on behalf of the all the governors, that we were really hoping that Councillor Phyl Davies would be would be with you today because he didn't appear at our meeting in January and I feel that as the Cabinet are the people who are going to be making this, from our perspective, momentous decision, that we would like to be able to directly put our case in front of the person who has the portfolio for education in Powys, and although there are many disadvantages to having to conduct it over Zoom, one of the advantages I guess from a Councillor's perspective is rather than travelling down to the South of Powys, he would have been able to join us for today's session and heard directly from us about our many concerns.

This isn't my question. This is an observation, and that observation gets strengthened by the fact that I have been writing to Cabinet members and I'm getting no response. I won't go into this in any more detail, but you know, it's subject of a complaint that I have made, and this isn't really reassuring to us that we are actually being directly heard by the people who are the decision makers in relation to this

situation. We understand the role that officers have, but the buck stops with the members who are going to make this decision and it feels like you know there isn't a way through for us to communicate directly with them. That's not a question, it's an observation.

Geraint Rees: Could I respond to the observation before you come to the question. An appointment has been made for the Cabinet to visit the school next week and that will involve Councillor Phyl Davies. You'll be aware that the very nature of local government, elected members are generally, other than the retired ones, holding down jobs as well and for all Councillor Phyl's efforts to be at almost everything that goes on in the authority, this is the first time that I've known him genuinely unable to be somewhere because of his other obligations, but he will receive the recording of this meeting and as well will be visiting Llanbedr next week, or the Cabinet will be visiting and we need to make arrangements to for how that can happen safely.

Governor: That doesn't reassure me I'm afraid, particularly as he didn't join us in January. We all have work as well, and we are doing this and the situation that our governors are in has meant that we are spending hours every week on this now and it's a cause that we are completely committed to and we expect others to be taking this as seriously as we are, and when I write to Councillor Phyl Davies and I get no response, that does not reassure me. I would have asked him this question and it relates to his overarching press release about the strategy.

He says, and it is a very laudable aim, that the strategy is aiming to deliver change that will benefit **all** learners and that this change is in the best interests of learners and this is at the forefront of the decision-making. Now, it won't be a surprise to you to know that we feel sceptical about this in relation to the pupils that we're concerned with in Llanbedr. The question I would have wanted to ask Councillor Davies, is how exactly will closing Llanbedr school benefit our pupils? What's the advantage to them?

Geraint Rees: We've had the Headteachers in the Ystradgynlais area and the ones in the area around Hay-on-Wye during all the engagements that we've had with them around the transformation strategy, all saying that they would have been sceptical prior to the reorganisation in their own areas. They would have been sceptical of the intended outcome that was at that time mentioned by the local authority.

Each of them would be keen now to say that that change has been a significant one for the better, including some of them who are working with Headteachers who are going through change process at the moment because of the belief that actually it is worth it for the learners. Now to convince anybody that is in the thick of it that it's of direct benefit immediately is particularly challenging and the view you express is a very common one around school organisational change. However, there's quite a lot of feedback that we are receiving, that some of them would have wished that they would have gone with the change rather than object to it when the proposals were on the table for them. Across Wales, there's been significant investment in the

reorganisation of schools over 20 years and rarely do people say we wish we hadn't done it. It's actually quite the opposite, including from families whose children then are part of different school arrangements, different configurations, and get different kinds of education.

Now, as it happens, Llanbedr is a school that is punching above its weight. It's performing well as a school and that then quite rightly, leads to the question you're asking. However, there are good schools around you in the Crickhowell area, it is an area that is blessed with strength in its primary and secondary sector.

Governor: I think we know these schools Geraint, we've got friends whose children go to these schools. My own grandchildren go to some of these schools, so we know their classification, but we also know in detail what Llanbedr is offering. As governors we are scrutinizing the delivery of education in great detail and everything we are finding out about the delivery within Llanbedr is of a positive nature and has become more positive in the last few years.

The reports from the Challenge Advisor are very positive. We are being used often as an exemplar of good practice, so we are being reassured that the education that is being delivered is of a good standard. You have to convince us before we can give up the fight. You have to convince us. You say that these other heads are now convinced, so what are the areas that they are saying that they were wrong about? What areas are they saying that they are now benefiting from?

Geraint Rees: Well, the sorts of conversations we have are around the benefit of a larger number of staff to carry the burden of curriculum development, the wider opportunities available with greater numbers of learners of a similar age to have some benefits from extracurricular activities. The staff earlier on were mentioning the commitment and the strength of those activities in Llanbedr, so it's not as if it's not on offer. There is a question around the possibilities then, for developing people throughout their careers with responsibilities that match the experience that a member of staff would have, the leadership development opportunities, all of those issues are ones they regularly raise that become part of a school with a greater number of staff than they previously had, because in the Hay area it went from ten to four schools and in Ystradgynlais from twelve to five.

So, it's proportionately quite a change in numbers which they feel has strengthened them as a community of schools. One of the things we had a discussion earlier on was the strength of Llanbedr as part of the network of schools in the Crickhowell area, working collectively, and that's already in place, but that's often a benefit from organizational change, that people end up working together who previously wouldn't have.

It may not be the case this time, but there's a range of benefits, and one of the other benefits is in terms of the deployment of support staff where you're able to deploy people differently because you have a greater number of support staff, and they can

be deployed flexibly in a range of situations and acquire expertise in the range of additional learning needs specialism. But there's a whole range of things that greater numbers will allow. That's not to say it can't happen in smaller schools, but the effort it takes in the quality of leadership is a real challenge, but the meeting earlier on was compelling in terms of the staff commitment and the leadership commitment to being the kind of school that you talk about. So, we're under no illusions about that.

Governor: I think to balance what you're saying, and I mean some of the areas that the heads are identifying – we would actually say yeah, OK, that is a strength in our school already and I think there also needs to be a critique that larger schools do not work for all pupils and in fact some people, maybe half a dozen or more pupils who attend Llanbedr are there because they haven't settled, and the larger schools haven't worked for them. It isn't all plus on one side, and all negative on the other. Small schools can deliver. My own children went to this school and it was exactly what they needed at that time in their life, they went on and they flew afterwards. They both went into higher education, did really well and I will always be grateful for the firm foundation both in terms of education and values that were formed at Llanbedr and the size of the school was nothing but a benefit from their perspective.

Governor: I would just like to mention as well, I don't think Estyn have ever said that small schools don't work have they?

Geraint Rees: Not at all, and quite the opposite. Many of our small schools have outstanding inspection reports from Estyn. There's a little bit of a challenge there for local authorities because very often they comment on the strength of community, the quality of relationships, and then when they inspect the local authority, they throw the challenge around equity in terms of the distribution of funding across schools. So, there's sometimes quite a challenging position that they take. But no, you're right to say that you probably would be quite pushed to find a direct link between the quality of education provision as Estyn deem it and the sizes of schools. However, there's a whole range of other things that they would comment on that sometimes are helpful with scale.

Governor: So, do, you feel that Powys County Council feel that Estyn were recommending the closure of their small schools?

Geraint Rees: Well, Estyn were unequivocal in that the management of the finances in the school estate doesn't achieve equity across the board and the spend by the local authority is a perfectly reasonable spend – there's not a problem with the quantum that's allocated, but its distribution is causing difficulties. The inspection reports commented on the need to resolve the challenge of Post 16 learning in Powys, and that's partly linked to the organization of schools and budgets. Mari will exemplify what the spend on secondary and primary is like in Powys, but in order to be able to maintain the extensive number of small primary schools, it's essentially taking money from what would have been the secondary system in order to do that, which then is leaving us with quite a challenging lack of choice between 14 and 19

for learners, so these were mentioned in the inspection along with the challenge and the delivery of additional learning needs and the coordination of additional learning needs, which is a further challenge by having so many different schools with people with heavy classroom commitment and ALN management commitment, which in a large school you might actually be able to have an additional learning needs coordinator who has quite a bit of time in order to be able to manage that agenda. So, there's a whole range of things they criticize about Powys that are not directly linked to small schools, and nobody would be foolish enough to say small schools are the problem, but it is a challenge to maintain the estate that we have and to attract leaders in general. You are very fortunate as a small school to have somebody the calibre of Mrs Green, but that's not universally the case in terms of recruiting leaders into small schools, which is sometimes very challenging.

There's a whole range of things there, so it would be foolish to see it as a small school against the world issue. That would be an oversimplification of it, but it is part of the mix that Powys needs to resolve so it has a sustainable school community that can see learners through with choice and quality to the age of 18 or 19, and currently there's a significant piece of work to be done around all of it.

Governor: Quite a lot of presumptions are made against Llanbedr as it's a small school in the consultation and I just wanted to know if maybe you realize you know some of the things are wrong, such as numbers on roll – you know they're actually rising, not falling. Is there anyone that can comment on that?

Marianne Evans: At the time of writing the numbers were based on the PLASC 2020 return and for the projections, two sets of data, one based on PLASC and one based on the finance projections were used. We know you've already increased to 52 currently. When the consultation report comes back to Cabinet, all the data will be updated because we had PLASC for 2020, but we haven't had PLASC 2021 yet because of Covid. I'm not sure if that would be with us in time, but we will make sure that the data is updated to reflect your numbers on roll and then how that changes the surplus capacity figure or how that changes anything else. But as I said, the numbers were at a point in time.

Governor: Will they also be changed for schools in the catchment area as well?

Marianne Evans: Yes, any data or changes to pupil numbers, yes we will be updating them.

Governor: The things you've been saying about Llanbedr are obviously great things because it's a very, very good little school, an exemplar little school so that given that the educational standards we have are high and the fabric of our building owned by the church, not yourselves, is very good, and that we have excellent community engagement with a huge amount of parental involvement, and we have a wealth of extracurricular activities at the school, do you still maintain that with this wealth of information that our school is possibly still not viable?

Geraint Rees: In response to that, it's not a question of viability. You can make anything viable. It's a question of addressing the overall school estate in Powys to try and configure something that is sustainable and allows for continued development and investment in the learners and their entitlement to a new curriculum. Also, that the range of experiences, and I know to repeat what you said, we're already saying that the staff that you have are working very hard to overcome some of the challenges they have through being a small school and that is admirable and is a real tribute to them.

So, what we're saying is we're looking at transformation as a Powys wide activity. There will be reports coming to Cabinet around Post 16 in the very near future which is all across Powys. There's a whole range of things that we need to tackle. The additional learning needs agenda is part of a new strategy to try and improve the support available to our most vulnerable learners. None of these stand apart. They're all part of trying to ensure that we have a model that can work into the long term and secure investment into schools. Supporting the digitalization of learning as well and the wellbeing of learners is key to all of it, despite the challenges we currently face in the current climate. It is an overall strategy. It's up to the Cabinet how they would wish that to work through, and therefore as officers we've got a whole range of proposals that we're consulting on in this way and they will take a decision one by one on these to see how it stacks up in terms of getting Powys over a period of 5-10 years, maybe even longer, to a point where somebody can say we've now got a school estate that does what it needs to do across the board so that that is the challenge.

Governor: That's nice. I like that answer, but like Marianne said, these are going to come in waves and Crickhowell isn't going to be looked at for potentially quite a few years – so are we just a random dot on a map that you just thought potentially that's where we could go, but actually now that you've actually seen the exemplary things that we do here, is it now a point where actually we are having to fight a corner for no apparent reason, because actually we're very good at what we do?

Marianne Evans: All the issues that you raise and all the information that you send to us about the Community Impact and the additional services and clubs and everything that you provide – all the information about the impact on the Community should there not be a school in Llanbedr, and all the added value work that you do, all of that is heard and will be included in the Consultation Report that then goes back to Cabinet – going back to the decision makers. Cabinet would be the decision makers here and that information about your school, how it's doing now, all that information will be there within the Consultation Report and as I said earlier, that Consultation Report is absolutely key now to the next stage, when Cabinet makes the decision. Nothing is being hidden anywhere, everything around the school and your passion, the staff's passion about the school will come through in the Consultation Report.

Geraint Rees: It is the responsibility of the officers to deliver that honestly and transparently. It's non-negotiable, really.

Governor: Thank you Marianne, and if you decide to withdraw your consultation there will be no hard feelings from Llanbedr and you are most welcome for a cup of tea at any time.

Geraint Rees: We appreciate the generosity of spirit. I don't know if it extended to me, but I did hear that Marianne was invited!

Marianne Evans: OK, I'll take you up on it!

Governor: We will have to see who works hardest on our behalf. Thank you very much.

Governor: How can you explain the best interest for our pupils in bigger classrooms in a bigger school?

Geraint Rees: I think there's a couple of things here, I'll call in Lynette in a moment - it's an issue around the whole of the local authority. The question was asked earlier on and the average class size, I understand is 17 in Llanbedr at the moment. That's quite unusual across Wales and would be quite unusual in England as well, but that's what's required in order to support Llanbedr to be able to maintain a viable education provision, given the numbers, in order not to have too many cross-year groups. But the issue is to do with across the board and what is reasonable for all learners in Powys and how do we give everybody a fair crack of the whip, and that's why this proposal is partly on the table, in order to try and develop that equity. Lynette, you'll have experience of having been a pupil in a small school in Powys.

Lynette Lovell: Yes, I was a pupil in a small school in Powys, and then as a teacher, I've been a teacher in a large school so in response to the question there, in larger classrooms with more children, and we've talked about it earlier with the staff. the key to anything it is the quality of teaching and learning and we know you've mentioned that about Llanbedr.

In general terms, a class that is larger may sometimes provide more opportunities, but what it does do from my own experience is you've got perhaps less of the year group span in those classes. So, you may have a straight Year 6 class of 30. You may have a mixed, but it's usually mixed for two-year groups in a larger school, so that's where you've got the opportunities to be developing skills within those age ranges. It is more difficult planning for the full age range of children in a key stage, and I'm not saying that that isn't happening in Llanbedr, I'm just saying in general terms, the workload, particularly for teachers, when they've got the full key stage compared to perhaps one year group or two, even though the class is 30, when it comes to differentiation, it's when you've got a year six class, generally differentiation is three ways. However, you could have the full range as well, I appreciate that, and

you look at individual pupil need. But in a school of classes of 30, perhaps one year group or two, the teacher workload for planning can be easier.

Governor: We have some kids from large schools, and they've come to us as they didn't thrive in bigger schools. I come from a small school. I was the only one going up to high school on my own and I was fine, so it doesn't harm the kids to be in smaller schools, smaller classrooms because they all have got to help each other out so it doesn't seem to affect the kids at all.

Lynette Lovell: Your experience was exactly the same as mine, as a pupil going to secondary school – the only pupil from the school. What I will say is the same is true of a large class in a large school where children are together, and go up together, there's absolutely no problem with it that way as well. I take on board the fact that you say you've had children come to Llanbedr from larger schools coming to a smaller school and are thriving, and that it is good, but I would say that there are different children, in certain aspects, thriving in larger schools too. For me, it is about the quality of teaching and learning, no matter what size the school is and that is the key factor for me that enables pupils to thrive. The ethos of the school is important, you've already talked about this at Llanbedr, but that's important for large schools too. From my own experience as a headteacher, that ethos of care is very important. So, it really is about the quality of teaching and learning in a class of 30 where children can all thrive in that environment too.

Geraint Rees: Could I just say something as well about scale, and I think it is quite important because we're talking about large and small schools. A single form of entry school will have 210 learners – that's 30 in each year group, plus these days, a nursery on top of that. A two form of entry then has 420 plus a nursery again, and there are three form of entry schools around Wales where they will have 630 plus a nursery, and sometimes those nurseries are 150 or 200 learners as well.

When we talk about larger schools in this context in Powys, we are talking about, and you will have seen the size of the schools that we have in Llangynidr and Llangattock in Crickhowell, and they're not massive schools. So, when we talk about larger schools we're not talking about larger schools as they would be in an urban area. They are still relatively small schools, but they are larger than the experience that children would have in Llanbedr obviously, but I just need to make that clear because there are proposals around Wales, in some authorities, for three form of entry primary schools, which would be 630 plus a nursery – but we're not in that domain at all. I just need to stress that.

Governor: I just have another question, because one of the schools that you are putting forward that our children could go to already has year groups in the class of over 30 children – well over 30 children, and the other school that you are suggesting they go to also has shared year groups, they have the same amount of classes as us, so don't have a separate class for each year group – so I don't see

that you're offering our children any better educational experience, in either of those schools.

Geraint Rees: Do you want to come back in there Marianne on the matter of numbers? I mean, the organisation of those schools is a matter for them. But the capacity must be there because we're talking about over 100 surplus places in the Crickhowell catchment primary – so the way they're configured still leaves quite a significant amount of capacity in the area.

Marianne Evans: Again, it's down to what the choice of the parents is if a decision is made to close Llanbedr. Then whichever schools receive children from Llanbedr, that governing body and the head of those schools would need to look at the class structure and accommodate those pupils as and when. So, the numbers now, yes we know numbers in year groups, there may be over 30 in in some, but until we know what happens and what the decisions of parents are it's hard to know how that would impact every year group. Lynette do you agree?

Lynette Lovell: Yes, I agree, Marianne. I think the issue is that there are lots of ways of structuring a primary school, and you have to balance. You have some year groups that are perhaps over 30. You have some that are 20 or even looking at your numbers, although they are from PLASC 2020, I think you have a bit of a bulk there in year two and year three with the numbers that are in the consultation document, so you do have that issue as a Headteacher every year to look at how you're going to structure your classes going forward. You mentioned that there are some schools on the list there that don't have single year groups. But as Geraint said earlier, even our largest school in Powys is around 300, and in actual fact we don't have the schools that have got the two form entry, but there are ways of organizing the school, so if you've got a year group of 32 and a year group of 27 or something like that, you can mix the classes, and some of our primary schools, the larger ones, do go with a 5/6 year group. Now of course it is a split year group, and some of them do 5/6 5/6 5/6. That is a split year group, but it isn't the range of a full key stage, so there are different ways of organizing it accordingly, and that's what headteachers do to make sure they've got that sort of even split, even though your group numbers may fluctuate, and you do it too here, obviously because you've got a fluctuation in some of your groups as well.

Governor: I think a lot of concerns from parents is being a small school, there are families that go to the school, who have got quite large families and there are also friendship groups who would like to go to the same school, and not every school that you're offering can take those children in those year groups. I think you're splitting our children, and just putting them in a school that's got space, instead of giving them the choice.

Geraint Rees: Why don't I just come in there as somebody who's worked in various authorities around transformation. When a school closes, families then make their choices, and there's a whole range of things that come into play, and I've never

known the population of a school all wishing to decamp to a single other option. It usually brings with it a whole range of things around convenience, parents' workplace, childcare support that's available, cousins. There's a whole range of things that come into play, and I think we'd reasonably have to expect that to happen here.

What Marianne was saying earlier is that we have in excess of 100 surplus places in neighbouring schools, and we have about 50 learners who would need to seek a place. So, there's a fair bit of flexibility in the system. The assurance of a place in a denominational school is not a guarantee as was pointed out earlier on, but due consideration needs to be given to it, and that is clearly something we are considering in our discussion with the diocesan staff. We are looking at how church education can develop across the whole of Powys and there will inevitably be some gaps, and as was pointed out earlier, the numbers available in Llangattock do not match the numbers currently in Llanbedr, but it may not be that all those parents would seek that in any case, but they may – we'd have to see how that works out.

Governor: You are saying how it does come down to parental choice, of convenience and everything like that, but a lot of children that come to this school it's not at their parents' convenience – they come to this school because it is the best school for them, so this is what parents believe for our children. So, saying that it's all down to convenience and everything like that isn't quite the thing.

Geraint Rees: Should the decision go ahead, and Llanbedr is no longer there, there is a range of factors that parents will take into account when considering where their child might go. I wasn't saying it about Llanbedr per se, it was about what happens next potentially.

Governor: The thing with that is the disruption to the pupils and the staff relationships, because they are being presumed to be scattered amongst the local areas. The local community is going to be dissolved in order to fill places at other schools. Is that fair?

Geraint Rees: I think that's a strong statement. I think that needs to be on the record as it will be there quoted verbatim. Thank you. Point strongly made.

Governor: I'm sorry, I just feel that you don't know this community. Llanbedr School is at the heart of it, and I know the rural communities are very important and I just think it seems very unfair particularly at this point in time. It feels like the pupils would be scattered rather than moved in their best interests.

Geraint Rees: Point noted, I think is the best thing to say at this point.

Governor: You keep saying parents will have a choice. There is not a single other school in the area that parents could get their children to anyway, never mind easily, even from a practical point of view, with journeys and distances, and if they have to

have a working day themselves and that sort of thing, which is anything close to the same ethos and character and learning standard and all the rest of it that is unique to Llanbedr. So, to say that they would have a choice of other schools to send their children to is just simply untrue.

Geraint Rees: Can I ask how would you propose it should work then if it's not a matter for parents? Is there is there another way we could do that?

Governor: No, my point is that by closing Llanbedr, you are removing that choice from parents. You are removing the choice for more than half of the children that currently choose Llanbedr to go to a church school. You are removing the choice for families who have chosen to drive across the catchment area to schools where their children thrive. We've got children who have come from other bigger schools in a wide area, and their parents have chosen to take them away from those larger schools to send them to a smaller school where they have subsequently thrived under the pastoral care and ethos and friendship groups and all the rest of it that they find in Llanbedr, and that is what you are in danger of destroying.

Geraint Rees: Point clearly made and understood.

Governor: A couple of points on procedure, because everything I've just heard I fully endorse and what has been said I couldn't support more, but purely on procedure you talked about that ultimately the Cabinet is going to make a decision, but in order for the Cabinet to make its decision, they have to have all the correct facts and all the correct feedback that is actually relevant to making that decision. Will the group who are actually preparing the report that will go to Cabinet make a recommendation to Cabinet, or is it just going to be the statement of facts and then allow the Cabinet to make their own decisions? First question. I have another one.

Geraint Rees: I'll turn over to Marianne on this one.

Marianne Evans: Yes there would be a recommendation. The consultation report is prepared, and the Cabinet report that goes with it would have a recommendation.

Governor: And who will be making that recommendation?

Marianne Evans: Officers will be making the recommendation, then Cabinet then have the chance to either agree with it or disagree with it.

Governor: The track record from my experience is that usually when recommendations are made, they are usually followed, so ultimately there's a possibility that the quality of that recommendation will determine the outcome. For the Cabinet to go against the recommendation is not something that is normal. So really, the onus is not really on the Cabinet but on the people making the recommendation.

Marianne Evans: That's an interesting point. I think we have in the past been in similar situations, considering small schools. We have then analysed the issues raised and we have come to the conclusion as officers that there's an issue that means that a proposal cannot go forward, so we recommend to Cabinet that a proposal is either modified or it's abandoned. So, our analysis of the issues raised is actually very, very important, and on the basis of that, officers will make a judgment about the recommendation, and it is a very honest and open and transparent process. It's never done in a way to get to a conclusion, we're not pre-empting the conclusion. If there are issues that are so significant that have come through, then our advice would be, maybe take account of that issue.

Governor: It boils down to the quality of the recommendation and the extent to which that recommendation could be fully supported. So that brings me to my second question and my second question is, once those recommendations are put to the Cabinet and the Cabinet make a decision, will that be the final decision, or will there be another opportunity for the Cabinet to be challenged on that decision and perhaps put the officers who make their recommendation to answer those challenges?

Marianne Evans: So, if the proposal goes forward, then a Statutory Notice will be published, and there will be a 28 day objection period for anybody to object to the proposal. So, there's another decision point, and that objection period is an important one as well, because when Cabinet then receives those objections, they can then consider if there's anything that's come to light that they hadn't considered during the consultation, then obviously it's a second chance to consider the issues. There's a third point as well, which relates to a Church in Wales School. If Cabinet make the final decision, governors of a Church in Wales Schools can refer that to Welsh Government, stating why they disagree with the recommendation. That's something that only Church in Wales schools have, Community Primaries do not have that next step.

Governor: You've actually answered my subsequent question – before making a final decision, what recourse do we have to go to Welsh Government to actually challenge the Cabinet decision, which is a very, very tall order because generally speaking, Welsh Government will have to have some pretty overwhelming reasons to overrule a Cabinet decision, and I suspect it's unlikely to happen, which means it is absolutely essential that the quality of the report made by the officers is fully supportable and that there is an opportunity, subsequently, once the Cabinet makes their decision for there to be another opportunity for us to discuss the matter with Cabinet before it gets to the point where it has to be referred to Welsh Government.

Geraint Rees: Can I come back on one point that along the journey as well, which is the Council has a Scrutiny function. The Scrutiny function largely consists of opposition politicians and some community specialists as well, and they can actually scrutinize proposals that go to Cabinet, including coming to a view as to whether the recommendation from officers is sufficiently substantiated by the evidence that is

presented. Therefore, that can happen before it even goes to Cabinet, and when it goes to Cabinet then it goes with the report from Scrutiny or it can happen after Cabinet take a decision, as part of the Statutory Notice period, they can actually call it in to take a view of that. So, there's a significant number of gateways that hold officers to account for being honest, transparent, accurate and all range of other things. That in a sense becomes the public guarantee that Marianne and team and myself don't abuse our position as officers.

Governor: I never suggested that.

Geraint Rees: No, I understand that, but it's the reason why they're there to make sure that honesty is there.

Governor: Is there an ultimate legal framework, legal opportunity to actually challenge an ultimate decision, within the Welsh Government?

Geraint Rees: There is for Church schools, so you can actually refer it to Welsh Government for consideration and there have been some very challenging views, coming back to local authorities over the years from that.

Governor: I think you've now gathered that you're likely to get some significant challenges, if this does not go the right way.

Geraint Rees: We are under no illusion as to the need for this to be done with real propriety and professionalism.

Governor: I would just like to ask whether we as governors get a chance to see the report before it goes to Cabinet.

Marianne Evans: Yes, we have to publish the report so everybody would have a copy of the report to scrutinize before Cabinet.

Can I just add one other thing just for a point of information? Estyn is actually a statutory consultee during any school reorganization process. So, Estyn's response to the proposal, would also be published as part of the Consultation Report. Estyn is therefore scrutinizing the proposal as well.

Geraint Rees: We are very thankful to people for the quality and the detail and the thoughtfulness that's gone into this. We do realize how significant this is for your school and its community – we are under no illusions, and we hope that we've responded as you would have hoped for.

Governor: Are you saying we are coming to the end now?

Geraint Rees: Well, I think we probably would need to at this point. Obviously the channels are open for written communication quite extensively.

Governor: We probably have a few more questions we will put in writing for you.

Geraint Rees: Are you content to do that?

Governor: Yes.

Governor: Just to say, if we do that will we actually get an answer?

Marianne Evans: Yes, if you send it into school.consultation@powys.gov.uk. If you copy me in to my own email, then will I make sure that a response is given.

Geraint Rees: We do see several emails a day that Marianne composes, so there is heavy engagement.

Geraint Rees: I thank you very much on behalf of our group of officers of the Council. Thank you not just for this evening, but for your ongoing commitment to the school. We do realize the significance of the meeting we've just held. Thank you very much. And sorry we didn't start with a prayer, but I will leave that to you as a school community. If you would wish us to drop out for you to have a moment's reflection or prayer that's absolutely fine by us.

Governor: Do you want me to close the meeting with a prayer Geraint, while you're still here?

Geraint Rees: I think you can feel free to do so, yes.

Governor: Dear Lord Our Father,

We thank you for this opportunity that we've had, to exchange views, to gather information, to seek response, and we pray for your blessing, as we all go forward in this process and we remember that our main concern, in all of our hearts, is the welfare of the children of Llanbedr School.

We thank you and ask your blessing.

Amen.

A meeting with the School Council of Llanbedr Church in Wales School

17th June 2021 – Held virtually on Microsoft Teams

Present: Marianne Evans, Sarah Astley, Sian Fielding, Huw Rowlands – Powys County Council

Officers from Powys County Council met virtually via Microsoft Teams with representatives from the School Council of Llanbedr C in W School to discuss the consultation to close Llanbedr C in W School with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.

The School Council group consisted of 4 Foundation Phase pupils and 7 pupils from Key Stage 2.

A short introduction was made, explaining that Powys County Council looked after all of the schools in Powys, including Llanbedr, and that the meeting today was to talk about the plans the Council has for Llanbedr school.

Tell us about Llanbedr school. What's good about Llanbedr school?

- Small school
- Mixed years together in one class
- We all stick together and help each other, for example if a friend falls over
- We have lots of friends here
- Teachers are nice
- I love school
- We love learning in Llanbedr
- We all do teamwork and work together
- We are all like a family
- After school clubs

What kind of after school clubs do you have?

- Dragon sports
- Gardening club
- Technology club

What else do you like about the school?

- In big schools they only have one or two years in one class. Here we have more years in one class so we learn more
- The friendships
- I like learning science, English and Welsh
- In our class we have ponds with tadpoles and we have to put the water back in when it dries out

- We have puppet clubs
- Busy feet – where pupils can learn and do some fun things at the same time

What do you think about the school building – is it nice and warm?

- Yes

Have you plenty of space outside to play?

- Loads of spaces
- We have a field, yard, play area for KS1

What about school dinners? Are they nice?

- Yes

There are a lot of things that you like and that are good about the school. Is there anything you don't like about the school or that could be better in the school?

- No

Nothing at all?

- No

We're here to talk to you about some changes Powys County Council might make to Llanbedr school. The Council always has to review the schools in the county to make sure that we have the best education in the County now and in the future. We always have to review different schools, and we're wondering whether some things should change. At the moment Powys County Council is looking at Llanbedr school, and is wondering whether to close Llanbedr school, which would mean that you would have to go to a different school, instead of Llanbedr. We're here to find out what you think about that idea, and how that would affect you.

We're having a consultation where we're asking lots of people what they think – parents, staff, governors, but we especially want to know what you think as pupils of the school. No decision has yet been made and we need your views and to take that into consideration when deciding whether or not to carry on with that plan.

Does everybody understand why we are here to talk to you?

- Yes

We'll ask you some questions about what you think about the idea of there being no school in Llanbedr and how would that affect you – what might be bad for you and

what might be good for you. Then at the end you will be able to ask any other questions you have about the plans, and we'll answer as best we can.

What do you think about the Council's plan to close the school and how do you feel about that?

- I would be sad if the school is shut
- We do Welsh clubs so we would be 'trist' and 'crac'

What would be different for you if there was no school in Llanbedr? What would that mean to you?

- We would be sad

How many of you live in Llanbedr itself?

- Mostly everyone lives in Llanbedr, some across the road or just outside the village

If you had to go to a different school how would it affect you and your parents and your family, and what would be the changes if there was no school in Llanbedr? Would it be more difficult for you to go to school?

- It would be very sad and when we are sad our parents are sad, because they made some friends and before lockdown our parents would come over for bonfire night and there would be a stall outside the school to collect money

So it would have an impact on the school and the community?

- Yes

What do KS2 pupils think?

- It would affect our friendships as not all of us would go to the same school and we would be torn apart.

How would that make you feel?

- Very bad
- We wouldn't have the opportunities that we have here
- It would ruin the community

The school is very important to the community?

- Yes

What would be the big changes for you if there wasn't a school?

- We would have to leave early in the morning as we would have to go to a school further away
- Most of us can walk to the school now, but we wouldn't if going to another school

Are you worried about that?

- Yes

Would it have an impact on the community?

- Yes
- It would ruin it. The school is so important in the community

What would be the big changes for you if there was no school in Llanbedr?

- We would have to rush around in the morning, as we would have to travel further to different schools

Can everyone walk to the school at the moment?

- Yes – a lot of us

If you had to go to another school, you couldn't walk, you would have to go on buses or your parent would have to take you. Are you worried about that?

- Yes

Is there anybody that feels excited by going to a bigger school and meeting new people?

- No
- Not at all
- Have you ever thought about how it would affect our well being?

Yes, the Council is aware of pupil well-being, especially after this difficult Covid year. When pupils transfer to other schools, when schools close, the headteachers and staff of the school pupils would go to would work closely with you to ensure that any transition to a new school is done as well as possible and pupils are happy when they transfer. We're very keen if Llanbedr closed that that would happen, that you'd be looked after as you transfer to another school.

- But we won't be together anymore?

Are you worried about that? Do you think you need to be together? Is that important to you?

- Yes

So you are worried you won't be able to go to the same school?

- Yes

If Llanbedr school did close, and only if it did close, which school do you think you would go to?

- I wouldn't choose to go anywhere, I would stay in Llanbedr
- Llanbedr as I live across the road

If there wasn't a school in Llanbedr, where would your nearest school then be?

- Crickhowell
- Abergavenny
- Crickhowell

What else concerns you if there was no school in Llanbedr? What would it mean for the community if there was no school in Llanbedr?

- There would be no Eisteddfod which would mean that people wouldn't be able to come and see us, and people like to come to see the Eisteddfod
- People couldn't wave to us as they pass the school
- The church warden wouldn't visit any more

So you're a very visible part of the community?

- Yes

We have some questions for you.

Why did you choose our school to be closed?

The Council has to look after around 90 schools, and from time to time we have to look at how many schools we have. We were worried that Llanbedr school has low pupil numbers and is a small school. We are looking at a number of small schools at the moment. There are also other factors as well, such as the higher cost for pupils in smaller schools. We are looking at Llanbedr, but we are looking at a number of other schools as well.

You've got our numbers wrong – we have more pupils than you have said.

The numbers in our document are based on last year's information. We know that your pupil numbers have increased and you have over 50 pupils at the moment. When we bring back the report to the people in the Council that make the decision we will make sure that the figures are updated.

I live near the school. Will my friends go to the same school and how will I get there?

It would depend where parents would choose for their children to go to if Llanbedr closes and that would be a decision for each individual family. Until a decision is made about closing the school or not, we wouldn't know where your friends would go until the school closes.

As to how you would get there, then if you live 2 miles away from another school, the Council would give you free transport to the school. It could be a bus, minibus, taxi.

When did the people from Powys last visit our school?

It was probably me, Sian, who came to the school last, when I borrowed something from the school and had a chat with your headteacher. I come to the school at least three times a year, and sometimes a bit more if I have to see the governors.

But when did you last come?

The last time I came on a proper visit was before COVID, so I guess it was in the autumn term of 2019.

The Council wants to make sure that the councillors that make the decision come to visit the school before making a decision. We will arrange that, probably during the summer holidays because of COVID.

If only you have been here, why didn't you tell us anything was wrong and how can the other members of Powys close it if they haven't even been here?

What we do in the Council is that we look at all the information for the school, things like pupil numbers, standards of teaching and learning in the school and we put all the information in a document and the councillors will consider that before making a decision. But as I said the councillors will be coming out to see Llanbedr school before the next decision is made.

Why do you want to close our school as we haven't done anything wrong?

No, you haven't done anything wrong. But the Council has to look at all its schools and we have 90 schools to manage and we are worried that we have

too many small schools. We want people's views on our plan to close the school. That doesn't mean that it will definitely happen. We will bring back what people have told us to the Councillors and they can read what's been said before making a decision.

Life is supposed to be a gift. If you close our school have you thought about how that will make us feel sad?

It's important that you tell us how you feel, and we can then tell the Councillors that you are feeling very sad about the plan. That will come out very clearly in the information that we give back to the Councillors.

Is money more important than my well-being?

No, what's really important is that you get a good quality education. That's the no.1 priority for the Council. We have to look at how many schools we have to make sure that pupils in the future have access to good quality education. I know you get good quality education in Llanbedr as we speak, but the Council has to look at everything, not just Llanbedr on its own.

When you were asked, you said you were looking at small schools because they cost money.

It's one of the factors. We have to look at how many pupils you have, how many pupils will be coming to the school in the future, how many classes you have and the standards. One of the issues with small schools is that there is a higher cost per pupil. So it is a factor, but it is one factor of a range of factors.

We may be small but why aren't you supporting us?

We support all the schools, be they large, small or medium. At this point we're only asking people about their views about the plans. The decision to close the school has not been made yet. We will be working with the school and supporting the school, whatever happens to Llanbedr.

How is trying to close our school supporting pupils in any way?

We have to think about the future. How many schools we have, the impact on the curriculum, what opportunities can be provided. It might not feel to you now that you are getting support, but the Council has to consider how many schools it has and its plans for the future, but we recognise that at the moment it is a difficult time for you.

Can you explain that better to the younger ones so that they can understand?

What we're saying is that we're supporting you and understand that it is a very difficult time for you, but the Council has to look at all its schools and make plans for the future. Did you understand that?

- Yes

Every child has a certain amount of money for their education and you need a certain amount of money for each year, and a certain amount of pupils to be able to afford all the people you need – headteacher, teachers, canteen staff, teaching assistants. You need classes to be of a certain size for schools to be able to afford all of the things that they need. It is very hard, but if the local authority can put their money into a school which has all the things you say that you want and all the teachers you want, they would be able to do that in fewer schools than we have now. Does that make sense?

- Yes
- But we have less teachers in our school.

Yes, you are right, you have less, but they cost more than if you were in a larger school. For example for one pupil in yr 6, it might cost for example £10,000 for that pupil in Llanbedr, but say that pupil went to a larger school, it might only cost £2,000. And in the High School the cost might be £3,000. Does that make sense?

- Yes
- What will happen to the pond, the tadpoles, the flowers and the trees?

The school is a Church in Wales school, so the school is owned by the Church in Wales, the organisation that looks after churches, so it would be up to them to decide what to do with the school and the grounds, if Llanbedr did close. Is that clear?

- Yes
- Money is just pieces of metal. Do you want to break our friendships over pieces of metal?

Unfortunately, money is purchasing power, and sometimes we have to pool our money together. For example if you were planning to have an exciting holiday rather than a picnic in the back garden. It is not an easy decision. I could give you an example from Caerphilly, which decided that schools less than 200 pupils were too small, and schools had to join together to become very large schools of 400-500. In Powys our larger schools will still be relatively small and friendly and close. They won't be that big.

- Why are you comparing us to Caerphilly?

I'm just trying to give you an example from what other local authorities do. This isn't a decision that has been made. It's a consultation process, so your comment about human beings not being metal will be mentioned as part of the consultation. Your voices will be heard.

- What is the problem with the small schools?

As we have said there are a number of factors that mean that some schools are not viable. We haven't got the money to keep very small schools open. Schools need facilities, the age of the building and a lot of things have to be considered, but every small school can't be kept open in the future, in the long term.

- Why do you want to make us sad?

Nobody wants to make you sad. It is a difficult process to go through and it's about looking at the future of education for pupils. I'm hoping that you're not feeling too sad.

- Closing the school would make us 'trist'

It's important that what is said is passed on to the Council, so we'll put all the views of everybody together in a big report that goes back to the Councillors.

Have you heard of the Council's Cabinet, the word 'Cabinet'?

- Some have

The Council's Cabinet is a committee, like the school council, a committee of councillors who look after everything in the Council. They are the people that will make the decision about Llanbedr. It's therefore really really important that you let us know your views, that it's making you sad and your concerns. We will put that in a big report, and they can read it before making their decision.

- Do we get to see the report?

Yes. It will be a public report. Everybody will be able to see it.

- Will we be able to see it before it goes out? Can't we see it before it goes public?

No, we have to publish it on a set date. We have to follow the law. But we will have notes of this meeting which we will send to you to check. The notes of this meeting will be sent as a draft for you to check that you are happy with them. The notes are then published as part of the paperwork, that goes to the

Cabinet, so that the words that you are telling us now will be able to be seen by the Cabinet.

The consultation period, where we are asking everyone what they think, ends on 23 June. Once the consultation has finished, we will start working on a report and some other steps will need to happen before a final decision is made to close the school, if that is what the Council decides to do.

When we publish the consultation report, the Cabinet will have to look at the report and decide whether they want to carry on with closing Llanbedr school or not. If they do want to carry on, we will have to publish what's called a 'Statutory Notice' which is like a poster to tell everybody that the Council intends to close the school, and there would be a further 28 day objection period for people to let us know if they don't agree.

We would then have to do another report saying what people have said during the objection period, which would go back to the Cabinet for Cabinet to make a final decision. It's quite a long process, and we're still in the early stages. No definite decision has been made. We're just asking what people think of this idea at the moment.

Thank you for all your comments today. If there is anything else we haven't covered or anything else you would like to say, you can still send them through to us before the 23rd June, so by next Wednesday.

- I have got some more questions.

If there is anything else you want to add you can send them on to us.

How many more questions have you got?

- Some of us have not asked one question yet.
- Do you really need to close Llanbedr school?

As we've said we have to look at small schools and we are looking at a number of small schools as we have explained before. But as we have said we are looking at it now, but no decision has been made. We're hearing what people think and have to say about the proposal.

- What will you gain from closing the school?

We have a lot of schools we have to look after. It would mean that pupils would be able to have good quality education and opportunities in other schools in the future.

- We've already suffered two lockdowns, please don't make us suffer any more. Tell me how you are thinking about the children at the school.

You should be supported by the school and your families. I know that it is a difficult time, but you are supported through your school.

- When children move to bigger schools they don't always get the education that they need. How can you make sure everyone has what they need as happens here?

When schools close and pupils have to transfer to other schools, the other schools work very closely with the pupils and parents to make sure that the transfer to the new school is a happy one. Bigger schools have bigger opportunities and good quality education in your area. So it would be the same for you or even better if that did happen, and we think that the education would be the same for you and perhaps even better if that happened.

- Please don't close our school.

We hear what you are saying and we will take it back to the Councillors who will make the decision.

- It would be hard for our mums to find new schools. What would you do to help?

There is a lot of information that the Council has about all the schools in the County, as well as schools outside Powys, and that information is available to parents to look at – standards in schools, the classes they have, and we would be able to support parents to make sure that they would be able to find that information.

- Aren't you supposed to be helping schools?

Yes we have a team who work and support schools all the time.

- So why aren't you helping us then?

Support comes in different ways. I support the Headteacher and the teachers in looking after the well being of pupils and staff and the leadership and the management of the schools, and help them look at the priorities for learning, and to make sure that you have the right resources. That support will continue, and that support will be there in whatever school you go to.

It's different to the support in keeping the school open. All of us here from Powys are here to listen to what you have to say, which we will take back to

the decision makers. All the decision makers will be informed by all the information that we have on the school and your views.

- When we are sad, our mum and dad and grandparents are sad. What are you going to do to make us feel happy?

Because we are now in the middle of this phase where we are listening to what people have to say, our job is to make sure that people can tell us their views honestly and we can then make sure that those views are heard by the Cabinet. So our job is to make sure that your parents, grandparents and you have the opportunity to tell the Council what you think about the plans. We have to ensure that process is carried out correctly and giving everyone a chance.

- That's the end of our questions.

Pupils were thanked for their attendance at the meeting and their honest views.

Pupils were reminded once again that they had until 23 June to submit any further comments or questions as part of the consultation process, either directly by email or with the help of their teachers.

A meeting with the School Council of Llanbedr Church in Wales School

23rd June 2021 – Held virtually on Microsoft Teams

Present: Marianne Evans, Sarah Astley, Sian Fielding, Anwen Orrells, Huw Rowlands – Powys County Council

Officers from Powys County Council met virtually via Microsoft Teams with representatives from the School Council of Llanbedr C in W School to discuss the consultation to close Llanbedr C in W School with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.

This was a follow up meeting from the one held on 17th June 2021.

The School Council group consisted of the same pupils as that of the meeting of 17th June 2021, being 4 Foundation Phase pupils and 7 pupils from Key Stage 2. No teachers were present.

It was explained that if any of the pupils needed a break during the meeting, then they could say so, and the meeting could be paused at any time.

The meeting was handed over to the pupils.

One of the pupils asked if the meeting would be minuted and when will any minutes be sent out, stating that minutes from the previous meeting had not yet been sent out.

It was explained that minutes from the meeting on the 17th June would be sent out after this meeting, and minutes of this meeting would be sent out by the end of the week.

The meeting commenced with one of the pupils reciting a short Prayer.

We asked for a child friendly document which you did not provide. How can we have a meaningful consultation with you if we don't understand the document you provided? The previous meeting was very difficult to understand as you used very big words and we were rushed. You said in the last meeting that the cost for educating each pupil in Llanbedr was £10,000 but my mother says that in the consultation document it is £5,948, which is a very big difference.

We've used the same child version of the document in other consultations. The document is only one part of the consultation process. The other part is us coming to talk and explain to you the plans and hear what you think about them. That's why we didn't change the document as it is the same one that has been used and we've already used that many many times.

The figure of £10,000 was used as an example, not referring to the exact actual amount. The figure in the consultation document is the correct one. £10,0000 was just used as an example to explain how the funding for schools works.

My parents chose Llanbedr school for me. Why are you telling them they might have to choose somewhere else?

The Council has to look after some 90 schools – which is a lot. We always have to look at schools and pupil numbers, standards, how well the schools are doing, costs, whether they have headteachers or not. The Council is concerned or worried about Llanbedr in particular because of the low number of pupils in the school, and that's why we are here to hear what you have to say about it.

We're nearly full.

Yes, you're nearly full because you are a small school anyway. You haven't got a large building or a lot of empty classrooms. The Welsh Government says that all schools below 91 are small schools, so we are looking at all the schools below 91 pupils. In that context Llanbedr is a small school.

Do you understand that?

Yes. But our standards are very good here and we're happy.

Standards are good, it is a very good school. Teaching and learning and leadership are all good. This aspect is a different feature of the plan to look at the size of schools, and even though you are right, and standards are good, you enjoy school and you do have a good education, but sometimes in a small school there's no chance to do extra elements like sport, school trips, and outdoor activities if there were more children in your school.

But we're going on a trip next week. We have more chances than my friends.

Your friends in other schools? That's really important information for us to make a note of.

We are going to a theme park.

Llanbedr is a Church school. How can Powys make sure that we can go to our nearest Church school?

Llanbedr is a Church school and Llangattock is a Church school, but Crickhowell is not, nor is Llangynidr. So the choice of Church school if Llanbedr school would close would be Llangattock, but the Council knows that Llangattock doesn't have enough spaces for all the children in Llanbedr, so if there was no room in Llangattock, it would be a choice for your parents whether they wanted to choose another Church

school. We know that there isn't another one close by. The next one is Brecon which is far away, or Llangorse, or outside of Powys.

However, there are plenty of spaces in other schools in the Crickhowell area, but we do know that there is not enough space for everybody in Llangattock.

What do you like or what's different about Llanbedr school because it is a Church school?

It means that we can do concerts and lots of different things in the Church and the community always comes to watch and support us.

I chose a Church school. It's important to me.

That's really important as we have to take what you say back to the Council's Cabinet – that is the Committee that makes the final decision on this matter. They need to know that being in a Church school is important to you.

Do you think this is a good time to think about closing schools? We have already missed lots of school, learning and our friends for a year. Do you think of our well-being and if so what have you done to us so far?

We know it's been a very difficult time for you, and we know that this plan for closing the school is probably very worrying to you as well. In terms of well-being, from my perspective, as I said on Thursday, I need to make sure that you have the chance to put forward your views about this plan to the Council and make sure that your voices are heard. In terms of your well-being that is my job and I hope that this gives you the opportunity to make your voices heard.

The school, your teachers and headteacher are very clever and have put a lot of well-being activities in the school day, such as the school trip and outdoor classroom.

I do know from my recent visit that you have worry monsters around the school where you can tell the worry monsters how you feel, which helps a lot of pupils. Timing is always very difficult. Part of these well-being activities the school is doing with you is to help you cope with change, as change does happen, in school and outside school. Llanbedr and all schools in the Crickhowell cluster have been doing lots of well-being activities.

Why are Powys leaving it to our teachers. We feel very sad. What are you doing to comfort us?

The answer is that your teachers are doing a lot, and maybe you're not aware of all the things they are doing, the teachers have training and courses to help them as well. We can also go on courses to help our worry and anxiety too.

Your teachers know you best, so they know what's right for you, but your question is about what we have done. I can say that we as an authority have things in place to help your teachers to help you. My boss Lynette has sent an important message to schools today to give them ideas about how to help schools and children, to make sure that you are looked after and that your well-being is a top priority. That is at the top of the list. So, our job is to help your teachers help you.

Does that make sense?

Our teachers are fantastic and help us when we are stuck on maths or something.

If you close our school, what will our teachers do?

If the school did close, we have a team in Powys who look after people and jobs, and they would be looking after your teachers to ensure that what the teachers wanted to do could happen. For example, they would have discussions with your teachers and see what the teachers would want to do in the future, whether they wanted to carry on teaching somewhere else, or whether they wanted to take a different job, or stop working. They would work very very closely with them, and it would be up to that team to make sure that the needs of the teachers would be met.

They will be very sad.

Yes, people do get sad when there are changes. That's why we will help people to make sure that they make the best decisions and the choices that suit them.

Some of our teachers live further away and have schools closer to them, but they choose to drive further to come to a school they like to go to.

Yes, if the school was to close, discussions would take place to see what their options were. What they wanted to do in the future. We don't want to lose good teachers or teaching assistants. We would want to make sure that everybody's needs were met.

Does Powys think that they know what's best for us, our parents and teachers, when they haven't even met us?

We're in the middle of this consultation, which is a time when we listen to what people have to say. We have met with your teachers and governors, and we met with you last week and now, and we have published information, and we want to hear back from your parents, families and anybody in the community of Llanbedr. They can write to us, fill in the forms online, email us and then we can understand exactly what your parents, families and your community think about the plan. We've already had an enormous amount of letters and forms and a petition as well. We will

look at what your families say, what you say, what the community says, in detail and putting all that has been said into a big report that will go back to the Cabinet – the committee that makes the decision.

The forms were very hard to fill in.

Were they? Why were they hard to fill in?

It took ages to try and answer the questions, because we didn't know what they meant.

We'll have to have a look at that.

There were some words and things in there that our year 3 didn't understand.

Sometimes these forms are difficult because the language is a little different to that you normally use, but your parents and teachers can help you fill in the forms and explain things to you.

Why are you thinking of upsetting our education when we love learning at Llanbedr? You can't promise that we will have the same opportunities, fun and friendship somewhere else? Why are you taking the risk with our education and well-being?

The Council has to look at the whole of the County and how many schools it has, how many small schools it has, and whether there are different or better ways of providing education in an area. The fact that you love Llanbedr is coming through very very strongly and the fact that you love learning, and that says a lot about Llanbedr school.

What do you think about this?

We're hearing your views very strongly about Llanbedr school. We'll take that forward and your views will be included in the reports and considered as we move forward.

Can Powys think of other ways of raising or saving money?

It's not about saving money. It's about looking at everything, the pupil numbers, how many pupils will come into the school in the future, looking at the building, the standards. It's not about saving money; it's about making sure that in terms of pupils in the future that Powys can offer a good education for everybody.

In the last meeting you mentioned the costs. There's lots of other ways you can save money without closing the school.

We have saved money by having a sponsored cycle ride, we're thinking of a sponsored ride on horses across the mountain, and having lots of stands across Powys to sell things.

Fundraising events like that do raise money and can be very successful, and normally they allow schools to buy additional resources, books and games and to pay to go on trips, but very rarely will they raise enough money to do huge things for a long period of time. We're not looking necessarily just about the next term or the next year, we are looking at the next 25 years. It's a long-term plan for the future.

Most people think small schools are wonderful. What evidence does Powys have that bigger schools are better?

The standards in the school don't really link to the size of the school. It's about how well the teaching and learning happen in the school. We have large schools that are good and large schools that are not quite as good, and we have medium sized schools that are good and medium sized schools that need to improve, and we have small schools that are good and small schools that need to improve as well. It all depends on the children and the staff, and every school is slightly different, but every school will get the appropriate support. Sometimes a larger school have more extensive grounds, a larger number of classroom bases, so new children can join the school easily because of the accommodation and there are usually more facilities or up to date things available in those schools.

We think that if you are in a larger school there are more opportunities to be part of different things, but we hear what you say, that you have the same amount of opportunities in Llanbedr as in a larger school, but in general the Council thinks, there are more opportunities in a larger school, because you are part of a larger group of children. You have larger year groups, so you are mixing more with the same age groups, and we think that's a better thing.

But you wouldn't have opportunities to have an iPad and MacBook in a bigger school. Here we have those from class 3 until high school, and I use my MacBook now.

All schools would have the same level of IT equipment. It can vary, but all schools are looking to do the same thing.

Bigger classes mean less time with teachers.

I don't think that's completely true. Even in larger classes, the teacher has to make sure that every child has the same opportunities, the same level of teaching and learning.

Even in Llanbedr, the actual number of children in each class can be quite large. For example, last year there was at least 25/26 in one class, but your teacher manages

to support the different learning groups and ages very well. Most schools have teaching assistants as well, which you have.

In our school, in class 3 we have a variety of years, some children in yr 4 sometimes do yr 6 work.

Wherever you are, the teacher will make sure that every child does the very best they can. So, if your friend is the same age, they will make sure that every child in the class works to the best of their ability. That's what teachers do well.

But if we were in a bigger school, you would have your age groups, for example if you were in yr 4 work you would be doing yr 4 work, not being in yr 4 and doing yr 6 work, ready for high school.

I see your point, but actually teachers provide the right work to match the abilities and the needs of a pupil, so even if they are in yr 4, if they are doing work needed to catch up with the foundation phase, or if they need to be stretched to make sure that they can work at a higher level for the high school that happens. That's one of the jobs of school improvement people who go in and check that in schools. We can ensure you that the needs of pupils will be met, even if pupils are in a class of the same ages.

Are you all OK – do you need a break or are you happy to carry on? Is the smaller class OK? How many questions do you have left?

There are 7 questions left.

The next few questions are questions we asked in the last meeting but don't think you answered very well.

Why aren't you supporting us?

So, the question is why aren't we supporting the school? My job is to make sure that this plan that we are discussing at the moment allows you the opportunity to have your voices heard. In terms of supporting the school, some of us work very closely with the school and headteacher to provide support to the school. We always support schools, pupils, teachers and governors when there is any change. We give you support through the teachers that know you best. The worry monsters is a very good idea – a worry shared is a worry solved.

The support is around you all the time, even though you can't maybe see it, and everybody helps each other when there's change, and that's when we are now doing a lot of exercises in school to build things back and to help coping with change generally in life.

The next question is one which you said in our last meeting was a good question, but you didn't answer it.

Money is just pieces of metal. Do you want to break our friendship over pieces of metal?

It's about breaking friendship groups?

Yes

That's not the purpose of what we are doing at all. We want to make sure that pupils in future can have good education. However, we do know and understand if a school closes, and again we don't know yet if the school will close, your parents will have to make difficult decision as to which school you go to, and maybe you won't all be going to the same schools in the future. We know that you are a Church school, and we know that if the school closes we know that there aren't enough spaces in Llangattock for you all to go together. So, we're not trying to break friendship groups, but trying to look at the whole of education across Powys and plan for the future.

You may not be aiming to break friendships but that's what you are doing.

That's an important point, because if our plans means that you are really really worried that our plans will break friendship groups, that's a really really important point to come back to the Cabinet so that they can understand that fully.

But if the school was to close our best friends would go to a different school and we wouldn't see each other ever again.

I know that what I say won't solve your concerns immediately, but all the schools in the Crickhowell area, Llanbedr, Llangynidr, Crickhowell and Llangattock, regularly meet together and regularly have joint events. There's lots of visits to the high school and those transition meetings always look at friendships and how you can build new friendships in new places and where there is new change, so staff will be helping you to make new friends and keep new friends when you meet again in the high school.

But some of my friends will be going to schools outside the county. You said to go to the nearest school, and their nearest school is not in Powys.

It would depend on which high school they would choose. We can't predict which school a parent would choose for you if the school closes. But we hear very very clearly what you have to say about it, and that's the important thing and we need to hear what you have to say.

Do you really need to close Llanbedr school?

The Council has to look after 90 odd schools, and we always have to look at schools with low pupil numbers and see if there are any different ways that we can offer education in different areas. At the moment no decision has been made, the only decisions made is to see what people think about the plans, so it's very important that you tell us what you think. That will then have an impact on the next decision. The next decision is very important because that's when the Councillors on the Cabinet will read everything everybody has said about the plan and then decide whether to carry on and close Llanbedr or to put everything on stop and keep Llanbedr.

Why do you want to close our school because we have everything here?

Again, we have to look at the whole of the County and how many schools we have and look at schools with low pupil numbers and the Council thinks that if you are in a larger school you will have more opportunities and better opportunities to learn with your year groups.

You've got lots and lots of brilliant things in Llanbedr, MacBooks and lovely resources, but if, and it's a big if, because we are finding out what you think, in a larger school there would be even more resources, even more facilities and even more things available for pupils to make sure that they have everything they need to help their learning.

But we don't want any more we've got everything we need here.

That will be noted in the minutes and will go to the decision makers. You need to remember no decision has been made. That is why we are talking to you, to hear your opinions. What you are saying today is very important and we will take that back to the people that make the decision. So, it is really useful to hear your voice today.

When children move to larger schools they don't always get the help and education that they need. This could affect them in different ways. What do you think about this? How can you ensure that everyone has everything they need like they do here?

Teachers do that all the time. At the end of each year, or when pupils transfer to other schools at any time, they pass on what they call pupil information and all that information that they hold about what progress they have made and any particular needs, and all of you in Llanbedr have got a one page pupil profile about how best you learn, so all that information will not be lost and will be handed on to new teachers, or the teachers that will be working with you.

You could save money by giving less pay to people who want to close our school.

So, you're saying that we could save money by paying the Council people less? I hear that, and that we will take back. That may happen – who knows?

What will you gain from closing the school? Aren't you supposed to be helping schools?

A lot of help is provided to schools on an ongoing basis. Our role is to make sure that the process we are going through at the moment is carried out properly and that you have the opportunity to give us your views as we are doing now.

One of the support mechanisms and activities that pupils, staff, and governors have is how we manage change and how we cope with change and changes that will happen. People in our work, some of those people are deciding to have different jobs so there has been a reorganisation of jobs there and all of that is being looked at so we are all looking at having people cope with change. That's the type of support people have been having at the moment.

We have had a lengthy lockdown. Please don't make us suffer any more. Please tell me how you are going to help the children in the school.

Yes, it's been a tough year and a half, and it's been difficult for everybody – for you and your teachers, everybody in your community, so in terms of supporting the school we have mentioned that quite a bit. We are looking after your teachers and staff so that they can look after you.

That was the last of our questions.

Pupils were thanked for their attendance at the meeting and told that minutes of both of the meetings would be sent to them.

Pupils were reminded that this was the last day of the consultation and for receiving responses as part of the consultation. As well as the form, they were told that they could send any comments by email if they didn't want to use the form.

Would you like to be split up from your friends, and what would you think if Powys was thinking of doing this to you?

No, I don't think I would like to be split up from my friends. I don't think that anybody would like to be split up from their friends, but this is something the Council has to do. Every Council has to look at their schools. You've made it very very clear that splitting from your friends is worrying for you, and we'll make sure that is in the report as well.

Pupil voice in Llanbedr is strong. And your voice and your views and those points that have been raised will be minuted, and you've had two hour long meetings, and made sure your questions had been asked and asked again for clarity, so thank you.

You've been very clear, and you have got a powerful voice in the school, and your time is appreciated and also your preparation for today.

Before we go, just to make sure that the minutes are correct, could you let us know who is in the room with you as we saw somebody's thumb on the screen. Have you got a teacher or somebody else in the room?

No

We saw a thumb on the screen and if there. If there anybody else there let us know and we will put their name in the minutes?

There's nobody else in the room.

Pupils were thanked again, and it was said that the Cabinet want to visit Llanbedr school to see the school before making their decision.