

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

### Contents

Consultation meeting with Staff of Churchstoke C.P. School .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Consultation meeting with Governors of Churchstoke C.P. School.....	21
A meeting with the School Council of Churchstoke C.P. School .....	43

## **Consultation meeting with Staff of Churchstoke School**

**10<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

### **Present**

#### **Staff:**

Ian Roberts, Headteacher  
Staff of Churchstoke C.P. School

#### **Officers:**

Emma Palmer, Head of Transformation and Communications  
Lynette Lovell, Interim Chief Education Officer  
Marianne Evans, Service Manager Schools Transformation  
Eurig Towns, Service Manager for School Improvement  
Mari Thomas, Interim Schools Finance Manager  
Sarah Jones, HR Business Partner (Schools)  
Sarah Astley, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education

Emma Palmer welcomed all to the meeting. The Headteacher asked for a transcription of the meeting for a member of staff who was unable to attend. Emma Palmer also offered for the member of staff to have a separate meeting with officers to go through the briefing if wanted. Emma Palmer welcomed all to the meeting and introduced the Powys County Council officers that were in attendance.

Emma Palmer noted that the only decision by Cabinet at this stage is to go out to consultation in respect of Churchstoke School. No decision has been made at this stage. This is an opportunity for staff to contribute to the consultation and to put forward their views as part of the consultation process.

Marianne Evans gave a Powerpoint presentation and explained that in February 2021, Powys Cabinet gave approval to proceed with consultation on a proposal to close Churchstoke C.P. School. The consultation started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April and will end on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June.

The proposal is as follows:

- To close Churchstoke C.P. School from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools in Powys.

Emma Palmer then invited question and comments on the proposal.

**Member of staff:** Firstly, why are the predictions for pupils' numbers, the additional learning needs, and the free school meal numbers so out of date?

**Marianne Evans:** The data is based on PLASC 2020 data as PLASC 2021 data is not available. Obviously when we move onto publishing the consultation report, if we have any updated data, we will be publishing the updated data then, but the basis of the data is PLASC 2020 unless it is stated elsewhere.

**Member of Staff:** That updated data already exists. We have a current situation that could have been used. The paper was published in February 2021 and the data has changed considerably since then and we informed the transformation team at the meeting with the governors that there was a considerable change. It seems bizarre just to continue using what the local authority knows to be outdated data.

**Marianne Evans:** That is the data that we have used and if there is any additional data from verified sources then we would update them at the next stage.

**Lynette Lovell:** This is a valid point and as you say is taken from a point in time. Just to note that is the data that Welsh Government currently use for everything in terms of grant funding coming in or anything like that is the 2020 PLASC data. As Marianne has said as the 2021 data comes in and is verified that is what we will use.

**Marianne Evans:** In terms of the projections, we have used two sets of data, one is the PLASC 2020, and the second is based on finance figures that were taken in November 2020. We do know that your numbers are higher now than what is published in this document and we know your admissions in 2021 is slightly higher as well.

**Member of Staff:** I think the concern is how misleading the data is bearing how much the village has changed. It gives a very misleading picture of the school and of the situation that we have and for that to be published as part of a closure consultation, it guides people into a decision that they might make with regard to consultation and when the local authority know that the data is inaccurate, perhaps that should have been stated in the document as well as that the data is considerably out of date.

**Emma Palmer:** Can I ask, in respect of the consultation response, that you provide the figures that you believe are the accurate ones and the reason I say that is in terms of a consultation response, the consultation report has to respond to each of the responses made and that document has to go before Cabinet at the time that they are making any further decisions. There must be a response against each of those consultation points that are raised on behalf of the organization, so those things will be taken into account.

**Member of staff:** Yes, you will certainly have those figures from us.

**Member of staff:** Are the transformation team aware of the housing developments, not just in Churchstoke but also in Montgomery, Chirbury, Forden, Kerry and another surrounding catchments?

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, and we have included that in the consultation document as well. We have detailed information about the housing developments. There is a lot going on in the Churchstoke area but in terms of taking that into account in terms of pupil projections, until those houses are built, and we know how many pupils come from those housing developments, we are unable to even put an estimated projection on pupils, but yes, we are aware.

**Member of staff:** It's not just our village but also the likes of Montgomery's housing developments as well. I would disagree with you that there is a detailed analysis in the document. I think that there is very superficial analysis in the document, but the concern is will there be space for all our children in the other local schools. Will they go to one school? Will they be expected to move on because that school is full? They would certainly fill year groups up to the admissions number in some of the schools. The concern is how much it is going to fragment the village when children are being moved into one school and then find there is not room there and then have to go to a different school. The other concern is regarding siblings, where there may be room in one year group for one child but not for the other. We're concerned about families and all siblings should be in the same school.

**Marianne Evans:** One of the risks that is clearly identified in the consultation document is potentially the lack of capacity at Montgomery school in particular. It will be the closest school to a number of pupils currently attending Churchstoke. If the decision is made to close Churchstoke school, we do not know which pupils will go to which schools. However, if a lot of pupils do choose to go to Montgomery school, part of the council's overall management of its school estate is to continually review its school places on an annual basis or even more frequent than that. We would then address the needs of any school that is full and that would be looked at going forward. However, until we have a decision about Churchstoke, as remember, this is still a consultation, we do not know where parents would choose to go, and we would not know the impact on whichever schools those pupils go to.

**Member of staff:** It is not offering any certainty to anybody. That lack of reassurance, that uncertainty is very unsettling for parents and is likely to lead them to send their children elsewhere.

**Emma Palmer:** One of the issues for ourselves is that we cannot mandate where those children go, and that is down to parental choice. But I do fully respect the points that you are raising in respect of wanting to keep children together and also wanting to keep sibling groups together. I understand that point completely.

**Member of Staff:** But you cannot guarantee to do it.

**Emma Palmer:** You cannot guarantee because it is parental choice in respect of where they send their children to school.

**Member of staff:** If a lot of parents choose to send their children to Montgomery, could you even guarantee that siblings will be kept together there?

**Marianne Evans:** It is all about pupil numbers again. If a child is in Montgomery year 4 and then a sibling follows on, that parent would apply for a place at Montgomery in the same way as any parent would apply for a place at Montgomery. If any school is oversubscribed, then the admissions policy for over subscription criteria kicks in, that will then be managed through the admissions policy. But as I say, you know, there is no guarantee, they would have to go through the policy.

**Member of staff:** You are looking to close our school and move the children off to somewhere where there is no room for them, that's the concern.

**Member of staff:** And you cannot guarantee that either. You know, you cannot say that they have a place in Montgomery School.

**Marianne Evans:** Until we know where parents will choose.....

**Member of staff:** It will be too late then. The school would be closed and there would be no room at Montgomery where they want to go. The concern is that once parents have chosen, and the school will be closed it will be too late to realise how needed we are in the area. That's the concern.

**Marianne Evans:** In previous consultations around school closures, we know that parents have not all applied en masse to go to the same school. Parents take different views so I think it is reasonable for us to expect that parents in Churchstoke will maybe make different decisions at the point of closure if the school would close. Until then, it is difficult to say about guaranteeing school places.

**Member of staff:** Surely part of the decision that must be made is whether and where children are going to go, and you do not know that? How can that then impact on the decision Powys County Council is going to make regarding school closure?

**Marianne Evans:** Our preference is for pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative school in Powys. We haven't named a receiving school, but our preference is for them to stay in Powys.

**Member of staff:** The parental preference is overwhelmingly Churchstoke. As you say the nearest alternative school is not necessarily in Powys and it is not necessarily Montgomery but because you have not named either and the uncertainty is extremely unsettling for the whole community.

**Member of staff:** Powys are passing the buck as you expect them to go to their nearest school in Powys, which is Montgomery, which will not take all the pupils which means some of them will be going to Shropshire.

**Marianne Evans:** Our preference would be for pupils to stay in Powys and have a Welsh education.

**Member of Staff:** I think what we are trying to say is that people are saying the place they want to stay in is Churchstoke.

**Lynette Lovell:** I am aware that when I was a Challenge Advisor at the school that many of the parents that you have are in Wales and at the moment from the PLASC data that only about three or four are living in Shropshire. Our preference as per the consultation, is that they do remain in Wales for their education if they are Powys pupils and with the changes to the curriculum it is really important for us to retain those learners. There have been cross-border transitions over the past few years, but it is our preference that the children do remain in Powys and go to the nearest school, but please note this is still a consultation and all points you have brought up are valid for consideration in the consultation process. Our preferred option is that these learners remain in Powys for the Welsh curriculum.

**Member of Staff:** Thank you. If it is important to Powys, they really have got to provide more security and more information to parents because at the moment there is nothing there to give any security that Powys is the place to send their children as they are not getting enough information.

**Lynette Lovell:** Thanks, that is helpful.

**Member of Staff:** In the consultation document, page 8, it states that closing the school will improve learner entitlement and experience. Can you detail what improvements we will see and provide evidence as to the better outcomes for the children?

**Lynette Lovell:** You will be well aware of our vision for learner entitlement and as Marianne started the presentation, looking at our recommendation from Estyn, looking at what we have to do to transform education in Powys. We've been through the transformation document, we have worked with headteachers and governors to produce a document for our 10-year transformation programme, and as part of that we are looking at learning experience and entitlement. We have also looked at the opportunities for our learners across Powys and there are various examples in that document of what we think in the future, learners in Powys should experience as part of the four core purposes and ensuring that they have those extended opportunities. We have looked at cluster working during the period of the pandemic and that's been good.

**Member of Staff:** Apologies but you are not answering anything about the actual evidence that by closing Churchstoke School they would get better provision elsewhere.

**Lynette Lovell:** Okay, I will come to that if you do not mind not interrupting. That is where we are in terms of looking at the learner entitlement going forward. Looking more specifically at Churchstoke then, rather than the wider concept of improving learner entitlement, you know we can have a look at what are the schools that are around you and how the learner entitlement going forward in those schools is a situation where those schools would probably be providing good opportunities. Eurig, do you want to come in there with some more specifics about provision at the schools around the area?

**Eurig Towns:** In Churchstoke, you have a key stage two class and the foundation phase class, so we understand how difficult it is to have all those year groups in the same classes. Looking at other schools they are able to have one or two year groups per class whereas you are providing it within four. This is part of the evidence that we would use to say that there is an opportunity there to improve that entitlement.

**Member of Staff:** Thank you, I still hear no evidence. I am hearing a lot of opinion. As you are aware, if we produce a self-evaluation, we have to back it up with concrete evidence and there are a lot of sweeping statements throughout this document that presents a statement with no evidence to back it. This is just one of them. There is another statement that says people numbers in each year group are small, it is more difficult to ensure peoples are appropriately challenged. We feel that is not true, but you have not presented any evidence for that statement. For the statement that larger schools have improved ability to monitor pupil progress, again, we feel that is not true. In our small classes, in our family classes we monitor our progress very well. There is a statement saying pupil well-being is better in larger schools, we say that is not true. There is no evidence presented in any documentation we have seen. No evidence for these statements says this will be better in Montgomery. There are an awful lot of sweeping statements throughout. It says Montgomery School would be a better place to develop provision which meets the requirements of the new curriculum, without evidence. Now, that would not be acceptable from a school presenting something to Estyn or presenting its self-evaluation report to the local authority. And yet this document throughout it has sweeping statements that are opinion, not backed by the evidence, or not backed by clear and transparent evidence that everyone can sit down and look at.

**Emma Palmer:** I think one of the components that that we are looking at is the wider range of educational extracurricular opportunities that can be provided in those alternative schools, and also in respect of the pupils being taught in classes with peers of similar ages. What we cannot get away from in respect of the size of Churchstoke School is that it is deemed as a small school and that definition is not a small school definition determined by Powys County Council. That is a definition

determined by Welsh Government. So, any schools with pupil numbers below 91 are identified as a small school.

I just want to give some broader context, noting that this is not answering the specific question that was just asked. I am not a teacher by trade and I, therefore, do not feel equipped to answer specific questions on teaching and learning, but in terms of the wider requirement for us to transform education in Powys, we were clearly challenged by Estyn in respect to the recommendations that they provided us with. We know that we have the financial envelope, so the money that is available to the local authority is sufficient for education in Powys. When you compare us with the rest of Wales, we are able to fund each child the average, so the same as other children across Wales.

However, we have got too many schools in Powys. Too many schools for the number of children. Overall, the numbers have decreased from 20,000 to 16,500 and they are going to further reduce to around 15,000 or 15,500. I do not know the exact figures out of my head, but I have got the data surrounding that elsewhere, and what we are seeing across the infrastructure are significant numbers of surplus places.

What is happening is in the primary schools, children are getting a really good education as determined by our challenge advisors, and previously Estyn when they were undertaking the national classification, etc. I appreciate through the pandemic that this has not been able to take place and they will be moving to other mechanisms. But what we are not able to do is provide the same level of education that people become accustomed to in primary schools in our secondary schools, and that is not because there is not sufficient funding. What is happening is the money is going into the infrastructure rather than the education, and what we need to do is re-configure the infrastructure in Powys. We need less schools, but we need to make sure they are accessible across the county. Then we need to make sure that the financial envelope remains on a par with the rest of Wales so that we can fund the education of children.

On a strategic level, you cannot really challenge that, and no one can really challenge that. It makes sense, and through the engagement that we did back in 2019 it came through very strongly from the teaching profession, from governors and the wider communities that we needed less schools. What is unfortunate, and I do appreciate from an emotional perspective, the position that you find yourselves in is that one of those schools affected is now Churchstoke. I do recognize that, and I do realize that this is a challenge for yourselves, but I must remind you that this proposal is only at consultation at this stage and no final decision has been made.

**Member of staff:** OK, thank you for that overview, but it is a generalization and that is not what we are about. What we are looking for is specifics. Now you have said that surplus places need to be addressed. Our surplus places are decreasing because our pupil numbers are rising rapidly, so we are already addressing that here. The only evidence I have had mentioned still, is an inspection report from

2015, that is already six years out of date and core visits from a Challenge Advisor who has never actually visited the school at all. That does not seem to me to be up to date with current evidence and the kind of thing that should be used in a matter that is this important.

**Emma Palmer:** With regard to the Estyn inspection report, within the School Organisation Code, we have to use the last inspection report, even if it is 10- 15 years old. Whether it is two years old, one year old we can all challenge that, about how relative it is in terms of context. But that again is something that we must do by law in respect of meeting the requirements of the School Organisation Code. It is a standard approach that we must comply with.

**Member of staff:** Even though it has nothing relevant to say about the school?

**Marianne Evans:** Just to go back to your comment about lack of evidence and sweeping statements. In terms of the likely impact of the proposal, we must address the factors in the School Organisation Code, and then we have to state in the consultation document what we think the likely impact on the proposal is. Even though there is no hard evidence, as you say, the judgment that we have come to, have come about by engagement and discussion with the Challenge Advisor team, HR team, with the Finance team - professional officers within the Council. So, it is the collective view of the Challenge Advisors and other professionals within the Council.

**Member of staff:** As you say, no hard evidence. How is Montgomery better equipped to meet children's needs?

**Eurig Towns:** Just to respond to the comment about the Challenge Adviser not actually attending the school or visiting the school, which we understand at the moment is not possible because of the pandemic. However, during all of the support visits, the evidence that you will have produced and shown to the Challenge Adviser will have been represented in the report. It is not that the Challenge Adviser is not representing what is actually happening at the school. So, I acknowledge that we cannot visit but I would say that everything that is in there is a true reflection of what is happening at the school because you are producing the evidence which we are using in the reports.

**Member of staff:** You said about the number being below 91 as being too small. That is an awful lot of schools you are going to have to close in North Montgomeryshire.

**Emma Palmer:** Yes, you are right. The Welsh Government has a definition of those schools below 91 and what we are doing is a process whereby we are working through each of those schools.

**Member of staff:** So, will we have a village school in any villages or is it going to be just an amalgamation outside Llanidloes, outside Newtown, outside Machynlleth, outside Welshpool and a village school will no longer be a thing because there is not a school in a village anymore?

**Emma Palmer:** There will be schools within villages, but we do not anticipate seeing small schools within villages.

**Member of staff:** Such as?

**Marianne Evans:** Every school and every area is looked at on a case-by-case basis and in certain areas there may be specific reasons why schools would not close. What we must do is make sure that every school that we propose to look at or review would have to go through the exact same process as we are going through with you with the exact same documentation and approach to possible options.

**Member of staff:** So, for the likes of Trefeglwys, Caersws, Llanbrynmair, Llandinam, Llangurig you would close all of them and move them to Llanidloes or Newtown.

**Marianne Evans:** We would not close all the schools but we must look at all the schools and review them. For Trefeglwys it is in the middle of a proposal currently to change the language category. We are looking at schools throughout Powys and there are a number of proposals currently ongoing, but that is not to say that any of them will close. They must go through the process.

**Emma Palmer:** Every area of the county over the period of the 10-year programme will be looked at and then proposals will come forward for consultation in the same process, and proposals differ depending on the context and the circumstances surrounding them.

**Member of staff:** It is a follow on from the previous question there, that one of the concerns we have is that we have not been included in any review of an area that we have been targeted. When you look at the document, the current people numbers in Montgomery are 90. In other words, they are a small school. Forden with 68 is a small school, Abermule with 64 equals a small school, Leighton with 71 is a small school and Berriew with 85 pupils, a small school. So, all of the schools that are potentially receiving schools for our pupils are small schools themselves. One of our concerns is that the children who move from us to Montgomery will very soon have another review and have to go through the whole process again, which would be completely unfair. As you have identified, all of these schools are small schools and therefore you should be looking at reorganisation in those areas. Why us and why is the area not looked at all together?

**Emma Palmer:** In some proposals over the years, some areas have been looked at in totality and in others they have not, and it is really around the change that we need to see across the County. In some instances, you have to do things in a certain order

to unlock the ability to make a change within the area. If, for instance, based on what you were saying earlier that most families wanted to take their children to Montgomery Church in Wales school, then actually the consequences of that would be that it would no longer be a small school for example.

**Member of Staff:** If they have the room to expand. Montgomery is in a better condition than us, but they do not have the room to expand. There is a need for something in this area, but our pupils would move into a situation where they are going to have all this disruption again, or they have that choice of either staying with the uncertainty within Powys or to move to a stable situation in Shropshire.

**Marianne Evans:** If you feel that there are options that we have not considered or should be considered further as part of this conversation please put them forward. We would need to look at all alternative options when we bring the consultation report back before Cabinet and assess those options. If your view is that Churchstoke should be looked at as a wider area review, then put that forward as a case and we can have a look at that.

**Member of staff:** Even options you have already discarded?

**Marianne Evans:** If you feel we have discarded an option and you feel that we should not have discarded, then make that known to us.

**Emma Palmer:** Essentially, it is about making your case, because we cannot assume that we have all the answers. Hence the consultation is so important and it may be that you are aware of something completely obvious that we have not recognised. It might be that you come up with an idea that we had not been considering at all, that makes perfect sense. The consultation element is to make sure that we have that understanding and then we can absolutely consider those views and that will shape what we do next.

**Member of staff:** I wish we had the confidence that you were listening, but I think that is lacking.

**Emma Palmer:** It has happened in other circumstances and we can give a recent example of where we worked with the Diocese in another area where we have consulted with them and actually having done our initial consultation with them, we have reconsidered the proposals and then gone back out to consult with them again, before moving to the next step. That was in recent months.

**Marianne Evans:** We have also had previous proposals at this stage in a process, that when we have taken the consultation report back to Cabinet for a decision those proposals have not proceeded. Quite recent ones as well. It is really important that give us your local views so we can inform Cabinet.

**Member of staff:** I have no doubt that we will share those views. The consultation document says in terms of mitigating action, engagement with parents will happen throughout the process. So why is that not happening? Some of the staff feel that this is a human rights issue there as you are not properly engaging with the community and refusing to have a public meeting, with Churchstoke Explorers as well who are on this site. The document says they will not be affected which is patently absurd. Why is it that Powys County Council refuses to properly engage with the community?

**Marianne Evans:** I think we are engaging with the community. Everybody has a chance to be part of this consultation and provide their views. We have not had public meetings in school consultations for quite a long time before this pandemic. We have relied on meetings with the governors, with the staff, with school councils etc. to bring that information forward, and that has worked.

So, in terms of that statement around mitigating action being to engage with parents throughout the process, what we mean by that is that there is an opportunity now for parents to engage in the process by supplying us with their views. There is also an opportunity should the proposal go forward - we will continue to engage with the parents. Should the school close then we would still continue to engage with the parents. That is what that statement is all about.

**Emma Palmer:** Just to confirm there and in respect of the parents being able to put forward their views, they can put forward their views as per the one slide that was shown in respect of responding to the consultation either with the form online, either in written form or through email. Our experience of undertaking the consultation in this way is that we are having far greater responses through this process in this way than ever before. Also, with those written responses that you obtain, we referred to the consultation report earlier. They will see the responses from the organization in that consultation report.

**Member of staff:** Thank you, I do not think that the ability to respond is an issue. Parents are finding a way to do that. The community is finding a way to do that, it has more to do with engagement and how do they get their questions answered, surely a public meeting where you have direct engagement is better.

**Emma Palmer:** Any questions that the parents have, please do encourage them to submit them with their responses.

**Member of staff:** But they need the answers to the questions in order to respond, for clarification and so on.

**Emma Palmer:** There will not be any public meetings going forward. That is the process that we have adopted and which has been taken since 2016.

**Marianne Evans:** I think with public meetings in the past, the value to the public and the Council is limited because, in the time you have, there are only about 10 questions that can be asked and I am not sure it helps at all in disseminating wider information, so we have moved away from that and relying on this approach.

**Member of Staff:** What about the playgroup, engaging with other professionals that will be directly affected?

**Marianne Evans:** In terms of the play group, they are a non-maintained setting, I know the request came for setting staff to join this meeting, but we felt that this meeting was purely for school staff because we are not responsible for the early years setting. The setting is responsible for the setting staff.

But one of the key things I wanted to ask you anyway is whether there is an early years issue. I know we have recognized it in the in the consultation document about the potential impact of not having a school in Churchstoke on the early years setting, however I wanted to have a conversation with you about that to see how badly affected the setting may be.

**Member of Staff:** At present, the setting meet in one of our buildings. They have developed an area outside with grants from Powys County Council. They use the disabled toilet facilities and our staff toilets. They have their dinners in the school as well, so in the absence of the school, it is beyond anyone's comprehension how they could not to be affected. We have also got the fact that parents who are able to, would be more likely to take their children to the early year setting that their children would be going to school in. Their numbers would fall and would not be viable. No one here has any doubt that losing the school will be the end of the play group as well. The difficulty being the impact on the community. Those who could afford it or who are able to do so will transport their children. A third of the community that we have got are on free school meals, who do not have transport, and who cannot afford it and would be deprived of pre-school education.

**Emma Palmer:** Thank you, those comments are important so that we can reflect in terms of the impact assessment.

**Member of staff:** If they are really, really important, I would urge you to engage with the Playgroup Little Explorers because they give you far more detail, so if these facts really are important, then you really need to have a meeting with Explorers.

**Marianne Evans:** We will take that on board.

**Member of staff:** Plans for the site is the next question. Are there plans to replace the wildlife, environmental and amenity value of the site, if it should be developed following the closure of the school?

**Marianne Evans:** If there isn't a school in Churchstoke, then as the site is in Council ownership, it does provide an opportunity for us to sell it and receive capital receipts which would then be ploughed back into the Council's budget to be spent on education provision.

However, until that time, we will not know what the options are for the site. That is something we would work through once a decision has been made, and we know where we are headed.

**Member of staff:** Is it part of the critical path and that certain things must happen before other things can happen in the area? Is the sale of our school site part of that critical path to possibly do something in the area?

**Emma Palmer:** No, the sale of the school is not in the critical path. There has been no decision about the future of that site to my knowledge. What would happen as I said, first and foremost, is we need to go through the consultation and due process in line with the School Organisation Code. Say we have gone through the process and we have gone through a number of decision points and the outcome is that the Cabinet decides to close the school, it is at that point that we would then have the discussions with our corporate property colleagues, who would then determine whether or not the site is surplus. They would then look at what the options are for the site. Those conversations have not started because we are not, we are nowhere near down the process basically in respect of that. The local authority has not made any decisions around that because first and foremost is the consultation and decision around the school's future.

**Member of staff:** There is a concern over the community hall as well because the school make a substantial contribution to the community hall funds for the use of sports facilities. Recreation and association are quite certain that without that contribution the hall will no longer viable. That is another issue that really needs to be highlighted, losing not just the play group but the community hall as well.

**Marianne Evans:** I would like to thank you, first of all for the information that you gave for the Community Impact Assessment, which is something we will build on as we take this forward into the next stage, so you know any anything around the impact of that on the community is really essential now for the next Cabinet decision.

**Member of staff:** Again, engagement with the community more fully would probably help inform you. There's a couple of points in the consultation documents along the lines of "it is not anticipated that implementation of the preferred option would impact on professional learning opportunities for staff", and there is also one that says "it is not expected that it would impact on the salary arrangements of staff". I do not understand how you can say that when the majority of staff will be made redundant?

**Lynette Lovell:** We are aware of how difficult the situation is for the staff. I do not know if Sarah Jones wants to come in and talk through the HR process? Sarah

Chrisoforou has already been to meet you to talk through some of that and what it could actually mean in practise in terms of staffing arrangements going forward. Of course, this is all if the consultation goes through.

**Sarah Jones:** Yes, I am afraid I do not know the answer to your initial question, but I have made a note of it and I will ask Sarah Christoforou to respond. In terms of the staff consultation which would take place, again if a decision was made by the Cabinet to close, a staff consultation would take place with you and that would be for a period of a minimum 30 days where we would go through with you all of your options and what the possibilities are of different roles within the Council, and we would sit and meet with you individually to go through all of that.

**Member of staff:** We shall leave that to get an answer from Sarah Christoforou with regards to specifics.

**Emma Palmer:** If we can ask for Sarah Christoforou to respond by the end of the week, that would be helpful to the staff.

**Sarah Jones:** Yes of course.

**Member of staff:** We have another sweeping statement that says “the children will have access to additional resources at the alternative schools”. What additional resources will they have access to an alternative school that they do not have access to here?

**Lynette Lovell:** In terms of resources, we are looking at human resources as well. In terms of the teaching groups that you have. We know that have got full key stages in classes at the moment. However, in a larger school there would be less of that full key stage teaching. Also in terms of resource you have got leadership capacity which is strengthened, as in larger schools there is more time for leadership activity for monitoring, quality assurance etc.

**Emma Palmer:** The other side that we are looking at was those extracurricular activities. Naturally, if you have got larger schools the children could be afforded the opportunity of football teams, netball teams and those components. So, the resource is not just necessarily around the financial resource. It is in its broader case of the number of factors that fall within the resource.

**Member of staff:** Okay, a couple of points there. In terms of the leadership and monitoring, I mean I have got two classes to monitor. A larger school has more classes. I do not necessarily agree that the benefits are as great as they are stated in terms of the ability to provide better leadership within a school and better management of the school. By implication, the leadership and management in this school is being criticised simply because it is a small school, I think that is being overstated.

When it comes to the extracurricular benefits that is all very well, provided the children can access them, and the paper itself admits that children who have to rely on free school transport cannot necessarily access the benefits of these supposed additional extracurricular activities.

The concern is that it is going to greatly increase social division as well, in that the ones who can afford for their parents to go and collect them at the end of the day will be able to access the extracurricular activities, or for that matter things like concerts, parents evenings and those kinds of things, those who must rely on free school transport will not be able to. Contrary to what the document says, we have got 29% of children on free school meals here. That is a full 1/3 of the school community that we would be looking at being disadvantaged not advantaged by the transfer. The whole argument over extracurricular activities and increased extracurricular activities, is very decisive and not true.

**Lynette Lovell:** I appreciate that comment about after school extracurricular activities, but I know from my own experience that many extracurricular activities take place during the lunchtime. So, netball practice football practice, and choir practice. I have spent many a lunch time doing those, so there are those extracurricular activities that the children in a larger school perhaps have more access to that can take place during the school day, so that those children that you talk about are able to take part in those extracurricular activities.

**Member of staff:** The difficulty is that what we are asking Montgomery to do is change what they're doing for the sake of the pupils that are coming in. It's been stated that so few pupils are coming in that the local schools won't be greatly affected by taking the pupils in and now we appear to be saying actually they're going to change what they're doing in order to accommodate the fact that some pupils will be coming to them. It is one of the contradictions in the report. I think that the concern is that you are saying that the school will not have to change what it is doing, and it won't be greatly affected, but it will have to change what it's doing.

**Member of staff:** How do you know that we are not providing extracurricular activities such as lunchtime clubs, after school clubs, because you have not asked us, you do not know that we do not provide those already.

**Member of staff:** It was actually in the Community Impact Assessment, and I think someone has commented on the considerable amount of extracurricular activity that we do here. I must admit I do not know what Montgomery have, but I do not think it will necessarily be greater.

**Marianne Evans:** I think the issue is that we do recognise that those pupils who are reliant on home to school transport would potentially not be able to take part in after schools' extracurricular activities if they were reliant on home to school transport. We do recognise in the consultation document that is a weakness of the proposal. But then again, we have many rural schools across the county and pupils rely on

home to school transport all the time. I think schools across the county and across Wales and any rural area would have the same problem and they work through it, so those children are not disadvantaged.

**Lynette Lovell:** I was just going to come in with the question brought up there about how do we know? Just to say that when we visit schools – and that is the Challenge Advisor team – it is part of the Estyn inspection framework to look at what clubs or what opportunities there are. So, we do have that information on Churchstoke School. I know we have been in a very different year now with the pandemic, but we do have that information from your schools as we have got detailed Challenge Advisor reports on the school over a period of time and considering some of that broad and balanced curriculum that is provided at schools as well. We do have that information and as you know, up-to-date information has been a challenge over this year in some cases, but we have carried out Challenge Advisor visits and we have asked those questions around the blended learning provision that the school has provided over this time as well, so we do have that information.

**Member of Staff:** You discussed previously about masses of buses taking children to school. That is not environmentally friendly especially when Wales is trying to reduce its carbon footprint.

**Marianne Evans:** It is a problem for a county the size of Powys and being so rural. It is just a fact that we have a massive school transport bill and a massive school transport infrastructure. Going forward the Council have signed up for a zero carbon future. However, we would need to look at whether there are more environmentally friendly methods of transporting pupils such as electric buses.

**Member of Staff:** Surely if you need more transport, that is going to be detrimental, and it is better to keep the children in the village where they can walk to school. Most of our children walk to school.

One of the many concerns is that Powys have declared a climate emergency. They have policies and procedures that have supposed to be directed towards improving the carbon footprint and improving the environmental sustainability of the local authority. And yet we have proposals such as the one that is being made that actually acts against it, and that will put far more vehicles on the road and whatever we think about getting electric buses, we will not have enough electric buses to take all these children to school.

**Emma Palmer:** The transport element is a real challenge for the county – it is quarter the size of Wales. However, you are making the assumption that there will be more buses on the road. Instead of more buses on the road, you put a different size bus on the road. That does not reduce the carbon footprint, I appreciate that, but less buildings will reduce CO2 emissions as well.

**Member of Staff:** Putting one bus on the road will not be a solution for us when the children have to go to at least three different schools. We are not talking about putting one more vehicle on the road. We are talking about putting lots more vehicles on the road.

**Emma Palmer:** I am afraid I do not agree with that statement and the reason I do not agree with that statement is because there will be buses already travelling to other schools across the whole of the estate that we have across Powys and working with our transport colleagues there are spaces on certain buses. I cannot speak specifically for Churchstoke right now because I have not got the facts in front of me.

**Member of Staff:** There are no buses running from Churchstoke to Chirbury or Montgomery. The only bus that runs from Churchstoke to Bishops Castle is the secondary transport from Churchstoke to Bishops Castle which does not go to the same site and it is full anyway. It will mean a considerable increase of buses on the road. Also, for the ALN transport as well, you would need 2 or 3 taxis. We are not talking about just putting one more bus on the road.

**Marianne Evans:** Okay, we will take your comments there and respond to them accordingly in the consultation report.

**Member of staff:** The numbers of children is an issue. If you go on Powys estimates, its 22 children to transport in September 2025, but the actual numbers are 52 plus. There are also a number of children within the community who already go to school in Shropshire. In the absence of this school, their closest school will become the school that they are going to, and Powys will be liable for transporting them as well, providing free transport. We have come up easily with 30 names. You are looking at transporting 80 children, not 20 odd, which is why I am saying the idea of one bus on the road, is nowhere near being close to accurate.

**Marianne Evans:** Can you confirm your statement regarding the 30 pupils travelling?

**Member of staff:** They are living within the catchment of the school, but are already attending Primary schools in Shropshire. If Churchstoke closes, then their nearest alternative school will be in Shropshire and therefore Powys would be liable to pay for their transport.

**Member of Staff:** Just a query on the consultation document, it says that Montgomery school currently has 0% of free school meals, we have 29%. The question is, is the figure for Montgomery correct and what experience have Montgomery got in meeting the needs of vulnerable children.

**Lynette Lovell:** Currently there's 0% there, but, looking at the teaching and learning at that school currently and obviously from their Estyn report, they can deal with groups of learners. Although there may not be free school meal learners there, we

are not saying that all free school meal learners are vulnerable. There are vulnerable groups within the school, and the school successfully deals with those vulnerable groups.

**Member of staff:** I am just coming back to that. I have a concern about social economic status and a divide, if our free school meal children were going to Montgomery school and if it is correct that they have zero free school meals children or disadvantaged children, they are probably not going to be happy about a massive wave of Churchstoke children coming to their school anyway. I am worried that there would be even more of a divide. With children that are maybe more disadvantaged anyway with those things such as new school uniform, new shoes etc. I worry for our children.

**Member of Staff:** Picking up on that, I think it was polling day and I was sat there giving out the forms and both Chirbury and Montgomery parents were willing to fill these forms in because they did not want our children at their schools. I was devastated by the fact that these parents from other schools are willing to fill in these forms to keep our school open as they did not want our children at their school and so many people did not know they had to fill in the consultation form. They all thought they had to sign the petition but did not know they had to fill in a consultation form. People do not know that they have to fill the consultation form.

**Marianne Evans:** We can reiterate the message for the need to complete the consultation form.

**Emma Palmer:** Firstly, I am sorry that you have had to experience that.

**Lynette Lovell:** Can I just say that there is nobody more passionate about vulnerable groups than myself. In terms of that, it would be our expectation that all schools are truly inclusive in Powys and if there is any hint of that kind of behaviour in schools towards children who are less well off or who are vulnerable in any other way, that would be dealt with. We are not having schools that do not include everyone. Every learner is equal in Powys and I am very strong on that.

**Member of Staff:** There is a commitment within the document to support pupils with the transition process and I can see that working within Powys schools. However my concern is with the Shropshire schools and how well Powys can engage with them, because like it or not there are going to be large number of families who choose to send their children to an English school because there'll be free transport there because it's their closest school. It will cut down journey times for the younger pupils, the funding in Shropshire school is better and there is that bit of distrust towards Powys at the moment.

The way we can support their transition into Shropshire is a concern if parents make that decision. Also is the fact that it will deny children access to the Welsh curriculum and to the Welsh language and the Welsh ethos. I know that it is a concern right

across the wider community and the Welsh Language Commissioner has been in touch about it. How does it fit in with the local authority and the Welsh Assembly's plan to increase the use of Welsh language when so many of our pupils are being pushed across the border into England?

**Marianne Evans:** I do not think that they are being pushed across the border. Our preference is for them to have a Powys education and the opportunity with the Welsh language. We do not know what parents will decide but from the local authority point of view the that is fundamental to us.

**Member of Staff:** That said, I think better engagement with the community would have helped from the start. There will be a drastic effect on the Welsh ethos and the Welsh identity in the village and that is a concern to everyone who thinks that the Welsh curriculum is getting it right and that learning Welsh is the right thing to do. I do not think you would see Churchstoke as a Welsh village in anything other than name if the closure goes ahead.

**Member of staff:** There is a feeling that the consultation has all been operated at too much of an arm's length, too remotely and not being able to have face to face meetings doesn't help. But within the community, staff, and people from Little Explorers there is a feeling of the remoteness of Powys which we feel a lot of the time anyway I think and the outlying areas of Powys are just being knocked off and far from creating an outstanding rural education system, what's being imposed is an urban rural education system on a rural area.

**Emma Palmer:** We'll note your comments.

**Marianne Evans:** This is a very anxious and uncertain time for staff in school and if you want to contact Sarah Christoforou to discuss anything please do so.

Emma Palmer thanked the staff for attending the meeting and contributing, and reminded them that they could still respond to the consultation in writing.

# **Consultation Meeting with Governors of Churchstoke School**

## **10<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

### **Present**

#### **Governors:**

**Charlotte Swanson**, Chair of Governors

**Ian Roberts**, Headteacher

**Cllr Michael Jones**

**B Evans**

**Louise Tilsley**

**Neil Yapp**

**'Pandn'**

**Gwyneth Evans**

**H Morris**

**J Hilliard**

#### **Officers:**

**Emma Palmer**, Head of Transformation and Communications

**Lynette Lovell**, Interim Chief Education Officer

**Hayley Smith**, Service Manager, Inclusion and Youth Services

**Marianne Evans**, Service Manager Schools Transformation

**Sarah Christoforou**, HR Business Manager (Schools)

**Mari Thomas**, Finance Manager for Schools Transformation

**Sarah Astley**, Strategic Programme Manager, Transforming Education

#### **Other:**

**Cllr Phyl Davies**, Portfolio Holder for Education (observing)

Emma Palmer welcomed all to the meeting and the headteacher asked for a transcription of the meeting for a member of staff who was unable to attend who is also a governor. Emma Palmer welcomed all governors and introduced the Powys County Council officers attending the meeting. It was explained that the meeting would be recorded for the purposes of preparing a transcript, and the recording then deleted.

Emma Palmer explained that she would be chairing the meeting and would give all members opportunities to raise questions.

Marianne Evans gave a Powerpoint presentation and explained that in February 2021, Powys Cabinet gave approval to proceed with consultation on a proposal to close Churchstoke C.P. School. The consultation started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April and will end on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June.

The proposal is as follows:

- To close Churchstoke C.P. School from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools in Powys.

Emma Palmer emphasised that the only decision that Cabinet have made so far in respect of the school is to consult on the proposal. No decision has been made. Emma Palmer then invited questions.

**Chair of Governors:** I'd like to read a little statement, then I'm going to ask some questions and when I ask the questions, I may also include a bit of background knowledge or background information as to why I'm asking them. If you need me to repeat the question again, I'll be very happy to do that.

What I hope we can start to achieve with discussions at this meeting is to prove to you that Churchstoke school should not be closed, particularly when you're using a flawed and contradictory consultation document with inaccurate figures and facts, and without there being a presumption by you to keep rural schools open. Your actions, if you go ahead will rip the heart out of the community of Churchstoke and have a massive knock-on effect. More importantly, we intend to prove to you that you will make no financial saving. In fact, it's going to cost you more. Thank you very much.

So, for my first question. The consultation document states on Page 6 that closing our school will improve learner entitlement and experience. I know this has really upset our staff. Could you please detail what improvements we would see and provide evidence of better outcomes for our children? Having had four children go through Churchstoke, I feel that without evidence, this is just the opinion of those writing the proposal or making the decision, without any evidence or any understanding of standards in Churchstoke and to what depth? Even our current Challenge Advisor has never visited the school. What input has there been to the consultation document from Challenge Advisors who provided the information which informed this statement and where did they get their information from?

**Lynette Lovell:** Yes, I'm happy to come in on that one. In terms of the input into the statements there, the Challenge Advisors are fully involved in all of the analysis and the meetings as all of this comes together. You mentioned there that your Challenge Advisor this year hasn't been to the school, but in Powys we have carried out a virtual visit and had evidence and you've had your report back around that. We've also got Hayley online tonight who, prior to that was your Challenge Advisor. Prior to that, I was the Challenge Advisor at the school. I know that we have to go back in time as well, because the report that we have to talk about in terms of the Consultation Document is the 2015 inspection report. I think that I was working with you as a school then. But all of that is considered and they do have full input. Eurig Towns as the Senior Challenge Advisor and the Challenge Advisor team input into

all of this information, and we have our reports from not just this year, but we have the report, the categorisation report and all of that going back.

The bigger picture is around the sort of learner entitlement and experience around the transformation document. And looking at that issue whereby you have schools that are larger, you have year groups that are not a full key stage, whereas in smaller schools you have a full key stage. You also very often have a teaching head in a smaller school and that has its own complexities in terms of trying to manage and balance the teaching and learning, the leadership, expectations, etc of the school. Where you've got a larger school, that teacher often has less teaching commitment and is able to look at the broader and more strategic picture at the school. Those are the kinds of evidence that that go into those statements, and I can just assure you that the Challenge Advisor team are fully involved in all those discussions now.

Hayley is here to talk about it more specifically, but I think she is having difficulty connecting. She has more recent first-hand knowledge of the school. As I say, we realize this last year that with the pandemic we have not done face to face visits between yourselves and your Challenge Advisor at school, but certainly Hayley's reports over the years before would have been crucial to the evidence base for that.

**Emma Palmer:** We can bring Hayley in as soon as she's able to join this. There was just something that Lynette said that I wanted to make clear to everybody. Lynette referred to the 2015 Estyn inspection report. Just so that everybody is aware, the School Organisation Code which is the process and the policy that we have to adhere to from a Welsh Government perspective requires the latest Estyn inspection report to be mentioned in the consultation documents, whether that's 2015 or whether it was 2001, we have to legally make reference to it. I just wanted that to be clear.

**Chair of Governors:** Some would argue that you have a better educational process in a much smaller school because problems you have can be identified.

**Emma Palmer:** We note your statement there.

**Headteacher:** I think as the Chair of Governors has said, there are pros and cons in both situations. I think it irritates us who work in small schools to see that small schools are constantly put down and denigrated by Powys County Council. We work very hard. We are very passionate about what we do and actually in many ways having children in family groups is better than having them in single year groups. But that just is not recognized in the report it all. Just the negatives on small schools and the positives of large schools.

**Emma Palmer:** Thank you, we will take that as a statement.

**Chair of Governors:** Why have the transformation team continued to use out of date data in the consultation document in relation to number on roll, free school

meals, funding per pupil, surplus places, despite the fact they were quite clearly informed that the data has dramatically changed in the past year. Why have you chosen not to use current data? Because I feel the deficiencies in the data mean that the Cabinet have been misled when they approved going forward with the proposal.

**Marianne Evans:** The data as we stated in the document is mostly based on PLASC 2020 which is our standard data set. We have not received the PLASC 2021 data yet. If we had not had the pandemic, I am sure we would be in a position now where we would have had updated data. When we go forward into the next stage in the consultation report, if the data is updated then we would make sure that is reflected in the consultation report. For our purposes the data is based on PLASC 2020 unless stated otherwise. In terms of projections, we have two sets of projections that you'll see. So, Powys finance projections were taken in November 2020, which is more up to date, but we do know that at the moment you have more pupils on roll and we know what your intake is going to be in September as well, so that will all come out in the next report.

**Chair of Governors:** It's annoying when we inform you of the deficiencies of the data, and nothing happened. But I appreciate you're saying you have to use a certain set of data.

**Emma Palmer:** If we had the 2021 verified data it would be the 2021 information that was included. But this is the consultation element, and if we go to the next stage, we can look at the figures during that time. Just so that all governors know, I explained this to staff as well, the definition by Welsh Government for a small school is anything under 91. That is not a Powys County Council definition of a small school. So even with a difference of 10 based on the numbers that you are looking at, you would still be defined as a small school in the context of the Welsh Government definition.

**Headteacher:** As we said in the staff meeting, all our surrounding schools are small schools by that definition as well. Every single one of them are also small schools under the Welsh Government definition.

**Emma Palmer:** As I explained in the staff meeting, the programme that we have is a 10-year programme in respect of delivering the strategy and all small schools in every area of the County is being looked at, not just small schools, but also ALN, Welsh-medium and secondary provision. So, there will be no stone left unturned. We are working our way through.

**Chair of Governors:** It's just frustrating when there's no consistency in the data, but we'll move on, or we will never get anywhere. What birth rate has been used in the consultation document? As you may be aware, because we are reasonably close to the border, our families are registered at both Montgomery and Bishops Castle medical practices. Does the source of your birth rate data reflect this? If not, why?

School health services have already informed us that you have not looked at the data properly.

**Marianne Evans:** The data has come from our school's statistician. We will have a look at that.

**Headteacher:** Just to say the school health service have given us sort of definite information that whereas they have access to the Powys statistics on birth dates, they don't have access to the Shropshire ones. In fact, a good half of our pupils won't be recorded on there. That is something that I think the transformation team need to take into account, not just for Churchstoke but all the way up and down the border as it will be happening elsewhere as well.

**Emma Palmer:** Thanks. We do have a statistician corporately also and as you know the recent ONS has been undertaken, so we're constantly looking at that and the border issues, but we'll go back and double check that point so that we can clarify.

**Chair of Governors:** Why close the school to address the issue of low pupil numbers as stated in the consultation document, at a time when pupil numbers are growing significantly? We are forecast to have 52 pupils on roll in September 2022. This is an increase of 108% since January 2020 and it is based on current known children in the school and preschool plus those that are already known to be moving into the area who have asked for admission, so these are real people and we do have names for all of them. Playgroup is currently at capacity with 22 pre-school children on the books and this does not take into account any of the additional housing developments in progress. Why does the consultation document say that our pupil numbers are not expected to increase for the foreseeable future? Powys forecasts are demonstrably inaccurate. A projection of 22 in January 21, when actual pupil numbers were 38.

**Marianne Evans:** In terms of pupil projections, the consultation document does say that there may be a potential from the housing developments that would increase pupil numbers, so we do recognize that. However, as stated in the meeting with staff, we need to probably take more account of that so we will do that.

**Chair of Governors:** There are still 100 houses to be built.

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, so in terms of the reason for the case for change still being low pupil numbers, I think that recognizes that you need quite a lot of pupils to reach that number of 91 Welsh Government classifies as being small and that is the reason why.

**Chair of Governors:** Our capacity is 72.

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, but what I'm saying is you're still classified as a small school.

**Chair of Governors:** I appreciate that. We cannot get to 91 even if we wanted to.

**Marianne Evans:** I understand that.

**Headteacher:** We feel that the section on future need and demand in the area for additional places, page 26 of the consultation document is completely inadequate. There has not been a proper consideration of the housing developments. It has been brushed under the carpet and ignored. There is the potential for us to reach our capacity and beyond. There just has not been a proper analysis of Powys housing development, even though the planning is all being passed by Powys, not just in Churchstoke but in the surrounding communities as well. There's some increase that's allowed within the document. But it's another hundred houses. That is not some increase. That is a major increase and to say that people numbers at the school are not expected to increase significantly is not correct. They have done and they will continue to do so.

**Marianne Evans:** OK, this is the purpose of the consultation. So, if you want to point these things out, if you think our projections and estimates are incorrect, then please say so and we will respond then in our consultation report.

**Chair of Governors:** The slightly crazy thing is some of the houses are being built by Powys as affordable housing, so perhaps the Planning Department and the Schools Department should talk to each other a little bit?

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, we do. The difficult thing is to estimate how many pupils will come from these housing developments. It is not an easy estimate to do. We note your comments around this, and we will make sure that the consultation report is clear about your point on this.

**Chair of Governors:** Yes, I have insider knowledge on one of them so I can assure you that parents of school age children have bought quite a lot of the houses.

**Marianne Evans:** It's good to know, that's why local knowledge can be very important.

**Emma Palmer:** I can't remember the figure off the top my head and I'll try and look for it as the meeting is going on, but there is a ratio where in terms of planning purposes you calculate the number of children anticipated, but I can't remember the exact figure.

**Marianne Evans:** It is just below 0.5.

**Headteacher:** So, 100 is another 50 pupils?

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, potentially on that criteria. It's still only an estimate.

**Headteacher:** In terms of forward planning, surely that's all we've got anyway. We have to look at what the potential is there for it. So, it's already all well and good to say it's just an estimate, but we have to use it. We cannot ignore it.

**Marianne Evans:** By raising it we will take account of it. And then we will look at it in the consultation report.

**Headteacher:** Sorry it would have helped if housing and community development had actually been included in the engagement proposal. But the impact assessment actually says that they were not. Why were housing and community development not included in the impact assessment?

**Emma Palmer:** Just to confirm that the Head of Housing and Community Development actually sits on the Programme Board for Transforming Education.

**Headteacher:** So, the fact that it says in the impact assessment that they weren't included is wrong?

**Emma Palmer:** I am not sure of the context within the impact assessment right now.

**Marianne Evans:** We do engage with them around housing developments, so we have looked at this.

**Headteacher:** So just an error in the impact assessment?

**Emma Palmer:** We will make that amendment. If I can ask other governors if we can remain respectful through this in terms of behaviours, as we are trying to answer the questions so if we can refrain from laughing when people are speaking, that would be just respectful for those that are that are engaging. Thank you very much.

**Chair of Governors:** On the same sort of wavelength, in the consultation document projected pupil numbers for Shropshire schools include housing projections. Why have you not used housing projections for Churchstoke? You have partly answered this question, but I just want to emphasize it. Similarly on page 42, why have you used current capacity data and not forecast capacity with the housing data?

**Marianne Evans:** We use the current capacity figures because that is known and when we know what your intake is going to be for next September, then in the consultation report we will update the capacity figures.

**Chair of Governors:** OK, so in the consultation document, page 50, why does the SWOT analysis say that option one, continue as we are, would not reduce surplus places? It stands to reason that as our numbers grow, our surplus places reduce. Why does the same table also state that option one would not address the high

budget per pupil? Again, it stands to reason that as our numbers grow, our funding per pupil reduces. Can you explain your statements?

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, it is based on the status quo and the current numbers that we have, that's why when we looked at that, pupil numbers in Churchstoke would continue to be lower based on the projections. Until we know the exact number of pupils on the roll, it's difficult to say whether we'd be reducing surplus places or not.

**Chair of Governors:** But I mean from the predictions we've got, and the houses coming to Churchstoke, it is going to go down isn't it.

**Emma Palmer:** If I can just interject, there is a comment in the chat 'impact on other services section, page three of the impact assessment shows housing and Community development as no impact', so we'll need to revisit that based on the conversation.

**Governor:** It's not a finance related question, this is just a comment. Marianne has mentioned a couple of times about how we're using current data. It's not current, but it's your latest current data if you like from reports that you have and that you will update things when you know what actual numbers are come this September. Actually, we're making a decision here. That is, a decision that impacts on our community forever. So actually, if in 2-3 years' time, given all the 100 extra houses, we potentially have 70, 80, 90 pupils on our roll, we surely need to be making a decision today that reflects that, not just what's currently in place. Otherwise, it's not going to be fit for purpose in the future, is it? I just think it's very short sighted to say that you will use current data to decide whether to close your school. It just worries me.

**Marianne Evans:** We will take account of updated projections. We will take account of the housing issues that you raise, and you know, as I said before, this is the purpose of consultation, to look at this.

At the moment we're using PLASC 2020 data as our benchmark, but when we get to the next round of whatever we publish, consultation reports, then we will have probably had PLASC 21 data, and we'll update accordingly then.

**Governor:** But we also need to be looking at our numbers and I appreciate they are just estimates, but we need to be really mindful of those estimates because we can't make a decision now that impacts the community and the children and the young families in this community in 2-3 years down the line. We've got to look forward.

**Marianne Evans:** It's an important point. We will take that into account. So, thank you.

**Emma Palmer:** Yes, thank you very much, absolutely. And in terms of future generations and sustainability, we need those factors.

**Chair of Governors:** Can I just add to that, Churchstoke is designated a large village and it is therefore prioritized for housing and economic development.

So, the consultation document states that the federation option was discounted because there are no other CP schools in the vicinity. There are in fact three CP schools under 10 miles away from Churchstoke and six more within 15 miles. There are many examples of successful federations covering distances between schools greater than 10 miles in Shropshire, and the Carno, Llanbrynmair and Glantwymyn federation for example in Powys. The distance between those schools is greater than 10 miles. Do you not see this as a successful federation in Powys?

**Marianne Evans:** In Powys, in the federations that we have, we generally tend to federate schools that are neighbouring schools. Because of that we considered the federation of Montgomery and Churchstoke, but obviously Montgomery is a Church in Wales school and Churchstoke is a CP School. However, if you feel that we need to consider a federation with another school or schools, you could put that forward as an alternative option as part of the consultation. As part of it all we have to assess those alternative options coming through. So, if you feel as a body that is something we need to look at, then please by all means put that in. But that's the reason why we didn't consider any other school.

**Chair of Governors:** Yes, because of course the School Organisation Code states that there must be a strong reason for closure and that all other options, including federation, must be properly considered. We have no evidence that this has been done at all.

**Marianne Evans:** OK, well I'll just say that we had to discount the option to federate with Montgomery on the basis that it is a Church in Wales school. In terms of federation as a model, Lynette do you want to come in?

**Chair of Governors:** I can't see why it has been discounted.

**Lynette Lovell:** I'm not going to go over what Marianne said, because obviously the schools local to you are Montgomery, St Michaels, Forden, and those schools are all Church in Wales and looking at where you are in terms of geography there, the schools that are within 10 miles of you there that wouldn't be Church schools are probably in Shropshire.

I think in terms of federation as a model it can work, and it does work. It is effective with Carno, Llanbrynmair and Glantwymyn, and there are options around various federations. We've also got split sites, Newtown High School for example. That's gone on quite a while as you know. So, there are options that we do consider, and they can work. It does offer up some instances for shared working etc. It is considered and, in this instance here, it was considered by the team, the Challenge Advisors and the Transformation Team who look at all these options and the

situation you're in there is that the schools that are closest to you, are Church in Wales schools so there is another issue there. We do have examples where Church in Wales schools have a soft federation or an acting head from a Church in Wales school, but certainly not something that is an agreed formal federation.

**Chair of Governors:** There are three schools within 10 miles; Berriew, Leighton and Abermule.

**Headteacher:** Yes, there are three schools within the 10 miles; Berriew, Leighton and Abermule. They have actually been suggested as alternative schools. If parents don't want their children to go to a Church in Wales school, then there is alternative CP provision for the pupils. If that's the case and the pupils can be expected to travel that distance, we really fail to see why it could not be considered for federation purposes. If the children can do it, then it's perfectly viable as a federation option.

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, just to clarify, we usually consider the closest schools, the neighbouring schools as part of any federation. The fact that it is discounted is based on the fact that we can't federate community primary schools and Church in Wales schools, but we have considered the merger option for Churchstoke and Montgomery.

**Headteacher:** Just to come back on that. I mean merger is of course an option as well, and that's still within the proposal. The problem with that is it takes away CP provision in the area. As you said yourself, the surrounding schools are all Church in Wales. If parents want their children to have a CP education, their only option is to take their children into Shropshire. That's not something that we want to see. So, the idea of keeping CP provision within Churchstoke, allowing parents that option I think is a very powerful one and federation with one of our neighbouring CP schools. I don't see anything wrong with that.

**Chair of Governors:** The consultation document states alternative CP provision is available within 10 miles, which we've just established. Will you provide free transport to these schools, bearing in mind you're depriving parents of any choice closer than this? If the CP schools are too far away for us to federate with, why are you saying that it is appropriate for our children to travel to these schools on a daily basis?

**Marianne Evans:** In terms of transport, we would provide transport to a pupil's closest school if they were eligible, if they lived more than two miles from the school. In terms of transport to specifically a CP or to a Church in Wales School, the policy doesn't include transport for students to denominational schools, purely to the closest school.

**Chair of Governors:** The impact on protected characteristics of faith or belief is assessed as neutral. But if Powys do not fund transport to a CP school, there is a

definite negative impact for families who do not wish their children to attend a Church in Wales School.

**Marianne Evans:** I take your point there and just to say in terms of the impact assessment they are published as draft at the moment so they will be updated to take account of anything we hear through consultation.

**Lynette Lovell.** It doesn't form part of the transport policy as it stands, but certainly the comments that you've made can be taken back, but it is the fact that it is the nearest school, regardless of whether it's CP or a Church in Wales school. That's across the board in Powys.

**Emma Palmer:** A requirement in terms of Welsh Government legislation, I understand.

**Chair of Governors:** We're on to transport now. In the Consultation Document, page 27-28, is the funding formula saving of £61,000 based on 52 Churchstoke pupils in September 2022? If not, then how many? I suspect your answer is no.

**Mari Thomas:** I'm just checking the actual details of the calculations. They are based on the pupil numbers that we had at the time that we were doing it. I think it's based on 25 pupils as needing school transport to their nearest school.

**Marianne Evans:** Just in terms of estimating the transport costs and estimating how many pupils we would expect to transport, we base that on the known pupils within the school, so we haven't taken account of any future projections. Again, that comes down to until there's a decision made on whether Churchstoke closes or not, and until we know when parents may decide which school pupils are to go to, it is very much an estimate at this point in time.

**Headteacher:** Just basing these proposals on 25 pupils just makes the whole thing fatally flawed. And to be honest, Powys are looking at running into serious financial difficulties if they take it forward on the basis of 25 pupils because there just will not be 25 pupils in September 2022.

**Emma Palmer:** Thank you again, the beauty of the work that Mari does is that it can be based on the updated information that you're providing us, and we're able to rerun those calculations, but of course with any proposals we have to do them at a point in time and with the best information we have at the time. So, you're giving us more information in between us originally coming out for consultation and then before we go back to Cabinet, which allows us to use any updated intelligence to rerun that so that we have factually correct information before the Cabinet at the time they make their decision, but we recognize that some things will materialize. But it's important that we do that, hence why we always reference any data at that point in time.

**Governor:** Thank you, it was an issue about funding. When you've managed to model the funding formula savings, and the transport savings when we get onto transport. When you've managed to model those based on better pupil data, would it be possible for us to see those calculations? I appreciate and you mentioned Marianne in your email that it's confidential what funding other schools get, but we actually see every school's funding formula anyway, don't we? So, would it just be possible at least to know how many pupils in how many different schools? Because I know that a big concern for parents is how many different schools our children will be squeezed into? So what will be really key is how many schools you've modelled that funding formula calculation on, and how many children are going to each of those schools, so that we can understand the financial impact of this. Because that's got to be key to any decision made. What we're really concerned about is that a decision could be taken that increases the costs of Powys County Council greatly, rather than making any savings so it would be useful if we could see that detail if that's possible.

**Emma Palmer:** This didn't come up in the staff meeting and my apologies, but we have been having recent discussions with Cabinet because we're not only looking at revenue, but also at capital and how we fund the requirements going forward. There has been a commitment from Cabinet to continue to fund Powys education on a par with the rest of Wales in terms of average cost per pupil. So, when I work with other services in respect of transformation quite often as a result of making a change, you would expect to make a saving that reduces the revenue spend. That is not the requirement around education. The commitment from the Cabinet is that we will continue to fund education on a par with the rest of Wales to that average. So, what that means is if on any proposals that we're taking forward we've identified any potential savings, then in essence that would be used within education, to bring other schools up so that everyone's to the average, or alternatively to bring down the cost of borrowing for capital to invest back into schools, if that makes sense. I just felt that was an important point for me to make, but I completely understand the points that have been made and we take those on board.

**Chair of Governors:** How many alternative schools for our children have been included in the formula calculations? We have asked for details on how the calculations are being made but have not received the information requested.

**Emma Palmer:** OK, thank you.

**Chair of Governors:** How much does the consultation process cost? And although it's a one-off cost, why is it not being included in the finance calculation? Does this include the cost of engaging lawyers and barristers, if there is a legal challenge to any of the outcomes of a judicial review?

**Emma Palmer.** We were quite lucky in respect of the 21st Century Schools funding which Marianne and Mari will be very close to having worked on this over the years, and were able to charge the cost of the transformation to that fund. At the moment,

based on the way that Welsh Government fund us it's a 65%-35% split. Therefore, Welsh Government pick up 65% of all of the costs that are attributed there. That includes the costs in terms of Legal and also Barrister cost, but we don't factor in going to judicial review because we want to get the process correct and actually do not want to go to judicial review. But we have already engaged with a lawyer and Barrister through the process.

**Marianne Evans:** Just in terms of the officers' time etc., we're dealing with a huge range of proposals and a big transformation programme, so the Churchstoke proposal is only one component and then there are no additional staff costs, it's a day job for the Council officers.

**Chair of Governors:** This is about the transport costs, which we believe have been horrifically underestimated. We've been told that the additional transport costs of the proposal will be £19,000 per year based on £100 per day. What is the basis for £100 a day? How many buses to how many different schools? Is it based on each day and for how many pupils? I believe at the moment you thought it would just be one minibus to one school. You're going to need a minimum of five minibuses. You're also going to need two taxis for the ALN statemented pupils who can't travel on public transport. If children decide to go to Chirbury or Bishops Castle, you're also going to have to pay for the transport there. We also have about 30 children within the catchment area that, for whatever reason, have decided to be educated in Shropshire. It may be that they don't want to learn Welsh or other reasons. If you close Churchstoke school, their nearest school will be closed so you will then have to transport all of those pupils as well, so that will be about 80 pupils at an absolute minimum. How are the young children going to be transported? They can't go on a Secondary school bus because the buses are full and a year seven and year eight pupils that don't want to go on Secondary school buses. We just need to know why you have woefully underestimated your transport costs.

**Emma Palmer:** Thanks. I'll bring Marianne and Mari in. We haven't got a transport lead here. They work in another Department of the Council, namely Highways. It's very interesting that that 30 children are already going out of County and not being educated in their nearest school.

**Marianne Evans:** Mari will come in from the financial perspective, but what I will say is until the time that we know where pupils would go, should the decision be to close Churchstoke, it is difficult to estimate accurately. So, it is an estimate, and I will continue to say that.

**Mari Thomas:** As you say, it is an estimate based on the best information that we had at the time. We do work with the head of school transport as well around what those predicted costs per day would be, and that is based on 25 pupils needing transport to their nearest school. Now obviously, through this afternoon's meeting and this evening's meeting, there's been additional information coming to us, particularly around those 30 pupils that are currently going to Chirbury. We know, if

that would be their nearest school, then that will impact on transportation costs as well. So, we will need to update those costs.

**Emma Palmer:** I think we will need to have a closer look at it because it's interesting they're not accessing the council's transport now, because actually if we're already funding them then that cost is already accounted for. If we're not funding them and they're choosing to use their own transport, why would we assume that all of a sudden, they want to use Council transport, so I think we need to have a bit of a closer look on this based on the intelligence that that we're hearing and that is coming to light, so we'll take that action away.

**Headteacher:** Just to clarify that you are not funding them because at the moment they're not going to their nearest school. We are their nearest school. They are choosing to take them a little bit further. Parents are choosing to send them a little bit further. However, if Churchstoke closes then the school they're going to will then become their nearest school, therefore Powys, then become liable for costs.

**Emma Palmer:** I see. OK, thank you again.

**Chair of Governors:** You made a small comment before. I think you were trying to say why these children are not at Churchstoke because they're in the catchment area. What you have to understand is that the border weaves in and out and pupils that would be considered as being in the catchment area may actually be just in Shropshire, so they then go to a Shropshire school perhaps due to the choice of their parents. It may be easier for people when they work. It may be because they went to a Busy Bee's play group. It does not mean that we are a bad school which I think was sort of a suggestion coming there, some of them go to Welsh schools, some go to Forden for example.

**Emma Palmer:** This is nothing in terms of the proposal or my comment or any comments made that that would state that Churchstoke is a bad school.

**Chair of Governors:** Some of them may go to Bishops Castle because there is actually longer childcare in Bishops Castle, and if you work you have no choice. We have pretty good wraparound care, but they have much longer childcare there so it just may be a necessity. And of course, some people may not want the Welsh education.

**Emma Palmer:** There are a number of variables as you've set out there and I think what's been interesting when we look all across the county is that many children don't necessarily go to their nearest school. It's not just in Churchstoke, it would be elsewhere as well, and there would be different factors. It might be grandparents, it might be people's work as you say, but actually one of the things that came through that was really important was not just about the school day, but there were the other components because of people working as an example where they wanted to see the transition right the way from early years through, but to have that wrap around

care as you're referring to that came through, and that the schools become more than just the school.

**Governor:** Yes, I just wanted to add to that the other big factor, of course, is the significantly additional funding that Shropshire schools get compared to Powys schools. So extra funding for pupil deprivation grants, etc. ALN funding. All of their per pupil funding through the core formula budget is significantly higher and hence they can sometimes offer smaller classes or increased resources. I firmly believe it doesn't mean you necessarily get a better education that way, but some parents will believe that actually they can access more at a school that is significantly better funded which we know Shropshire is.

**Chair of Governors:** Why does the map in the consultation document not show all of the Churchstoke catchment area? It appears to be centred on Chirbury village. Where I live is not shown and that really annoyed me. It omits most of the catchment including important border areas. Why does it not show the location of all the nearest schools? Bishops Castle is not shown on it, yet it is the closest to the east side of the catchment. Nor are the neighbouring CP schools named in the Impact Assessment. Now I appreciate it can be difficult with a map, but I would have thought you could have done a bit better.

**Marianne Evans:** I take your point there really, and we'll have a look at the map.

**Chair of Governors:** The consultation document on page 11 states pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation. But Montgomery school building condition is also rated as poor. Can you explain how it is better accommodation than the Churchstoke building as both Churchstoke and Montgomery have identical buildings ratings, condition C and suitability B/C, but the report on Churchstoke is outdated. Since the report you've used, we have had a new disabled entrance built, and I think that makes our building a lot better.

**Marianne Evans:** Yes, Montgomery and Churchstoke school have exactly the same rating, but in general, the other schools in the area have a slightly better rating, so that's why that statement is in there. So, you know, it's more of a general statement instead of a Montgomery versus Churchstoke comparison.

**Chair of Governors:** When it comes to the Equality Act 2010 why have you not answered question 17 Part 5 on page 26, which states will the proposal improve access for disabled pupils in accordance with the Equality Act 2010? Is it because the simple answer is, no? The statement made does not answer the question, will it improve access and which schools are fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and which partially? Specifically, is Montgomery fully or partially compliant? Will Montgomery be able to properly accommodate our disabled pupils? What about the Shropshire schools which are not included in this section at all? Was any inquiry made to Shropshire Council to check on this? Why is the impact on those disabilities assessed as neutral in the impact assessment, when the consultation document

states that some of the schools are only partially compliant with the Equality Act? What about the impact of additional travel on those with disabilities? This has to be a negative impact, not neutral.

**Lynette Lovell:** All schools have their Accessibility Plan and are compliant with the legislation. I know Hayley's here now as well and as you know she leads on ALN at the moment and I'm aware that both of the schools are compliant with the Equalities Act and the Accessibility Plan that they have.

**Hayley Smith:** We expect our schools to have Accessibility Plans, so it's really important that all schools have that and then have plans for the future as to how they're going to develop and adapt for the pupils they may or may not have. But if you have children and young people, with specific difficulties, obviously that's something we work with our schools on to make sure that we're meeting those needs.

**Chair of Governors:** Why have you stated in the consultation document that Montgomery school has an admission number of 21 when your admissions 21/22 document refers to Powys County Council admission arrangements and information stating that it's 17? Similarly, why are some of the Shropshire data, including income and cost per pupil figures incorrect when compared to the references?

**Marianne Evans:** We will take those away and have a look at them and any potential inaccuracies will be updated.

**Chair of Governors:** It's clear from the consultation document that there is insufficient capacity at Montgomery School for our children, which we are all agreed on. Do you intend to squeeze our children into other schools to fill the gaps, and how many other schools? Potentially we have as we've already said, 52 pupils needing to be accommodated. The premise of the consultation paper is that they all transfer to Montgomery. You said there are 29 spaces in Montgomery, but this number does not take into account their new development of 33 affordable homes at the bottom of the town.

Which other Powys schools would pupils have to travel to, and have both the cost and distance to these schools been factored into consideration bearing in mind the pupils furthest from Montgomery will be the last to get a place under the Powys Admissions arrangements? How long will it take to get for existence from Pentre or Snead to a receiving Powys school if it's not Montgomery? What would happen if there was room in one year group for a pupil but not in another for their sibling? Can Powys guarantee under their admission arrangements that siblings would be kept together?

**Marianne Evans:** In terms of siblings if there was an issue with the school and it was oversubscribed, but there was a sibling in a year group already, then the answer is that the admissions process would then kick in, in terms of the oversubscription

criteria. So, in terms of guaranteeing places, we cannot say we will guarantee places for siblings. It's something that would be picked up through the admissions process.

In terms of Montgomery, we have not named Montgomery as a receiving school. We do know that Montgomery is the closest school for a number of Churchstoke pupils. However, as we said, the proposal is for pupils to transfer to alternative Powys Schools. We know that there are capacity issues in Montgomery, but again, until the time that we know a decision is made in relation to Churchstoke and where parents have applied or are applying for places. Again, that's not something we can give guarantees on tonight.

**Chair of Governors:** What is going to happen in Montgomery if say our pupils go there and they fill the whole school, and then the 33 affordable houses are built by the fire station in Montgomery, which there is permission for. Where are all those children going to go?

**Marianne Evans:** The answer to that is as part of the Council's general management of school places and the schools' estates we would continually review pupil numbers and if schools are full then we need to address that issue and it would be the same for any school. For example, shall we say, theoretically, if Montgomery becomes full, then the authority would need to do something about that and we would need to see where and how we can accommodate additional pupils. It's all part of the general overall process of managing the school's estate and managing school places.

**Chair of Governors:** It's not forward thinking in my opinion. You need something that will go on into the future, not just now.

**Emma Palmer:** We have to look at the predicted growth, which is why annually we have to look at the figures because what we're talking about is sustainable provision for the future. Yes, that does have to be looked at.

**Headteacher:** Just to make the point that under the admissions criteria our pupils are going to come bottom of the pile all the time. Because distance is one of the criteria, and the pupils closest to the school would get places before those further away. Churchstoke pupils are going to be at the bottom of the pile in every school along the line. If there is no room for them in Montgomery they are even further away from the next school. So, they're kind of being dropped to the bottom of the pile all the time.

**Marianne Evans:** All I can say to respond to that is, the admissions policy is there for a purpose, so you know we will adhere to the admissions policy, the same as for any other school in the county, but I take your point.

**Headteacher:** The point I'm making it is that it is a reason not to close the school. It disadvantages pupils from the village greatly in terms of admissions because if they

want to stay in Powys they are going to travel further and further into Powys. The further you expect them to travel, the more likely they are to take the Shropshire route.

**Marianne Evans:** OK, thank you.

**Chair of Governors:** When deprived of the school payment for use, and with the cuts in funding from Powys County Council, how do you think the Community Hall will make up the shortfall in order to survive? Does the local authority appreciate how tight the finances of the Recreation Association are, and I know about this because I've only just left this committee. Do they know how much the school contributes? Do they know what effect the closure of the Community Hall would have on the local community, such as the Football Club? Would they be prepared to, for instance, grant fund the Hall?

**Emma Palmer:** Could I come in there just in terms of my wider understanding of the organization? At the moment I don't know if you're aware, but organisations such as the Community Hall can apply for a grant from the local authority. It's the Community recovery grant. It's live now. It's something that you can apply for. I think it's up to the value of £20,000, and there are criteria set around it, but actually it takes on board the components around Covid. So just to make you aware of that, particularly if the Hall is so dependent on that funding, I just take the opportunity to let you know for other meetings that you're in.

Also there is the Community Impact Assessment, which you have helpfully completed, and that has been factored in in respect of the assessment. But actually, it's not too late to add to that because the impact assessments, we can add to through the process to make sure, again, that we've got the latest factual information in front of Cabinet at time of the making a decision.

**Headteacher:** Regarding the Community Recovery Grant, just to clarify, that's not ongoing. That is just the Covid recovery grant. It's not something that is going to solve the problem long term.

**Emma Palmer:** You wouldn't be looking at a grant for the next 20 years, no. It is certainly this year, and I believe from memory for the following year, but we need to double check if this year's elements that are open and obviously we need to watch closely what will happen in respect of the Senedd now and also, we've received levelling up funds or can bid for levelling up funds directly from Westminster within Powys, which not all Welsh authorities can do. There is a significant amount of funding available from the Government in respect of regeneration. That renewal element is different to 21st century schools funding.

**Chair of Governors:** Given that Little Explorers, which is the playgroup, use our site and that the consultation document states that closure of the school would not directly affect the early years provision, what are your plans for our site and

buildings? Why were the Little Explorers not included in the consultation? And why will no one at Powys County Council answer the questions they have? Why were Little Explorers given £10,000 to enhance the outdoor space shared with the school at the same time as starting a consultation to close the school? Given that the Council is currently facing significant financial pressures, do you think that this was an effective budget management or forward thinking?

**Marianne Evans:** Let me just say that for Little Explorers, the consultation information was sent to them. We are aware of the issue around Little Explorers and we have highlighted it as a risk within the consultation document and that there could be an impact on the early years setting should there no longer be a school in Churchstoke.

We had grant funding from the Welsh Government to support early year settings, which we have invested in the provision in Little Explorers. I would say that we have a duty to maintain schools and we have a duty as the local authority to maintain schools and settings. And even though a school is going through a review or a reorganization, we would continue to fund the maintenance of that school because that is our duty. Even if a school is in the position of being closed, we would still ensure that the school is maintained until such a time it is closed.

Therefore in terms of the setting and using that grant, there are no decisions that have been made about Churchstoke school. The grant to support that setting as it rightly should. If the proposal to close the school were to go ahead, then there is an impact on the setting in terms of the fact that it's in a demountable on your school site. We know that they share facilities with the school so we would need to have a look at that again. There could also be an impact on the early years setting if the Council wanted to sell the site of Churchstoke school for instance. However, we would still need to look at whether there was still demand for a setting for places in Churchstoke and then we would need to see whether we could do something about that provision. But that is further down the line and dependent on so many decisions. The point is that the Early Years setting is an integral part of your overall school community and Churchstoke, and I think that's come out pretty strongly at the consultation meetings.

**Chair of Governors:** It's full to the rafters because it's so successful, the children eat their meals in the school so there's intertwined provision in Churchstoke. I think that if the school closes that we know pre-school provision will go. So not only would the school go, but the pre-school provision would also go, which comes on to my next question. How does the inevitable loss of the pre-school provision in Churchstoke, which currently shares the school site, fit into the Council's plans for early years provision?

**Marianne Evans:** We would need to look and see if the demand is there in Churchstoke.

**Emma Palmer:** I'm conscious that not everybody has spoken and there may be others wanting to speak. Is there anybody else that would like to speak in this meeting? I appreciate that the Chair of Governors has collected questions on behalf of the governing body, but just in case there is anybody that wants to speak, please raise your hand now and I can bring you in.

**Chair of Governors:** How would you ensure that the 29% of Churchstoke pupils on free school meals, can I repeat that please, 29% - your document says 8% - and those whose parents do not have transport, all of whom would rely on free school transport, are able to access extracurricular and after school activities or even breakfast club?

You should be aware that many parents are dependent on the wrap around care currently offered at the school, meaning that the work of the parents may no longer be viable or that they would be unable to take on jobs. We have letters to prove that from Saint Nick's House and Montgomery Spring Water to back this up. What effect do you feel this would have on social disadvantage and the local economy?

**Lynette Lovell:** I just wanted to come in on the aspect of the deprivation that was mentioned there. That is a crucial factor of learner entitlement, which is really what this meeting is all about tonight, that learner entitlement and experience is equal for all our learners with the new curriculum coming up, ensuring they have that broader curriculum, including extracurricular activities which do not necessarily have to be after school, it can be during lunchtime.

To ensure they have those broader opportunities, whether they're free school meals, whether they have ALN needs, whatever. That they can be part of a team, that they can be part of a school, and I know you've got that already. I'm not saying that you don't.

The inclusion of all our learners with all their needs, we talked about disability earlier, that learner entitlement and experience for all our learners is key. And that would need to be factored in. I know you talked about wrap around care there, and that's a key issue probably going forward. What we want to do in the transformation document is look at those opportunities for that and the investment that we can have going forward as well in the future, in terms of having that wrap around care in schools, etc. I just wanted to assure you that from my perspective and for officers, ensuring that equity and inclusion and learner entitlement for all our learners, no matter where they come from, no matter what background they've got is absolutely key for me going forward. That is something that would be at the heart of what we do.

**Emma Palmer:** I'm personally very passionate around the matter of equality and with the impact assessment that we've done around Covid-19 it is clear that we can expect to see an increase in free school meals across the county.

**Chair of Governors:** A lot of the parents of these children do not have their own transport, and that's the reason they go to Churchstoke so they can walk and then they are employed in places practically next to the school as well. I mean all that would go. You have to understand.

**Governor:** A question we skipped over which is important to me is why you have undertaken not to have a wider view of provision in our area?

**Emma Palmer:** We have approached this in various ways across the county and in some areas it's a wholesale area review and in others it's less so and focusing on certain schools. The Transforming Education Programme is so complex and the scale of it is so significant, I refer to it as a critical path. There are certain things that we need to do to unlock changes down the road.

We've got serious aspirations around wanting to improve that learner entitlement for children, and it was really clear when we were talking with the Cabinet right at the outset, don't chase the money, actually trace the entitlement, do the right thing and we'll do right by the children. The difficulty we have in the Council is the infrastructure that we have in place and that we just have too many schools. We've got too many schools across the county and what's happening is that the money is going into sustaining that infrastructure, rather than into the education of the children. We have to reduce the infrastructure, but make sure the infrastructure that we have in place is the best that it can be, which is why it's a 10-year programme with significant investment in terms of the capital side for that element. But actually, then we can invest the revenue component into education and into really harnessing that learner entitlement for the children.

So, for us to unlock that, depends on where we're looking across the county. We've looked at secondary provision where we're moving to all age. We've looked at reducing the English-medium and increasing the Welsh-medium offer because that needs to be a better offer across the county. We've looked at ALN because, again, that depends on where you are, and the provision you get is different.

The other thing that we looked at is small schools and rationalization of small schools. I'm not going to say it differently. That is part of the strategy and the work that we need to undertake, and I'm afraid Churchstoke has been identified as one of those schools, and there are others. We have not concluded our work around small schools at all. We're only at the start. We've got a significant number of proposals that we're consulting on now and we've got others that are imminent to go out to consultation on, and as soon as we've worked through this phase then we're moving straight onto others across the county.

**Governor:** Talking about this programme and if you close our school, our children only have the option to go to other small schools. What is the likelihood that our children would need to then go through this process all over again?

**Emma Palmer:** A lot of the conversation and questions from yourselves have indicated that children would go to Montgomery Primary School and if families chose Montgomery School because the Cabinet had made a decision to close Churchstoke, that would no longer be classed as a small school, because the numbers there would go over the threshold of what's determined as a small school by Welsh Government.

I want to say thank you to you for joining us this evening and to the Chair of Governor and Headteacher for doing a sterling job on behalf of the governing body because we wouldn't have got through as much otherwise. I would also like to thank you for being respectful and that we've been able to have the conversation. I appreciate that this is a very emotive subject for yourselves.

This is a consultation. The final decision has not been made, so please can I encourage you. to complete the consultation form online email or write to ourselves. The consultation report has to consider all of the responses that we receive and we then need to provide a written response to the comments in the form of a report to Cabinet report and that report has to be published. It will form part of the next set of papers that go before Cabinet. So, I give a commitment that we have to and will read absolutely everything that comes through. If there's anything in the responses that we receive that signposts us in a different direction or some of the factual information that you've been raising today, all of that is considered. Thank you very much.

**Chair of Governors:** One thing before you have your meeting with the school Council, the governing body know that I love a quote, usually Shakespeare. But tonight, it's going to be Anne Frank. A quote from her is "even if people are very young, they shouldn't be prevented from saying what they think". And I hope that will come out in the School Council consultation that you are doing next with our lovely pupils.

## **A meeting with the School Council of Churchstoke CP School**

20<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – Held virtually on Microsoft Teams

**Present:** Marianne Evans, Sarah Astley, Nia Vaughan, Huw Rowlands – Powys County Council  
Ian Roberts, Headteacher – Churchstoke CP School

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

The School Council group consisted of 9 pupils, two of year 2, one of year 3, two of year 4, one of year 5 and three of year 6.

Officers explained that Powys County Council was reviewing the future of schools in Powys, including Churchstoke CP School and is wondering whether or not to close the school. It was explained that there was now a period of consultation where people were being asked what they thought about the idea to close Churchstoke school. It was emphasised that this was only an idea at this time, and no final decision had been made. The views of pupils at Churchstoke CP School are a very important part of the process, and pupils were welcome to ask any questions regarding the proposal.

The pupils were asked several questions and their responses are summarised below:

### **Do you understand why we are here?**

- Yes

### **What do you like about Churchstoke school?**

- The staff, because they focus on each child
- The cooks and the food
- Everyone is very friendly
- Lots of help
- The learning. I'm from a Welsh-medium school in South Wales and came here with no knowledge of Maths in English, and in my previous school there were 300 people. The staff there didn't focus on each child independently as Churchstoke does.

### **You've seen a difference then since you've come to Churchstoke?**

- Yes

**Do you like the school building?**

- Yes
- The big field the equipment there
- My friends
- We can do lots of sports and sport competitions

**What kind of sports do you do?**

- Rounders, sports day events, swimming and tennis
- Also the Community Hall, we go there in winter to do PE

**Do many of you live in Churchstoke?**

- Yes

**Do you all walk to school?**

- Not all but some do

**Is there anything you don't like or could be better about the school?**

- Heating in our classroom
- The size of the school building could be bigger

**What's good about your learning in the school?**

- Teachers give support to each individual child, and will work at their level
- We are challenged appropriately, for example one year 5 pupil is doing year 6 and 7 work.

**What else do you like about your learning?**

- Everything

**If you could change anything what would you change?**

- Maths and have Welsh maths instead
- We do Spanish and Welsh but I would like to focus on one and then learn more languages – a different one each term
- More history

**Have you learnt a lot about the history of your local area? What can you tell me about Churchstoke?**

- There used to be a war in Churchstoke

- The border has changed back to England and back to Wales a number of times

**If you were going shopping to a big place, where would you go?**

- Welshpool, Tuffins, Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Newtown

**If the school was to close, and there was no school in Churchstoke, what would be different for you?**

- We would make a lot of friends
- It would be weird because I have lived my whole life in Churchstoke school and it would be weird seeing Churchstoke without a school,
- Houses are being built and there's no point building houses if there is no school in the village
- School is the main attraction to the village

**What would no school in the village mean for the village?**

- Nobody would want to move here, especially if people had children as they would have to take children to a different school
- The community will break apart. People would not talk to each other any more. Parents talk and meet when taking children to school. School is a very important part of Churchstoke
- Would we get to our new school in time?

**Does the school get used for different things in the community?**

- Brownies Guides and Rainbows use the school field
- After school club

**Is the after school club very important to you and your families?**

- Yes
- After school club is very important because parents are working and can pick you up later

**How many go to breakfast club?**

- Only 2 or 3 don't go to breakfast club
- There is a breakfast club which most go to, and that is very handy. We go because our parents are having to go to work. It's important to our families

**If there was no school in Churchstoke and you went to other school do you think it would be helpful to you and your parents to go to other after school clubs?**

- No, because there would be more stress on parents
- We would not be able to walk to school
- Also going on a bus to a different school, there would be no after school activities as we would have to leave when school bus leaves

**Have you got younger brothers and sisters that go to Little Explorers. If there was no school in Churchstoke what would the effect be on Little Explorers?**

- If there was no school you would destroy Little Explorers

**How do you think that would impact on families and parents?**

- I don't think the toddlers will have as many friends
- It's harder for people to make friends as a toddler. They can make friends in Little Explorers, but they would find it difficult if there was no Little Explorers
- Also Little Explorers has dinners at the school, and if there was no school they wouldn't be able to have dinners

**So there would be quite an impact on Little Explorers if there was no school in Churchstoke?**

- Yes

**Where would you go if there was no school in Churchstoke?**

- Montgomery, Montgomery, Bishops Castle, Welshpool, Welshpool, Bishops Castle, Bishops Castle, don't know, Bishops Castle

**Which high school do you usually go to?**

- Bishops Castle mostly. Some people go to Welshpool

**If there was no school in Churchstoke, the Council is keen that children from Churchstoke have an education in Wales. Is that important for you?**

- Yes, because it keeps Welsh education

**Do you like learning Welsh? Ydych chi'n hoffi dysgu Cymraeg?**

- Yes
- 'Os fyddech chi yn chi yn cau yr ysgol bydd plant yn mynd i ysgolion Saesneg a bydd hynny yn golygu colli Cymraeg yn ein pentref. Bydd hynny yn golygu llai yn siarad Cymraeg.' (*Translation: If you close the school, children will go to English schools and that would mean losing Welsh from the village. That would mean that less would speak Welsh.*)

**Do you know that you follow a different curriculum in Wales? How would that affect you if you moved to a school in England**

- All pupils would probably find the English curriculum much harder than the Welsh curriculum. Because we don't have Welsh spellings, we have English spellings, so the spellings are a lot harder, and a lot of stuff in England will be different to Wales and it would be all new.

**What else would you lose?**

- It would affect how we speak Welsh.

**Anything else you would lose if you went to a school in England?**

- Spanish

**Is there anything else you could think of that would be worse for you if Churchstoke school closed and you went to a different school?**

- One of my youngest siblings has speech problems and if going to a different school it would affect his speech and he probably would not have as many friends as he does now
- We would lose contact with some friends, but also if you made new friends in a new school, they would live further away and therefore you wouldn't be able to see them after school, only at school
- My younger sibling has no one to one by Powys, so if the school closes she would go to Bishops Castle.

**Do you think that your younger sibling gets more support in Churchstoke school? Do you think that would be lost if she went to Bishops Castle?**

- No, she gets more support in Churchstoke school, but Shropshire provide more one to one in Bishops Castle than Powys does
- I might be split up from my siblings
- My siblings might have to go to different schools

**A lot of questions have been asked as to why the Council is doing this. One reasons is because Churchstoke is a small school. Can you tell me what do you think is good about Churchstoke because it is a small school?**

- In a bigger school you probably would not get as much help from teachers as you have in a smaller school. Here teachers and staff pay more attention to you

- In a bigger school you are in a class with pupils of the same year, but here classes are mixed ages, so year 6 can help year 3 so you don't always have to go to the teachers. Teachers are busy
- I have been to a 300 pupil school and it is not better. There are fights every day
- In a bigger school we would have to work more independently without any help if you really need it. That is bad, as your education would not be as good
- Some teachers will be working with lots of different children rather than helping children that actually need the help

**Is there anything which you think might be better if you went to a different school?**

- More friends

**Are any of you the only pupil or one of only two in your year group?**

- Yes, I have been for two years, until someone else joined

**Did being the only pupil in your year group make a difference?**

- It did make a difference, but a good difference. As I was the only person in my year group, there was no point in me doing just abacus so I got to a stage higher than I was. I did maths with a year group above me and that definitely helped me.

**Would you be going to the same secondary school as the pupil in same year group as you?**

- Yes. I would be happy to go to high school with a friend I know.

**When there wasn't somebody in the same year group as you, were you worried?**

- It did worry me a tiny bit that I would be going to high school with nobody I knew
- I have been on my own most years. I was worried in going to high school because I had no friends, until another girl joined my class

### **Questions from pupils**

Pupils asked the following questions. The responses provided are summarised beneath each question:

- Why do you want to close the school?

The Council need to look at the 90 primary schools it has in Powys, and from time to time we have to look at schools which are very small such as Churchstoke. The Council has to make sure it has enough schools and in the right places for the amount of pupils it has.

- Have you ever visited Churchstoke?

Yes, but not to the school.

- Have you seen the school and the new houses?

I haven't been to the school but I am hoping to visit the school in the next few weeks if we're allowed to.

- Why do you think that a school with more children will help us learn better?

It won't be just because it is a larger school. We're looking at the whole experience of school, how the learning is organised, the friendship groups. It doesn't necessarily mean you would learn better just because a school is larger, but that's what we're looking at the moment. We're looking at giving you just as good an experience that you have now, if the school closes. It's important that your learning and needs are considered, so that's why we are here today and giving you the opportunity to say what you think.

It doesn't always mean that little schools are bad, and that big schools are good. We look at the learning you have curriculum, whether your school is well equipped to provide the curriculum, your wellbeing, that you're having good learning experiences, that you can learn what you want to not just what school decides, making sure there are good social groups and good opportunities to mix with other children. We want to make sure that nobody is losing out. We don't necessarily think a bigger school is better than a small school, but we have to look at all schools in Powys and make sure that the opportunities are there for all the pupils in Powys.

- What will happen to the school site?

If the school closes, the Council would talk to community to see if the community would want to use the school building. If that's not possible, the Council would then sell the site and the money gained from the sale would go to the Council education budget and used for schools and education across Powys.

- Will the money from the sale go towards our education or would it go to any education?

It would go to the education pot for the whole County, so to everybody.

- What happens to the Community Hall?

What do you think would happen?

- I don't think that the Community Hall could still continue as the school gives it money and without that money the school would be unable to run

Is the hall attached to school building?

- It's next door on the school field

Is the Community Hall used a lot by the community?

- Yes

You think if the school closes there would be an impact on the Community Hall? Do you think it would survive without the school?

- I don't think it could survive without the school.

Is it just used by the school during the school day?

- Yes, just the school uses it during the school day. We use it for PE and activities, we don't have lunch there
- Have you considered the environmental impact on the school and the wildlife on the school site?

If there was no school there, we would have to make sure that the ecology is protected as much as we can. It's an important factor. In terms of considering any environmental impact we have one of our documents in the consultation process which is an impact assessment and we consider the impact on the environment in that and if we get any more or different information about the environmental impact, we will update the document before the end of the consultation process.

- Why is it a good idea to go on a bus to school rather than walk?

We are looking at everything. If there would be no school in Churchstoke then you would have to travel further. But a lot of pupils across Powys already have to travel to school, because the County is so rural, and it is a natural part of everyday life across Powys.

- But so many buses are being used, how will that help with the environment?

It's one of the things we have to take into account. We have to look at a lot of things and balance them. If there is a need for any additional transport, we have to look at

how we can minimise the impact. We would have to look at what we could do, for example electric buses.

Educating children across the County in lots of different buildings also has an environmental impact. It's balancing the environmental cost at the moment and what that would be if you were transported. You have to look at the whole picture.

- If the school closes, we have free transport to the closest schools. Fuel would cost a lot, because we would need a lot more buses.

It would not necessarily be buses, it could be a taxi or a minibus. That's still a cost to the environment but it's not quite as bad as having a big bus.

- Have you considered how closing the school would affect children's mental health and wellbeing as we would be split from our friends?

It's a difficult time, as you have been in and out of school and in bubbles over the past year.

The impact on pupil's wellbeing is very very important to the Council. We are here today so that you can tell us exactly what you think about the proposal, and we can then take back your views which will then be considered by the Council's Cabinet. If you say there would be an impact on your wellbeing, you need to tell us that and we will feed that back.

- Have you thought that parents who have been through the school would want their children to come to the school as well?

We do need to consider how important the school is to the community and the emotional connection with the school which they might not have with the school down the road.

This might not happen, but if it does, we don't want you to worry. For example if you went to High School, the schools and the teachers talk to each other and find out about the pupils. The same would happen here, if you went to a different primary school. If you were to go to a new school we would ask you how we could help you make the move better. We would want to help you to settle in. Say what you think now but try not to worry as it might not happen, we don't know.

- What about resources like I pads and other equipment?

If the school was to close, we would look at the equipment there and see what equipment there is in the schools you are moving to. We would spread the resources to other schools.

- What if half the pupils went to for example Bishops Castle in England and half to Powys schools. Would you share them out?

No, we would only share them out to schools in Powys, not in England.

- Will teachers be given new jobs?

It depends where there are other available jobs. It could be if all pupils go to the same school that school would need an extra teacher, and it could be that one of your teachers would go there. But it's not guaranteed. In the past everyone's situation is different, and some teachers move to other schools, and some teachers decide that they want to do something else.

- How do our parents get answers to questions that they have?

During this consultation period anyone can let us know what they think. At the end of the consultation period we will have to prepare a report and the Council will have to respond to what's been said, so any questions we get during the consultation period, we will have to respond to in the consultation report which Cabinet will consider and then decide whether or not to carry on with the process.

The children were thanked for their comments and questions, and reminded again that if they or their friends thought about any further questions or comments after today, then they should send them in by 9 June when the consultation closes. Their teachers or parents would be able to help them send the information on if