

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

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**Report on meeting with the School Council of
Nantmel C. in W. School**

22nd February 2016

Meeting with the School Council of Nantmel Primary School

Officers in attendance:

Marianne Evans, Senior Manager School Transformation

Sarah Astley, Project Manager, School Transformation Team

Jade Clay, Schools Transformation Programme Support Officer

A meeting with the School Council of Nantmel School was held on the 22nd February 2016.

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

1. What do you like about Nantmel School?

- It's colourful
- There is a good environment – a large field, a garden, a fort
- Everyone is friendly
- They enjoy golden time (a longer playtime on a Friday)
- It is in the Countryside
- There are small classes so less distractions and more attention from teachers
- The teachers are nice
- Enjoy the work and the teachers are helpful
- Enjoy planting plants
- Links with the Church, they like going on Church Visits
- There are fun activities, going on school trips, making things (Dens, forts etc.) Sports day.
- Santa visits them
- Enjoy games day, they can take their own games and toys in
- They think it's the best school in the world
- The school is close and they don't have to travel far
- The football goals
- The food
- Family members work there
- They can sit out of lessons if they are ill or get hurt
- There is a good office
- The school is small so they won't get lost
- There are no bullies in the school

2. What don't you like about Nantmel School?

- The farm toys aren't very good
- The playground is slanted and isn't big enough
- There is too much football
- The whiteboards are too small
- The taps in the toilet drip
- There aren't enough toilets

3. What would be worse if you had to move schools?

- Additional travel
- The extra traveling with damage the environment
- Money will be wasted on petrol
- Pupils would have to make new friends
- Pupils would lose friends they currently have but they can invite them over to their own houses
- The teachers would lose their jobs
- They would lose their head teacher
- They won't be a part of Nantmel any more
- They will have to go to a bigger schools and there will be more distractions
- There is a difference between country children and town children
- Towns are too noisy
- They may get bullied or feel isolated or excluded
- There are monkey bars in Rhayader – they may fall off and hurt themselves

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

- There would be more pupils, which would help confidence

5. If the school were to close and one of the pupils here had additional needs, how do you think it would affect them?

- They may get bullied in a bigger school
- It would be harder for them because they are used to the teachers in this school

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

- Why does the council want to wreck the school?
- The more schools the council closes, the more sad children there will be
- What happens if there isn't enough room at the other schools?
- Half of what will be saved from closing our school will be spent on employing new teachers at another school
- Could the pupils arrange activities to raise money so that the school can be kept open?
- They are like a big family here
- It would be unsettling to move schools half way through the year
- Where would the money go?
- What would happen to all our stuff in the school?
- It would be unsettling to move schools half way through the year
- Where would the money go?
- What would happen to all our stuff in the school?

Minutes of a meeting with staff of Nantmel Church in Wales School, held at Nantmel School on 25th February, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

Gareth Jones, Senior Manager School Central Support Services
Marianne Evans, Senior Manager, Schools Transformation
Catherine Cottle, HR Business Partner (Schools)

Revd. Helen Rees, Education representative, Diocese of Brecon and Swansea

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

Dee Hanson, NUT

Nantmel School Staff

Tracy Lewis
Nicky Higginson
Rebecca Cook
Lora Thomas
Linda Crockett, Headteacher
Roy Gardner

Attendees introduced themselves.

It was noted that the purpose of the meeting was to receive comments from staff on the proposal to close Nantmel Church in Wales School from 31st December, 2016, as part of the formal consultation process. It was explained that should the Council's Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposal to close the school, a separate consultation would take place with staff around the potential redundancy process.

Gareth Jones explained the background leading to the review. It was noted that schools had been identified for review using a range of criteria. Between February 2015 and November 2015 discussions had taken place with governors of those schools identified for review. A report had been presented in December, 2015, when the Council's Cabinet had taken the decision to consult on a recommendation to close Nantmel Church in Wales School from 31st December, 2016, with Rhayader Church in Wales School being named as the receiving school. It was explained that for those pupils who live within the natural catchment area of Nantmel and more than 2 miles from Rhayader C in W School, transport would be provided to that school.

Staff were informed the reasons for the recommendation to close the school are:

- i) The school has had fewer than 50 pupils on roll for the three previous years and numbers are not projected to increase to above 50.
- ii) There are more than 15% surplus places at the school.
- iii) The funding per pupil is more than 120% of the council's average.

Staff were informed that a consultation meeting had already taken place with the school council and further consultation meetings would be taking place with governors of the school and parents and community members.

At the end of the consultation period, the Cabinet will receive a report of all the issues raised during consultation. The Council's Cabinet has a legal obligation to consider all the issues raised during the consultation and it would be for the Cabinet to decide whether or not to proceed with the proposal.

Staff were invited to ask questions and to give their views on the proposal.

1. Question

What is the expected timescale for the Cabinet to consider the outcome of the consultation?

Response

It is expected that Cabinet will consider a Consultation Report in May.

2. Question

When will we hear what will definitely happen?

Response

The report will be published on the Council's website a week before it is considered by the Cabinet and schools representatives can attend the Cabinet meeting. If, following consideration of the report, Cabinet members decide to proceed with the proposal, the next step will be to publish statutory notice of closure of the school for a period of 4 calendar weeks of which at least 15 days must be school days. During this time written objections to the notice can be received. Following the statutory notice period the objections will be collated and an Obejction Report, including all the issues raised and the Authority's response to them, will be prepared for the Cabinet who will take the final decision on whether or not to close the school. The Cabinet has to take account of all the issues raised within the objections.

3. Question

If the Cabinet decides to close the school when will we know?

Response

On the timescale we are working to, the Cabinet would be likely to take the final decision on the future of the school in July, but this would depend on the Cabinet. The Authority needs to give 1 term's notice to parents if a decision is taken to close a school.

4. Question

What about notice to staff?

Response

Staff would not be given notice until a separate consultation process had taken place. This would not be undertaken until the Cabinet has taken a final decision on the school. The HR process could not start until after the Cabinet decision.

Response

There is a separate consultation process for staff. There is a different notice period for support staff and teachers. At the very least, it would be the notice period stated in your contract. This is normally 1 term for teachers and 1 month for support staff, but if you have long service it may be longer, up to a maximum period of 12 weeks. If staff are given notice of redundancy we would hope to redeploy staff to local vacancies. The Authority's preference is always to redeploy staff.

5. Question

When will we actually know what is going to happen?

Response

If the Cabinet takes the decision to close the school from 31st December, 2016, we would aim to get your names on the redeployment list as soon as possible.

6. Question

Do we have to accept jobs offered to us via the redeployment process?

Response

If you turned down what was considered a reasonable offer of employment you might make yourself ineligible for redundancy pay but the Authority would take personal, individual circumstances into consideration.

7. Comment

It is a long process

Response

4/5 months as a minimum.

8. Question

What if parents decide to take children out of the school before Christmas?

Response

One of options would be to give consideration to redeploying staff to the receiving school but some staff would also be needed to assist with the closedown of the school.

It would depend on where parents decide to send their children but there would be discussion with the headteacher of the receiving school.

9. Question

If the decision was taken to close the school from December, 2016, would you be looking for some staff to consider staying beyond that date to assist with the closedown?

Response

We would be looking to retain some staff to carry out the formal closure process.

10. Question

Could there be a point where, if we were redeployed, we would not be receiving payment.

Response

You would be paid for the period for which you are employed. Redundancy would take effect from your notice date.

11. Question

I understood there would be no impact on redundancy payment if we wished to continue with supply work. Is that still the case?

Response

It is complicated.

Response

Day to day supply would not affect redundancy payment.

Response

If one of the teachers took a maternity cover post that would halt the redundancy process as this would be considered suitable alternative employment. The redundancy date would be the date the usual postholder came back from maternity leave unless permanent employment was found in the meantime.

12. Question

If we decide to take redundancy is it true we are not allowed to apply for another job in Powys County Council within a year?

Response

There is a reemployment policy. You would need to check with the school whether they have that policy in place.

13. Question

If our names were on a redeployment list, what support are you going to give us to continually develop our skills and training?

Response

We would hope that teachers in school would keep their skills up to date.

14. Question

What support would there be from September, if we do not have a job to go to?

Response

The Authority would not provide support after the redundancy date. Your name could be on the redeployment register until the end of your notice period.

Response

Your name would be removed from the redeployment register at the end of your period of notice.

Response

If you were reemployed by the Authority within a year of your redundancy date you would have to pay back the redundancy payment.

Response

But if you took another job within a year of the redundancy date with another local authority or in the independent sector you would not need to pay back the redundancy payment.

15. Question

Should Cabinet members take the decision to close the school, what would the process be for redeploying resources?

Response

Unless something specific has been bought by the school fund then the receiving school would have first call on the resources.

16. Question

Would Rhayader Church in Wales School have the first option as the named receiving school?

Response

Yes, the named receiving school would have first call on resources from the closing school followed by other receiving schools but, if the majority of children went to another school other than the named school, then discussion would be needed. If, after that process, any resources were unallocated it would be open to other schools in the catchment area, followed by any other schools, to apply for them.

17. Question

What if it can be proved that the school fund paid for a particular resource?

Response

Once resources have been bought by the school they become the property of the Council. However, if the Friends of the School, or the playgroup can prove they have bought particular equipment then discussion would be needed around how it would be reallocated.

18. Question

Could you explain about tax liabilities on any compensatory payments made to staff?

Response

If, in the event of closure of the school, staff were redeployed by the Authority to a job with reduced hours or lower pay a compensatory payment would be made. This compensatory payment would be liable for tax whereas redundancy pay is tax free for any redundancy payment less than £30K. There is a difference in the rate of redundancy payment for voluntary and compulsory redundancy for support staff.

Response

If, for instance, there was a restructure whereby the number of teaching assistants was to be reduced and a voluntary redundancy scheme was in place, a teaching assistant who volunteered for redundancy would get a higher rate of redundancy payment as that would be voluntary redundancy.

If Cabinet members decide to close the school there would be a separate staff consultation process.

19. Question

How do you qualify for redundancy payment?

Response

Staff need to have 2 years continuous service with the Authority in order to qualify for redundancy – not necessarily in the same school - but should staff be given notice of redundancy, there would be individual discussions with the staff involved.

20. Question

If a decision is taken to keep the school open would the school operate as usual from January 2017?

Response

Yes, the process could stop in May or July if the Cabinet decide not to proceed with the recommendation.

21. Question

Would the decision need to be referred to the Minister for Education?

Response

The Church Authority could refer the decision to the Minister after the Cabinet has made the final decision following the statutory objection period.

22. Question

If a decision is taken not to close the school, how frequently could the school be reviewed under the School Transformation Policy?

Response

The Schools Transformation Policy, 2014, sets out an annual cycle of review but a new School Reorganisation Policy is now in place which doesn't have an annual cycle and is more flexible.

Response

When the school was reviewed again would be dependent on the reasons why the process was stopped but the Authority shouldn't be putting schools through a continuous process of review.

23. Comment

There is a high turnover of staff at this school because we are a small school under threat of closure.

Response

If the Cabinet members decided to proceed with the recommendation and the decision was referred to Welsh Government it is unknown how parents might react to this. They could move their children if the Minister took 12 months to take a decision on the proposal.

24. Question

What would happen if there were so few pupils left in the school in the autumn term that the school became unviable?

Response

If pupil numbers in the school reduced to such an extent that it was not good educationally for the children then there would need to be discussion with parents of those pupils.

25. Question

How would the staff be affected if pupil numbers reduced to such an extent?

Response

If, say there were only 6 pupils remaining in the school in September, there would need to be discussion with the headteacher, staff and parents.

Next Steps:

Staff were reminded of the next steps in the process

The consultation concludes on 11th March. Every issue raised during the consultation period will be logged and analysed. A report will then be prepared for Cabinet consideration, which will include issues raised during the consultation and the Authority's response to them. The report will be published a week before the Cabinet meeting on the Council's website. Following consideration of the consultation report, if the Council's Cabinet decides to take forward the recommendation then a

statutory notice of closure will be published. If anyone wishes to object to the statutory notice they will need to resubmit any objection previously submitted during the consultation period.

Written responses to the consultation can be submitted on paper, online or via email to school.modernisation@powys.gov.uk.

26. Comment

It is felt that Cabinet members are very out of touch with the community. They will be taking a decision which will affect a lot of people. They need to take time to visit the school and find out about it.

Dee Hanson requested a copy of the minutes of the staff consultation meeting be forwarded to her.

Staff were informed about the format of Cabinet meetings. It was noted that local members can register a request to speak at the meeting and would be allowed 5 minutes each to put forward their views.

27. Comment

I think the Cabinet needs to look at personal circumstances. All my three children and myself are affected by potential school closures.

28. Comment

The school's review is a long exhausting process.

29. Comment

The communities where we live are very important. Powys's mission statement is "stronger communities in the green heart of Wales."

30. Comment

Not once have the good standards at Nantmel School been mentioned.

Response

Standards are paramount in this because we would not be allowed to name a school with lower standards as a receiving school.

31. Comment

We went through the review process 5 years ago and the school is still here today because of its high standards.

Gareth Jones thanked staff for attending the meeting and for their input. He told them that, as community members, they would also have the opportunity to attend the meeting for parents and community members to be held that evening.

Staff were reminded that the next "decision point" in relation to the recommendation to close the school would be in May. They were informed that if staff requested individual meetings with HR, that could be arranged during the consultation regarding their employment that would only happen if the cabinet confirmed the decision to close the school.

Minutes of a meeting with governors of Nantmel Church in Wales School, held at Nantmel School on 25th February, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

PCC

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

Governors

Rob Lewis, Community Governor
Sam Knill, Community Governor
Julia Lewis, LA Governor
Catherine Rees, Parent Governor
Cllr David Evans, LEA Governor
Linda Crockett, Headteacher
Clare Haslam, Parent Governor
Phil Bowen, Foundation Governor

Nicky Higginson, Clerk to Governing Body

Revd. Helen Rees, Director of Education, Diocese of Swansea and Brecon

In attendance

Darren Ivey, Opinion Research Services (observer)
Kelly Lock, Opinion Research Services (observer)

Ian Roberts thanked governors and Revd. Helen Rees for attending the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves. Governors were informed that unless they wished to be reminded of the recommendation, this would not be re-iterated at the meeting, unless governors requested this, as they had already been informed of the recommendation.

Ian Roberts explained that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to governors comments and to answer as many of their questions in relation to the recommendation as possible. A note would be made of any comments and questions received. Those questions which could not be answered straightaway would be addressed in the consultation report for the Cabinet.

Governors asked whether they would have sight of the consultation report before it was published and suggested they would need to have answers to questions before the consultation report was available.

Governors were informed that officers would endeavour to provide answers to the questions they raised, within a suitable timescale, depending on the number and complexity of the questions. It was noted that governors' questions would need to be answered to allow sufficient time for governors to respond before the end of the consultation period.

Catherine Rees asked whether or not Cabinet members would be attending the public meeting.

Governors were informed that Cllr Arwel Jones, Portfolio for Education, and Cllr Barry Thomas, Leader of the Council and Chair of the Cabinet, would be attending the meeting with parents and community members to be held later that evening.

The following comments and questions were received from governors.

1. Question

Why are councillors not attending this meeting? I want them to witness what we are saying. I did ask why we are having this meeting in addition to the parents meeting.

Response

When there is a recommendation to close a school consultation meetings are arranged for pupils, staff, governors, and for parents and the community. It is felt different groups affected by the recommendation may wish to bring up different issues for instance governance. By arranging consultation meetings for pupil, staff, governors, and parents/ community it is considered this gives key stakeholders as wide an opportunity as possibility to have their say.

2. Comment

We are concerned that time will be limited for the public meeting.

It was explained that no decision had yet been taken on the recommendation. The Cabinet had approved consultation on the recommendation and there had been occasions in the past when Cabinet had decided not to take forward a recommendation following consultation. It was noted that the Authority are not legally bound to carry out formal consultation meetings, but it is considered that by doing this, stakeholders are given an opportunity to have their say.

Governors were informed that the Authority aims for the process to be open and transparent and, for this reason, independent facilitators had been commissioned to assist with the consultation process with parents and community. It was explained it would not be officers who would be making the decision on the recommendation but members of the Council's Cabinet and it was therefore considered important for the Cabinet member for Education and the Leader of the Council to attend the public meeting in order to hear the views of parents and community members.

3. Comment/Question

The public do not want us to ask the same questions as those that will be asked in the public meeting. Why are we meeting twice? We though you would be giving a presentation to us.

Response

Do you want us to go through the recommendation with you?

4. Comment

We are concerned that the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder will not hear the questions we are asking.

Response

There is no reason why you can't ask the same questions in the public meeting and in this meeting.

5. Comment

I requested a recording be made of the public meeting and that request was denied.

Response

To record the public meeting would need the permission of everyone attending that meeting. The minutes of the public meeting will be made available to you.

6. Comment

The minutes are not fully complete.

Response

The minutes taken will be a full note of the meeting.

7. Comment

Sometimes parents think governors are given more information than they are and separate meetings for governors and parents just reinforces some parents' perception.

Response

It is difficult to get it right. There are occasions when governors have appreciated and welcomed a separate meeting and have asked questions around governance procedures. This is the first time where governors have felt there is not much point in a separate meeting but it is your right to say that.

8. Question

The school's costs are increasing. We have a small number of pupils at this school and it is possible that long-term the budget for the school would not look healthy. If the school closes what would happen if there was a deficit budget?

Response

When a school closes the deficit or surplus position at the time of closure is written off and governors would not be liable for that position.

Response

Unless governors had acted inappropriately i.e. inappropriate use of monies. For instance, if there was heavy expenditure in the last two months of a school being closed that would be scrutinised.

9. Question

Are we required to restrict our spending on the children still remaining in the school?

Response

No, if the school was to close on 31.12.2016 the budget would be reduced to a 9/12 allocation for the full year.

Response

You would have a budget plan for the year the school closed and you would be expected to spend within that budget plan and available budget.

10. Question

Are there any financial reasons for the proposed closure date of 31st December, 2016?

Response

No. The cabinet could decide to alter that date.

Response

The other sum of money that would need to be considered is if there is a school fund held as public money and how the balance at the closure of the school is used/allocated.

11. Question

I am unclear as to why our proposal was not given more consideration. What about strengths of the current collaboration with Rhayader School?

Response

I think you are referring to the option of federation or a split site school. Under a split site school each site would be funded in accordance to the current formula for a split site school. The budget that would come to Nantmel School under a split site school would not support the number of teachers needed to run the school. Where schools have been federated in Powys those schools normally have had over 50 pupils.

12. Question

Why 50?

Response

The formula is predicated on a teacher pupil ration of 1:25. Taking into account efficiencies applied to the 15/16 budget this would mean a teacher funded pupil ratio of 1:26. The overall impact of the teachers' pay award, increased superannuation and National Insurance contribution, this would mean a 3-4% decrease in spending power meaning we would be looking at funding on a teacher pupil ratio of 1:28 for 2016/17. Once a federated school gets to 30 pupils the funding drops and this would mean there would be insufficient funding to support the number of teachers needed to run as a 2-class Infant/Junior school. If the school was funded as a split site school, it would mean the budget would be more difficult to manage as Rhayader would be funded as a single school with the pupil numbers in Nantmel School added to the total number of pupils Rhayader School would be required to fund.

13. Comment

No consideration has been given to standards.

Response

It was made clear when governors met with members of the School Organisation Review Panel that there are no concerns about current standards at Nantmel School.

14. Question

So the recommendation is down to money?

Response

It is as a result of low pupil numbers.

15. Comment

I would prefer that question to be answered at the public meeting.

16. Comment

You are not operating under the premise of the quality of education being most important.

17. Comment

There has been no engagement with Cabinet members until this point. There is only one Councillor who is a member of the Schools Organisation Review Panel. It is mainly made up of officers.

Response

When the School Organisation Review Panel was proposed there was a suggestion within the initial cabinet report to include more members but the decision of Cabinet at that point in time was to just include the Portfolio Holder for Education.

18. Comment

These are issues I would like the general public to know.

Response

The questions can be repeated in the public meeting.

19. Comment

I have submitted 3 Freedom of Information requests to the Council for which I am awaiting responses. I know the Authority has the information to hand and it is painful for me to have to wait 20 days for reports and it is not guaranteed that I will get those reports within 20 days. I would like a response within the consultation period.

Response

Your Freedom of Information requests will be responded to within the timescale required under the FOI protocols i.e 20 days.

20. Comment

That only gives me from 8th March until the consultation concludes on 11th March.

Response

If Freedom of Information Requests are outstanding with our officers we will ensure they are responded to within 20 days.

The governor who had submitted the Freedom of Information requests read out the details of information requested. Officers stated it would not be possible to provide a response to the information requested at the meeting but a separate meeting would be arranged in order to discuss the information requested and provide the relevant data.

21. Comment

I have not received an automated response to acknowledge receipt of the FOI request.

Response

You should have received an automate response to your request and if you have not received this it is something you should take up with the FOI Service.

22. Comment

Rhayader School has been named as the receiving school but the access to the school building and the car parking is not good.

23. Comment

There is no disabled access at Rhayader School. The school building is categorised as Category D which is less than Nantmel school building.

Response

The condition of the school building at Rhayader has been assessed as being “B” and the school building at Nantmel as condition “C”. The assessment of the school building at Rhayader as “D” is in relation to its sustainability and that could be addressed by installation of double rather than single glazed windows, for example. As part of the Schools Service Asset Management Plan I will be recommending the surveys of school building condition are carried out as part of a rolling programme. We are aware of issues around the service areas and car parking at Rhayader School and will work with school to improve that.

24. Comment

I don't think the information you will be presenting to the Cabinet will be wholly unbiased. Will Cabinet members be visiting the school?

I don't feel it is a transparent process as Cabinet members are presented with the information that officers choose to present to the Cabinet.

Response

The issues you are raising will be included in the consultation report and the cabinet will have to consider and respond to those issues.

25. Comment

The responses to the Freedom of Information requests have to come back to us within the consultation period. 20 days is not acceptable.

Response

We will commit to ensure that Freedom of Information requests are in the system and are responded to in order to allow you plenty of time to respond to the consultation but the Authority has 20 days to respond to a Freedom of Information request.

26. Question

Is there any flexibility to extend the consultation period?

Response

The consultation period cannot be changed at this stage as it has already been published but the Cabinet has flexibility to extend the timeline.

27. Comment

Our formula is less specific. It is not just about figures. It is more about community. It is difficult for the two to meet.

Response

It will be for the Cabinet to balance the quantitative and the qualitative.

28. Question

Do you negotiate the funding formula for schools with Welsh Government?

Response

The percentage of funding which must be delegated to schools is based on pupil numbers but it is a Powys formula but the funding comes from Welsh Government.

29. Comment

The funding formula does not reflect the locality. It is news to me that the funding formula is dictated by officers.

Response

Officers do not dictate the formula. Funding comes from Welsh Government and Powys decides how funding is delegated via the Fair Funding Formula – schools are consulted about any proposed revisions to the formula, before it is then considered by the Council's Cabinet. It is reviewed every year as is the Scheme for Financing Schools. Every Welsh authority has its own formula for funding schools. Rural authorities have had a settlement which is poor as compared to more urban areas. The sparsity factor of the formula for funding local authorities does not carry as much weight as other factors.

Response

If there is an extra number pupils in other local authority areas the funding is less for those local authorities which have fewer young people of school age.

30. Comment

No one wants to live in an area where there are no schools.

31. Comment

It seems the only way of getting money from Welsh Government is by building schools. Is money coming for new sites and new spends. It seems the Authority can only access money from Welsh Government for capital projects.

Response

There is less money available from Welsh Government for schools because the number of pupils in Powys has reduced significantly as a percentage of the Welsh school population. Post 16 funding is an example. There has been a cut of £450K in the budget for post 16 education in 16/17 because post 16 student numbers have reduced. There are 750 fewer pupils in the secondary sector now in Powys than five years ago. Funding is mainly based on pupil numbers.

Response

Capital funding cannot be used for revenue funding.

32. Comment

We have the money in Wales but Powys is poor at negotiating for its share of it. You are proposing a new school in Builth which will cost £40m when you are saying you have not got the money to keep Nantmel School open. I want these discussions so we can be transparent and people are not misled. You said pupil numbers are reducing but, at same time, you are proposing a new school in Builth.

Response

It is not possible to use capital for revenue funding.

Response

The Section 151 officer attends the Welsh Government Distribution Subgroup and a change to the formula which recognises rurality has already been put in place. Every opportunity is taken to put forward Powys issues at that forum.

33. Comment

I don't understand why there is not a dialogue with Welsh Government so communities and officers can get together to lobby Welsh Government. You seem determined to close small schools. There has been no early dialogue about how we go forward. I don't believe this is a democratic consultation process.

Response

I have provided you with that assurance. I have said I want people to come here this evening to give their views. I cannot tell you what the outcome will be as the consultation process has only just begun.

34. Comment

Matters have been raised at this meeting which the parents and Portfolio Holder has not heard.

Response

We respect your right to ask what questions you want to be answered in front of the public.

35. Comment

I think we should call this meeting to a halt and ask any further questions in the public meeting.

36. Question

Does anyone here feel it would have been useful for the Portfolio Holder to hear our discussion?

Response

The members will receive the consultation report.

37. Question

With a recommendation from yourself?

Response

It is not my personal recommendation. The report which goes to the Cabinet is in the name of the Portfolio Holder for Education.

The report is written based on the questions and issues raised during the consultation period and the answers are provided to the Portfolio Holder.

The officers respond to all the issues raised. The report goes to Cllr Arwel Jones who makes a recommendation.

38. Question

Don't you think it would have been useful for the two county councillors to be at this meeting?

Response

They will attend the public meeting this evening.

39. Comment

The more people engaging in the discussion, the better.

Darren Ivey of ORS concluded the meeting by commenting that it is useful to ask questions for clarification but there is a difference between asking questions and listening to the views of stakeholders. There is a need to distinguish between questions and views. Questions can be very specific but it is important that the general voice of stakeholders is heard.

Minutes of a meeting with parents and community of Nantmel Church in Wales School, held at Nantmel School on 25th February, 2016, on a proposal to close the school from 31st December, 2016.

Present

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

In Attendance

Sarah Astley, Schools Transformation team
 Jade Clay, Schools Transformation team
 Darren Ivey, Opinion Research Services
 Kelly Lock, Opinion Research Services

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| Mike Hodgson | Chair of Governors | Claire Mills | Parent |
| Clare Haslam | Parent Governor | Cllr Gary Price | Councillor |
| Julia Lewis | LA Governor | Victoria Wilks | Grandparent |
| Sam Knill | Parent Governor | Geoff Wilks | Grandparent |
| Geraint Watham | Community member | Revd. Helen Rees | Diocese of Brecon & Swansea |
| Phil Bowen | Foundation | | |
| Catherine Rees | Governor | Andrew Thomas | Parent |
| Ian Rees | Parent Governor | Nigel Bufton | Parent |
| Sarah Davis | Parent | Katie Rose | Parent |
| Philip Clegg | Parent | Dean Roberts | Parent |
| Kate | Parent | Lewis Pugh | Former pupil |
| Robert Pugh | Pupil | Samuel Rees | Former pupil |
| Rebekah Thomas | Parent | Meurig Rees | Former pupil |
| Carolyn Rowlands | Parent | Kenneth Rees | Former pupil |
| Lora Thomas | Parent | Ruth Rees | Parent |
| Rebecca Cook | Member of Staff | Lynne Tolhurst | Community member |
| Roy Gardner | Member of Staff | Rachael Beech | Community member |
| Rebecca Pugh | Parent | Heather Jones | Parent |
| David Butler | Parent | Kerena Pugh | Community member |
| Fred and Sue Nally | Community member | Jessie Pugh | Community member |
| Clare Evans | Community member | Kath Bufton | Dolau community member |
| Kirsty Williams | AM Brecon & Radnor | Graham Chaplin | Community member |
| Cllr Kelvyn Curry | Councillor | Sophia Pugh | Community member |
| Heather Curry | Community member | Amy Evans | Former pupil |
| Mike Broadhurst | Community member | Katrina Evans | Parent of former pupil |
| Victor Morgan | Community member | Lisa Hardwick | Parent |
| Elizabeth Morgan | Community member | Stephen Hardwick | Parent |
| Dorri Davies | Community member | Anneka Price | Parent and community |
| Margaret Thomas | Grandparent | Bryan Pugh | Former pupil |
| Phillip Davies | Community member | Stephen Pugh | Former pupil |
| Edward Jones | Community member | A Pugh | Former pupil, parent & member of community |
| John Lawrence | Community member | | |
| Richard Thomas | Community member | R Lewis | Parent of prospective pupil |
| Kevin Lewis | Community member | A Lewis | Parent of prospective pupil |

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|------------|-------------------------|--|----------------|------------------------|
| M Jones | Former pupil and parent | | Katie Rowlands | Former pupil |
| R L Lewis | Community member | | Sooty Rowlands | Parent of former pupil |
| J B Morgan | Gwystre community | | Phil Rowlands | Former pupil |
| B A Pugh | Former pupil | | Emma Jones | Former pupil |
| | | | Alice Collard | Former pupil |
| | | | Pauline Bore | Parent of former pupil |

Cllr Arwel Jones welcomed parents and community members to the meeting. He explained that the meeting was part of the consultation process on the proposal to close Nantmel Church in Wales School from 31st December, 2016. It was noted that no decisions had yet been taken regarding the future of the school and the purpose of the meeting was to listen to views of parents and community members. Attendees were informed that translation facilities were available should they wish to speak in Welsh. Panel members introduced themselves.

Darren Ivey from Opinion Research Services explained the format of the meeting and the purpose of ORS's involvement in the consultation. It was noted that discussion at the meeting would be recorded and included with the report to be submitted to the Council's Cabinet.

Marianne Evans explained the context and background leading to the School Organisation Review process. It was noted that members of the School Organisation Review Panel had met with governors of Nantmel Church in Wales school in February 2015, in September, 2015, and again at the end of 2015, as part of the review process, as set out in the Authority's Schools Transformation Policy, 2014. The Panel had considered a range of options in relation to the school but had concluded that the recommendation would be closure of Nantmel Church in Wales School from 31st December, 2016, with Rhayader Church in Wales School being named as the receiving school. At a meeting on 15th December, 2015, the Council's Cabinet took the decision to consult on closure of the school.

Those present were asked whether or not they wished to ask any questions to clarify the proposal.

1. Question - Revd. Helen Rees

The school and the church have a central role in the community. What reference has been made to the outcome of the Community Impact Assessment in relation to the use of the school building and the place of the school in the community?

Response

The Authority is required by legislation to collate information on and analyse the community use of school facilities and to consider the impact of closure of a school would have on the community. The draft Community Impact Assessment needs to identify, through consultation, and provision of detailed information about the impact of the current proposal on the community. The Community Impact Assessment will be included with the report for Council's Cabinet to inform them what impact closure of the school would have on the community.

2. Comment - Ian Rees – Parent

You just need to drive through Beguildy to see what impact closure of Beguildy School has had on that community. Nantmel School has been under threat of closure for 8 years and the Authority does not say Nantmel School is available to take pupils. Rhayader Church in Wales School is not fit for purpose. It has a narrow entrance. I know you say the decision on the future of Nantmel School has not been made but the decision was made a long

time ago. You haven't given the school a chance. Nantmel School has managed its budget a lot better than Powys County Council has done.

3. Comment

Rhayader School has poor visibility from the site entrance. It has narrow access and there is serious congestion at drop off and pick up times. Will access and parking be reviewed?

Response

Access into Rhayader School is narrow and one of the issues which needs to be considered is whether or not there is a need to invest to improve the access to the school. Any child in the catchment area of Nantmel School who lives more than 2 miles from Rhayader Church in Wales would be offered school transport to Rhayader School.

4. Comment

That would mean more vehicles using the access to the school. The access to Rhayader Church in Wales School is the same as it was in the 1940's and there are now 200 children using the school.

5. Question – Cllr G Price

The consultation report says that the school is owned by the Church in Wales but the playing field is leased. For what period of time is the land leased, how much is paid for the lease and is that charged back to the delegated budget for the school? I noticed that the report to Cabinet on Welshpool primary schools included a rating of the school buildings' condition for the purpose of the Disability Discrimination Act but the consultation document for Nantmel School does not mention this. Could you tell me, in terms of Nantmel and Rhayader Church in Wales schools, if you add on the score for DDA what are the scores for the schools please?

Response

The details of the lease are not to hand and I am not aware of whether or not there is a formal lease agreement but I can provide that information for you. The condition assessment of Nantmel School is "C". The Property Service has indicated that with some replacement of single glazed windows and some other minor work this could be upgraded to a condition "B". The DDA rating is dependent on individual disability needs of the current pupils.

6. Comment – Cllr G Price

The DDA condition rating was included in the model for Welshpool but was left out of the consultation report for Nantmel School. How can we respond to the consultation when you do not tell us what the score is? The school should comply with the regulations regardless of what the disability is.

Response

I understand that you can have a school which is DDA compliant for pupils that attend the school at a particular point in time but if a new pupil with specific and different needs, in terms of disability, joins the school further adaptations may be necessary.

Response - Cllr Arwel Jones

I will get a request that a health and safety assessment is completed in relation to the access at Rhayader Church in Wales school.

7. Would the cost of that assessment be as much as the cost to run Nantmel School?

8. Question -Kirsty Williams

How can the Council make promises about improvement to the access at Rhayader School when access problems at Knighton School have not been sorted in spite of assurances made to the parents of pupils of Beguildy School?

The School Reorganisation Code makes reference to other models of governance, such as federation, as an alternative to closure and as a way of keeping children within in their local communities. I want to hear in detail why that option has not been afforded to this community.

Response

Federation is a model that has been considered as an alternative to closure. Under a federated model, schools have 1 headteacher and 1 governing body but are treated separately for budget and inspection purposes. The funding formula has to allow for affordability of two schools but when pupil numbers are as low as they are in Nantmel School, the Fair Funding Formula would not enable Nantmel School to retain its present level of staffing if it was part of a federation. The schools in Powys which are currently part of a federation have a higher number of pupils than Nantmel School.

Response

Under federation regulations, federated schools are funded separately. A school with 30 pupils or less would only be funded for 1.8/1.9 teachers. A dual-sited arrangement would result in that school being funded as a single school with a teacher pupil ratio of 1:25 and, taking into account Council efficiencies, this would mean a teacher pupil ratio of equivalent to 1:28. There would be a small split site allowance equating to .25 of a teacher. Based on 30 pupils and 1:28 ratio this would give the school 1.3 teachers, including the split site allowance. The larger school site would have to subsidise the smaller school site if two teachers were needed. Although under federation regulations, the Authority is required to fund federated schools as 2 separate schools, governors would have the option to pool the budgets and plan a single staffing team.

9. Comment

The Fair Funding Formula is created by Powys County Council and it is responsible for that formula. Powys County Council, as creators of that formula, is responsible for making small schools unviable but they are spending money on consultants. It is frustrating for communities to see Powys County Council spending money on things we don't want.

10. Comment

Remember that Powys is a very rural county. It has sparsity issues. At the same time the community is part of the county and parents are about to lose freedom of choice about what type of school their children go to. If the Authority closes 3 small schools in the locality parents will have no choice about what type of school they choose for their children and there will be longer journey times for small children.

11. Question

Both my children went to Nantmel School. I am aware of the savings Powys County Council has to make.

Would the Cabinet be open to collaboration with the community in order to save the school?

Response

We would need to find out whether that would be legally possible in Wales.
What do you understand by a collaborative approach?

12. Comment/ Question

The community council sets a precept for the community each year. There are 621 houses in Nantmel. If the Community Council was able to raise the precept would collaboration with the community council be possible in order to fund the shortfall to enable the school to remain open?

13. Question

When will the report on the proposal to close the school next be considered by the Council's Cabinet? The consultation takes us up to the pre-election period.

Response

The consultation period finishes on March 11th and it is hoped to take a report to Cabinet in May after the Assembly election.

Response

In relation to your question about using the precept in order to fund the school, I cannot answer at this point whether this would be possible, but there are historic examples where community groups have funded a particular post in a school.

If the community was to come together to devise a way of keeping the school open that would be listened to carefully and not brushed aside. If that is something you would wish to be considered we would welcome a business case around that.

14. Question -Revd. Helen Rees

Governors have talked about the option of federation with Rhayader C in Wales School, if there was a possibility of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School becoming a church school would that make the possibility of federation stronger?

Response

Thank you for the question. Consideration would need to be given to implications of that on the budgets for the schools.

Comment

The assumption is that if Nantmel School closes, the pupils will transfer to Rhayader School but it is likely that more than half will go to Crossgates CP School. Crossgates School will get the pupils from Dolau and Llanbister if those schools close. What criteria will be applied in terms of allocating places at Crossgates School if it reaches capacity? Will places be allocated on a "first come, first served basis"?

Response

The capacity of the current schools given in the consultation document is based on the assumption that the County Council will provide education from nursery through to year 6 but another consultation is taking place currently on a proposal to change the age of admission to primary schools and the impact of that will change the capacity numbers for individual schools. Part of the report to the Cabinet will include the impact of that change. Currently, the Authority is the admission body for each of the schools named and there is a set admission number for each year group. If the number of places applied for exceeds the set admission number then the Local Authority applies the criteria as set out in the Authority's School Admission Policy.

Once the Authority has allocated a place for a pupil in a school and that has been accepted, the offer of a place cannot be retracted unless the place has been offered based on false information, for instance, the address has been falsified.

15. Question

Is it possible to secure a place in a school now for a move in January 2017?

As the children will have been disadvantaged by closure of their school, what assurance can the Council give that children can secure a place at parents' next chosen school?

Response

The Authority would have to ensure that a place is available in the named receiving school but parents can choose an alternative school.

16. Question

Would there be any special circumstances for children already disadvantaged by closure of their school?

Response

If the proposal is taken forward, the Authority has a duty to make sure there is a place in the named receiving school but it cannot make plans when the decision on the future of the school has not yet been taken.

17. Comment - Kirsty Williams

When places were allocated to the new primary schools in Ystradgynlais you knew that the named school for the pupils of the former Cynlais School was not Ysgol Bro Tawe but Ysgol Golwg y Cwm and you made special arrangements for the children of Cynlais to stay together. You recognised parental choice. The council has a precedent of accommodating parental choice on school closure. You need to treat communities consistently.

18. Comment

Not once has there been any reference to standards. You are just talking about money. We already pay a precept for every school. We are in danger of just looking at facts and figures. The geography of Radnorshire is important. Cabinet members have not visited the school. Alternative options appear to have been disregarded. What do you, as officers, know that we can't understand by reading your papers? If we had a referendum I think you would lose. The disappointment is that the consultation is on closing Nantmel School. Can't the consultation be on keeping Nantmel School open? I would have thought a number of options suggested tonight should have been considered before there was consultation on a proposal to close the school. It seems that consultation on closure is premature when there are other options.

Response

The principle of consultation is that all options must be considered.

19. Question

If a local business wanted to support the school to enable it to remain open would that be an option? You had previously said that would be unsustainable.

Response

I do not recollect saying that it would unsustainable. I had asked whether it would be sustainable.

Response

Sustainability is one of the criteria which would be considered.

20. Question

What would be the timescale for the community to put a business case together?

Response

That idea could be explored but it is not possible to change the timescales. I would suggest you submit your ideas as part of the consultation, and they will be considered.

21. Comment

It couldn't be done in 11 days. If the idea hasn't been encouraged previously it would take time for the community to come together to discuss with stakeholders and draft a business case. It sounds as though the gates have only just been opened to allow us to do something. We would need more time to prepare a sustainable business case.

Response

If the case put forward is sufficiently cogent there would be scope for it to be considered. However, we can't change the consultation timescales.

22. Comment/question

In order to draft a business case we would need to have figures. We need to have information tomorrow from key people. If it were to be a split school we would need information in order to say what the current situation is and to inform our proposal. We need to know the sum of money that would be sufficient to sustain the school. What do we have to do financially in order to keep this school open?

Response

We can run the funding formula and give you the figures that would be generated based on various pupil numbers.

23. Question

Wouldn't you have thought that was a reasonable question from us so that you had the figures for the shortfall to hand?

Response

The average delegation per pupil in the primary sector across Powys is £3600 average and for Nantmel School the per pupil funding is £4900.

24. Comment

Other schools don't work to an average. You have different costs in different schools. Surely Powys should be offering to arrange a meeting with us to discuss our proposals. We would like to see a more collaborative approach. PCC should set a meeting for parents, teacher and governors to discuss this by the end of the week. Council officers should look at their diaries to meet with key stakeholders in Nantmel.

25. Question

Why should the rural schools have to meet the same per pupil cost as the town schools?

Response

We are not saying that Nantmel School would have to have the average per pupil cost.

26. Comment

We need to know what sum of money would need to be found to enable the school to continue.

Response

The information can be provided to enable you to calculate the shortfall but there is nothing in the formula which factors in rurality. Transport costs are funded from central budget.

27. Comment/Question – Cllr G Price

There is £1000 discrepancy between the Cabinet report and the consultation document in relation to savings. In terms of school standards Rhayader Primary School was graded as “adequate” and Nantmel School was graded as “good” when it was last inspected. How can you send children from this school to a school that is achieving less?

Response

Both schools came out of category and requiring no further follow up from previous inspections. Standards at Nantmel School are good but we are confident that standards at Rhayader Primary school are as good.

28. Comment - Cllr Gary Price

In terms of the consultation document and the Cabinet report there is a discrepancy of £1000 in relation to the savings figures. Can you clarify the reference to £10K kitchen subsidy?

Response

Nantmel School gained £1000 following an adjustment to the formula with regard to the new Service Levels agreements, this was applied across all schools. The cost of the kitchen service is higher in a smaller school and in the consultation report the estimated figures of £10K as the cost of the kitchen service have been used but that will be clarified in the report for Cabinet.

29. Comment /Question- Cllr Evans

We want our schools in rural areas as well as schools in towns. How serious are you with your consultation? I attended the Cabinet meeting when the proposal to close Nantmel School was discussed. 849 people signed a petition to say did not want school to close. The standard of education has got to be paramount. You will not get a better education than at Nantmel School. I hope you will take on board what we have said. The school has been a centre of excellence for 160 years. It is a pity members of cabinet could not visit the school to see how it works. You have no idea of the havoc that closure of this school would cause. This proposal is all about money. Our rural areas are going to disappear. There are 3 schools under threat in this area. The legacy that Powys County Council will leave behind will never be put right. There is no reason to close this school at all. It is an excellent school and we do not want to lose it.

30. Question

Will the Cabinet members be visiting Nantmel School and the receiving school in order to make an informed decision and, if not, why not?

Response

It is up to individual cabinet members if they wish to visit the school. The Leader of the Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Education are here tonight.

31. Comment

You are taking for granted the information provided by officers which is not always unbiased. By visiting the schools during the school day, including the receiving school, you will be able to make an informed assessment. You will see for yourself the inappropriate access at Rhayader Primary School.

32. Comment

I live in community of Nantmel and my children were past pupils of the school. Nantmel School is highly regarded in the area. I was told at parents' evenings at the High School that children from Nantmel School are setting the standards. The education provision at Nantmel School has always been the best. Rural children need this space to grow. Nantmel only has the school and the church. We do not have a village hall. The school is not just a school but a community place for us all.

33. Comment

I worked in this school for 10 years and now I work at the high school. I am from London. Powys have lost sight of where they live. You are trying to deal with these schools as if they are in urban communities. You don't realise what you have here. There is a wonderful standard of education provided by the rural schools in this area. By closing rural schools you are tearing the heart out of the communities.

34. Question

I would like to know how you make a decision on closing small schools when you don't visit them. That is vital. It is all about the pupils. I would like to know how you can justify making a decision based on numbers on a page. Everybody who is involved in the decision making process needs to visit the schools. How can you make a decision without seeing what the school is about?

Response

Officers have visited the school – for example we met with the School Council earlier this week, and other officers also visit the school on a regular basis, but I think your question is about a chance for the decision makers to visit the school.

35. Question

Why don't Cabinet members visit the school and see it in operation? You need to take the children into account.

Response

As Portfolio Holder I will be visiting the school before the decision is taken but it will be up to other Cabinet members to decide whether or not to visit the school.

36. Question

Will you be recommending that they visit the school?

Response

The decision whether or not to visit the school will be up to individual Cabinet members.

37. Comment

Above all, councillors should listen to the needs of the local people. The community is asking you to visit the school.

Response

I will feed that comment back.

38. How many Cabinet members are actually from Radnorshire? How can they take a decision without visiting the school?

Response

I understand that you feel that Radnorshire and Breconshire are having a raw deal but a number of primary schools in Montgomeryshire have closed.

39. Question

Is Llanfechain School being considered for closure?

Response

There can be complex situations relating to some schools where the closest receiving schools do not have any surplus capacity. There is no spare capacity in Llansantffraid Church in Wales School which is the closest church school to Llanfechain Church in Wales School.

40. Comment

I don't want my daughter to go to Rhayader School. I want her to go to Crossgates School and it will be full.

41. Comment

You are hoping we will take our children away from Nantmel School due to fear that our children won't get into the next school that we choose. We need reassurance that our children will be placed in the next school of our choice.

42. Question

How is Crossgates School going to take all the children if Nantmel, Llanbister and Dolau schools all close?

Comment

The figures that have been included around saving exclude the money that would transfer to the receiving school with the child.

43. Question

Who is in charge of the finances and who has the breakdown of the savings?

44. Question

Give you give us the figure charged for the rent for Nantmel School?

Response

The funding per pupil is provided in the Section 52 document that is available on Stats Wales website. The County Council has full landlord responsibilities for both schools. There is no difference in the funding for running costs between a Community Primary and a Church in Wales School and they are both funded according to the same formula but with a Community Primary School the asset remains with the County Council if school closes. For Church in Wales schools the Church mainly owns the building.

45. Question

What about the funding for the playing field in Nantmel?

Response

There is a small element within the Fair Funding Formula which includes funding for the field.

46. Question

Does the lease on the playing field run for another 90 years?

Response

I don't have the details of the lease with me at the moment.

47. Question – Cllr G Price

I attended a meeting of the Council today in relation to the budget. Included within the identified efficiency savings for the Schools Service there are projected savings of £60K for small school closures and I asked the Portfolio Holder how the projected savings were made up and he said savings from closure of Dolau, Llanbister, Nantmel schools. If no decisions have been made how he can name those schools? I would say to the communities of Dolau Llanbister, and Nantmel the opportunity for judicial review is open to you. I have a webcast of the Council meeting as evidence.

Response

The savings to be achieved are partly through closure of Whitton School. I said that the Authority was consulting on the closure of Nantmel, Llanfihangel Rhydithon and Nantmel schools.

Response

As the Council is looking at the financial position over a 3-year period a number of assumptions and estimates need to be made in relation to projected savings but decisions have not made on those items. It is a model based on certain assumptions rather than predetermination.

48. Comment

You said the report would go to Cabinet in May.

Response

Yes, in May.

49. Question

What evidence are you gathering on the impact of closure of schools on the educational outcomes and wellbeing of pupils?

Response

There are no concerns about the standards of education at Rhayader C in W School and the range of clubs and extra-curricular activities at Rhayader C in W School are comparable to those in Nantmel School. Attendance at Rhayader School is good. When Rhayader School was last inspected, wellbeing of pupils was judged as being good as it is at Nantmel.

50. Question

Is there any evidence available to indicate outcomes on well being of children who have moved from a small to a larger school environment?

Response

In Ystradgynlais 10 primary schools were closed and 4 new schools opened 3 years ago. A number of children who transferred to the larger new schools had previously attended small schools. When the new schools were inspected the wellbeing of pupils in those schools was deemed to be at least as good and in some cases better. The evidence from the Ystradgynlais is that there was no detriment to wellbeing of pupils following their transfer to the new larger primary schools.

51. Question

Were stress factors and the children's mental health monitored? What is important is how children respond to change.

Response

Only a medical professional can provide an opinion about a child's mental health but we have looked at the benefits, attainment and opportunities of pupils in the Ystradgynlais primary schools and I can categorically say wellbeing for children in those new schools has been judged to be good. I cannot comment on the wellbeing of individual pupils but overall pupil wellbeing is good.

52. Question

Currently there are only two children who travel to Nantmel School on school transport. Other children are brought to school by parents. Can we have figures for the transport costs?

Response

In terms of financial assessment the estimated additional transport costs included in the consultation document would be £30,400 per annum.

53. Question

But it has been said that closure of Nantmel School would save £69,000?

Response

Transport costs have already been considered in establishing the net savings figures.

54. Comment

As chair of the governing body I have been privileged to sit in on lessons and have seen how well the teachers deal with pupils in different age groups. There are outstanding standards of teaching at Nantmel School. I have also helped to coach the cricket team. There is no selection for the team. The children join in enthusiastically. Our school was runner up in the schools cricket tournament. The children accept the opportunities offered at this school. If the school closed, it would be a severe loss to the community.

55. Comment

There is a fair bit of mistrust and hostility towards the Authority in this community. I hope you put in your report what you have seen here tonight.

56. Comment

I have heard what happened leading up to the closure of Beguildy and Whitton schools. Parents feel they are being bullied and scared into taking children away from the school.

57. Comment

There is a lot of feeling in the community that the situation with Nantmel School and other schools under review is being manufactured. Parents are frightened to enrol their children at Nantmel School because of the uncertainty and there are children who might otherwise have come to this school who have gone to other schools.

58. Comment/Question - Cllr Curry

Speakers at tonight's meeting are speaking from the heart. The quality of education at this school is not in question. I have heard that the shortfall in funding is not as great as it could be once the costs of school transport have been factored in. You owe it to this community to give correct figures. How are you going to measure the impact closure of the school would have on the community? What weight will that have? Is the proposal all about the finance? The cost of transport could go up vastly. Currently fuel is relatively cheap. What if the cost of fuel increases? What weight is given to the community impact? If this proposal goes ahead there would be nowhere in the community for us to meet. A lot of community organisations meet in the school. If the school closes it will rip the heart out of community. Can you tell us what weight will be given to the Community Impact Assessment?

Response

There are two aspects of community impact - the impact on the young people and the impact on the wider community as a result of loss of the school building. If the school was to close, there would need to be discussion with the Church in Wales, which owns the school building. When we looked at community use of schools in Ystradgynlais only one school building was used by community groups but it is a different situation in Nantmel.

Response

It is not a given that the asset of the building would no longer be available to the community if the school closes.

59. Question

Why haven't discussions with the Church already taken place? I don't understand why you have not already discussed with the Church what conditions relate to the school building. I would like you to respond to that question. Removing the school and its activities seriously affects the community. This element is missing from the consultation report.

Response

It is fully recognised that activities in the school impact on the community – information received from the school has been included in the draft Community Impact Assessment which is part of the Consultation Document.

60. Comment

When a school closes it affects the whole community and how a community is perceived by those outside that community.

61. Question

Why would young families come and settle in Nantmel if there is no school?

62. Comment

If the school closes it will have a negative effect on the wellbeing of those living in this community. There will be a health and social care cost. A lot of groups meet in the school. If there was nowhere in the community for people to meet, they would become isolated and lonely.

63. Question

How have you been able to determine that the birth rate in Nantmel won't increase and, if it does increase, where are those children going to go to school?

64. Comment

Nantmel School has been under threat for 8 years and that has had an effect on the number of pupils coming to the school.

Response

Data on birth rates in the County is provided by statisticians but we do not have the detail around birth rates for this area.

65. Question

So you have applied a model formula to project pupil numbers for this area?

Response

The projected pupil numbers have been discussed with the governing body of this school.

66. Comment

I live outside Nantmel but I choose to send my child to Nantmel School. Projecting pupil numbers is not just about birth rates. Parents from outside the village choose to send their children to Nantmel School.

67. Comment

I personally think Nantmel School is the best it has ever been and now you come in and say the money is not right so we will close it and I think that it is disgusting.

68. Comment

I think we have shown you that there is enthusiasm in the community to save Nantmel School and that there are other options available other than closure. There are easier ways for you to save £40-60K other than by closing the school.

69. Comment

I am concerned that as paid representatives you have been unprepared to answer obvious questions.

Response – Darren Ivey

That is not always a negative that is what public consultation is about.

70. Comment

I thank the 2 members of the Cabinet who have attended the meeting tonight. It is a pity the other Cabinet members have not visited the school.

Attendees were informed of the next steps in the statutory process. It was noted that a record had been made of the meeting and that the minutes of the meeting would be published as part of the report to be presented to the Council's Cabinet. The consultation concludes on March 11th and those present were encouraged to submit their comments in writing to the School Modernisation team by that date. It was explained that the Cabinet has a legal obligation to take account of every issue raised during the consultation period and the Council's response to the issues. It was explained responses to the consultation can be submitted online via the Council website, by writing to the Schools Modernisation team at County Hall, Llandrindod Wells, or by e-mail to school.modernisation@powys.gov.uk.

Darren Ivey thanked attendees for their honesty and passion in contributing their views and explained Opinion Research Services would be involved throughout the consultation process.

It was noted that officers from the Schools Services would provide data and figures to enable community members to formulate a business case in relation to their proposal to save Nantmel School from closure.

Cllr Arwel Jones thanked parents and community members for attending the meeting and encouraged them to submit written responses to the consultation by 11th March.

A pupil from Nantmel School concluded the meeting by saying

"Keep my school open. I like my country school. It is the only country school we have got."