

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET EXECUTIVE****19 March 2024**

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

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

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Further to the decision made by Cabinet on the 23rd January 2024, the Council has published a Statutory Notice in respect of the following proposal:
- To close Irfon Valley C.P. School from 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet members of the outcome of the statutory objection period and the objections received.
- 1.3 The report includes a recommendation to proceed with implementation of the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School from the 31st August 2024.
- 1.4 The report is supported by the following appendices:
- **Appendix A** – Statutory Notice

2. Background

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

¹ Teacher Centre, 4th March 2024

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Irfon Valley C.P. School	1	4	4	0	1	2	5	17

- 2.4 In July 2023, the school's governing body wrote to the Council, outlining their concerns about the impact of the decrease in pupil numbers on the school's educational and financial sustainability. Following the initial communication with the governing body, the Council carried out an options appraisal exercise to consider options for the school and identify a preferred option, which was to close the school, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.
- 2.5 On the 24th October 2023, Cabinet considered a proposal paper in respect of Irfon Valley C.P. School and agreed to commence consultation on the following:

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

Consultation

- 2.6 Consultation on the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code (2018) from the 26th October 2023 to the 7th December 2023.
- 2.7 A Consultation Report listing the issues raised during the consultation and the Council's response to them was published. This was considered by Cabinet on 23rd January 2024.
- 2.8 At the meeting on the 23rd January 2024, Cabinet agreed to proceed with the publication of a Statutory Notice in order to proceed with the process to close Irfon Valley C.P. School on 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

Objection period

- 2.9 Further to the decision made by Cabinet on the 23rd January 2024, the Council published a Statutory Notice proposing the following:

'To discontinue Irfon Valley Community Primary School, Garth, Llangammarch Wells, Powys, LD4 4AT, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.

It is proposed to implement the proposal on 31st August 2024.'

- 2.10 The Statutory Notice was published on 2nd February 2024 for a period of 28 days, in accordance with the guidance within the School

Organisation Code (2018). A copy of the Statutory Notice is attached as Appendix A.

2.11 The objection period ended on the 1st of March 2024.

2.12 No objections were received during the statutory objection period.

3. Advice

3.1 As no objections were received during the objection period, it is recommended that the Council proceeds with implementation of the proposal to close Irfon Valley C. P. School from 31st August 2024, as outlined in the Statutory Notice (Appendix A).

3.2 The reasons for this are:

- This would address the issue of low pupil numbers at Irfon Valley C.P. School.
- This would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools.
- There would be a revenue saving to the Council.
- Pupils will attend a larger school where they will be part of a larger cohort of pupils.

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

4. Resource Implications

4.1 The amount of delegated funding provided to individual schools is driven by the funding formula, which distributes the schools delegated budget agreed by Council. Any change to the formula funding provided will impact on the Council's revenue budget. Based on the funding formula allocation the school would have received in 2024-25, it is estimated that implementation of the proposal would result in annual revenue savings to the Council of around £76k. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of £122k and estimated additional transport costs of £46k. The proposal is expected to have no saving for the catering service. These figures do not include any estimated redundancy costs.

4.2 Irfon Valley C.P. School was projecting a carry forward surplus of £30.6k at the end of financial year 2023-24, which was estimated to change to an escalating cumulative deficit, projected to be £121.5k by 31 March 2026, if the school was to remain open. Schools have now received their funding packs for 2024-25 and financial meetings are taking place with all schools. These figures are therefore subject to change following a review by the school at the Spring Term finance meeting.

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

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

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

- 4.4 It is therefore proposed that:

- Spend at Irfon Valley C.P School is restricted to that included in its approved budget plan and no virement of funds between budget headings is permitted unless approved by the Authority;
- Any staffing changes are subject to approval by the Authority;
- Any contracts awarded for the supply of goods or services are subject to approval by the Authority.

This will ensure that expenditure is limited to that which is absolutely necessary to protect the Council's resources.

- 4.5 Should the school remain open beyond 31 August 2024, then it will move into the escalating cumulative deficit position set out in paragraph 4.2 above.
- 4.6 Based on the current school condition data report it would cost approximately £248,520 plus VAT to bring the building up to current standards, however this figure is expected to rise due to construction industry inflation experienced. If the proposal is implemented, this cost will be avoided.
- 4.7 Implementation of the proposal will require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, Finance, HR, and ICT. These service areas have been kept informed of the development of the proposal throughout the statutory process.
- 4.8 Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report and supports the recommendation.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: The recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view as the process set out in the School Organisation Code 2018 has been followed.
- 5.2 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer has commented as follows: I note the legal comment and support the recommendations.

6. Climate Change & Nature Implications

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

7. Data Protection

N/A

8. Comment from Local Member(s)

- 8.1 Cllr Bryan Davies (Llanafanfawr with Garth):

'I note from the report that the Council has not received any objections to the proposal for the closure of Irfon Valley CP School at the end of the current School year and in my view this reflects the professionalism displayed throughout this process by the Governors, Staff, Parents and Pupils in the School.

I note that the Council propose that the Children in the school are offered places in the closest alternative school to their home address, but I would like the authority to be sympathetic to situations where friends wish to maintain their friendship and attend the same alternative school.

It is my understanding that if this sympathetic approach was taken that there would be no additional home to school transport costs and would be a reasonable approach for the authority to take.

I will continue to support the staff as they manage the physical closure of the school and undertake the management of change programme from which I expect them to gain suitable employment positions for the 2024-25 school year.'

9. Impact Assessment

- 9.1 Initial impact assessments were carried out, and were updated following the consultation period to take account of the issues raised. The updated versions were considered by Cabinet on the 23rd January 2023.

10. Recommendation

- To approve the proposal to close Irfon Valley C.P. School from 31st August 2024, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools.
- In accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools, to introduce the following restrictions on Irfon Valley C.P. School:
 - Spend at the school is restricted to that included in its approved budget plan and no virement of funds between budget headings is permitted unless approved by the Authority;
 - Any staffing changes are subject to approval by the Authority;
 - Any contracts awarded for the supply of goods or services are subject to approval by the Authority.

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