

CABINET REPORT **October 9th, 2012**

Cabinet Member: Councillor Sian Gwenllian – Education and Young People Cabinet Member

Subject: Priorities Plan – Reorganisation of Education Provision

Contact Officer: Iwan T Jones – Corporate Director

The decision sought / Purpose of the report

It is recommended that the Cabinet should accept the direction outlined in this report and note the contents of the Priorities Plan which includes matters already decided upon, and also;

- i. Resolve to prioritise a review of the primary education provision within the Groeslon area, which includes Carmel and Bronyfoel (Fron).
 - ii. Resolve to continue and move the discussion about the situation of schools in Meirionnydd, and present further reports with details of the plan to the Cabinet
 - iii. Resolve to conduct research into the situation regarding surplus places in schools throughout the County and consider plans to reduce the number of surplus places.
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Local Member's Views

The relevant Local Members will be invited to the Cabinet meeting

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 During the course of the previous Council a cross-party Working Group developed a Schools Reorganisation Strategy, namely '*Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd*'.¹ In April 2009, the strategy was unanimously supported by the Full Council as it established the vision, aims and clear principles for the task of reviewing schools organisation within the County. Then, after a period of implementation the strategy was reviewed at a meeting of the Full Council on 16 December 2010, and as a result certain changes were made to the way the Strategy was being implemented.
- 1.2 During the same period, a further strategy, '*Strategic Programme – Towards 2025*'² was developed and received by the Full Council on 21 October 2010. This document will stand as the strategic base to set a direction for developments in the field of education and training for the next 15 years. The programme is presented in the context of policies and

¹ Appendix 1 - '*Excellent Primary Education for children in Gwynedd*'

² Appendix 2 – '*Strategic Programme – Towards 2025*'

plans which are being established – both locally and at national level – with the aim of transforming the services provided for children, young people and their families.

I.3 The case for changes to the education system in Gwynedd are clear. These are some of the reasons:

- The need to ensure that the children and young people of the County receive the best possible education and experiences within a learning and teaching environment which is acceptable by twenty first century learners and teachers.
- **The number of primary school pupils within the County has fallen by 25% since 1975** (2,750 fewer pupils)
- **There are 28% surplus places within the schools of Gwynedd, the highest in Wales.** This means that there are in excess of 6,400 surplus places in our schools and that resources are spent each year on maintaining inefficient buildings and systems rather than on education for the children and young people of the County.
- A review is called for in order to ensure that the schools within the County are adequate in numbers and appropriately located.
- **31 primary schools within the County receive between them £600k of additional financial help due to lack of pupil numbers (2012/13 financial year).**
- Throughout Wales only 12 secondary schools (5%) have **fewer than 400** pupils. Of these 12 secondary schools, 6 are in **Gwynedd, including every secondary school in Meirionnydd.**
- The observations and criticism of regulators such as the Wales Audit Office, Estyn and the Welsh Government note the need to ensure that the correct and most effective use is made of resources in order to provide education of the best quality for the children and young people now and in the future.

I.4 On the basis of the strategic direction agreed upon, steps were taken to implement a programme of transformation. Very briefly, these are the outcomes of the plans to date:

- Discussions on the future of schools organisation have been held in the catchment areas of Tywyn and Y Berwyn (Bala) and in one part of Y Gader (Dolgellau) catchment area.
- These discussions have so far involved **21 schools.**
- The Council **has ensured that rural education will be maintained** in the Tywyn, Dolgellau and Bala areas, in schools which will remain viable and sustainable into the future.
- **Rural and urban schools** in these areas **will be upgraded.**
- Innovative plans are to be implemented, plans which will be **breaking new ground** (lifelong education centres will be established in Bala and Dolgellau, and Rural Area Schools will also be established – one of these on two sites).
- The plans within the Priorities Plan will lead to **an investment of £44 million to improve and develop schools.** Through the procurement processes, every effort will be made to allow local contractors the chance to benefit from the investment.

2. CONTEXT / FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

2.0.1. This transformation plan has to be looked at within a local and national legislative and strategic context. This section contains an explanation of the context within which we operate.

2.1 National Strategic Context

2.1.1. During the last few years, Welsh Government has expressed a desire to improve the standards and efficiency of the education system in Wales. Following the publication of the Pisa Report (December 2010) which compares performance and education standards across a large number of countries, considerable attention has been given to the failures of the system at national level in Wales. Although the performance of pupils in Gwynedd is still among the highest in Wales, we are determined to further improve the educational attainment and learning of children and young people in a number of different fields, across all the Key Stages. We shall put more emphasis on reducing the differences in performance within schools and between schools, and as a result we shall raise the attainment levels in general.

2.1.2. Also, much attention has lately been given to reducing the number of surplus places in Welsh schools. A report was published by Estyn³ which notes:

“Where the number of school places is higher than the number needed, resources are being used inefficiently and could be better used to improve the quality of education for every learner”.

2.1.3. Then following this report a letter was issued to every Authority in Wales by the Education and Skills Minister⁴. In the words of the Minister...**“every surplus place is a burden on every pupil...”**.

2.1.4. In the letter the Minister clearly notes his expectation that every authority with more than 20% of surplus places in the primary or secondary sector should note what steps it intends to take in order to reduce the level to below 15% by January 2015.

2.1.5. Both Estyn and the Welsh Government have expressed concern over the ineffective use of resources. According to Estyn, every surplus place reflects this through expenditure on systems (administrative and managerial duplication, maintenance costs of buildings and systems etc), rather than direct expenditure on education for our children and young people.

2.1.6. Gwynedd has the highest percentage of surplus places in Wales (and fourth highest in respect of numbers - over 6,400).

³ Appendix 3 – Estyn Report May 2012 - ‘How surplus places affect the resources available for improving outcomes for pupils’

⁴ Appendix 4 – Copy of the letter from the Education and Skills Minister on the need to reduce surplus places

2.1.7. The Education Cabinet Member for Gwynedd prepared a response to this challenge⁵. It acknowledged that Gwynedd has a contribution to make in respect of surplus places within Gwynedd schools. But, it also clearly stated that responding to the challenge within the context of providing education in a rural area such as Gwynedd is exceedingly difficult due to travelling distances and population distribution, and that capital resources were needed in order to achieve the aim of reducing surplus places. It was made clear that surplus places are one factor under consideration and that there are a great many other factors which need to be looked at when making recommendations regarding the situation in Gwynedd.

2.2 Twenty First Century Schools Programme (21C Schools Programme)

2.2.1. During the course of 2009 a new programme was published by the Government whereby all the schools in Wales will be upgraded under the banner of the *Twenty First Century Schools Programme*. The new programme will combine all the Welsh Government capital grants under one investment programme.

2.2.2. The Government Minister issued a statement on 5 December 2011 noting which schemes of those submitted by Gwynedd had been successful. ***It was stated that Gwynedd Council, in principle, had managed to ensure an investment envelope worth in excess of £36 million*** which is in addition to the investment secured through transitional sources. The following schemes had been successful at the first stage of the *Twenty First Century Schools Programme*:

SCHEME	COST OF SCHEME (approximate)
Y Berwyn catchment area	£10.27m
Part of Y Gader catchment area	£3.60m
Special Education Centre of Excellence	£12.40m
Y Groeslon area	£4.84m
Glancegin	£5.11m
TOTAL	£36.22m

2.2.3. Further work will be needed to attract this funding from the Government, and strong business cases will be essential, showing that the investment meets with strategic requirements, gives value for money and is an improvement on any present situation. The Government has suggested strongly that further opportunities for attracting capital funding will be scarce during the coming years (until around 2017/18).

2.3 Legislative Context

2.3.1. Following a review of the present legislation, the *Schools Standards and Organisation Measure (Wales)* has been put forward by the Welsh Government. It is anticipated that the measure will become law during 2013. The changes in statute seeks to simplify the statutory processes and delegate decision making locally. Any legislative changes confirmed will be considered along with an appropriate response.

⁵ Appendix 5 – Copy of the letter by the Cabinet Member in response to the letter from the Education and Skills Minister

2.4 Local Strategic Context

2.4.1. As a local strategic context, mention has already been made of the 'Towards 2025' strategy and the 'Education of the Best Quality for the Children of Gwynedd' strategy. Other strategies and projects within the Council's Strategic Plan are an important context for this work, and these are a few of them:

- Breaking the Circle Project
- Transforming Services for Children and Young People with ALN
- Transforming Post-16 Education and Training

2.4.2. Also, since the election in May 2012 the Cabinet Member for Education has outlined her priorities and central to these is the vision and wish to create an education system which will take us into the future. This paper was submitted to the Gwynedd Secondary Strategic Planning Group on 12 July 2012, the Services Scrutiny Committee on 31 July 2012 and also to the Primary Headteachers Forum.

2.5 The above information sets the context for compiling a schools organisation programme Priorities Plan for the next few years.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDING THE RESOLUTION

3.0.1. Therefore, having considered the direction of the strategy, the wider context and what has been achieved so far, we recommend that certain specific aspects be prioritised, namely:

- A) Proposed plans which have already been agreed upon and Twenty First Century Schools Programme plans,
- B) The situation regarding pupil numbers in both primary and secondary schools,
- C) Vulnerable situations
- D) Surplus places situation

3.1 Proposed Plans and 21C Schools Plans

3.1.1. As we have noted, the Council has completed, or is in the process of going through, the statutory processes regarding the reorganisation of education provision in some areas. Also, other specific plans have been identified which will receive substantial investment through the 21C School Programme.

3.1.2. It will have to be ensured that the schemes that have already been agreed upon are implemented in the Tywyn, Y Berwyn and Y Gader catchment areas.

3.1.3. Gwynedd Council has resolved that the Authority will contribute towards the schemes and the Government has stated that the Council's schemes have been successful in the first stage of the funding process. The next steps will be to secure contributions from the Welsh Government, and to achieve this a work programme will have to be followed. There will be comprehensive steps to be taken and discussions to be held for some of the largest projects e.g. the new Special Education Centre of Excellence and the lifelong campus in Bala.

3.2 **Situation Regarding Primary and Secondary Pupil Numbers in Meirionnydd**

- 3.2.1. The process of reorganising schools has commenced at a number of primary schools in Meirionnydd – in Tywyn, Y Berwyn and Y Gader catchment areas. These areas were prioritised because of the vulnerable state of the primary schools. As discussions progressed in these areas, the Full Council 16/12/2010 resolved to extend the education provision review to include cross-sector elements – nursery, primary, secondary, special needs and lifelong learning models.
- 3.2.2. Preliminary discussions regarding the situation of the secondary schools in Meirionnydd were held at political forums, and with the area’s Secondary Headteachers before the last Council came to an end, and a consensus was reached that further discussions on the subject would have to be held. There is concern regarding the reduced numbers of primary and secondary pupils in the area. Discussions were held as follows:
- Workshop with Meirionnydd Members -15 July 2011
 - Following the Workshop a report to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 22 Sept. 2011
 - Report on demographic tendencies to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 9 December 2011
 - During this period discussions were also held by the Schools Reorganisation Cross-Party Working Group
- 3.2.3. As a result of the work carried out at an early stage and in accordance with the wishes of the Meirionnydd Local Members it was resolved to press on with this matter. A review and discussion now needs to be undertaken on the future of education in Meirionnydd so that we can build upon the transformative work already carried out in the area.

3.3 **Vulnerable Situations**

- 3.3.0.1. The ‘*Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd*’ strategy noted that steps should be taken to ensure that some schools which were in a vulnerable situation would have to be given support:
“*Relevant professional information should be discussed in order to draw attention to vulnerable situations within the County which directly impair the quality of education and pupil experiences (e.g. very low numbers of pupils at a school, very poor condition of the school buildings, failure to recruit a headteacher)*”.

It has become apparent there are two categories of vulnerable situations that require attention; vulnerable situations due to condition and suitability of buildings and vulnerable situations due to low numbers.

3.3.1. **Condition/Suitability of the Buildings**

- 3.3.1.1. The Strategy notes the need to ensure flexibility to embark upon discussion since there is a need for substantial investment to improve education provision within any specific

area. These situations are identified through condition and suitability inspections by the Council's Property Service.

3.3.1.2. One situation which has already been highlighted by the Council (16/12/2010 meeting) is the condition of the building at Ysgol Y Groeslon. Due to the condition of part of the school building, alternative measures had to be taken so that education could be provided there from September 2012 onwards, this matter must be prioritised for attention.

3.3.1.3. In the past a bid had been submitted to the Welsh Government for funding to construct a new school at Y Groeslon but the bid was unsuccessful since the business plan did not match the broader strategic requirements.

3.3.1.4. In order to ensure that the necessary resources are available from the Twenty First Century School's Programme, - we need to make sure that a strong business plan is developed, which shows that the Council is responding strategically to meeting the area's needs for the future. Therefore, a local review panel will have to be established to look into the future of education provision in the area.

3.3.2. Shortage of Numbers

3.3.2.1. During the last few years some children, staff and residents in Gwynedd have faced challenging situations whereby the number of pupils attending a school have fallen to a very low level. The number of pupils at a school can fall so low that the situation is considered to be at a vulnerable level. In a situation such as this, fair play for pupils and staff alike has to be considered. We must remember that school resources are limited and that it becomes difficult for one teacher to lead and to ensure full and appropriate provision of the entire curriculum.

3.3.2.2. In 2009 the schools at Rhydyclafdy, Llawrybetws and Croesor closed on account of very low numbers (as low as 4 pupils). In March 2011, Ysgol Abergynolwyn closed after the numbers fell to 14 pupils. In 2010 another school contacted the Education Department in an effort to respond to low pupil numbers. The governors at that time voted to continue with the situation for another year and to review the situation in twelve months.

3.3.2.3. Therefore it is important that the Council has a system which will respond to these vulnerable schools in an effective and flexible manner. The flexibility and the ability to respond in a timely manner to these situations reduces the uncertainty for schools, staff, parents and pupils. Allowing schools to close themselves, with pupil numbers falling year by year until they become unsustainable is not acceptable. We need to develop a suitable mechanism to monitor and assess the situation at our schools, and in accordance with the statement made in a document produced by the Gwynedd Primary Headteachers Federation, respond appropriately when numbers fall:

'A school with fewer than a specific number of pupils and where the prediction in terms of numbers is low, is unsustainable. In noting this, consideration should be given to the context of the school within its area, whether the pupils could easily attend another school, number of

surplus places and also staff numbers. It has been agreed that a school with fewer than twenty pupils comes within this category ⁶.

3.4 The Need to Reduce Surplus Places

- 3.4.1. Following the report by Estyn (May 2012) and the consequent challenge set by the Education and Skills Minister to reduce the percentage of surplus places at our schools – we have to admit that the situation in Gwynedd cannot be ignored. **In Gwynedd we have the highest percentage of surplus places out of all the schools throughout Wales - 28%.**
- 3.4.2. In terms of numbers, **this means that there are in excess of 6,400 surplus places in Gwynedd schools and that this, according to Estyn, could lead to substantial financial inefficiency.**
- 3.4.3. The Council has already taken initial steps to respond to this challenge and the proposed plans will contribute towards reducing the County percentage. Even so, having accomplished the proposed plans there is a further challenge to reduce surplus places by approximately 2,500 in order to achieve the national target of 15%. Although reviewing schools organisation is challenging, according to Estyn:
“Closing and combining schools can be difficult and lengthy procedures but these are the most effective examples of strategies which can get rid of surplus places and release savings for reinvestment aimed at raising standards”.
- 3.4.4. Managing places can mean great effort in terms of ensuring a balance and making sure that there are sufficient places at schools in growth areas, and also rationalising situations where surplus places are found. We acknowledge that it is unreasonable to expect the removal of all surplus places at schools. We have a duty to provide sufficient school places and need to manage changes in the need for places (resulting from demographic changes and parent choices), we need to deal with surplus vacant buildings since these can use up resources which could be better utilised to improve educational provision.
- 3.4.5. As noted, this Council has been considering a large number of factors, including surplus places, as it seeks to transform its education provision in areas across the County.
- 3.4.6. The Welsh Government 21C Schools Building Programme supports strategic planning by local authorities in order to improve or provide new school buildings and to reduce surplus places. Proposals for investment approved by Welsh Government will deal with surplus capacity and school buildings in poor condition and help to provide sustainable, cost effective schools suitable for the 21st Century.
- 3.4.7. However, with regard to those areas where reorganisation has not yet taken place and areas which have not been included in the 21C Schools Programme, we shall have to take a pragmatic and more creative approach in order to tackle ineffective use of school buildings.

⁶ Appendix 7 – Document by the Gwynedd Primary Schools Headteachers Federation on Primary Schools Reorganisation

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STEPS

4.0.1. Therefore, in considering the context and the background described in the report, the above four priority areas are underlined. Within the four areas the Priorities Plan comprises several individual projects. Consideration of resources to fulfil this comprehensive programme will follow. Details of the work programme and the next stage are as follows:

4.1 Special Education Centre of Excellence

4.1.1. We have noted the Council's wish to amend its Special Education provision because the capacity of the existing provision at Ysgol Hafod Lon is insufficient and in need of being modernised and extended. An application for this development was submitted as part of the Council's 21C Schools programme package.

4.1.2. There is appropriate and suitable provision for the northern part of the County at Ysgol Pendalar, Caernarfon, and the new development will aim at establishing a similar provision, at a central location, for the remainder of the County. The aim is to provide a regional Special Educational Needs Centre of Excellence and to rationalise the provision for pupils who are at present placed beyond the County boundaries. The current provision is not centrally positioned for the area it serves, and the resources within it do not meet modern educational requirements.

4.1.3. In order to move forward with this development, we recommend that a Project Team be established during the Autumn Term to drive the project forward. The project is worth approximately £12.5million.

4.2 Vulnerable Situations – Condition of Buildings – Reviewing and improving education provision in Y Groeslon area and the development of a new school building at Ysgol Glancegin

4.2.1. The Council has been monitoring the condition of part of the building at Ysgol Y Groeslon for some time. The school kitchen was closed some years ago, and lately education had to be provided in mobile units for some of the pupils.

4.2.2. In 2010 a bid was made for funding from the Welsh Government Tranche 3 Transformation Capital Programme for the construction of a new school at Groeslon. The bid was not successful, and Welsh Government deemed that the condition of the building in itself was not sufficient reason for releasing the money. The bid needed to be part of a strategic plan for the provision of education within an area in order to conform with strategic requirements. Likewise, the Council could not consider expenditure on one school without looking at the broader picture.

4.2.3. Therefore, in accordance with the Strategy and the previous decision by the Full Council (16/12/2010), due to the vulnerable condition of the building at Ysgol Y Groeslon, and the guidance received from Welsh Government with regards funding, local discussions will have to be commenced and a Review Panel appointed for the area as a matter of priority. We shall have to move forward with discussions on developing educational

provision with the help of grants obtained jointly from Welsh Government and the Council.

- 4.2.4. In order to achieve this and to take this discussion further, we shall have to define a specific area. At the moment there is no need to hold discussions on the entire Dyffryn Nantlle catchment area since the area is low with regard to priority order. Indeed, holding whole catchment area discussions would take much more time and would hinder quick progress with any option. In defining the area, a number of factors were discussed.
- 4.2.5. The Carmel and Fron areas are geographically close to Y Groeslon and within Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle catchment area. The geography and natural catchment area defines itself. But, there are other factors which further strengthen the logic.
- 4.2.6. There is a significant number of surplus places at the three schools:

School	Numbers			
	Pupils Sept.2011	School capacity	Surplus places	% Surplus places
Groeslon	84	128	44	34%
Carmel	47	78	31	40%
Bronyfoel	30	52	22	42%
Total	161	258	97	

In terms of numbers – this is equal to almost 100 surplus places (97).

- 4.2.7 There is around £3,000 (£2,958) difference in the cost per head between the 3 schools – this shows inequality within a distance of barely 2 miles.
- 4.2.8 In accordance with the Strategy, the Council has a responsibility to spend public money wisely and to ensure that schools are sustainable. In order to ensure effective use of resources we must take the opportunity to consider every option that will ensure educational provision which is sustainable and strong for the future and also within the framework of the Strategy.
- 4.2.9 By defining the area in this way, therefore, the Council has the chance to:
- A) Attract a financial contribution from Welsh Government
 - B) Achieve a number of aims within the Strategy by striving to:
 - Bring consistency to class sizes and reducing the age range currently found in classes
 - Respond to the challenge that population changes is likely to bring in the future
 - Improve the learning environment for more pupils and ensure that schools can fulfil the educational requirements of the 21 C
 - Ensure strong leadership and management
 - Ensure a new resource which is fit for purpose and sustainable

- Reduce the range within the cost per head for the provision of education in the area
- Make the number of schools in the area consistent with the need
- Release funding to be spent on children in the education system rather than on buildings and maintaining the present infrastructure
- Substantially reduce the number of surplus places at our schools and at the same time increase efficiency

4.2.10 Therefore the aim is to hold discussions on the future of primary education provision in the area where the villages of Y Groeslon, Carmel and Fron are located. A panel of representatives from the schools at Y Groeslon, Carmel and Bronyfoel will be convened for discussions.

4.2.11 As part of the financial bid from the 21C Schools Programme, we managed to attract the investment for building a new school at Ysgol Glancegin where the school building is in poor condition. There will be no need for a full review of the whole catchment area within the wider area of Bangor since there are other areas which merit more priority. In accordance with the Strategy we need to develop a plan for the provision of education in Maesgeirchen due to the vulnerable condition of the building.

4.2.12 Considerable work is needed before the new school can be developed. A strong business plan will have to be developed, and also plans which will concentrate on the needs of the child and the family and fit in with the development of the building. We hope that this development will lead to wider benefits for the community and that experiences and developments gained whilst developing Ysgol Yr Hendre in Caernarfon will be of great help in this venture also.

4.2.13 In order to complete the work a Project Team will have to be established in the coming years, with emphasis placed on working with community and family projects. In addition to these benefits, it will be possible to do away with a large number of surplus places at the school.

4.3 Forthcoming Plans

4.3.1 There are a number of plans already established in the Tywyn, Y Berwyn and Y Gader catchment areas. It will have to be ensured that those plans are implemented in accordance with decisions already taken, and in accordance with proposed resolutions.

4.3.2 Plans which have already had the final decision made and need to be implemented:

- Develop and establish an Area School in Bro Dysynni and close the schools at Bryn-crug, Llanegryn and Llwyngwriil
- Develop Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn and close Ysgol Aberdyfi
- Improvements in the remainder of the Tywyn catchment area and establish Federal Schools at Dyffryn Dulas and Pennal
- Develop Ysgol OM Edwards and close Ysgol Y Parc

4.3.3 Plans where a proposed resolution is expected or where further discussions are to be held:

- Establish a Multi-Site Area School in Brithdir and Dinas Mawddwy and close the schools at Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Machreth and Ieuan Gwynedd (subject to a decision by the Education and Skills Minister)
- Move forward with discussions on establishing a Lifelong Learning Community at Dolgellau
- Move forward with discussions regarding the establishment of a Lifelong Learning Campus at Bala and the closure of Y Berwyn, Beuno Sant and Bro Tegid schools
- Improvements to Bro Tryweryn and Ffridd y Llyn schools

4.4 Vulnerable Situations – Low Numbers in Schools

4.4.1 It was stated earlier in the report that children, staff and parents of some schools in the County have faced challenging situations where the pupil numbers have fallen to a very low level. School numbers can become so low that it is considered a vulnerable situation. In such a situation we have to consider what is fair for children and staff.

4.4.2 Therefore we need to develop a suitable mechanism to monitor and assess the situation at our schools, and respond appropriately where numbers fall to a vulnerable level. We shall have to consider situations which arise at individual schools with low numbers, and hold appropriate discussions to try and find sustainable solutions and ensure the stability of the children's education.

4.5 Surplus Places

4.5.1 As part of the work programme in response to the Government's challenge to reduce surplus places, we shall have to conduct a review and obtain a true picture of the surplus places at schools within the County. The intention is to form a work programme of simple and practical steps that could be taken to reduce the number of surplus places across the County:

- As a baseline, revisit schools capacity to find out the true use made of the buildings and to calculate surplus places in more detail
- Identify schools with "substantial" numbers of surplus places and prioritise these situations
- Manage the admissions policy to ensure that aspect such as capacity are considered appropriately
- Adopt a pragmatic and more creative attitude in an effort to deal with uneconomic use of school buildings, look at alternative use of rooms/buildings and be more aware of opportunities to make more effective use of school buildings.

4.6 Western Part of Y Gader Catchment Area

4.6.1 As stated, discussions are ongoing in the Gader catchment area, and the western part of the area will have to be revisited in order to find out the best way of providing education in the area for the future. It is anticipated that this discussion will be held as part of the mid-term work programme.

4.7 Provision of Education in Meirionnydd

4.7.1 There is genuine concern over the situation regarding education provision in Meirionnydd. Indeed, in accordance with the primary Strategy of reviewing the sector, the catchment areas in this region were prioritised because the situation is so vulnerable due to a number of factors, including: reduction in pupil numbers, condition of school buildings and problems in terms of recruiting headteachers.

4.7.2 It has been stated that discussions and initial work have already started by looking at the future of secondary education provision in Meirionnydd involving the secondary schools of Tywyn, Y Berwyn (Bala), Y Gader, Y Moelwyn (Blaenau Ffestiniog) and Ardudwy (Harlech). Indeed, in two catchment areas, the discussion on the primary sector has extended to include the secondary sector in the catchment areas of Y Berwyn and Y Gader. But we acknowledge that the situation regarding secondary education provision in the Meirionnydd area calls for specific and immediate attention. Here are some facts regarding the situation:

- Since 1975 there are around 1000 fewer pupils in the secondary schools.
- In terms of national comparison, the average size of a secondary school in Wales is 900 pupils – whilst on average the size of secondary schools in Meirionnydd is 350.
- Predictions show that this reduction tendency is likely to continue for approximately ten years – with a prediction that there will be a total of 1400 pupils between the five schools in Meirionnydd by 2020. Some secondary schools in Meirionnydd could be as small as 240(s) by the end of this decade.
- The average number of surplus places in secondary schools in Meirionnydd is 44%, compared to the Gwynedd average of 30% and the Wales average of 15%.
- The reduction in numbers – together with the general financial situation – means that it is a challenge to maintain sufficient educational capacity to implement the curriculum.
- There are concerns regarding the sustainability of maintaining standards within the present educational framework.

4.7.3 Discussions will have to be conducted on the future of education in general with the aim of ensuring a sustainable education provision in the area for the future. We recommend that a workshop be arranged for the Meirionnydd Members in order to rekindle discussions and to move the matter forward and find the best way of providing education in the area for the future.

5. In Summary

5.1 Therefore, within this transitional programme for education provision in Gwynedd, there are a number of important projects and plans. These complement each other and contribute towards the challenge of ensuring that we give our children and young people the best opportunities and experiences so that they can reach their potential in the future by making best use of the resources available. Further reports will follow on specific matters in keeping with the milestones of individual projects.

5.2 In summary therefore, these are the main headings of the Priorities Plan:

- i. Review the primary education provision within the Groeslon area, which includes Carmel and Bronyfoel (Fron).
- ii. Implement the plans already resolved upon in the catchment areas of Tywyn and Y Berwyn, namely:
 - Develop, build and establish an Area School in Bro Dysynni and close the schools at Brynchrug, Llanegryn and Llwyngwril
 - Develop Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn and close Ysgol Aberdyfi
 - Improvements in the remainder of the Tywyn catchment area and establish Federal Schools in Dyffryn Dulas and Pennal
 - Develop Ysgol OM Edwards and close Ysgol Y Parc
- iii. Establish a detailed plan and work programme for developing the Special Education Centre of Excellence.
- iv. Conduct a comprehensive review of primary and secondary education provision in Meirionnydd
- v. Develop a mechanism and take appropriate steps regarding the situation where schools are vulnerable due to their low numbers
- vi. Proceed with discussions and plans in the remaining parts of Y Berwyn and Y Gader catchment areas;
 - Establish a Multi-Site Area School in Brithdir and Dinas Mawddwy and close the schools at Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Machreth and Ieuan Gwynedd (subject to a decision by the Education and Skills Minister)
 - Proceed with discussions regarding the establishment of a Lifelong Learning Community in Dolgellau
 - Review the education provision in the western part of Y Gader catchment area
 - Proceed with discussions and develop plans to establish a Lifelong Campus in Bala and with improvements at Ysgol Bro Tryweryn and Ysgol Ffridd Y Llyn
- vii. Research into the situation regarding surplus places in schools throughout the County and consider plans to reduce the number of surplus places.
- viii. Proceed with discussions and develop plans to construct a new building for Ysgol Glancegin.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet should accept the direction outlined in this report and note the contents of the Priorities Plan which includes matters already decided upon, and also;
- i. Resolve to prioritise a review of the primary education provision within the Groeslon area, which includes Carmel and Bronyfoel.
 - ii. Resolve to continue and move the discussion about the situation of schools in Meirionnydd, and present further reports with details of plans to the Cabinet.
 - iii. Resolve to conduct research into the situation regarding surplus places in the schools throughout the County and consider plans to reduce the number of surplus places.

Comments by the Statutory Officers

The Chief Executive:

1. I welcome the convenience of having all school organisation modernisation plans in the same document and the information regarding the effect of these plans on different areas in the medium term.
2. The recommendations reflect the further steps necessary to complete decisions that have already had the Council's attention. The specific situation of the sustainability of secondary Education in Meirionnydd is a matter of significant concern and it is important for Members and officers to support the Cabinet Member in addressing the problem in a creative and effective way.

The Monitoring Officer:

“The report gives a timely up-date on several matters within the reorganisation of schools agenda, along with actions to be taken. As the work is done, legal obligations of any plans and decisions will be considered. There are no further views regarding propriety at the moment.”

Head of Finance:

“I support the intention of school re-organisation in a fair and logical manner, despite the challenge of achieving these aims within an extremely challenging financial context. This report identifies a number of areas where there are risks by delaying and benefits by proceeding.

I will weigh the risks by analysing and commenting on the financial impacts and implications on the individual options as the project team develops the relevant plans, as occurred in Tywyn, Y Berwyn and Y Gader catchment area where decision have previously been made.”

Appendices

Appendix	Document
Appendix 1	Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd
Appendix 2	Strategic Programme – Towards 2025'
Appendix 3	Estyn Report May 2012 - 'How surplus places affect the resources available to be spent on improving outcomes for children'
Appendix 4	Copy of the letter from the Education and Skills Minister on the need to reduce surplus places
Appendix 5	Copy of the letter by the Cabinet Member in response to the letter from the Education and Skills Minister
Appendix 6	Main Matters 2012-2017 –Cabinet Member for Education and Gwynedd Council's Lead Member on Children and Young People Committee
Appendix 7	Document by the Primary Headteachers Federation on Primary Schools Reorganisation