

<b>MEETING</b>	THE COUNCIL
<b>DATE</b>	2 April, 2009
<b>TITLE</b>	County Primary Schools Re-organisation
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To present a Strategy for the Reorganisation of the County's Primary Schools
<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	To approve the recommendations
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Iwan T. Jones, Strategic Director Development
<b>PORTFOLIO LEADER</b>	Cllr Liz Saville Roberts

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Improvement Working Group was established by the Council in June 2008 to consider the future organisation of schools within the county. The Working Group was asked:

- to consider a new arrangement of formal co-operation between schools;
- to consider the appropriateness of school closures, in accordance with clear and firm criteria;
- to present proposals to develop area schools in some catchment-areas;
- to deal with any other matter which the Working Group deems relevant.

1.2 The purpose of presenting the report is to present comments on the process and set out clear steps for further action. To this end the Strategy is enclosed at Appendix A.

## 2. PRIMARY SCHOOLS RE-ORGANISATION IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP

2.1 The Gwynedd Primary Schools Improvement Working Group was established by the full Council in June 2008. It was now met on 14 occasions.

2.2 The Working Group was chaired by Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn. Membership comprised Cllrs. Seimon Glyn, Sian Gwenllian, Brian Jones, June Marshall and Dewi Owen. The Schools Portfolio Leader, Cllr. Liz Saville Roberts, was invited to sit in on meetings. The working group was supported by Development Directorate officers, namely Iwan Trefor Jones, Dewi Jones and Seimon Williams. An external consultant, Gareth Williams, has also contributed to discussions.

2.3 The Working Group has received presentations from several bodies and individuals, including:

- ESTYN and the Wales Audit Office
- Assembly Government
- Headteachers representing the county's small, medium and large schools
- League of Schools and Supporters
- Welsh Language Society
- Officers from Gwynedd Council
- National Association for Small Schools

Summaries of the presentations will be made available on the Council's website.

- 2.4 The Working Group has received a broad range of statistical evidence on the situation regarding schools in Gwynedd. The factual information has been approved as a fair, transparent, accurate and neutral analysis by all working group members.
- 2.5 The Working Group presented a report to the Scrutiny Committee in November 2008 outlining its responsibilities and offering initial ideas.

### **3. INITIAL FINDINGS**

- 3.1 The Working Group has already published its initial findings which were supported by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, namely:
- Changes need to be introduced in certain areas for several reasons;
  - The scale, nature and time-table of the change may vary from area to area;
  - The change need to be planned area by area in consultation with local representatives;
  - In certain areas, several options can be discussed and ideas on change that will stem from the local discussion can be considered;
  - It is imperative that the change be planned systematically, prioritising those areas where the need for change is most evident and clear.

### **4. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- 4.1 The *Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd* Strategy was presented to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 February 2009.
- 4.2 The report was approved with a request for some amendments, mainly:
- To note the intention to consult with children and school staff;
  - Outline the role and responsibilities of the Catchment Area Review Panel;
  - To tie the process in more closely to the statutory process.

### **5. THE COUNCIL BOARD**

- 5.1 A revised version of the *Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd* Strategy was presented to the Council Board on 10 March 2009.
- 5.2 The report was accepted with a request for some changes, mainly:
- to ensure that consistent emphasis is given to the Welsh language within the review framework so that the Council clearly explains its vision and commitment to the language;
  - explain and expand on the process of reviewing catchment areas including representation (the headteacher and a member of the governing body) from each school within the catchment area on the Catchment Area Review Panel if that is the wish locally;
  - adapt the document to note that Headteachers of the catchment area's comprehensive schools;
  - confirm that any savings made from the closure or changing the status of a school are kept within the education system;

- aim to provide high-quality school buildings within the county through structured planning (4.3.4 in the Strategy)

5.3 A revised version of the report is attached at Appendix A which takes account of the amendments listed in 5.2 above.

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

5.1 If the strategy is approved by the Council, the intention is to begin discussions in the Tywyn catchment area during the Summer Term 2009, and then in Y Berwyn and Y Gader catchments during the 2009-10 academic year.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 That the Council Board approves the Strategy presented in Appendix A.

**I.T. Jones**  
**Strategic Director**  
**ITJ/SW/ls/24.03.09**

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A. Views of the Local Member:

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B. The Views of the Statutory Officers:

1. Chief Executive:

"It is clear that the working group has worked hard in order to draw up a clear direction for the sustainable provision across the catchments in the county. As the working group has noted clearly, change will be unavoidable in some areas and the strategy outlines all of the considerations that would influence the pattern of the provision and also a procedure for prioritising attention.

The recommendations offer a sensible step forward. It is key that the Council take possession of the programme in order to manage the situation and not only to respond to developments, as it has had to do in recent situations. In order to do this, it must take hold of the vision and the objectives that the strategy outlines and make hard decisions, within a reasonable timetable, in order to verify those visions and objectives."

2. Monitoring Officer:

"With the changes to the strategy following the meeting of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee I am satisfied with the propriety of the recommendations."

3. Chief Finance Officer:

"I support the frank intentions of the Working Group to re-organise primary schools in a fair and reasonable manner. There are reasons to believe that the Assembly Government are aiming capital grants towards strategic planning in the near future. Therefore, if we have a desire to draw resources in order to build better schools in Gwynedd, it is essential that the Council agrees on the vision and move forward with determination.

I note that some objectives in the Strategy are ambitious (see part 4.13 of Appendix A on the Strategic Director of Development's report, where it is noted that we would be aiming over the coming years to ensure that a maximum of 25 pupils be in classrooms), and in order to verify the vision, over-reaching steps must be taken (note, again in part 4.13, we will be aiming to ensure a minimum of 12 pupils in a classroom).

Furthermore, I note that the Strategy recognises that an effort will be made to fulfil these objectives in a very challenging financial context (see part 4.7 of Appendix A). Despite this, if we are unable to reason, I believe that the financial implications will be more threatening in an individual schools situation, and this will affect the quality of the education provided in those establishments.

Therefore, I look forward to receiving the proposals of the Catchment Review Panel (see part 7 of Appendix A) and the County Advisory Panel (see part 6 of Appendix A) during the next financial year regarding the catchments of Tywyn, Y Berwyn and Gader."

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C. Background Papers:

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CH. Policy Implications:

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