

<b>MEETING</b>	COUNCIL
<b>DATE</b>	16 December, 2010
<b>TITLE</b>	Review of Gwynedd Schools Re-organisation Process
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To seek the Council's support on the recommendations for the review of the Gwynedd primary schools re-organisation process
<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	To approve the recommendations
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Iwan Trefor Jones, Strategic Director
<b>PORTFOLIO LEADER</b>	Cllr. Liz Saville Roberts

## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The strategy on *Education of the Highest Quality for Children in Gwynedd* was unanimously approved by Gwynedd Council in April 2009.
- 1.2 The intention was to conduct a review of organization of all primary schools in the county catchment by catchment-area, with the aim of holding 3 annual reviews. The process commenced in the Tywyn catchment-area in May 2009, in the Y Berwyn catchment-area in November 2009, and in the Y Gader catchment-area in April 2010.
- 1.3 The strategy allows a process review on completion of the third catchment-area review.
- 1.4 Proposals have been submitted and consultations held on them in the Tywyn catchment-area, and have been published and consultations on them are about to be held in the Y Berwyn catchment-area. The requirement for more detailed site assessments has delayed the announcement of proposals in the Y Gader catchment-area, but it is expected that this can be done by Easter 2011.

## **2.0 STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

- 2.1 The report consists of 2 sections. Firstly, the review policy context is outlined, and secondly, the principal matters that have emerged regarding proposals for response are focused upon.

### **3.0 POLICY CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 21st C Schools**

3.1.1 During 2009, a new programme was announced to up-grade all schools in Wales under the *21st Century Schools* banner. The new programme will merge all Assembly Government capital grants under the new banner. The Programme provides outline definitions of what a “21<sup>st</sup> Century School”:

- Schools that are organized to respond to changing attitudes towards teaching and learning, as well as more robust leadership in schools and the school community’s participation, reflecting local requirements and supporting young people to achieve their potential.
- Environments to inspire, that are suitable for new educational developments and technologies, that are efficient but flexible enough to meet the changing future needs until 2030.
- Sustainable environments, of the best global standards for teachers to teach and learners to learn; full ITC support, that is the driver for improvements in educational standards, and deals with climate change considerations. An output based specification is used, in accordance with agreed standards (amended where appropriate) for the 21st Century.
- Is inclusive, providing appropriate provision to cater for every learner’s individual learning needs, locations that make the individual who has special educational needs and disabilities feel that their needs are respected, and which enables every member of the school workforce to work, rest and socialize.
- Provide an excellent resource for the entire community that can offer a range of facilities on the same site such as child care, health and social services, and adult training.
- Provide an opportunity for schools and other services to collaborate to improve teaching and learning and make more effective contact with the post-16 transitional agenda.

3.1.2 LEA’s are expected to prepare a Strategic Outline Plan that will identify counties capital requirements over the next 10 years. LEA’s are required to submit their application by 10 December 2010.

3.1.3 LEA’s are required to identify expenditure requirements per expenditure “bands” of 3 years. LEAs are requested to submit Band A applications – namely period spanning 2012-2015 – in some detail with the application. Details of Gwynedd Band A applications will be submitted at the Council Board meeting to be held on 14 December 2010.

3.1.4 The current financial climate raises doubts about the total grants available and about the programme's duration. The latest information raises doubts about the timing of holding catchment-area reviews and submission of capital applications.

### **3.2 Strategic Programme "Towards 2025"– The Future of Education and Training for Children and Young People in Gwynedd**

3.2.1 Gwynedd Council approved the *Towards 2025* strategy, on 21 October 2010. This strategy outlines a long-term strategic direction for education and training for children and young people aged between 3-19 in Gwynedd, and gives the Council's views on national policy developments, such as 21st Century Schools Programme and Schools Effectiveness Framework.

3.2.2 The strategy identifies a vision to:

“provide the highest possible quality of bilingual education and training that will provide children and young people of the County with the experiences, skills and confidence and equip them to become bilingual, successful and well-rounded citizens”.

3.2.3 The vision for education and training in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is based on six principal aims:

- Provide the best possible learning experiences – for all learners in the County, ensuring an exciting and broad curriculum, as well as the extra-curricular curriculum, that motivates them to learn and understand and leads to improved standards, fully utilizing Information Technology;
- Promote and support children and young people's physical health and emotional well-being - ensuring that the principal education and training establishments in the County are key players when planning and presenting integrated services for children, young people and their families;
- Equip young people for the workplace - ensuring that they are equipped with the correct types of skills for employment, especially within the local economy;
- Create the best possible learning environment for children, young people and teachers in the County - mainly through improving facilities and buildings, and ensuring that schools are structured to respond to the change in contemporary teaching and learning process practices, especially when using Information Technology;
- Develop the correct type of educational establishments (primary and secondary) to provide a focal-point for public and community-based services where appropriate – and enrich experiences gained by children and young people as they become part of establishments that provide services for the wider community;

- Strengthen the Welsh Language – as an educational and social medium – and enable children and young people to have access to bilingual education and training.

### **3.3 The statutory process and Government guidance**

- 3.3.1 The Government outline the statutory expectations during school closure consultations through 021/2009 *Schools Organisation Proposals* legislation and regulations.
- 3.3.2 During summer 2010, the Minister for Education announced his intention to shorten the statutory process. Consultation is currently being held on a process to shorten the statutory process by approximately 6 weeks. A series of consultations on the change in the statutory process will be held during 2010-2011.

### **3.4 The financial situation**

- 3.4.1 The financial climate is now entirely different to that when discussions were held when preparing the original strategy. Undoubtedly, public services across Wales will face substantial cuts during the coming years, and this is likely to impact all the Council's services, including Education.
- 3.4.2 Full awareness of the implications of the financial squeeze on the future of education and schools in Gwynedd will be required, and it stands to reason that financial considerations become increasingly important when planning for the future of the education structure in the County. That cannot be ignored. A complete understanding of the Assembly's capital programme for investing in new developments will also be required. Even though the Assembly's capital programme is likely to reduce, it is essential that the Council continues to give priority to develop an education system of high standard for the County and also give consideration to different ways of financing any investment requirements which arise from new proposals.

### **3.5 Gwynedd Primary School Headteachers Federation**

- 3.5.1 Appendix 1 contains a paper that outlines the outcome of a discussion held between Gwynedd Primary Schools Headteachers Federation and the Head of Education in Summer 2010.
- 3.5.2 This paper contains several important statements, including statement no 6, noting that the "current re-organisation process is slow, laborious and reiterative. It is not felt that it is a sustainable process and it should be reviewed. Judging from the year, it is noted that there is a heavy expectation on schools and their communities to fully contribute to the process, and within a tight schedule."

## **4.0 MATTERS RAISED AND PROPOSALS**

4.0.1 During the 18 months that the scheme has thus far been implemented, several matters are highlighted. Some of them are outlined below together with ideas to respond to.

#### **4.1 Strategic Review of education provision**

##### **4.1.1 Matter -The need to include the rest of the educational provision in the process**

4.1.2 The scheme was originally established as a primary organization review. The strategy aim was to plan the change in the primary sector catchment by catchment-area, prioritizing those catchment-areas where the need for change is most evident and clear.

4.1.3 However, it became obvious at a very early stage when implementing the strategy that the catchment-area's secondary school would have to be included in the discussions when considering proposals for primary education.

4.1.4 Certain catchment-areas also provided an opportunity for the wholesale review of educational provision, considering possibilities, for instance, for sharing buildings/resources between the primary and secondary through developing the lifelong campuses concept.

4.1.5 Of course, establishing lifelong campuses in every catchment-area would not be feasible, but it will need to be ensured that education re-organisation proposals in different areas make the best possible use of resources in the field.

4.1.6 This is supported by "Towards 2025", that clearly states that maintaining the status quo is not an option:

"it is crucial that every effort is made to make the best possible use of resources within the education and training system - be they human, technical, construction or financial resources – for the well-being of children and young people. A substantial percentage of the education budget is currently spent on maintaining a very expensive infrastructure, in the primary and secondary sector, and this will not be sustainable in future. In addition, there is substantial expenditure on schools which have a high percentage of unfilled places.

4.1.7 Action will have to be taken to rationalize the number of schools across the County, and identify opportunities to improve overall effectiveness in the education and training system. For the 21st Century, there is a need to ensure that Gwynedd has a network of schools of the correct type in the correct locations throughout the County. Reducing unfilled places and ensuring the establishment of firmly established well-sized schools would provide opportunities to develop inclusive elements..."

- 4.1.8 We are therefore of the opinion that a clear vision is required for nursery, primary, secondary and special education when preparing the detailed planning work catchment by catchment-area.

***Proposal***

- 4.1.9 The process now requires re-defining as a strategic review of education organization in the individual catchment-areas, including nursery, primary, secondary, special education.
- 4.1.10 To support this task, and so as to ensure that due attention is given to the strategic overview of the entire field, it is suggested that the Improvement Working Group should be re-established led by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. The Improvement Working-group will replace the County Advisory Panel who advised the Portfolio Leader when submitting models. The Portfolio Holder will be an observer in the Improvement Working-group.

**4.2 Simplifying and accelerating the process**

4.2.1 **Matter** – The need to accelerate the review process

- 4.2.2 Evidence presented by the stakeholders in the catchment-areas, headteachers and officers working on the scheme suggests that it is a laborious process and that the catchment-area discussions are too time-consuming. There is a significant risk that the time taken increases uncertainty and undermines the relationship between communities within a catchment-area. An extensive range of the linked activities are non-statutory and are not a legal requirement.
- 4.2.3 In the original strategy, guidance was given to establish Catchment-area Review Panels so that the process of discussing various options for the area was maintained in an open and inclusive manner. The Panels remit included gathering local evidence and presenting various ideas and options to the Education Portfolio Holder. It was suggested in the strategy that between 3 and 4 Panel meetings would be held.
- 4.2.4 It is important that the Catchment-area Review Panels continue so that local discussions can be held on the education provision in the area. but better focus can be obtained for the meetings and do much of the preparatory and investigative work beforehand. By doing so, there will be more time during Panel meetings to consider the future of the local education system. As part of the process of collating evidence and preparatory work, it is essential that separate meetings with schools continue. The intention is to hold these meetings in advance of the Catchment Area Review Panel.

***Proposal***

- 4.2.5 The statistical pack should be presented and checked with schools prior to commencing Catchment-area Review Panel discussions.
- 4.2.6 Officers should be commissioned to assess the community's requirements, housing developments, regeneration plans and any other relevant information before commencing discussions at a catchment-area level.
- 4.2.7 Legal work should be commissioned on ownership of sites, land use covenants and any other relevant legal matters.
- 4.2.8 The initial goal should be maintained to hold 3 or 4 Catchment-area Review Panel meetings, but aim to ensure that investigative and preparatory work is done prior to the Panel meetings and that there is clear focus on considering possible models that would provide a firm foundation for education in the area in future.

### **4.3 Prepare some possible re-organisation models beforehand**

- 4.3.1 **Matter** – The need to commence catchment-area discussions with definite models
- 4.3.2 The catchment-area review process began with a clean slate. The system of asking Catchment-area Review Panel members and then the County Advisory Panel to submit possible models, has led to a situation whereby a detailed assessment of almost twelve options has to be held in one catchment-area, that creates a substantial workload and implies that the process of drawing up a short list of options can be extremely laborious. It is questionable whether much benefit is derived from considering so many models. In certain catchment-areas, the process of submitting new models continues into a third Catchment-area Review Panel meeting.
- 4.3.3 We are of the opinion that the Portfolio Holder, jointly with Education Department officers, needs to do more preparatory work regarding possible options for the future of education in specific catchment-areas, as occurs in several other LEAs. That would enable us to make better use of Catchment-area Review Panel meetings, and hold a meaningful discussion built around possible models for the future of education in the area. The content of these discussions and consideration of what is discussed with each school will be looked at when developing the possible models. In addition, it is essential that any models considered correspond with the objectives in the original strategy (Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd):

- Provide children within the County with the best possible experiences and opportunities through ensuring classes of appropriate size and provide high quality leadership at our schools;
- Aim to promote and strengthen the Welsh language – as an educational and social medium - by presenting new proposals for primary education within the County;
- Respond to requirements and opportunities in the current education system by taking a pro-active and creative approach, working jointly with others on a sustainable and practical long term scheme;
- Fully utilize the available resources – human, technological, financial, - so that children gain maximum benefit from the County’s expenditure on education;
- Create a learning environment of the best possible quality by improving resources and buildings.
- Develop our schools into establishments that are a focus for community activities.

***Proposal***

- 4.3.4 It is therefore suggested that the Education Portfolio Holder, jointly with officers from the Education Department, should have the right to develop a possible re-organisation models before starting the catchment-area discussions. This will be an essential part of the preparatory work before the catchment area discussions. This should not prevent PAD members from offering additional models, but identifying certain models would move the discussion forward substantially.
- 4.3.5 It is suggested that work be commissioned to consider the obligations of projected school funding along with identifying costs associated with possible re-organisation models.

**4.4 Sites**

- 4.4.1 **Matter** – The need to get a better grasp of the sites available so as to achieve any plans prior to commencing discussions on such models.
- 4.4.2 Several of the models discussed thus far in the 3 catchment-areas, are dependant on the availability of suitable sites. The principle of starting with a clean slate in each catchment-area, possible sites cannot be identified and assessed until half way through the catchment-area review process. This has contributed towards increasing uncertainty in certain catchment-areas.
- 4.4.3 It is felt that this can be surmounted through once more investing more time in the preparatory work, and ensuring that there is clarity as to which sites are available for any new development so that time is not spent discussing proposals that cannot be realised.



4.4.4 In addition, a clear investment programme for up-grading the County's schools needs to be followed so as to meet the appropriate standards as outlined in the Assembly's 21st C Schools' Programme. Of course, this would be a long-term investment programme, but it is crucial that there is clarity as to the scale of capital investment the County's Schools require. If such work was commissioned now - and based on the preparatory work of preparing possible models for catchment-areas as mentioned above - facilities and resources up-grading requirements within schools will become clearer.

***Proposal***

4.4.5 It follows from the recommendation, that preparatory work should be done on initial re-organisation models, it is suggested that the Property Unit should be commissioned to support the process of identifying possible sites to realise options.

4.4.6 In addition, the Property Unit should be commissioned to conduct an assessment of action required to up-grade the County's schools so as to achieve "Schools in the 21st Century" programme standards.

**4.5 Language, community, economic and equality matters**

**4.5.1 Matter – The need to conduct Impact Assessments**

4.5.2 LEA's are now required to hold language, community and equality impact assessments on re-organisation proposals. We have also commissioned an economic impact assessment of options in the Y Gader catchment-area. However, the current catchment-area review time-table does not allow either a detailed assessment of the impact of the options or time to consider task findings prior to presenting proposals.

***Proposal***

4.5.3 *There is a need to commission a basic assessment and a language, economic, community and equality impact assessment of a limited range of re-organisation models prior to the catchment-area process.*

**4.6 Critical Situations**

**4.6.1 Matter – The need to respond to critical situations.**

- 4.6.2 When prioritising catchment-areas for review in the original Strategy, a range of statistics were used to input specific criteria. The criteria take an overview of the situation at a catchment-area level. Individual concerns are not therefore identified. Over the past year, it has become apparent that there are schools which are in an unacceptable state or as regards suitability or under-capacity but that this cannot be urgently addressed due to the priority system adopted in the original strategy.
- 4.6.3 It is felt that the process should prioritize critical situations far more. Retaining the current priority system as regards catchment-area reviews would create an unacceptable risk in several areas, especially when considering the fragile state of some schools in the County. There will therefore be a need to focus more on critical situations within the catchment-area priorities system in the re-organisation process.

***Proposal***

- 4.6.4 Work should be commissioned to identify critical situations within the County and plan a response programme within the context of the strategy.

**4.7 Role of Elected Members**

**4.7.1 Matter – The need to ensure Elected Members contribution to local discussions**

- 4.7.2 Elected Members have a crucial role in the discussions held at a local level. They are a crucial link when expressing their areas requirements, and they also have an important role in conveying the situation within the county to their areas. Elected Members have had an important role in the Catchment-area Review Panels but it is felt that they have an opportunity – as a local Members team for the catchment-area – to convene more frequently to discuss the proposed proposals and the implications of their implementation.

***Proposal***

- 4.7.3 The aim should be to ensure that catchment-area Members meet during the process of reviewing provision in the area to discuss and provide guidance on the proposals, the implications, choice of sites etc and to operate as a link with the local communities.

**4.8 Time-table for implementing the new proposals**

- 4.8.1 Reviews and implementation of proposals for Tywyn, Y Berwyn and Gader catchment-areas should be completed by Spring 2011.
- 4.8.2 Priority should be given to undertake preparatory work between December 2010 and April 2011.

- 4.8.3 Critical situations need to be identified and a response plan prepared as part of the preparatory work, we will prioritize the review of those schools identified between April 2011-December 2011. Consideration should be given to hold these reviews at a sub-catchment-area level or across the catchment-area, where appropriate in accordance with the principles and objectives of the strategy.
- 4.8.4 A long-term time-table should then be identified to conduct reviews of the county's education provision from 2011 onwards. Recommendations in this regard will be submitted to Gwynedd Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

## **5.0 APPROVE THE PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee gave consideration to the above-mentioned proposals on November 30. The recommendations were supported by the Committee, and in accordance with the recommendations a cross-party Working Group was established to carry on with the work.
- 5.2 The proposals were presented in to the Council Board on 14 December 2010. A verbal report on the Board's deliberations and recommendations will be presented to this meeting of the Full Council.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 The recommendations for amending Gwynedd schools re-organisation processes are noted as follows:
- to include the remainder of the county's educational provision in the process of the nursery, primary, secondary, special, and lifelong campuses
  - re-establish an Education Organisation Improvement Working-group led by Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to hold an overview of the county's entire educational provision
  - accept the need to rationalize the number of schools in the county so as to ensure a network of the correct numbers of schools, of the correct type, in the correct locations
  - fully take into account the national and county context, including financial matters and the need to develop a long-term capital investment programme
  - fulfil a broad range of preparatory work during the next few months to provide information for the discussions and accelerate the catchment-area reviews

- conduct a basic assessment of language, community, economic and equality matters throughout the county and hold an initial assessment of the impact of some of the possible re-organisation models on those matters
- give much greater priority to critical situations and plan a response programme
- continue to conduct reviews at a catchment-area level and through convening a Catchment-area Review Panel based on the above-mentioned preparatory work
- ensure local Members meet during the process of the catchment area review

6.2 A short time-table for December 2010 - July 2011 is noted in Appendix 2.

6.3 The aim is to present a detailed work programme based on the preparatory work referred to above to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

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A. Views of the Local Member:

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B. The Views of the Statutory Officers:

1. Chief Executive:

“Obviously, it is good practice to review key processes such as the Re-organisation Process on the basis of implementation experience so far. I am aware that detailed work has occurred on the re-organisation and, obviously, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Meeting have further approved the proposals.

2. Monitoring Officer:

“Since the review proposes some changes to the manner in which the original strategy is to be implemented it is appropriate that the report be presented to the full Council, with the Board’s recommendations. I have no comments regarding the legality or propriety of the detailed proposals.

3. Chief Finance Officer:

“I believe there is an increasing consent that an excessive percentage of the education budget goes towards maintaining expensive infrastructure, and this is not sustainable in a future of financial climate that is increasingly challenging. Every effort should be made to use the education organisation’s resources in the best possible way. Therefore, I support the review of the process of Gwynedd schools re-organisation and agree with the need to hasten the reviews of the catchment. By rationalising the amount of previous schools, the savings will be available earlier in order to be recycled for the benefit of all the county’s pupils.”

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C. Background Papers:

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CH. Policy Implications: