

MEETING	Full Council
DATE	15 December 2011
TITLE	Reorganisation of Schools in the Eastern Part of Y Gader Catchment Area
PURPOSE	Seek the support of the Council for the recommendations to reorganise the schools in the Eastern part of Y Gader, Dolgellau catchment area following a period of statutory consultation.
RECOMMENDATION	To approve the recommendations
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PORTFOLIO LEADER	Cllr. Liz Saville Roberts

NOTE:

This report is presented following statutory consultation on proposals for the reorganisation of schools in the Eastern part of Y Gader catchment area. The report reflects the requirements of a statutory process, the guidelines from Welsh Government and Gwynedd Council's *Excellent Primary Education for Children In Gwynedd*. This document includes the following:

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An analysis of the observations received during the consultation period is being produced. It was agreed during the Statutory Consultation that copies of the written responses would be made available. It will be ensured that copies of the written responses will be sent to the Elected Members. It will also be ensured that copies will be available for scrutiny by the public (following the editing of personal information on individuals, in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998) and these can be seen at the Council Offices in Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Dolgellau, Dolgellau Library and on the Council's website www.gwynedd.gov.uk.

I. INTRODUCTION

- I.1 The Gwynedd Schools Reorganisation Improvement Working Group was established in June 2008.
- I.2 15 meetings were held to discuss a range of evidence, and included presentations by:
- Welsh Government
 - ESTYN / Welsh Inspection Office
 - Welsh Language Society
 - Schools and Supporters' League
 - Head teachers representing small, medium sized and large schools in Gwynedd
 - 'National Association for Small Schools'
- I.3 During the Spring of 2009, the Improvement Working Group published its strategy *Excellent Primary Education for Children In Gwynedd*.
- I.4 It was agreed that education in every part of the County needed to be reviewed, catchment area by catchment area. Clear steps were set for carrying out the process.
- I.5 It included a list of aims and criteria to be borne in mind whilst the reviews were being held:
- Class sizes
 - Population and pupil numbers
 - Child's learning environment
 - The Community
 - Financial Resources
 - The Welsh Language
 - Geographical Factors
 - Exceptional Circumstances
 - Welsh Government Circulars 23/02 and 021/2009
- I.6 A range of specific criteria were developed around the factors listed above. In considering the situation of individual catchment areas against the criteria, it became evident that Tywyn would be the first catchment area to be reviewed, followed by Y Berwyn (Bala) and then Y Gader (Dolgellau) catchment area.
- I.7 ***The strategy was unanimously approved by the Council on 2nd April 2009.***
- I.8 During October 2009, proposals for the first catchment area were published, recommending a new system for the Tywyn catchment area. Consultation was carried out on the proposals and a resolution made to publish statutory notices in the catchment area during the period January - March 2011. The same discussion was also held in Y Berwyn catchment area and the Full Council reached its decision in May 2011.

1.9 In this report we outline proposals for the reorganisation of education in the eastern part of Y Gader catchment area.

2. REVIEW OF Y GADER CATCHMENT AREA

2.1 *Methods of Communication*

2.1.1 A number of forums were established in order to obtain views and observations as the Education Portfolio Holder developed her proposals, and included:

- Catchment Area Review Panel (CRP)
- Meetings with staff, governors and parents of every school
- Session for the children and young people of the schools
- Wider communication

2.1.2 It was also ensured that written information was available for all interested parties and all the information and CRP minutes were posted on the Council's website.

2.2 *Y Gader Catchment Area Review Panel (CRP)*

2.2.1 Y Gader CRP was established during April 2010. The first meeting of the Panel was held on 29 April 2010. Five further meetings were held on 13 May 2010, 25 May 2010, 6 July 2010, 25 May 2011 and 13 June 2011.

2.2.2 Representatives – namely head teacher, chair of the governors and parent governor – were invited from each of the nine primary schools within the catchment area. An invitation was also extended to the head teacher and chair of the governors from Y Gader Secondary School, local Councillors, a representative from the Bangor Diocese and a representative from Coleg Meirion Dwyfor.

2.2.3 A range of evidence was received and discussed by the CRP, including a pack of statistics on the area which the entire Panel agreed was a fair and full reflection. In preparing the statistical information, the school representatives were asked to submit their observations, challenge the contents of the papers and ask for any further information they felt was needed.

2.2.4 Information was also presented on the following:

- The financial context
- Information regarding national developments including Government guidance on handling proposals for schools reorganisation and new regulations on establishing patterns of collaboration between schools.

2.2.5 A long list of possible options for the reorganisation of schools within the catchment area was prepared. The long list was reduced to 14 main models for further consideration. An analysis of educational, managerial and financial implications was received at the meeting of the Panel on 25 May 2010, and the options were again discussed in detail at the CRP

meeting on 6 July 2010 and at subsequent meetings. 14 models were discussed, and these included:

- Developing collaboration models
- Rural area schools models
- Learning Community or Lifelong School

2.3 Meetings with individual schools

2.3.1 At the start of the process, a visit was held to every school in the catchment area by the Education Portfolio Holder and a representative of the County Consultative Panel. The purpose of the visit was to meet head teachers and to see and understand the situation at individual schools.

2.3.2 One circle of meetings was held with individual schools during the process, during the period between 7th June and 23rd June 2010. An open invitation was extended to staff, governors and parents to attend separate meetings. These offered an opportunity to discuss general matters including the specific models in question.

2.3.3 **Therefore 30 individual meetings with representatives from individual schools were held over a period of 16 days.**

2.4 Children and Young People

2.4.1 The opinions of children and young people were sought as the process went ahead. This was approved by the representatives of each school.

2.4.2 Individual schools were informed that the session for children and young people would take place at Y Gader Secondary School. The schools were asked to arrange representatives from among members of the School Council, and it was agreed that 3-4 children should represent each school. The session on 5th July was co-ordinated by specialist officers from the Council.

2.4.3 A range of activities was held in order to gain the views of the children and young people on a number of subjects, including:

- class sizes
- age range within classes
- children's language outside the classroom
- travelling distances to school

2.4.4 At the end of the session the children and young people were asked to suggest the type of facilities they would like to see at their school. In general, the children showed loyalty to their schools and their teachers whilst also identifying a number of resources they would like to see at their school.

2.5 Input from Members

2.5.1 By unanimously accepting the strategy *Excellent Primary Education for Children In Gwynedd*, the Council gave permission for members of the Education Reorganisation Improvement Working Group to continue as a forum and to support the Education Portfolio Holder as

she led reviews at each catchment area in turn. This was carried out under the title of *County Advisory Panel*.

- 2.5.2 During the discussion process in Y Gader catchment area, as part of the review of the operation of the Reorganisation Strategy the County Consultative Panel was replaced by an Improvement Working Group which operates in accordance with the work programme and brief of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
- 2.5.3 As part of the review also, it was decided that it was necessary for Local Members to meet during the catchment area reorganisation process.
- 2.5.4 Four meetings of the County Advisory Panel were held to discuss developments within Y Gader catchment area, on 24th February 2010, 24th March 2010, 8th July 2010 and 21st October 2010. Also a joint meeting was held between Local Members and Working Group Members on 18th May 2011. The situation in the catchment area was discussed and options for schools reorganisation in the area were proposed, side by side with an analysis of models put forward by the Catchment Area Review Panel.
- 2.5.5 ***The models for the catchment area were discussed in detail by the CRP, the Education Reorganisation Improvement Working Group and the Local Members – and the Members aired their views.***

2.6 Community, Language and Equality Impact Assessments

- 2.6.1 As part of the process an independent consultant was commissioned to undertake an assessment of the possible community, linguistic and equality effects of the various reorganisation proposals. It was reported that no substantial harmful effects could be expected from the multi-site area school proposal.
- 2.6.2 Meetings were held with individual schools in order to gather information and findings. A questionnaire was prepared to gather the views of staff, governors, parents and the wider community on the options. Electronic and hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed.
- 2.6.3 The findings of the assessments were submitted at a special meeting of the CRP on 29th June 2010. The results of the assessments have been used in developing the proposals put forward in this report and their findings will be discussed at a later stage in this report.
- 2.6.4 Copies of each of the three Assessments of Effect were provided for those who had been consulted during the statutory consultation period and they are available in the background document pack and on the Council's website.
- 2.6.5 The reports can be seen on the Council's website, and there are copies available for reading in the background documents pack (Council Offices, Dolgellau Library).

2.7 Written communication

- 2.7.1 ***Newsletters were prepared for circulation to every school during the catchment area discussions. Hard copies were sent to the schools to be distributed to every parent,***

the newsletters were e-mailed to every school and they were posted on the Council's website.

2.7.2 All the CRP papers were published on the Council's website.

2.7.3 Contact details for the officers involved with the work were posted on the website.

2.8 Status of the Process

2.8.1 Note that the activities undertaken so far were part of the process of gathering information whilst forming initial proposals.

2.8.2 The proposals were formed in accordance with guidance Circular 9/99 and 021/2009.

2.9 The Process of Developing Proposals for Y Gader Catchment Area

2.9.1 During the process of discussing options for this catchment area it became evident that there were no clear and simple answers for every part of the catchment area. Indeed, as stated previously, as many as 14 models were discussed in detail. During the fourth meeting of the CRP, held on 6th July 2010, the Portfolio Leader decided that there was no way of reaching a conclusion and forming proposals for the catchment area at that point.

2.9.2 There were a number of reasons for halting the discussion, the main reasons being the need to carry out research on sites and modelling work, changes to availability, methods of funding national capital projects and the review of the implementation of Gwynedd Council Reorganisation Strategy.

3. PROPOSALS FOR Y GADER CATCHMENT AREA

3.1 In developing options for the catchment area, it became evident that the catchment area could be split into three parts:

- Eastern Side – which includes Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth (also known as Ysgol Llanfachreth) Schools
- Western Side – which includes Clogau, Friog, Ganllwyd and Llanelltyd Schools
- Dolgellau town – which includes Dolgellau Primary School and Y Gader Secondary School

3.2 Options based on this classification were discussed for the following reasons:

- Geographical location and travelling time
- Local feeling that a large school in a central location to serve the whole area would not be accepted
- Site development and construction reasons
- The aims of the Council's Reorganisation Strategy, especially in terms of ensuring the development of schools to be establishments which are central to community activities.

3.3 In developing and discussing options for the reorganisation of schools in Y Gader catchment area it became evident that it was impossible to offer one solution for the whole catchment area. One of the principles of reorganisation notes:

“That the rate, nature and timetable for change will vary from one catchment area to another”

3.4 During the periods of discussion at the two last meetings of the CRP it became apparent that priority must be given to a solution for the area where Brithdir, Machreth, Ieuan Gwynedd and Dinas Mawddwy schools are located for the following reasons:

- Predicted numbers in three of the schools are causing concern. The predictions for 2014 are as follows:
Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd – 16 (**September 2011 there is 16**)
Machreth – 13 (**in September 2011 there is 16**)
Dinas Mawddwy – 20 (**in September 2011 there is 22**)
- **Number of surplus places** (106 in number) - 54% within the four schools or 66% not counting the situation at Ysgol Brithdir. This means that, considering the empty places at Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth, that there are **more empty places than there are children attending the schools.**
- **Four schools in the area receive an additional sum to the customary allocation** through the minimum staffing protection. This additional sum totals £111,616 between the 4 schools.
- **A total of £593,916 is allocated to the four schools** in this part of Y Gader catchment area for 2011/12. On average, this is equivalent to £5,883 per pupil. There is an average cost per head at Brithdir of £3,910; at Ysgol Machreth £6,861; at Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy £6,868; and at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd £7,519. The average cost per pupil for the County for this period is **£3,352**
- At the time there was uncertainty over the leadership situation at 2 schools due to staff turnover. By now the leadership situation at the schools is as follows: In Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy and Llanfachreth there is a permanent head teacher; at Ieuan Gwynedd, there is a temporary head teacher.
- **Ysgol Brithdir is over-full** (45 pupils in a school with capacity for 38)
- Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy **provides education for a wide area within** a large geographical region

3.5 On June 13th, 2011 the Education Portfolio Holder presented her proposals for the reorganisation of schools in Y Gader catchment area to the Area Reorganisation Panel, namely to:

- Establish a Multi-site Area School – with one site of the school on the existing site of Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy and the other site either on the existing site of Ysgol Brithdir or Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd, Rhydymain. This would mean that one of the two latter

sites would close as a school. As a result of this recommendation Ysgol Machreth will close and educational provision offered at the new Area School.

- Delay the discussions for the present in the Western part of the catchment area, (Clogau, Friog, Ganllwyd and Llanelltyd schools catchment area) and ensure that this part of the catchment area is prioritised in the next part of the schools reorganisation process.
- The recommendation for Dolgellau town is to establish a multi-site Lifelong Learning Community (School) for 3 – 16 year olds.

3.6 It was felt that there was no way of delaying the action in this part of the area due to its vulnerable situation. This means that, whilst regretting that there is no possibility of obtaining a new school, steps must be taken to develop an Area School. **At its meeting on 23rd June 2011, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee confirmed the opinion that steps must be taken towards obtaining a solution for the area without delay.** The matter was further discussed at the Council Board meeting on 5th July 2011 where this opinion was confirmed.

3.7 At the meeting of the Full Council on 14th July 2011 it was resolved to support the following recommendations:

3.7.1 Subject to a decision on the proposed location of the school, to undertake a statutory consultation process in accordance with the requirements of Section 28 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 during the Autumn term with the aim of establishing a multi-site Area School for 3 – 11 year olds with one site on the existing location of Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy, and the other site either on the existing location of Ysgol Brithdir, or Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd, Rhydyman, to open on 1st September 2013.

3.7.2 In order to establish the proposed school, to undertake a process of statutory consultation in accordance with the requirements of section 29 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 during the Autumn term 2011 on the closure of Machreth, Dinas Mawddwy, Brithdir and Ieuan Gwynedd schools on 31 August 2013.

3.7.3 A recommendation that the Council should deputise to the Council Board the decision on the location of the proposed Area School so that consultation can take place regarding either the existing site of Ysgol Brithdir or the existing site of Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd.

3.7.4 It is recommended that the proposal for a consultation on the principle of establishing a multi-site Lifelong Learning Community (School) for 3 – 16 year olds in the town of Dolgellau to open on 1st September 2013.

3.7.5 A recommendation for the Council to delegate the decision on the legal status of the proposed Learning Community (Lifelong School) for 3 - 16 year olds to the Council Board in order to enable further work to be undertaken, including discussions on the options of closing and reopening the schools or establishing a Federal School as well as establishing the appropriate statutory procedure for moving the process forward.

3.8 In accordance with this decision, guidance was received from the Board at its meeting on

October 11, 2011 regarding the location of the proposed Area School. It had already been resolved to locate one site on the existing location of Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy and the Board decided that they should hold consultations regarding the existing site of Ysgol Brithdir as the location for the other site.

- 3.9 Steps were then taken to hold a statutory consultation on the proposal to close Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools and to establish a Multi-Site Area School on the existing sites of Brithdir and Dinas Mawddwy schools. Here, we present a report on the views and observations gathered during the statutory consultation.
- 3.10 A report was presented to the Council Board on 11th October 2011, giving the latest information regarding discussions on establishing the Lifelong Learning Community in the town of Dolgellau. The situation and the implications of the various options were explained and it was decided that discussions should proceed and that a report be submitted to the Board when a clear recommendation had been reached. Discussions are now ongoing between governing bodies of the schools within the town of Dolgellau, representatives from Bangor Diocese, and the Council. The discussions will proceed until the end of the year and we hope to report back to the Board early in the new year.

4. THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION

- 4.1 In accordance with the statutory requirements and guidance from Welsh Government, Gwynedd Council undertook a period of statutory consultation with relevant interested parties, from 21 October until 13:00 on 25th November 2011 on the proposal to close Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools and to establish a multi-site Area School on the existing sites of Brithdir and Dinas Mawddwy schools.
- 4.2 A Statutory Consultation paper was prepared and distributed to the relevant parties for consultation within the areas served by Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools.
- 4.3 Statutory consultation meetings were held with staff, governors and parents at each of these schools between 2nd and 9th November 2011. Minutes for these meetings were taken by Council officers and distributed to the relevant schools. The minutes agreed upon are included with this report as Appendix 2. Below we give the timetable for the meetings.

Table 1: Timetable for the Statutory Meetings

School	Meeting for Staff	Meeting for Governors	Meeting for Parents
Brithdir	02/11/11 - 4pm	02/11/11 - 5pm	02/11/11 - 6pm
Dinas Mawddwy	03/11/11 - 4pm	03/11/11 - 5pm	03/11/11 - 6pm
Machreth	07/11/11 - 4pm	07/11/11 - 5pm	07/11/11 - 6pm
Ieuan Gwynedd	09/11/11 - 4pm	09/11/11 - 5pm	09/11/11 - 6pm

- 4.4 During the Statutory Consultation meetings it was agreed that the minutes of the meetings and copies of the written responses would be provided for Elected Members. Full copies were presented to every Councillor. Copies will be available for the public to see (conditional on personal information on individuals being edited in order to conform with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998) and they can be viewed at the County Offices in Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Dolgellau and at Dolgellau Library.

4.5 Gwynedd Council was eager for pupils to be given the opportunity to take part in the consultation process as well. The Council proposed two methods of doing this – either by arranging for an independent co-ordinator to hold a workshop with the pupils or by preparing a questionnaire to be completed by the pupils. The four schools decided to undertake the procedure themselves and to complete the questionnaire. An analysis of the responses received is included here as Appendix 3.2.

4.6 By 13:00 on 25th November 2011, a total of 65 responses had been received. Details of the responses are given below:

Table 2: Number and Details of the Correspondence Received During the Statutory Consultation

Schools	Letters			E-mails		Other	Total
	Bilingual	Welsh	English	Welsh	English		
Brithdir	0	16	5	0	0	0	21
Dinas Mawddwy	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Ieuan Gwynedd	0	8	1	7	3	0	19
Machreth	1	9	6	1	0	1 petition with 208 names	18
General	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
TOTAL	1	38	12	10	3	1	65
		51		13			

5. OBSERVATIONS RECEIVED DURING THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION

5.1 The purpose of this section of the report is to present the Council's response to some of the main points that were revealed during the statutory consultation period. An analysis was made of all the responses and a qualitative report on the responses received and the Council's response to those observations is included in Appendix 3.1.

5.2 In terms of response in general during the consultation, it can be noted that there was general support to the concept of establishing a Multi-Site Area School. The most obvious issue raised is that the response from consultees in Rhydymain and Llanfachreth quotes points regarding the choice of one of the sites for the school, and points out the favourable characteristics of a site within their own communities. Having said that, there is support for the proposal to locate the site in Brithdir.

5.3 The responses and the written observations received during statutory meetings at the four schools concentrate in general on the matters outlined below:

- Educational Matters – including numbers, class sizes and education standards
- Transport, road safety and journey times
- Choice of sites for the Area Multi-Site School
- Quality and suitability of the buildings
- Finance
- Leadership and staffing
- The Welsh Language
- Community matters
- Effect on ‘Church’ Education Provision

5.4 Educational Matters – Including Numbers, Class Sizes and Education Standards

5.4.1 Primary age pupil numbers in this part of the catchment area have varied greatly since 1975. Looking at the figures up to 2011, an increase was seen in one school (a substantial increase - 114% in the numbers at Ysgol Brithdir) and a decline in three other schools. According to the figures submitted by the schools themselves, the numbers are expected to decline during the next few years. Ysgol Brithdir is the only school that does not predict a decline.

Table 3: Numbers 1975-2011

School	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	1975-2010 (change)	1975-2010 (% change)	2011	1975-2011 (change)	1975-2011 (% change)
Brithdir	21	18	23	24	22	43	38	40	19	90%	45	24	114%
Dinas Mawddwy	38	43	38	52	44	37	34	25	-13	-34%	22	-16	-42%
Ieuan Gwynedd	31	31	32	28	24	17	26	19	-12	-39%	16	-15	-48%
Machreth	17	11	18	25	32	27	26	22	5	29%	16	-1	-16%

5.4.2 On average, the class size today at the four schools is 12, with a range of between 4 and 27 in a class. It is noted that Ysgol Brithdir is over its capacity and the other 3 schools have a number of empty places (Ysgol Machreth = 65% [30], Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd = 64% [29], Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy = 68% [47] therefore between the three schools = 66% [106]). At present there are two classes in each of the four schools.

5.4.3 The strategy adopted by the Council on 2nd April 2009 notes an ambition to ensure classes of between 12-25 pupils. If the recommendations are implemented, the classes in the Multi-Site Area School will on average be around 20. It is predicted that the average size of classes in the main school site will be 25, whilst the size of the classes at the second site will be around 12. If the proposal was achieved the Area School would have around 96 pupils, with approximately 73 pupils on one site and around 23 on the Dinas Mawddwy site.

5.4.4 Although the numbers at Dinas Mawddwy are low, there are other factors to explain how it is recommended that the site be retained as part of the Area School. Concern was voiced during the consultation period regarding the need to ensure that a site is retained at Dinas Mawddwy. Whilst this cannot be guaranteed, it was noted that the proposal provides an allowance to ensure that the site can operate as part of a larger school organisation.

5.4.5 During the consultation it was pointed out that the standard of education at present in the schools is very high. The latest Estyn reviews note that these four schools provide education of a high quality with no important deficits. No concerns or suspicions were voiced regarding the quality of the education at any of the schools, indeed, these can be seen as positive characteristics in the development of the Area School.

Table 4: Results of the latest Estyn inspections

	Ysgol Brithdir	Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy	Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd	Ysgol Machreth
Date of Inspection	January 2008	May 2010	February 2007	February 2010
Details of Inspection Reports	3 x Grade 1 4 x Grade 2	7 x Grade 2	1 x Grade 1 6 x Grade 2	5 x Grade 1 2 x Grade 2

Key:

Estyn Results – Grade 1 = good with outstanding features

Grade 2 = good features with no important deficits

5.4.6 The Authority is of the opinion that the education provided within this proposal would sustain and in some respects improve the quality of education for pupils who would attend the area school. Pupils would have the opportunity to be taught with their peers in significantly larger groups, by a larger number of teachers who could give and share their expertise. Indeed, when appointing staff to the new establishment, it is part of the authorities alternative employment policy (associated with school re-organisation proposals such as this) to guarantee interviews for staff who are already employed at the current schools. The Authority foresees that the governors of the new establishment will be able to choose from well qualified teaching and support staff to join the school team in order to maintain high standards.

5.5 Transport, Road Safety and Journey Times

5.5.1 The Gwynedd Council Strategy for primary education notes the aim of ensuring that pupils do not travel more than 30 minutes in one direction to reach school. If possible it aimed at restricting travel wherever possible. The proposal in question meets with the requirements of the strategy in terms of travel, namely to restrict travel to no more than 30 minutes in one direction. Transport will be provided in accordance with the Council's Transport Policy.

5.5.2 There was strong support for the proposal to continue with the educational provision on the Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy site within the wider framework of the Area School. When the proposals were being prepared, Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy was considered to be an Area School already as it provided education for a wide area where pupils already travel considerable distances to reach it. Also, consideration was given to the fact that the present

location of Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy is a considerable distance from the other locations, over 8 miles from the nearest location in Gwynedd. Also considered was the travelling time for some of the Dinas Mawddwy pupils to school from their homes, some already have to travel up to 25 minutes to school.

- 5.5.3 During the consultation, questions were raised regarding the need for children to move between the Dinas Mawddwy and Brithdir sites. Moving the pupils from one site to the other will be a matter for the Governing Body and the Head Teacher to discuss, but this is not foreseen happening on a regular basis.
- 5.5.4 There were concerns regarding road safety and the parking situation in the vicinity of Ysgol Brithdir site at the moment. As part of the development a new access will be built and the road close to the school will be straightened to improve visibility. Also, it is recommended that a suitable parking area is provided so that pupils can be transported to school in safety. It is further suggested that speed restriction measures be considered outside the school site.
- 5.5.5 If the proposal is implemented, provision will be made to ensure there is provision to transport pupils from the direction of Rhydymain and Llanfachreth. According to current figures, it is estimated that 2 small buses will be required to transport pupils from these areas to the main school site. Estyn reports on Brithdir note:

“Pupil safety is well implemented. Careful supervision is given as children arrive and leave the school and during break times. Appropriate policies have been established in order to ensure the safety and welfare of the children, and is implemented appropriately. Robust procedures are in place in order to undertake risk assessments whilst pupils are in school and when not on site...”

There is nothing to suggest that these robust arrangements will not continue under the arrangement of the new school as in the proposal.

- 5.5.6 Other concerns were mentioned, such as the bends on the road leading to Brithdir from the A470. It was explained that the Welsh Government has a proposed scheme which will involve improvements to this part of the road and also improve the turning towards Brithdir. There is a strong likelihood that this work will be completed before the school is developed. Mention was also made of concerns regarding the bridge on one of the roads to Brithdir. The opinion of the Highways Service was sought on this situation, and it was noted that the bridge is safe but narrow, and that traffic has to slow down to cross it.

5.6 Choosing Sites for the Multi-Site Area School

- 5.6.1 Consultation took place on the proposal to locate the school on two sites. It was decided, on account of geographical factors and the travelling times involved, to recommend that one site be located on the existing Ysgol Dinas Mawddwy site and the other on the existing Ysgol Brithdir site for a number of other reasons.
- 5.6.2 When discussing locations for the main site for the School, initial consideration was given to the existing site of Ysgol Machreth, but concern was raised regarding the viability of the location due to its geographical location and the nature of the road network leading to it. The existing sites of Brithdir and Ieuan Gwynedd schools were looked at and assessed in

detail in terms of their geographical location within the area and the road network leading to them.

- 5.6.3 The Council Board considered the matter of the location of the main site at its meeting on October 11th, 2011, and debated whether to decide on the present site at Ysgol Brithdir or the present site at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd, Rhydymain. Having balanced carefully the technical factors; the other factors which are relevant when considering the development of an area school; the observations of the CRP and the views of the Local Members, it was recommended that consultation should take place on the proposal to establish one of the Area School sites on the existing site at Ysgol Brithdir.
- 5.6.4 During the consultation concern was expressed by some over the proposal to locate the main site for the school in Brithdir, and it was stated by some consultees that the site at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd, Rhydymain would be a much better site to develop and would involve less cost. Consultees from Llanfachreth on the other hand were disappointed that the school would not be developed in their village and noted virtues of their school site. Consultees pointed out the positive features of the existing site at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd; its close proximity to the village hall, standard of the existing building and standard of the main road to Rhydymain. Concerns were expressed regarding problems and cost involved with developing the Brithdir site. The details of all the points raised and the full response of the Council to those points are included in Appendix 3.1.
- 5.6.5 When the Council Board considered the matter, it was acknowledged that developing the site at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd would be easier but that developing the existing site at Ysgol Brithdir offered the best opportunity to ensure a sustainable and viable school for the future, for the following reasons:
- Geographical location in terms of accessibility for pupils in the Area School catchment area. More than three quarters of the pupils live closer to the Brithdir site than to the Ieuan Gwynedd site
 - Distance from the Dinas Mawddwy site in terms of travelling time for pupils and staff and the importance of this factor in terms of running a multi-site Area School
 - Viability of the school for the future. There seems to have been a general tendency over the years for an increase in the numbers at Ysgol Brithdir, whilst the numbers at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd have declined during the same period. There could be a number of reasons for this, but the location is noted as an obvious factor.

These reasons were re-enforced during the consultation, and further reasons were noted, such as the link with the local nursery provision in Brithdir and the learning opportunities due to local characteristics.

5.7 Quality and Suitability of the Buildings

- 5.7.1 The reorganisation strategy notes that teaching and learning circumstances are of core importance to providing education of the foremost quality. The Estyn report "*Appraisal of the performance of schools before and after moving into new premises or renovated property*" (2007) confirms the above opinion. The report notes that schools which have seen their buildings renovated have experienced an improvement in pupils' achievement and attainment. It is noted that Estyn inspections of individual schools show that the quality of

the teaching has improved, that staff morale has risen, that attendance has been maintained and behaviour has improved, and that buildings that have been improved offer more choice of better provision in terms of education within the school and activities before and after school.

- 5.7.2 In developing this proposal and discussing options at the CRP meetings, it was estimated that developing new school buildings would cost approximately £3.8m. This option was considered, but a decision taken to develop the site of one of the existing schools because of the need to move forward without delay for the sake of the schools.
- 5.7.3 If this proposal is implemented, it is recommended that an investment be made in developing the existing site at Ysgol Brithdir. During the consultation concern was voiced over the suitability of the existing building at Ysgol Brithdir in comparison with the existing site at Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd. It was noted that the Ieuan Gwynedd site would also have to be upgraded in order to reach the same requirements, if it had been selected as the main site for development.
- 5.7.4 The Brithdir site will be developed and the classrooms will be in a new, modern and environmentally friendly building. It will provide a modern learning environment where the latest technological resources will be available. It is predicted that the existing building will be upgraded and adapted into a fit-for-purpose hall and dining room. A visit was arranged during the consultation period for representatives from the four schools to a school within the County which had recently been significantly upgraded. The feedback from the visit was positive.
- 5.7.5 Concerns were raised by some consultees regarding safety at the access point to the Ysgol Brithdir site from the road. As part of the development it is recommended that improvements be made to the school entrance as well as the construction of a suitable parking area.
- 5.7.6 Some concerns were raised regarding the fact that the cost of the development would be higher than the cost of developing the Ieuan Gwynedd site. In accordance with the decision of the Council Board, it is considered that factors such as viability for the future and accessibility of the site for the pupil population, and practical location of the site as part of a multi-site school due to the proximity to Dinas Mawddwy, outweigh the higher cost factor.
- 5.7.7 As one of the measures for alleviating any effects that school closure may have on the area, if the proposal is passed, and if the local residents wish, the Council will ask its Area Regeneration Officers to support the communities in Llanfachreth and Rhydymain when they consider after use for the land and buildings released as a result of reorganisation. Church representatives will be part of discussions on the future use of the Machreth site, as owners of part of the site. This will be carried out in line with the policies and action protocol adopted by the Council back in 2010.

5.8 Finance

- 5.8.1 A total of £593,916 has been allocated to the four schools in this part of Y Gader catchment area in 2011/12. On average, this is equivalent to £5,883 per pupil. The range of cost per pupil varies from Ysgol Brithdir at £3,910; Ysgol Machreth at £6,861; Ysgol Dinas

Mawddwy at £6,868; and Ysgol Ieuan Gwynedd at £7,519. The average cost per pupil for the County for this period is £3,352.

- 5.8.2 After reorganisation the total new allocation recommended for the area – based on the current allocation – would be £413,803. In terms of revenue costs, establishing the new organisation would save £180,000, less the additional transport requirements (estimated at £48,000), therefore a total of **£132,000** per year.
- 5.8.3 The four schools in the area receive the customary allocation plus an additional sum through the minimum staffing protection policy which guarantees a minimum of head teacher and teacher at each school and a head teacher and assistant in schools with fewer than 15 pupils. The total amount of this additional sum is £111,616. In comparison, if the proposal is implemented, there will be an additional sum of £69,069 multi-site allowance added to the customary allocation.

5.9 Leadership and Staffing

- 5.9.1 At present the four schools receive sufficient funding to employ 8 full time primary school teachers, four of them head teachers.
- 5.9.2 If the proposal was implemented, looking at the predicted numbers it is likely that there would be a budget for 5 primary level teachers (full time) for the entire Area School. The exact nature of the collaboration and staff sharing between the two sites is a matter to be discussed further and that calls for attention by the Governing Body of the Area School. The school will be a new entity and therefore a new Governing Body will have to be established in line with the current guidelines and regulations. The new Governing Body will need to appoint the Head Teacher and staff for the school.
- 5.9.3 The school's staffing structure will be a matter for the Governing Body to decide upon. However, the Council suggests that the Area School should try and earmark the posts which arise out of implementing the new system for teachers who work within the four schools in the first place, and then to other schools in Y Gader catchment area. Clear and open communication with staff is of core importance to successful implementation of the proposals.

5.10 The Welsh Language

- 5.10.1 An analysis of the linguistic background of every school was undertaken, based on information gathered when the complete statistics pack was prepared. An opportunity was afforded for challenging the evidence, and this was done by some during the catchment area discussions. Following this, the analysis was agreed upon. When the proposals for the catchment area were being developed, consideration was given to grouping together schools with a similar linguistic background.
- 5.10.2 An Assessment of Linguistic Effect was commissioned in relation to each of the various models considered for the catchment area when this proposal was being developed. This was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out by Welsh Government in *Circular 9/99 and 021/2009*. The full report is published on the Council's website. With regard to this proposal to establish an Area School, the Linguistic Assessment notes that establishing this model would have a positive effect on the Welsh language.

- 5.10.3 During the consultation, concern was expressed that closing some of the schools would have a negative effect on the Welsh language.
- 5.10.4 The score result of the Rural Area School Assessment (Brithdir, Machreth and Ieuan Gwynedd on one site and Dinas Mawddwy pupils on another site) is > +6 Positive. It is noted that healthy social use is made of the Welsh language at every one of the schools – especially the three which will merge together on one site. **The assessment therefore reaches the conclusion that an Area School would strengthen the Welsh language and that in a larger organisation it could develop into a positive linguistic powerhouse.**

5.11 Community Matters

- 5.11.1 Concerns were expressed regarding the effect of the proposal on those communities where the schools will close (namely Llanfachreth and Rhydymain). A note was made of the desire to see the continuation of school activities in each of the communities and that in this respect closing the schools could have a wider negative effect.
- 5.11.2 In the statistical pack, an analysis was included showing the use made of each school by the community, and the contribution the schools made to their communities. Also listed are the resources found within the communities (e.g. community centres, playing fields etc).
- 5.11.3 The Government guidelines (*Circular 9/99 and 021/2009*) on school reorganisation note factors which need to be considered when forming proposals for schools reorganisation. Information regarding the factors considered in the statistical analysis of the catchment area are available on the Council's website. A study of the possible community effect of the various options was commissioned by independent consultants as part of the process of developing proposals. In addition, an assessment of the economic effect was commissioned side by side with the community study. The reports can be seen on the Council's website and copies are available for scrutiny in the background documents pack.
- 5.11.4 In looking at the assessment carried out of the possible effect of a number of the initial models considered, the community and economic assessment both note categories of the effects of different types of models. In short, they noted that closing schools in the rural areas under any model would have a negative effect – this meant that any model of area school or lifelong school would have a similar effect. The only model that would not have a negative effect – but rather a neutral effect – would be a model of collaboration which in reality would mean that there would be no change in school presence within individual villages.
- 5.11.5 As specific models were developed the assessment for Area School models was finetuned. It was noted that closing some schools and establishing an Area School was going to have a negative effect on the communities and on the economy in those districts where the schools will close. On the other hand, whilst acknowledging the danger of moving pupils from the Dinas Mawddwy location on a regular basis, the initial assessment of models with satellites note that this type of model is less harmful than closing the school.
- 5.11.6 For those communities where the school will close (namely Rhydymain and Llanfachreth), the assessment recommends some measures for the Council to consider in order to

alleviate the negative effects. These alleviating measures would be incorporated in a work programme if the decision is taken to implement the recommendations in the area. These are some of the measures:

- Ensure support for those communities where the schools close in order to try and maintain the situation in those communities.
- Offer support for those communities so that they can consider the best use of the school building after closure.
- Plan for the Area School to include the villages of the school catchment area in activities and hold occasional activities in those villages.
- Offer transport provision in order to facilitate the transport of pupils safely and effectively from the communities.
- Attempt to restrict pupils' travelling time to the Area School to the County target (30 minutes) and assess parents' and pupils' satisfaction with the transport arrangements in terms of punctuality and safety.

5.12 Effect on 'Church' Education Provision

5.12.1 Ysgol Machreth has Voluntary Controlled School (Church) status. As the Council already noted, and some consultees – including the Diocese of Bangor Statutory Education Board - pointed out, the closure of Ysgol Machreth would have implications regarding the Church provision in the area. It was also noted that the Church owns part of the site at Ysgol Machreth, whilst other parts of the land are under covenant and this would need to be considered in respect of any discussions on after use of the site.

5.12.2 Even though pupil numbers have varied over the years, with a maximum of 37 pupils in 1997 and a minimum of 11 in 1980, it is believed that the educational provision in Ysgol Machreth School is no longer sustainable. Pupil numbers in the school are vulnerable, there are currently 16 pupils in the school with 61% surplus places.

5.12.3 It is noted that three other schools with 'Community' status are part of this proposal. It is noted that one of these school has over capacity. When considering this, it is suggested that a strong demand for community status school continues in the area.

5.12.4 It is believed that there will be educational benefits for pupils in an Area School arrangement. It would provide opportunities for pupils to benefit from facilities within a modern teaching environment, and would create educational opportunities for pupils as they could mix with more peers of their own age. It is also believed that the new arrangement would also ensure security for the future as far as pupil numbers are concerned.

5.12.5 Ysgol Gynradd Dolgellau offers Church provision. This means that Church provision choice would be available within Y Gader catchment area for pupils/parents. Of course, there is a separate proposal to establish a Lifelong Learning Community, – between the primary and secondary schools, in Dolgellau.

5.12.6 As part of this other proposal, discussions about the nature and legal status of the Lifelong Learning Community in the town of Dolgellau continue. Representatives of the Church have stated that it seeks to ensure a choice of Church provision in the area through that

establishment. The Council note and acknowledge the need to identify and satisfy the need for 'Church' education is a very important factor when considering the status of the provision in Dolgellau town. But as regards the situation of Ysgol Machreth, it is believed that the proposal which is recommended responds to the situation of the educational provision in this part of the catchment because of the reasons noted.

5.13 Alternative Proposals

5.13.1 In developing this proposal a long list of possible options for the reorganisation of schools in the area was prepared. The long list was reduced to 14 main models for further consideration. An assessment of the educational, managerial and financial implications for each proposal was submitted at the CRP meeting on 25th May 2010, and the options were again discussed in detail at the meeting of the CRP on 6th July 2010. Discussion took place on 14 models and centred on:

- Developing models of collaboration
- Models of rural area schools
- Learning Community or Lifelong School

5.13.2 As the options for these schools were discussed, they were evaluated as models of collaboration; rural area schools; and part of a Lifelong Learning Community.

5.13.3 The advantages and disadvantages of the various types of models that became apparent during the CRP discussions were assessed. A full consideration of these models can be found in the background pack, the advantages and disadvantages of all the models discussed in the CRP meetings and also the relevant budgetary information.

5.13.4 During the consultation, there was general support for the rural Multi-Site Area School. The vast majority of consultees agreed with the virtue of establishing an Area School as a means of providing rural Welsh education in the area.

5.13.5 Some consultees were concerned over the choice of location for the main site of the Area School in Brithdir. Consultees from the Rhydymain area, and to a lesser degree those from Llanfachreth, were loyal to and supportive of the sites of their existing schools as the site for the Area School. Having said that, there was strong support during the consultation period for the proposal of locating the Area School on the Brithdir site.

5.13.6 In addition, during the consultation period some consultees noted that it was necessary to ensure special educational needs provision in the area as is currently provided at the Ieuan Gwynedd site. Primary schools within secondary school catchment areas are denoted for providing education for children with special educational needs. Ieuan Gwynedd was denoted within this area. Before this, children had to travel outside of the county. The new area school will be designed to the standards of the Disabilities Discrimination Act (DDA) and Dolgellau primary school will be denoted for providing special education provision in the area. It has already been recommended to upgrade and adapt Dolgellau Primary School, therefore there will be expertise in the catchment area.

6. SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSAL

- 6.1 The reasoning for the proposals is mentioned below. These recommendations are made after consideration has been given to the responses to the consultation, the *Excellent Primary Education for Children In Gwynedd* strategy and the requirements of *Circular 9/99 and 021/2009 Schools Organisation Proposals*.
- 6.2 It is noted that the closure of Ysgol Machreth would have implications regarding the Church provision in the area. The reasons are noted above as to why Ysgol Machreth is not sustainable, and that various opportunities arise from the new education provision in the area. There is an alternative choice of Church provision in Ysgol Gynradd Dolgellau which offers Church provision. Discussions on establishing the Lifelong Learning Community (between the primary and secondary schools) in Dolgellau continue, and as part of this, issues relating to the nature and status of this organisation are discussed. The Council note and acknowledge the need to identify and satisfy the need for 'Church' education as a very important factor when considering the status of the provision in Dolgellau town. But as regards the situation of Ysgol Machreth, it is believed that the proposal which is recommended responds to the situation of the educational provision in this part of the catchment because of the reasons noted.
- 6.3 The response to the consultation shows support to the Multi-Site Area School proposal. Some consultees note the virtues of locating one site of the school within their community, however, there is support for the proposed site. Even though there are comments on the issue of location, there is general support in the consultation for this proposal as a means of **ensuring a stable educational provision in a rural area and ensuring a future for the rural Area School**.
- 6.4 We looked at ways of **ensuring sustainability and support** for a site which is geographically remote and which is already providing education for a wide area.
- 6.5 The new arrangements would provide **better opportunities for every child** in this part of the catchment area to be taught in reasonably sized groups as well as opportunities to work alongside and play more regularly with their peers.
- 6.6 These proposals provide **the best balance by providing effective learning in efficient organisations and allowing parents to choose**. No child would have to travel more than 30 minutes to school if the proposals were implemented.
- 6.7 **The proposals are an opportunity to further develop the relationship with the community**. Twenty first century schools need to provide services which draw the community and the school together, before and after school clubs, and other activities which are community based.
- 6.8 **Implementing the proposals in the catchment area would create stability and ensure educational provision for a wide rural area in this part of Y Gader catchment area**.
- 6.9 **More staffing security** will be ensured for the area and an opportunity for teachers to share their expertise and benefit a wider number of pupils. There will be a smaller age range within the classes which will make planning and teaching easier for the teachers.

- 6.10 **An estimated annual saving** of £132,000 is predicted if the proposal is implemented.
- 6.11 Alternative options were considered for schools reorganisation in this part of the catchment area but it is believed that the proposals put forward offer the best balance between upholding educational standards and ensuring **a Multi-Site Area School which is viable**. It has to be noted that an alternative choice must be considered regarding Church provision in the area following the proposal to close Ysgol Machreth, and that there is a need to ensure a solution in the near future for the discussion regarding the nature of the Lifelong Learning Community in the town.

7. THE NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 If the Council approves these proposals, statutory notices will be issued in order to:
- 7.2 Close Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools on 31st August 2013 in accordance with the requirements of Section 29 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.
- 7.3 Establish a multi-site Area Community School for 3 – 11 year olds on the existing sites of Brithdir and Dinas Mawddwy schools, to provide education for the existing catchment areas of Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools in accordance with the requirements of Section 28 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.
- 7.4 The statutory notices will be published in the local press and exhibited in prominent locations within the catchment area. Following the publication date there will be a period of one month in which to respond to the statutory notices.
- 7.5 At the end of this period, if no formal objections to the Statutory Notices are received, the proposal will come before the Council Board for confirmation. If formal objections to the Statutory Notices are received, the matter will be transferred to the Education Minister at the Welsh Government for a decision.

8. JOURNEY THROUGH THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

- 8.1 A report on this proposal will be submitted to the Gwynedd Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 9th December 2011, to the Council Board on 13th December 2011 and then to the Full Council on 15th December 2011.
- 8.2 The views and observations of the Scrutiny Committee and the Board will be conveyed to Full Council.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Approve the proposal to close Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools on 31st August 2013, and issue statutory notices in accordance with the requirements of Section 29 of the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 to implement this.

- 9.2 Approve the proposal to establish a Multi-site Area Community School for 3 – 11 year olds to open on 1st September 2013 on the existing sites of Brithdir and Dinas Mawddwy schools, to provide education for the existing catchment areas of Brithdir, Dinas Mawddwy, Ieuan Gwynedd and Machreth schools, and issue statutory notices in accordance with the requirements of Section 28 of the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 to implement this.

Opinion of the Statutory Officers:

1. Chief Executive

“This is an important formal step with regard to completing the Councils proposals to the reorganisation of education in this area. The report deals with the responses to the statutory consultation however, because the Council has looked thoroughly at the different elements of the project, as far as I am aware, no additional considerations were raised that the Council had not already considered when planning the proposals that were subject to consultation. I approve the recommendations. ”

2. Monitoring Officer

“The report and the recommendations follow as a result of the consultation period in accordance with the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. Information and comments are provided on the results of the consultation period and the Board is required to evaluate these results along with the other relevant factors whilst coming to a decision on the recommendations”.

3. Finance Head Officer

“The report seeks approval of the recommendations seen in part 9 as the latest stage of the statutory process resulting from previous decisions and thorough work by elected members, headteachers, teachers, governors, officers, and others when trying to move forward appropriately with reviewing the organisation of the schools in the Gader catchment area. I confirm the accuracy of financial figures in the report (summarised in part 5.8 with regards to allocation etc). The business case continues to be strong, and there are obvious reasons to support the recommendations presented, to be acted upon immediately”

Background Papers

Members will receive a background documents pack beforehand. Appendix 4 notes information where copies of background papers are available.