

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report for a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting:	22 January 2019
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Gareth Thomas
Contact Officer:	Garem Jackson
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Title of Item:	Bid for Council Plan Resources to Transform the Schools System

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1. (a) To commit £103,492 of funding now from the Council Plan Fund for a two-year period to fund a Project Manager post, which would enable the Education Department to respond to, and implement individual projects to transform the schools system in a timely manner as they arise and in accordance with the adopted education principles.
- (b) To review the situation when the initial two-year period ends, and/or if an increase is anticipated in the number of further individual projects that will need to be implemented to transform the schools system in light of adopting the education principles.

2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1. The Education Department is responsible for a number of higher level projects in the 2018-23 Council Plan. These projects encompass the following fields:
- Transforming the schools system
 - Strengthening Leadership
 - Education Modernisation - Bangor Catchment Area
 - Education Modernisation - Y Berwyn Catchment Area
 - Transforming the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion provision
 - The Welsh Language - Secondary Sector Language Strategy
- 2.2. The Education Department has consulted with the profession and key stakeholders on a series of principles that should be the basis for transforming the schools system in future. The principles are as follows:
- A system of viable secondary schools
 - No more than two age ranges within the same class **in the primary sector**

- Approximately 80% of non-contact time for the Headteacher to concentrate on leadership issues **in the primary sector**.
- 2.3. The observations of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on these Education Principles were received on 18 April 2018.
 - 2.4. Subsequently, on 18 December 2018, these Education Principles were adopted by the Cabinet, which would form the basis for fulfilling the Education Department's vision for the system to ensure a high quality of education for the children and young people of Gwynedd for the twenty-first century.
 - 2.5. There are two different elements to the means that the Education Department are going about transforming the schools system based on the adopted education principles. The first, and the most obvious of them, is the 21st Century Schools Programme, which is a capital programme consisting of Band A (Bangor, Bala) and Band B (post-16, Bangor and Cricieth). It is worth noting that the Education Department's entire project resource is currently completely allocated to implement this capital programme.
 - 2.6. The Education Department also has a number of non-capital projects under the leadership of the Education Area Officers that need to be addressed now, and that are in-keeping with the education principles, such as:
 - Setting up a formal federal arrangement between Ysgol Brynaerau and Ysgol Talysarn (a request from the schools).
 - Changing the admission ages of Ysgol Dyffryn Ardudwy and Ysgol Llanbedr (a request from the schools).
 - The future of Ysgol Cwm y Glo.
 - 2.7. However, as it stands, the Education Department has no resource to implement and realise any of the above projects by the Education Department. All of the above projects are tied to a complete statutory process, which is heavy on project resource, no matter how small the change intended to be implemented is.
 - 2.8. It is possible that other individual non-capital opportunities will arise naturally to transform the schools system based on the fit for purpose education principles, and the resource will need to be ensured in order to enable the Education Department to respond appropriately to these opportunities.
 - 2.9. Unless an additional resource is obtained, it will be an increasing challenge to continue to maintain an unsustainable system, with inequality in the opportunities and experiences our children and young people have to realise their potential.

3. PRESENTATION AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS YSTYRIAETHAU PERTHNASOL

Legislative Considerations

- 3.1 Delivering the Education Department's vision to transform the schools system based on the adopted education principles will be considered alongside the relevant statutory process requirements in accordance with the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the Schools Organisation Code

(011/2018), which gives guidance to weigh-up any specific statutory proposal. This means that there are very specific statutory systems and processes in place when reorganising schools. Therefore, when weighing up proposals, the Authority is required to appropriately deal with the outcomes of relevant consultative processes and impact assessments before coming to a conclusion.

- 3.2 The amended version of the Schools Organisation Code (011/2018) that came into force in November 2018 makes special arrangements for rural schools (as defined in the Code), and establishing a procedural assumption against closing rural schools. This document supersedes the previous Code of practice (006/2013).
- 3.3 This makes it a requirement for proposers to follow a more detailed series of procedures and requirements when forming a proposal to close a rural school. Specifically, during the consultation process on a proposal regarding whether a rural school should be closed and when coming to a decision. Nevertheless, an assumption against closing rural schools does not mean that rural schools will never close - rather, it means that every option needs to be weighed up and ensure that the case for closing is strong.
- 3.4 When considering the required arrangements, the Council is confident that it already follows comprehensive engagement processes in order to ensure local input when developing and considering any strategic plans. School provision across the county places the needs of the child in front of any other factor.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 3.5 As a Council, we are committed to the principles within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) in order to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of communities in Gwynedd. We will ensure that the Council considers the long term by collaborating and considering people of all ages when resolving and preventing problems. Working in this way will enable us to meet the present needs of our communities while ensuring that today's decisions are not harmful to future generations.
- 3.6 As part of the duty, the Council has published well-being objectives that outline how they will improve well-being in the "2018-23 Gwynedd Plan". The Education Department has a role to promote the well-being objectives of the Act amongst pupils in the county through its activities and projects. Any changes to legislation will be considered and assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Well-being Act, ensuring that decisions tie in with the seven well-being objectives of the Act, along with the Council's well-being objectives.

Other Key Considerations

- 3.7 It is acknowledged that there would be far-reaching implications to implement the adopted education principles on the existing education system in Gwynedd. Consequently, it is anticipated that there is no swift process that would enable the implementation of the principles across the system during the period of this Council, but rather, an operation that will take many years, that will span over many Councils.

- 3.8 It is also anticipated that implementing such major changes across the system in a relatively short time could lead to concern among all stakeholders in our schools, along with the communities they serve.
- 3.9 Along with these considerations, it is also anticipated that major changes are on the horizon in the world of education: changes to the organisation of the schools inspectorate (Estyn), along with very substantial changes to the curriculum and organisation of our schools in light of the recommendations of Professor Donaldson.
- 3.10 These changes over the coming years create clear challenges for our schools to meet and achieve all the changes, whilst at the same time, facing continuous and unforgiving national cuts to funding.
- 3.11 In light of all of these factors and their far-reaching impact on the educational organisation and provision in future, it is intended to transform the system based on the principles in a cautious manner, within context, and in a manner that would possibly facilitate the system's ability to respond to these major changes that are on the horizon.

4. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

- 4.1. By approving the bid to commit £103,492 of funding now for a two-year period to fund a Project Manager post, this would enable the Education Department to respond and act on the individual non-capital projects that they have in a timely manner as they arise.
- 4.2. By receiving the resource, the Department is enabled to take a step forward in transforming the schools system in future in accordance with the adopted education principles.

5. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

Sessions on the Principles of a Fit for Purpose Education System

- 5.1 A series of drop-in sessions (18 in total) were held across Gwynedd between 7 November until 14 December in order to engage with parents, staff, governors and the wider community as part of the process of developing new principles for Gwynedd schools. See the Appendix for the results of the consultation.
- 5.2 Below are the details about three of the principles that were the subject of consultation:
 - (i) Non-contact time for Headteachers: 98% of the respondents agreed that sufficient time needed to be ensured for Headteachers so that they can achieve their managerial duties. A high number of responses noted the importance of reducing the administration load in order to focus on the education provision, along with the need to consider collaborating to improve education in the County. A number of the observations noted that collaboration was required in

order to reduce the duplication of work, reduce work pressure, and give opportunities to share expertise and good practice.

- (ii) Age range in the class: 70% also agreed with the principle that no more than two age ranges should be taught together in one classroom. Many observations were received, noting the difficulty of having to educate children from more than two age ranges, although it is also important to consider this within the context of practicality for any changes.
- (iii) The management of secondary schools: When considering whether the Headteachers of secondary schools should be in charge of approximately 900 pupils, the majority of the responses disagreed with the principle, but it is possible that this reflects the finding that this would involve one school of 900 rather than considering different management models. Also, a large number of the responses received agreed strongly with the statement that children need to be taught by subject experts. Therefore, there is a need to consider co-operational arrangements between schools that create opportunities to strengthen the system, including horizontal leadership models.

Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

- 5.3 A report was submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 19 April 2018 on the Fit for purpose Education Principles, seeking the opinion of the Scrutiny Committee on the proposed education principles that would form the basis for fulfilling the Education Department's vision for the system to ensure a high quality of education for the children and young people of Gwynedd for the twenty-first century.
- 5.4 Based on the results of the consultation with Governors and schools, and the Education Department's vision, members of the scrutiny committee were specifically asked for their views on the following principles that were being considered as the foundation for the education system for Gwynedd in future:
 - a system of viable secondary schools
 - no more than two age ranges within the same class in the primary sector
 - approximately 80% of non-contact time for the Headteacher to concentrate on leadership issues in the primary sector
- 5.5 To summarise the discussion that was held at the Scrutiny Committee, it was noted that the principles were supported in general but, at the same time, it was acknowledged that challenges are anticipated on the journey to provide and implement these principles.

5.6 Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. Monitoring Officer:

No observations in relation to propriety.

ii. Head of Finance Department:

Many justified need /use will be competing for scarce resources from the Council Plan Fund for transforming services. It is a matter for the Cabinet to prioritise applications that make a difference when allocating resources from the Fund. I confirm that there is sufficient provision to fund these plans presented for consideration by the Cabinet, and that there are further funds in reserve for other projects that will be submitted to subsequent meetings of the Cabinet for commendation.