Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Education Area Offices - Projects to Reduce Workload
Date of meeting	21 March 2019
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Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Gareth Thomas

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 On 13 September 2016, the Cabinet approved a request by the Education Department to move towards Area Education Offices. In the report at the time, it was noted that the main work of the Area Office would be to <u>rationalise and share management, administrative and governance requirements of schools</u>. It was noted at the time also, by collaborating with GwE, combining the needs of the proposed ALN model and the schools modernisation model, that the intention was to secure an operational model in-keeping with the Area model.

1.2 The Cabinet report at the time requested:

- The Cabinet's support to implement the Area Education Offices.
- The Cabinet's support to the request for costs in the region of £275,000 annually for up to three years, by authorising the Head of Finance Department in consultation with the Head of Corporate Support Department and the Cabinet Member for Resources to confirm the total as a result of staff job evaluation.
- The Cabinet's support to the creation of a Service Level Agreement by the Corporate Support Department and the Education Department in relation to Human Resources to define the nature of the service.

1.3 The intention of these additional resources at the time was to enable the Education Department to support schools more locally, in order to reduce administration in our schools, and enable heads to lead on teaching and the teachers to teach. The additional resources allowed the Department to create the following jobs to support the Area Education Offices:

- Human Resources Advisory Officer
- Business and Services Officer (x3)
- Performance Management Officer
- DATA Officer

1.4 As a result of the appointment of a new Head of Education Department in November 2017, together with a new team of Education Officers since April 2018, the main focus and purpose of the Area Education Offices (as underlined above) has been reinforced; however, full focus is now placed on reducing the workload of heads, a direction and effort which is very much appreciated by all our school heads.

2. AREA EDUCATION OFFICES 2018/19 ONWARDS

2.1 Therefore, in 2018/19, we have revisited the Area Education Offices, and have attempted to define their purpose as follows:
Support and develop the effective governance and management of Gwynedd schools

The fundamental principle of the Area Education Offices is to rationalise and share management, administrative and governance requirements of schools Additionally, the Area Education Offices ensure that the Education Department's strategies for improving schools are implemented effectively.

Ffordd Gwynedd

2.2 The Department has commenced the work of defining the purpose of education in Gwynedd through the eyes of the citizens and meetings have been held with small groups of children, young people and parents.

The following is a list of things that are important to children, to date:
I want to...
- Go to a school where I can be happy every day.
- Go to a school where I feel safe.
- Go to interesting lessons with good teachers that will prepare me for leaving school and succeeding.
- Everyone in the class to be treated fairly.
- An opportunity to study every subject through the medium of Welsh.

The following is a list of things that are important to parents:

I want my child to...
- Be happy to go to school every day.
- Be safe and healthy at school.
- Have the same opportunities as every other pupil.
- Be taught by good teachers.
- Have an opportunity to study a wide range of subjects through the medium of Welsh.
- Be equipped to go on to further education, work, apprenticeship or training at the end of his/her educational career.

Indicators

2.3 We are in the process of identifying a series of indicators which will measure our progress against what is important to the citizen and we will adapt our approach to improve the indicators in due course. Currently, the indicators against the priorities are soft, qualitative ones.

2018/19 Priorities

2.4 Following an internal discussion with representatives of school heads at our Area Strategic Boards and Chairs of Governing Bodies at the Catchment Area Strategic Boards, the following priorities were agreed upon:

- Ensure arrangement to check the quality of governance at Gwynedd schools.
- Ensure that policies within Gwynedd schools are accurate and current.
- Support schools to implement the language policy while ensuring value for money.
- Reduce the effect of collecting and banking money on the workload of primary schools.
- Develop an effective purchasing procedure.
- Reduce workload by adapting current procedural management arrangements.
- Establish effective and efficient communication methods.
- Create a platform for heads to share good practice.
- Ensure support and sustainability for arrangements where heads lead more than one school.

Further work is to be done on defining the purpose through the eyes of heads and management teams; responding to short-term challenges is our priority this year.

3. 2018/19 PRIORITIES - PROJECTS TO REDUCE THE WORKLOAD OF HEADS

3.1 Nine priorities were identified to be implemented in 2018/19 as a result of discussions with heads and Chairs of Governing Bodies. A specific project was established around each of the priorities with the Business Officers acting as project managers and Education Officers acting as leaders.

3.2 The following is an extract from the Primary and Special Schools Catchment Group, dated 29 November 2018:

"It was noted that Projects to Reduce the Workload of Heads was very encouraging, and thanks was given for the support from the Authority."

3.3 The following provides details about the nine projects:

B1	GOVERNORS
	Who is the customer? Governors and Heads of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Ensure the quality of governance at Gwynedd schools.
	Project Ensure that a high quality training programme is provided for Gwynedd school Governors.
	What has been achieved to date? • *Consultation on training needs with governing bodies.* • *Adapt the training provision for 18/19* • *Offer catchment area training fairs as and when necessary.* • *Research opportunities to develop on-line thematic training*
	Feedback

	There is certainly a need for further training for Governors to be available to them conveniently online, so that Governors can complete the training when convenient and practical for them to do so.

B2	POLICIES
	Who is the customer? Heads of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Ensuring that the policies model is current with key individuals responsible for updating them. Investigate a system for schools to keep policies current with a specific focus on simplifying the procedure and reducing the Heads' workload.
	Project Investigate and agree on an effective system to adopt, update and keep statutory policies current.
	What has been achieved to date? • *Rationalise a list of statutory policies and those recommended by the authority* • *Create a system where it is possible to share the policies with the school logo* • *Statutory policies shared with every school* • *20% of the non-statutory policies shared during the Autumn term.*
	The policies have been accepted very well with a great number having responded in writing to express their appreciation. The content of the jobs policies has currently been shared and schools that have gone through an Estyn inspection recently have stated that they accepted them without challenge.

B3	TRANSLATION
	Who is the customer? Governors and Heads of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Support schools and Governing bodies to implement the language policy while ensuring value for money.
	Project Revise the department's current translation arrangements to reflect the needs and meet the requirements of our schools.
	What has been achieved to date? • *Agreement between Education Translation and the Corporate Translation Unit to trial a translation provision for schools which would provide a written translation service as part of the Service Level Agreement, as well as simultaneous translation service for Governing Body meetings cost-free. The scheme will be piloted from January 2019 onwards.*
	Feedback • *Outstanding service within a tight deadline.*

	- *I would like to thank you for dealing with my request so quickly. Having sent and received back in a short amount of time. Grateful for your work. Thankyou.* - *The percentage of customer satisfaction with the Translation Unit is 100%.*

B4	PETTY CASH
	Who is the customer? Heads and administrative staff of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Reduce the effect of collecting and banking money on the workload of primary schools.
	Project Investigate and agree on a system which will allow Gwynedd schools to become cash-free by the end of March 2019.
	What has been achieved to date? - *Pilot scheme in place in the Eifionydd catchment area which includes all primary and secondary schools.* - *Several schools outside this catchment area have receive support to become cash-free.* - *Identify two catchment areas in Arfon for the next trials, Brynrefail and Bangor.*
	Feedback *The schools in the Eifionydd catchment area report that moving to the cash-free system has been comparatively straightforward with parents seeing the value and convenience of the system after they started using it.* *A few families still cannot pay on-line due to problems with internet connections or mobile phones. We will look at alternative options for this small minority.*

B5	PURCHASING
	Who is the customer? Heads and administrative staff of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Reduce the workload and increase the capacity of the area office by developing an effective purchasing procedure.
	Project Investigate and agree on more effective options in order to order resources and process payments in the most effective way.
	What has been achieved to date? - *The flow of the current process has been mapped in detail to identify unnecessary steps.*

	• *Detailed research has been undertaken to the various e-procurement options.*
	Feedback

B6	REDUCE WORKLOAD
	Who is the customer? Heads and administrative staff of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Reduce workload by adapting current procedural management arrangements. This includes: reporting following sickness; milk, job advertising, DBS, travelling costs and several other aspects.
	Project Investigate alternative options to meet the need in the most effective way.
	What has been achieved to date? • *The need to complete milk forms and lunch books has ended.* • *On-line job advertisement is live and used.* • *Nine primary schools are on the self-service system which means that they can check the DBS date and present travelling costs on-line.*
	Feedback *Many of these minor changes are appreciated by Heads. Disposing of the milk forms, though only one form, is seen as an important step and has set the foundations for moving forward.* *Heads appreciate that the department does not ask anything of them without first considering what effect it will have on workload.*

B7	COMMUNICATION
	Who is the customer? Governors and Heads of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Ensure that we are communicating more effectively with schools and colleagues within the Council and beyond placing a focus on gathering the opinion of stakeholders more systematically.
	Project Establish communication methods which address the following: regular and succinct communication, the image of the department, gathering opinion, clarity around the role of key staff, clarity around the role of partners including GwE, e-mails, use of phones.
	What has been achieved to date?

	• *Newsletter has been updated*
	• *E-mail system has been reviewed to dispose of e-mails*
	• *Establish an education newsletter system*
	• *Phone answering pilot scheme in place and supporting nine schools.*

	Feedback
	The Heads appreciate that the number of e-mails they receive every day has reduced. Improving the e-mail filter and using a monthly education newsletter to share information from various Council departments has contributed to this.
	The schools that are a part of the phone answering scheme praise the service very much with many parents commenting that somebody now answers the phone during the school day. The number of calls dealt with by the office is increasing with fewer matters being referred to the Heads.

B8	**SHARING GOOD PRACTICE**
	Who is the customer? Governors and Heads of Gwynedd Schools.
	Priorities Where appropriate, offer opportunities and a platform for schools to share good practice.
	Project Create a platform to share learning plans, school development plans and good practice. A system such as iGwynedd or Sharepoint where good practice could be uploaded. Agree and reconcile planning frames giving specific attention to the expected detail in the planning work.
	What has been achieved to date? *Initial work has been done to look at examples of good practice within the county.* *Basic research has been carried out also on the suitability of current electronic methods of sharing good practice (intranet; HWB and iGwynedd)* *Work on piloting the sharepoint system under the Welsh Government HWB is in the pipeline (jointly with project B7)*
	Feedback *Feedback from Heads regarding the current usefulness of HWB as a management resource. At present, Heads do not feel that it is convenient or accessible to use them for this type of sharing good practice although substantial use is made of it otherwise.*

B9	**HEADS WHO LEAD MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL**
	Who is the customer? *Heads who lead more than one Gwynedd School.*

	Priorities Support Heads who lead more than one school so that they can continue in the role in the future.
	Project Investigate, agree and trial a model to support Heads who lead more than one school.

	What has been achieved to date?
	
	• *Additional administrative support offered and provided to all heads leading more than one school since September 2018. This support is provided in one of two ways:*
	  i.) Adding hours to the school's current administrative resource
	  ii.) SIMS Officer to provide administrative support to the school
	• *Additional funding allocated to all heads in order to buy support or specialist input, such as:*
	  i.) Mentor
	  ii.) Buying specialist time to bring the School Development Plan priorities together
	  iii.) Hold a networking group for heads who lead more than one school
	  iv.) Support the head with the Governing Bodies and promote an understanding of the role of a head who leads more than one school
	  v.) etc.

	Feedback *The Heads who lead more than one school certainly appreciate the additional administrative support although there are lessons to be learned under the two methods of offering the support. One Head has noted that she was unsure at the beginning of the scheme what work she would be able to transfer to the SIMS Officer but by now she would be lost without the support as it is so valuable.* *All of the Heads who attended the first networking group meeting were glad of the opportunity to be able to discuss with other Heads that are in the same situation and were keen to meet every term in order to look at lessons that the Heads could learn from each other.*

4. **OBSERVATIONS**

   Any comments or questions by members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee are welcomed on:

   - the direction of the Area Education Offices from 2018/19 onwards,
   - defining the purpose of Education in the context of Ffordd Gwynedd,
   - together with the projects to reduce the work load of heads.