

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of Item:	Arfon Post-16 Education
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Beca Brown
Relevant Officer:	Debbie Anne Williams Jones: Assistant Head of Education Department - Corporate Services
Date of meeting:	28 November 2023

1. DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1 The Cabinet is asked to approve Option 2 for the Post-16 Education project in Arfon.
- 1.2 Receive approval from the Cabinet for the Head of the Education Department to hold discussions on revising the memorandum of understanding with the stakeholders that make up the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium with the intention of strengthening the arrangements and report back to the Cabinet with recommendations for amendments that were agreed.
- 1.3 The Cabinet's permission to re-direct a part of the Arfon Post-16 Education project's budget in accordance with this report, to address the financial deficit in Band B projects that cannot be progressed at present due to the insufficient budget for them as a result of increased costs.

2. THE REASON WHY THE CABINET NEEDS TO MAKE THE DECISION

- 2.1 The deadline for submitting business cases for our projects which are part of the Band B envelope, Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, ends in March 2024, and we need to ensure that we have fulfilled our commitments within Band B by then. The Post-16 Education Project is part of the Band B capital envelope.
- 2.2 In March 2020, permission was obtained from the Cabinet to commence an informal engagement process with key stakeholders in order to consider the current post-16 provision and highlight the key considerations in order to co-identify the direction and opportunities to strengthen the post-16 education provision in Arfon. A simple report was drawn up, under the title [Post-16 Education Overview](#) as a basis to the engagement.
- 2.3 To support the engagement, virtual meetings were held with learners, parents, teaching staff and governors during the period to give them an opportunity to voice their opinions

and ask any questions about the field. Six virtual sessions were held, and over 140 stakeholders attended.

2.4 In addition, to encourage as much contribution to the conversation as possible, special virtual sessions were held to gather opinions and ideas from learners in Arfon about the type of post-16 education system that would satisfy the vision and their needs and that of their peers in the future.

2.5 The main messages received from the informal engagement process can be summarised as follows:

- Quality of Education is the main priority.
- ICT should be used to reiterate and support the face-to-face learning.
- That Welsh and bilingual Education is of integral importance (despite some conflicting comments).
- That the capital funding should be used to improve the facilities of our secondary schools in general so that all 11-18 year-old learners can benefit from the investment.
- That there is general objection to any proposal to centralise the provision or have a tertiary provision.
- That many comments were received regarding the provision of GLIM in terms of quality, medium and pastoral care.

2.5 On 7 March 2023 the Cabinet resolved to authorise further work to be undertaken with stakeholders in order to develop potential models for post-16 education in Arfon arising from the informal engagement that was undertaken in the autumn term 2020.

3 THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

The case for changing the Arfon Post-16 Education project is not as strong by today.

3.1 As a result of the Cabinet's decision on 7 March 2023, two working groups were held with the headteachers of Arfon secondary schools in the Summer Term 2023. On the whole, open and constructive discussions were held, led by an external facilitator. Headteachers were asked to consider themselves as leaders representing the interests of all Arfon learners and to try and avoid representing the interests of their individual schools.

3.2 The activity was designed as a scenario which placed headteachers five years in the future. They were asked to imagine that the work of modernising the post-16 education system in Arfon had been completed with the model being acknowledged as the ideal model to emulate by other authorities.

3.3 The headteachers were asked to consider and respond to probing questions, specifically on how they had succeeded, firstly as individual leaders, and report back on what they wished. The second part of the task was to work together to create a common ideal, considering the similarities and most striking differences.

3.4 The following principles were noted by the heads, following a discussion on what the system could be like in the future:

- Fairness for the learners
- Standards
- Welshness
- The voice of the stakeholders
- Joint ownership
- Trying to see the bigger picture
- The impact of any change on the community
- Sustainable system

3.5 The headteachers noted that the existing partnership arrangements (Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Consortium), and collaboration between the schools works well.

3.6 On 13 September 2023, the Education Department shared the conclusions of the two working groups held with Arfon secondary headteachers, which highlighted the reasons why the case for change was not as strong, i.e.:

- Estyn Thematic Report 'Post-16 Partnerships' (January 2021) acknowledging the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium as good practice.
- Estyn Report on Cyngor Gwynedd Education Services (June 2023), noting that there are no obvious shortcomings in the Arfon Post-16 provision, although it is noted that there is a delay in moving forward with this project over the past years.
- Arfon's secondary school A Level Results in the summer 2023 appear to be positive on the whole - although it must be acknowledged that this initial data has not been verified and that variety remains between courses and between organisations. *(It is acknowledged that the results will be validated in October 2023, and that they will not be finalised until December 2023.)*
- Collaboration between Arfon secondary schools is good, and there is no desire to see any change in the system to have a harmful impact on some secondary schools in Arfon.
- Ensuring learner well-being is key, and a key part of that is to enable the learners to continue with their post-16 education in their communities.
- The need to look at the secondary system in its entirety, and that post-16 education cannot be considered in isolation, without considering the impact on KS3 and KS4 (11-16 years) also.
- The need to consider the likely impact of the demographic change on the schools' system in its entirety in the future.

- The challenge of having to present a successful business case to the Welsh Government to release the money (including match funding from the Council) when the case for change is weak, or more likely, the challenge of submitting a successful business case to the Welsh Government in order to continue with the status quo.

3.7 Based on the above conclusions, the Education Department is of the opinion that the above main considerations undermine the original case for change for post-16 education in Arfon and acknowledges that new key considerations influence the original case for change, and thus influence the direction of the project in the future.

3.8 The findings of the working groups evidence that the situation has evolved from looking at the Arfon post-16 education system in isolation and that any change to this system would impact the rest of the Arfon secondary schools' system.

3.9 Therefore, the conclusion of the engagement process, and the clear view of the Headteachers, is that the Post-16 Education provision in Arfon should continue in the six secondary schools.

3.10 Over the coming months, we will re-visit the discussions via the Post-16 Education Consortium and identify the specific steps that need to be taken to be able to build on the existing collaboration. This could mean that some specific sites will require a capital investment in the future, and although we are not clear enough about that at present, we will need to be alive to that when considering the relevant programmes and capital grants in the future.

4 BAND B FUNDING, SUSTAINABLE LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

4.1 At present, beyond the Post-16 Education project, we have another 3 projects in Band B where we do not anticipate that we will be able to realise our ambition for improvements to the schools, based on the fact that there is insufficient budget for them as a result of increased costs.

- 1. Ysgol Hiracl** is the only primary school in the Bangor catchment area which is yet to receive an investment as a part of Band A or Band B funding.
- 2. Bangor Secondary.** In order to build on the substantial improvements that have already been achieved recently at some of the primary schools in Bangor, there is a commitment to invest in the secondary sector in Bangor to ensure a suitable learning environment for Ysgol Tryfan.
- 3. Ysgol Brynrefail.** In order to address the necessary improvements to Ysgol Brynrefail,

additional budget is required for the Condition and Suitability project, Band B, to include Ysgol Brynrefail in the project, and increase the number of schools that are to receive investment.

4.2 If we are unable to move ahead to realise Band B projects soon and within the timetable, the Council would lose the financial commitment it has in principle as a part of Band B to invest in the above schools, and a new Strategic Outline Plan would need to be presented by March 2024 for the Rolling Programme that follows Band B to ensure a new financial commitment by the Welsh Government to invest in the above schools.

4.3 To that end, it is not sensible to invest in the maintenance of these school buildings if no substantial investment in the learning environment is available because the buildings have reached the end of their lifespan and need to be renewed, since they are unsuitable for teaching in the 21st century.

5 ARFON POST-16 PROJECT OPTIONS

5.1 Based on the findings following a period of informal engagement with the stakeholders of the Arfon Post-16 project and holding working groups with the headteachers of Arfon secondary schools, we ask the Cabinet to make a decision on the future of the project based on the options below.

Option 1 - Investing in the existing Post-16 Education System

This option would be a way of sharing the budget between the six secondary schools in Arfon in order to create bespoke post-16 teaching spaces in the form of lecture theatres with the highest quality technology to facilitate hybrid learning. This option would involve a budget of around £2.5m for each school, and it would be a way of ensuring that every secondary school receives a capital investment.

Strengths of Option 1	Weaknesses of Option 1
Every secondary school in Arfon continues with a sixth form, and learners are able to continue to study in their communities, with prominent attention given to their well-being.	Some variety still exists in terms of the quality of the education and learners' experiences.
Every secondary school in Arfon receives a capital investment.	The capital investment would not make a significant difference to the schools' learning environments, and it would not ensure that the secondary schools in Arfon

	have resources that are as attractive as the substantial capital investment from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.
	It would be challenging to submit a successful business case based on the status quo to secure the funding from the Welsh Government.
	Restricting the capital investment to the post-16 element alone would be an investment in a void separate from the remainder of the needs of the schools' system in Arfon and would be a way to not securing best value as the budget is spread so thinly.
New learning spaces and hybrid learning technology available at each site for post-16 education.	There is no guarantee that the schools would make full and appropriate use of the new learning spaces and the hybrid learning technology, and it would be difficult to enforce that since hybrid learning is not an obvious part of the existing Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium, nor is it a priority for schools when planning their schools' post-16 curriculum.

Option 2 - Re-direct the Arfon Post-16 Education Budget

Currently, there are another three projects in Band B which cannot be proceeded since there is an insufficient budget for them as a result of increased costs.

i.) **Ysgol Hiraël Project**

A budget of £3m has been confirmed in order to make the required improvements to Ysgol Hiraël. However, as a result of commissioning proposed improvements to the school, and as a result of increased costs, it is anticipated that the cost of realising the improvements to Ysgol Hiraël would be £6.2m (with a potential contribution of £700k for the Childcare element). Therefore, there is a shortfall of £2.5m in the Ysgol Hiraël project budget at present, which prevents us from being able to proceed.

ii.) **Ysgol Tryfan Project**

Originally, the Bangor Phase 2 envelope was £18m (without earmarked match funding), however, £3m of this had already been approved in order to make improvements to Ysgol Hiraël, presuming that the match funding from the Council's Asset Management Plan would be approved. This means that the original budget of £18m has reduced to £15m for the Bangor Phase 2 project. A budget of £15m has therefore been committed in principle in order to make substantial improvements to Ysgol Tryfan. However, the budget is subject to the

submission of a successful business case before the Welsh Government, as well as securing and prioritising match funding from the Council's Asset Management Plan. Based on the current designs, and in order to be able to respond to all needs of Ysgol Tryfan, it is anticipated that the cost of realising improvements to Ysgol Tryfan is £18m. Therefore, there is a shortfall of £3m in the budget of the Ysgol Tryfan project, which prevents us from being able to move on at present.

iii.) Condition and Suitability Project - to include Ysgol Brynrefail

In March 2023, a business case was submitted to the Welsh Government for the final stage of the Condition and Suitability project, Band B, Sustainable Learning Communities Programme. At that time, due to an increase in construction costs, it was agreed to omit some schools from the project. Ysgol Brynrefail was identified as a school to be omitted from the project due to the possibility of receiving an investment from other sources. Recently, the Property Development Team has reconsidered the required improvements needed at Ysgol Brynrefail, and it is now anticipated that the estimated cost of these improvements will be £2.6m. No budget has been noted to meet this need thus far.

5.3 For clarity, here is the financial situation of Band B at present.

Project	Budget available today	Additional funding required	Budget after varying the envelope
Ysgol Hirael	£3,000,000	£2,500,000	£5,500,000
Ysgol Tryfan (Phase 2 Bangor)	£15,000,000	£3,000,000	£18,000,000
Condition and suitability to include Ysgol Brynrefail	£4,946,618	£2,600,000	£7,546,618
Arfon Post-16	£14,800,000	£0	£6,700,000
TOTAL	£37,746,618	£8,100,000	£37,746,618

6 VIEWS OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

6.1 As a result of all above considerations in the context of post-16 education and the rest of the Band B programme, Sustainable Learning Communities Programme, the Education Department is of the view that there is no sufficient case for change for the Post-16 Education project in Arfon by now, and there would be no guaranteed success for a business case in submitting a bid to the value of up to £14.8m in order to continue with the status

quo. Also, it is unlikely that sharing the budget between the six schools based on the current market prices would lead to a significant change in the learning environment.

- 6.2 Therefore, the favoured option of the Education Department is Option 2 since it is a means to address the actual needs of Ysgol Hiraef, Ysgol Tryfan and Ysgol Brynrefail, and makes a genuine difference to the learning environment and learner experiences at these three schools. By re-directing the funding of the Post-16 Education project, there is match funding to realise the improvements to these schools, from receiving Welsh Government approval.

7 BID TO THE WELSH GOVERNMENT FOR AN ADAPTATION TO THE BAND B BUDGET

- 7.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision, permission will be required from the Welsh Government to transfer £8.1m within the Band B envelope in order to proceed with Ysgol Hiraef projects, Bangor Secondary - mainly Ysgol Tryfan and Ysgol Brynrefail and submit a business case to the Welsh Government in order to release the funding.
- 7.2 A request to transfer a budget of £8.1m from the Arfon Post-16 Project to the 3 projects has been submitted to Welsh Government on 2 November 2023. There will be a need to confirm the Cabinet's decision before the meeting of the Government's Investment Panel on 14 December 2023, so that they consider supporting the application to transfer funding to the Ysgol Hiraef project, Bangor Secondary – Ysgol Tryfan mainly and Ysgol Brynrefail from another project in Band B, Sustainable Learning Communities Programme.

8 NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision and the Welsh Government's support to transfer £8,100,000 from the Arfon Post-16 Project budget from the Sustainable Learning Communities Programme (Band B) envelope in order to invest in Ysgol Hiraef, Bangor Secondary - Ysgol Tryfan mainly and Ysgol Brynrefail.
- 8.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision in 1.3 above, and following that, the support of the Welsh Government to transfer the budget to the 3 Band B projects as noted, it is anticipated that it would be possible to proceed immediately to submit Business Cases to the Welsh Government in order to release the funds to allow us to address the increase in construction costs and realise our ambition.
- 8.3 After receiving the Cabinet's decision on the future of the Arfon Post-16 Education project, the Education Department will update the key stakeholders as appropriate.

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

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The act imposes a well-being duty on public bodies which is aimed at achieving 7 well-being goals which are a Wales that is prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture where the Welsh language flourishes and which responsible on a global level. As part of the duty the Council has published well-being objectives which outline how we will improve well-being in the "Gwynedd Plan 2018-2023". The recommendations have been developed and prepared within the framework of the Act and it is intended to consider these objectives and principles when moving the plan forward.

Equality

The Authority has a responsibility to promote equality together with general duties to ensure fairness and foster good relationships. The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to consider the effect of any change to a new policy or procedure on people with protected equality characteristics, namely race, gender, disability, language, religion or belief and age.

An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been drawn up as part of the work of illustrating a current overview of the post-16 education provision in Gwynedd, and the Assessment will be updated regularly as a result of further discussions. See **Appendix 1**. The findings from the assessment indicate that it is premature to identify any impact at this point. Whatever the direction of the work, we will ensure that consideration is given to any impact on equality.

9 ANY CONSULTATIONS HELD PRIOR TO THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE DECISION

9.1 An informal engagement process was held in the Autumn term 2020 with the key stakeholders of the Arfon post-16 Education project in order to look at the provision and highlight the key considerations in order to identify the direction and opportunities to strengthen the post-16 education provision in Arfon.

9.2 During this informal engagement period, engagement sessions were held with:

- Parents
- Learners
- Governors
- Headteachers and all staff from Secondary Schools in Arfon

9.3 The conclusions of the Informal Engagement process were reported before the [Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2021](#).

10 VIEWS OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

10.1 Chief Finance Officer

“I believe that the proposal is reasonable, and I have no objection to the decision sought. The reallocation of resources to the schemes at Hirael, Tryfan and Brynrefail schools makes sense from a financial perspective in the context of the rising costs of those schemes and given that the case for change for the Arfon Post-16 Education project is no longer as strong as it previously was.”

10.2 Monitoring Officer

“This report has been the subject of input from the Legal Services. No observations to add from a propriety perspective.”

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment