

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

1 SEPTEMBER 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION

STRATEGIC REVIEW INTO THE DEVELOPMENT AND RATIONALISATION OF THE CURRICULUM AND ESTATE PROVISION OF PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND POST 16 EDUCATION

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the work of the schools task group, and to seek approval to appoint a strategic partner to support the development of a Strategy that will provide an evidence based rationale for change and will form a basis in order to reach informed conclusions about the nature of provision of primary, secondary and post 16 education and the need to add, remove or relocate school places.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 These proposals are related to the Corporate Plan and, in particular, in the Corporate Plan Improvement priority two and priority six:

- Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement
- Making best use of resources

3. Background

Schools Task Group

3.1 In August 2014 the Children's Directorate established the Schools Task Group to consider the way forward for schools within the County Borough and to ensure we continue to plan for and provide a high quality education system for our young people, that gives them the very best opportunities for their lives in the 21st century and builds upon the excellence and good practice that we already have in our county.

3.2 The rationale for the task group was agreed in the context of falling rolls, a large number of surplus primary and secondary school places, a number of headteachers reaching retirement age in the near future, and financial constraints leading to a growing number of schools in a deficit budget situation, which mean that maintaining the status quo may not be an option but at the same time acknowledging the great variety and diversity across the county which needs to be taken into account in any future plans. A strategic approach for sustainable provision is required.

3.3 Further to this rationale, there is a need to increase the pace of school improvement with a particular focus on outcomes for groups of vulnerable learners, narrowing the wide attainment gap between learners who have free school meals and those who do not receive free school meals.

- 3.4 The strategic approach will be shaped by the statutory guidance on the 'Federation Process of Maintained Schools in Wales' which sets out a more formal way of extending existing collaboration and promoting closer working relationships, and is the principal initiative for achieving formal partnership working amongst schools to improve performance and narrow the attainment gap for deprived pupils. Federations enable schools to work together through a formal structured process by sharing a governing body that will make decisions in the best interest of all the schools, staff and pupils in that federation.
- 3.5 Planning the future of the learning community across the County Borough needs to be a collaborative process with a range of stakeholders. The Schools Task Group was made up of primary and secondary headteachers, governor representatives, Welsh medium sector representatives, Diocesan representatives, local officers and an independent advisor. Terms of Reference were agreed, and the group was tasked with carrying out five pieces of work, with a view to producing an option appraisal paper and to make recommendations which could be consulted on.
- 3.6 The Task Group established a set of principles and criteria to underpin the future of education and learning provision which may be applied to establish a strategy for the next ten years (Appendix A). These were approved by Cabinet on 3rd March 2015. These criteria provide a framework upon which decisions may be considered and will contribute to the formation of a draft model of schools' provision prior to full consultation. It may be that alternative models can be designed for consultation. The Schools Task Group has taken into account the different dynamics of Bridgend County Borough –towns, rural areas, valleys and such like and other issues as they arise.
- 3.7 These principles have been developed to support an overarching strategy for school improvement that aims to provide 'fit for purpose' schools capable of delivering high quality educational experiences for all pupils. It is in this context that the principles are to be applied. They provide clarity of purpose and transparency of approach, and identify important factors that will be taken into account in considering all proposals for change, including, where necessary, school reorganisations.

Workstreams

- 3.8 The Schools Task Group established six workstreams:

1. Analytics

This group analysed the data and prepared calculations of projected numbers for the future and secured a high degree of confidence from stakeholders. Surplus capacity within schools was also reviewed.

2. School Modelling

This group has researched a variety of school delivery models to facilitate raising standards and have developed a menu of delivery models including hard federations, soft federations, all-through schools and amalgamations.

3. Post 16 Provision

This group has considered the options for post 16 provision.

4. Welsh Medium Provision

This group has explored potential future developments related to Welsh medium provision in the borough.

5. Catchment Review

This group has considered a proposed methodology for revising/determining catchment areas.

6. 21st Century School Modernisation

This group has worked to develop criteria which may determine/influence decisions about which schools should form part of the School Modernisation programme in the future to meet the needs of the future.

Brief Summary of Findings of Each Workstream

Analytics

- 3.9 Analysing pupil admissions data, this group considered the calculations of projected numbers for the future. The process for calculating pupil numbers was interrogated to ensure there was a high degree of confidence from headteachers. Surplus capacity within schools was also reviewed. The workstream found that the projected pupil number process was robust and accurate.

School Modelling

- 3.10 The group researched and considered a variety of options including: all-through 3-16 / 3-19 schools; hard federations; soft federations and closures/amalgamations of schools. A menu of delivery models outlining the potential benefits and drawbacks of federations, 3-16 schools and school closures was drawn up by the group to use as guidance for any further decision making.

Post 16 Provision

- 3.11 In parallel with the school modelling and Welsh medium workstreams, there has been further consideration of Post 16 options via the Partnership Steering Group (PSG) involving secondary headteachers and senior managers from Bridgend College as well as LA officers. This has been followed up with individual meetings with each school and the college to ensure that all views have been fully captured regarding options related to tertiary, sixth form or hybrid models of post 16 education. The group have considered the case for reorganisation and agree that the current arrangements cannot be maintained.

Welsh Medium Provision

- 3.12 The Welsh medium workstream was established to consider the future viability of Welsh medium provision. Recognising the need to cater for demand and over-capacity experienced at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr and the importance of attracting sufficient numbers of pupils to enter Welsh medium provision at nursery/foundation phase, the group have suggested establishing a starter-class within the grounds of an existing English medium school where there is surplus capacity. The group is also exploring a potential solution to Post 16 Options related to Welsh medium provision in the borough via formal collaboration and course sharing with Welsh medium schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf and with Bridgend College. Feasibility work is currently being conducted.

Catchment Review

- 3.13 The group worked on a revised set of principles. These were identified as:

- The number of pupils in catchments should match the capacity of the school (as defined by the Pupil Admission Number, PAN).
- Schools should be located within their own catchment area.
- There should be no shared catchment areas.
- Wherever possible addresses should be allocated to a school within the statutory distance using an approved safe walking route.

A revised methodology was explored that could be considered and consulted upon during any revision of existing school catchment areas.

21st Century School Modernisation

- 3.14 The purpose of this workstream has been to consider the council's school estate, and from a buildings perspective, how it can contribute towards educational attainment. The work of the group being to assess the factors which should influence future programmes for new builds, school remodeling works and school estate management, having particular regard to Band B of the 21st Century School Modernisation scheme. A priority matrix/map has been produced highlighting criteria to determine building investment based on: running costs, maintenance backlog, condition, surplus pupil places and overcrowding. This information has been entered onto a spreadsheet and a weighted scoring produced. Based on this scoring the condition of the building and the current and projected school places have been geographically mapped out. The plan produced highlights those schools with the greatest need, where investment should be prioritised in terms of improving the buildings and planning of pupil numbers. However, this work will need to link and inform the workstreams relating to catchment, school models, leadership, post 16, Welsh medium schools and faith schools. Coordination of this information will help determine where and how investment will be made in our schools.

Interdependencies

- 3.15 In each workstream there has been recognition of the fact that a strategic response from the Local Authority will only be possible by working together and combining the work of each group; it cannot be devised in isolation. A workshop on interdependencies found that none of the issues could be tackled in isolation. The findings for each of the individual workstreams were reported to the Schools Task Group Board. It is apparent that these cannot be viewed in isolation and therefore the interdependencies between them have been given some consideration. Presented as a problem solving exercise, eight 'problems' were identified from the emerging themes from each strand of work, as follows:

1. Standards

Continual drive to raise standards

2. Leadership/Succession

Headteacher demographics/importance of high calibre leaders/fewer Deputy Headteachers achieving NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) the qualification essential to become a headteacher

3. Finance

Budget constraints

4. Buildings

Significant maintenance backlog of circa £30m.

5. Pupil Demographics

Surplus capacity in some schools/overcapacity in others

6. Post 16

Viability of small sixth forms

7. Transport

Proposed changes to learner travel

8. Welsh Medium

Meeting growing demand in some areas and ensuring viability at post 16.

3.16 Links can be drawn between each of these strands to demonstrate the interdependencies between them. For example:

- each of these strands impacts on standards;
- finance has a bearing on each of the strands;
- options for Post 16 provision may affect/be affected by the provision in primary schools/Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

3.17 The work presented by the individual workstreams can assist in offering solutions to each of these 'problems'. For example:

- Catchment changes may be considered as a solution to surplus capacity in some areas or to finance associated with learner travel.
- School models/amalgamations may be considered as a solution to costs associated with building maintenance backlogs and funding that is not needed in this area may be invested elsewhere to drive up standards.
- School models/federation may be considered as a solution to leadership capacity, providing greater scope to attract high calibre leaders.
- Removing sixth forms from schools may be considered as an opportunity to re-organise provision into 'all-through 3-16' schools.
- Increasing Welsh medium provision at nursery/reception age may be considered as a long-term solution to viability of Welsh medium provision at post 16.

3.18 The list of interdependencies is complex and extensive.

4. Current situation / proposal

Developing a Strategy

4.1 The new principles provide a structured approach to aid in consideration of the rationalisation of education provision in Bridgend. The principles and the strategy is an approach that will provide evidence based rationale for change and will form a valuable basis in order to reach informed conclusions about the nature of provision and the need to add, remove or relocate school places. The approach will support the drive for improved pupil outcomes through the Central South Consortium by securing a more sustainable and effective pattern of provision than exists in all areas of the County Borough at present.

4.2 The purpose of the strategy is to provide the context in which to consider decisions relating to the organisation of school places in Bridgend and to plan the future delivery of a managed programme for change. The nature of change in school organisation will mean that some schemes can be affected within a short timescale whilst others will only be achieved over an extended period over the next 5-10 years.

- 4.3 Proposals will be clearly linked to corporate priorities articulated in the Council's plans and policies. They will focus upon making the most effective, efficient and flexible use of finite resources in order to raise educational standards and support continuous improvement in the performance of our schools.
- 4.4 In addition the strategy will need to address key issues and agreed priorities at both primary and secondary levels in areas that include:
- Welsh medium provision and the Welsh Education Strategic Plan
 - School Leadership
 - Curriculum and partnership developments, e.g. 14-19
 - Sixth Form Provision
 - Surplus places/overcrowding
 - Poor condition surveys
 - Reducing school budgets
- 4.5 The Schools Task Group has provided a useful foundation on which to build, providing a helpful insight into pressures faced within Bridgend and beyond. The local context has been explored in some depth, although at this stage the outcomes have been generic in nature. Every workstream has recognised the need to bring their work together in order to develop a coherent strategy for Bridgend. It is clear from the above exercise that a strategic review is required to consider the full range of interdependencies and to make recommendations to suit specific scenarios.
- 4.6 Due to the limited expertise and capacity in house, and the amount of work to be undertaken it is recommended that the council source a strategic partner to contribute to the development of a strategy.
- 4.7 It is expected that the strategic partner will carry out a Strategic Review into the Development and Rationalisation of the Curriculum and Estate Provision of Primary, Secondary and Post 16 Education, including the findings of each of the workstreams and taking account of the specific local context of Bridgend, to deliver an options appraisal paper to make recommendations which can be presented to Cabinet and consulted upon. .
- 4.8 This specification for the review will include:
1. scoping out Band B for the school modernisation programme and a timeline to facilitate proposed changes in a logical sequence;
 2. determining options around suitable leadership school models to meet the needs of each school in context for consultation;
 3. a sustainable catchment area methodology and recommendations for catchment area changes;
 4. determining options for post 16 provision for the future to enable consultation under the statutory code; and
 5. delivering improved financial modelling in each cluster in the context of Bridgend County Borough's demographic changes.
- 4.9 The review will consider a range of options, and these may include:
- some secondary schools may not have a sixth form;

- some schools may operate within federations;
- some schools may become all through schools for the age range of 3-16 or 3-19; and
- some schools may not have a non-teaching head.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

5.2 A full Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out following the formal consultation stage which will give stakeholders the opportunity to comment on any equality issues

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The costs have not yet been identified, but it is likely to be around £20,000. Bridgend College have agreed to part fund the cost of securing a strategic partner, although the amount as not yet been agreed. Any shortfall will be funded from the 14-19 revenue budget. A procurement process will begin following the working up of a clear specification for the work.

8. Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 8.1 approve the sourcing of a strategic partner to support the development of a Strategy that will provide an evidence based rationale for change and will form a basis in order to reach informed conclusions about the nature of provision and the need to add, remove or relocate school places;
- 8.2 approve the 5 outline areas for inclusion in the specification as set out in paragraph 4.8
- 8.3 approve the review as set out in paragraph 4.9.

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Background documents

Appendix A: Cabinet Report: PRINCIPLES DOCUMENT (March 2015)