

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** **LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **THURSDAY, 25<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**

**REPORT BY:** **CHIEF OFFICER, EDUCATION AND YOUTH**

**SUBJECT:** **UPDATE ON SCHOOL MODERNISATION**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To update members on the progress made with School Modernisation.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 Flintshire County Council has a responsibility to review and modernise all school provision, to make sure that we are providing the best possible opportunities for learners, so that they can achieve their full potential. There are a large number of surplus school places in some areas of the County, whilst other areas don't have enough places to meet the local demand. The need to maintain a large number of ageing school buildings and the supporting infrastructure is unsustainable. We need to review our school provision to:

- make sure our education provision is both high quality and sustainable;
- improve the quality of school buildings and facilities; and
- provide the right number of school places, of the right type, in the right locations.

2.02 The Council does this in line with the Welsh Government's statutory School Organisation Code which can be accessed at <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/130719-school-organisation-codes-en.pdf>

2.03 The task involves:

- forecasting pupil numbers;
- managing the supply of school places;
- managing demand through admissions and appeals procedures;

- ensuring that a framework is in place to secure improvement through school organisational change;
  - being prepared to take difficult decisions; and
  - monitoring and evaluating the impact of decisions
- 2.04 The Council reviews and modernise the way education is delivered through a rolling programme of area reviews. It reviews schools on an area by area basis, to make sure that when changes are made to school organisation, account is taken of any potential impact on other schools nearby.
- 2.05 When the Council carries out an area review, it always consults with children, young people, parents and carers connected with schools in that area. This is so that stakeholder can have their say and be involved in decisions made about local schools.
- 2.06 The outcomes of an area review can include merging of existing schools through a combination of school federations, merging on one preferred site or the building of new area schools and the closure of schools that are no longer fit for purpose. Achieving this can require substantial capital investment, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, to invest in our school infrastructure and ensure that school buildings are suitable and provide an effective legacy for future generations.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.01 Overall, the outcomes being achieved by Flintshire learners compare positively with other Authorities in Wales and continue to improve. There have also been some impressive examples of modernising education in Flintshire in recent years, which have proven to deliver improved opportunities and outcomes for learners. Examples include:
- all through primary provision across Flintshire (including nursery class provision);
  - new Primary Schools in Connah's Quay and Shotton; and
  - new Primary and Secondary Specialist Schools in Flint.

There are further exciting major capital investments in children and young people's education planned for Holywell, Queensferry and at the new post 16 centre in Connah's Quay.

- 3.02 There also remains a pressing case for continuing to renew local educational provision. Key issues for the Council include:
- continuing to raise educational standards;

- creating the conditions for school leaders to succeed;
- ensuring that school buildings are attractive learning and working environments;
- reducing the number of surplus places and the inequity of variation in cost per pupil; and
- providing resilience against falling revenue funding.

3.03 Our aim is that children and young people in Flintshire will develop essential life skills, a strong desire for lifelong learning and be very well prepared for the world of work. All children and young people will be supported to progress through the different stages of their education. Every child and young person will be entitled to a learning programme that will be personalised to make the most of his or her abilities. Children and young people will learn in an exciting and innovative range of styles and settings. These will include vocational, enterprise, voluntary, spiritual, cultural and sporting learning experiences. School organisation will provide opportunities for Welsh and English medium provision, and also faith provision.

3.04 Flintshire County Council is committed to continuing to raise standards, with key tasks including securing:

- high expectations and a clear focus on improving teaching, learning and attainment in all school communities;
- all resources available to schools being focused on improving outcomes for children and young people in a context of annual budget pressures;
- a consistent approach to the collection, analysis and use of assessment information, including tracking systems, to target support and interventions; and
- continued commitment to the development of school staff.

3.05 Successful schools have strong leadership at all levels. The challenges associated with leading and managing a school have increased substantially during recent years and the expectations are continuing to increase. The leadership expectations on Headteachers in ensuring teaching and learning is of the highest quality, evaluating and raising standards, developing robust self-evaluation procedures and ensuring the continuous professional development of staff, are substantial. At the same time, the number of applicants for headship posts is declining, particularly in our smallest schools.

- 3.06 The Hill Review envisaged that more schools should be structured (through federation or review) so that they are large enough to have a Headteacher without substantial regular teaching commitments. This would give the Headteacher the necessary time to undertake the key leadership role within the school or federation. Schools also need to be sufficiently resilient in size to ensure suitable leadership development opportunities in individual schools to enable effective succession planning.
- 3.07 Estyn (the education inspectorate in Wales) note that “improvements in the quality of buildings have a very beneficial effect on the quality of teaching and morale of staff which has a positive effect on pupil performance.” The challenge for the Council is to provide the right number of places in the right locations. In responding to this challenge, the Council needs to make the best educational provision for its area, taking into account current provision, community issues, demographic factors, the conditions of schools buildings, surplus places and the quality of the teaching and learning environment. The Council is committed to ensuring that school buildings will meet twenty-first century expectations, are fit for purpose and are a community resource.
- 3.08 There are serious shortcomings in the current suitability of a number of buildings, including pressing health and safety issues that question the long term viability of some of our existing schools. The current backlog of repairs and maintenance remains high at £25.6m. School organisational change remains the key tool available to Councils to address such deficits.
- 3.09 Our modernisation programmes needs to deliver high quality environments that inspire users to learn. In new school buildings and refurbishments we will endeavour to deliver:
- buildings and grounds that are welcoming to both the school and the community whilst providing adequate security;
  - internal learning spaces (classrooms and other areas) that are well proportioned, fit for purpose and meet the needs of the curriculum;
  - flexible design to allow for short-term changes of layout and use, and for long-term expansion or contraction;
  - good environmental conditions throughout, including optimum levels of natural light and ventilation for different activities;
  - well-designed external spaces offering a variety of different settings for leisure, learning and sport;
  - a sustainable approach to design, construction and environmental servicing;

- good use of the site, balancing the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and cars and facilitating community access to facilities; and
- maximising the use of new technologies to support effective learning and efficient administration and management.

3.10 The percentage of surplus places in Flintshire schools continues to remain above the Welsh Government target of 10%. Since funding for schools is largely driven by pupil numbers, surplus capacity means a disproportionate amount of funding is spent on infrastructure (such as buildings) and the “fixed costs” of running a school (such as leadership and administration). This funding could be better used to ensure that pupil teacher ratios are minimised to make a direct difference to learners. As public service funding reduces over forthcoming years the case for reprioritisation and change becomes even more compelling.

3.11 The Band A schemes of the 21st Century Schools Programme are progressing according to schedule. On 13<sup>th</sup> August 2014 the Minister approved statutory notices to:

- change the age range of Connah’s Quay and Holywell High Schools from 11-18 to 11-16; and
- change the age range of John Summers High School from 11-18 to 3-16 (incorporating Queensferry Primary School).

In reaching his decision, and taking into account all matters brought to his attention, the Minister was satisfied that the proposals will be likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area, whilst ensuring the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum, and will reduce travel time during the day by providing young people with a wider choice of post-16 provision located at one site. The Minister was also satisfied that the proposals will contribute to the transformation agenda and the aims of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure by strengthening sustainable provision.

3.12 The Minister was satisfied that the local authority had met the statutory requirements in respect of consultation on the proposals. School councils and individuals were consulted on the proposal, with consultations with young people at the affected schools conducted by officers of the Children and Young People Partnership.

3.13 The County Council now needs to complete the Full Business Case for capital funding as its next task. A copy of the Minister’s adjudication letter has been placed in the Members’ library.

- 3.14 Cabinet also commissioned local consultation on the principles and actions needed to address sustainability of post-16 provision in Saltney. The current consortium arrangements which enable the school to meet the Learning and Skills measure in respect of the post-16 curriculum will come to an end with the opening of the Connah's Quay Hub in 2016.
- 3.15 Community responses were generally negative about developing 3-16 provision, including Saltney Ferry Primary School, at this point. Responses were more positive about developing 11-16 provision at St David's High School. Issuing a proposal on the latter option would also enable further development work focused on securing closer working relationships between local primary and secondary schools, together with further consideration of primary organisation options. The outcomes from the Community Consultation are due to be reported to the County Council's Cabinet in September.
- 3.16 As previously reported, the County Council now needs to complete its annual commissioning plan for post 16 education. It is also timely for the Council to begin to consider potential strategic 'Band B' schemes for submission to Welsh Government for funding through the next tranche of 21st Century Schools. This funding is not expected to be available until 2018. There is also a need to commission further review work in relation to schools as some have high percentages of surplus places. Some have high backlogs of repairs and maintenance. Some have shortcomings in terms of outcomes for the pupils. The criteria of the School Modernisation Strategy will be applied in order to prioritise this work.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That members note the progress outlined in the report.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 The 21st Century Schools programme current tranche is funded via the Welsh government and Flintshire Local Authority funding package of £64.2m.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 The establishing of new learning environments, particularly in those communities first areas can have a positive effect on the outcomes for children and young people in those areas. It is recognised that improved learning environments have a positive effect on outcomes for learners generally.

## **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 New Schools are designed to meet with the requirements of the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), which ensures the highest standards in terms of environmental impact, and the incorporation of the latest technologies in the efficient use of energy, which will reduce future revenue costs for the schools.

## **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 There are no equalities implications from this report.

## **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 Re-organisations of schools will impact in various ways on the personnel employed. Whenever there is an impact on the workforce of school modernisation proposals, the Flintshire County Council policies related to personnel matters together with the National Teachers Pay and Conditions documents and adhered to in order to minimise any negative effect.

## **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 No consultations are required for this report.

## **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 No consultations are required for this report.

## **12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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