

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY 20TH JANUARY 2015**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (EDUCATION AND YOUTH)**

SUBJECT: **SCHOOL MODERNISATION STRATEGY**

1.00 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To consider and approve the updated 'Strategy for the Modernisation of Flintshire Schools'.

2.00 **BACKGROUND**

2.01 The refreshed 'Strategy for the Modernisation of Flintshire Schools' updates the original School Modernisation Strategy document of 4th January 2010 to reflect progress with the 21st Century Schools programme and local system developments.

2.02 Since the original Strategy was introduced, Flintshire County Council has undertaken the following school organisation projects to increase efficiency and effectiveness within the school system:

- new primary school in Connahs Quay (Caer Nant) – September 2012 - £7.5M;
- closure of Ysgol Rhes y Cae school - September 2013;
- closure of the Croft nursery and transfer of provision to the neighbouring Queensferry and St. Ethelwolds primary schools – July 2014;
- amalgamations to promote educational continuity, reducing the number of schools and governing bodies from 14 separate infant and junior schools to 7 primary schools;
- new Welsh medium outreach provision in Shotton - September 2014; and
- construction of new Shotton Primary School (Ty Ffynnon) September 2014 - £6.5m.

2.03 Work also progresses well on the 21st Century schools Band A projects at Holywell and Connahs Quay. The John Summers project is subject to current pause and review.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 It is a core responsibility of Local Authorities with education responsibilities to manage the supply of school places. Whilst the level of surplus places in Flintshire is similar to the Welsh Average, it is significantly higher than WAO advice and the Welsh Government target, which are both 10%. This means that resources that could be focused on teaching and learning are instead used to pay for the upkeep of buildings, leadership and administrative costs that are inefficient. Key drivers for school modernisation and reorganisation include the need to address:

- educational improvement;
- resilient school leadership;
- securing suitable learning and working environments;
- addressing unfilled places; and
- addressing diminishing revenue resources.

3.02 Flintshire County Council will continue to develop its strategies to ensure that we are providing school places that are fit for purpose in the 21st century. The Council continues to work in partnership with the Welsh Government to maximise the investment opportunities that are available to local communities.

3.03 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 school buildings. 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.

3.04 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.

3.05 We review and modernise the way education is delivered through a rolling programme of area reviews. We review schools on an area by area basis, to make sure that when we make changes to school organisation, we take into account any potential impact on other

schools nearby.

3.06 When we carry out an area review, we always consult with children, young people, parents and carers connected with schools in that area. This is so that they can have their say and be involved in decisions made about our local schools.

3.07 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 improve school infrastructure, to ensure that school buildings are suitable and provide an effective legacy for future generations.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That Cabinet consider and approve the updated School Modernisation Strategy.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The Welsh Government have indicated that £500million is available for the roll out of Band B of the 21st Century Schools programme from 2019, following completion of the national initial phase of the programme. It is expected that WG will provide further information in the next few months on planning for Band B.

5.02 However, it should be noted that WG funding criteria for 21st Century schools will only potentially be available for modernisation projects and that refurbishment or maintenance projects are not eligible for grant via this programme.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 The establishing of new learning environments, particularly in 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 community expectations, opportunities and outcomes for learners.

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.

- 7.02 A positive impact would occur in the Authority's Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) from new and refurbished sustainable schools.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 There are no equalities implications from this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 Reorganisations of schools impacts in various ways on the personnel employed. Whenever there is an impact on the workforce of school modernisation proposals, 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. No change takes place without workforce consultation and engagement.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 Individual local area reviews are individually commissioned by the Council's Cabinet. Their format meets the requirements of national statutory guidance underpinning school organisational change processes. Local area reviews involve consultation and engagement with children and young people, staff, governors and wider community.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.01 Consultation and engagement on the refreshed strategy has been undertaken with:
- Primary & Secondary Head teachers Federations
 - Diocesan Directors; and
 - Neighbouring Authorities.

12.00 APPENDICES

Appendix A – ADEW POSP – Benchmarking data 2014

Appendix B – Strategy for School Modernisation

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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