

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2015**

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

SUBJECT: **QUEENSFERRY CAMPUS PROJECT - PAUSE & REVIEW**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01 To inform Cabinet of the results of the pause and review for the Queensferry Campus project and to make recommendations on the capital business case and next steps.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 The pause and review of the Queensferry Campus project was held due to concern around resilience of the critical data required to support submission of the capital business case to Welsh Government (WG) for funding through the 21st Century Schools programme. The Council made a policy commitment to develop a business case for a 3-16 school and replacement campus for John Summers. The business case has to meet a number of tests if it is proceed and the latest data brought into question the viability of the project.
- 2.02 Admissions to John Summers High School fell to 50 (less than 2 forms of entry) (projection was 71) in 2014 with larger year groups (73 for Y11) leaving the school with compounding budgeting issues, given that school budgets are to a large extent determined by a multiplier of pupil numbers. Through the 2015 admissions process the school have 73 first choice preferences. The governors predicted that they would have an intake of 94 pupils. In Flintshire, as in any other Council, such a low intake would be reason enough to review the school's position, noting the pattern of parental preferences for school admissions and availability of alternative places within the area.
- 2.03 The 2010 and updated 2015 School Modernisation policy both state that admissions to secondary schools should be at four form entry (120 students per admission year group) or 600 places in total for the 11-16 age range. Such numbers are required for a school to be able to sustain the curriculum breadth required under the Learning and Skills Measure.
- 2.04 The basis for the original case for capital investment was that by 2019 there would be three forms of entry and, with the proposed Northern Gateway development, this would increase the school population to an

eventual four form entry school of around 600 places.

- 2.05 The Welsh Minister raised concern over the projected school numbers in his correspondence confirming statutory proposals dated 13th August 2014.
- 2.06 National benchmarking data confirms that Flintshire has 2113 unfilled places within the secondary sector. This remains above the Ministerial and local target of 10% (source: ADEW Planning of school places National benchmarking data September 2014). This means that resources are being diverted from direct support for teaching and learning to the upkeep of buildings and administration within the County.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 A series of meetings have been held between officers and the Governors of Queensferry Primary School and John Summers High School. A representative group of Governors was also formed to test the resilience of data and to consider whether other information was available that may support a capital business case submission.
- 3.02 The Council presented the representative group of Governors the following data available as Background Document A:
- John Summers High – Pupil Projections (September 2014)
 - John Summers High – Transfer Rates into year 7 (2012 & 2013)
 - Flintshire Primary schools: LA statistics (September 2013)
 - Northern Gateway housing yield forecasts
 - Birth data – Queensferry, Shotton & Sealand 2007-2019
 - Average Transfer into year 7 2013/12
 - Birth Trends in SPPA areas using birth data (2005-2012)
- 3.03 The methodology underpinning the information (in Background Document B) was also shared and considered.
- 3.04 The Representative Group of Governors provided their own projections (in Background Document C) in response. The Group's projections are based largely on an assumption that the school will attract 80% of all pupils from their nearest primary schools. This would mean that a high proportion of families would choose places at John Summers High School in preference to existing choices within the local area. Additionally, differing assumptions are made over the yield of pupils gained from the proposed Northern Gateway development (in Background Document D)
- 3.05 Figures provided by the Group vary significantly from the Council's. The Council's data on transfer rates is based on actual 'real time' movements from primary to secondary over a two year period is as follows:-

2013/14 AVERAGE TRANSFER INTO YEAR 7

School Name	Percentage % transfer
Queensferry	64%
Sealand	82%
Shotton St Ethelwolds	55%
Shotton Ty Fynnon	37%
Average	60%

- 3.06 No evidence can be found to support the case of the Group that 80% transfer rates are achievable given historical data. Up to date birth data has also been taken into account; this highlights a downward trend in birth rates both nationally and in Flintshire, a trend which will further reduce projected numbers.
- 3.07 If the housing development sites within the Northern Gateway were to be developed to the maximum capacity of 1325 homes (source: outline planning permission) and, in applying the housing yield formula (0.174 per home for secondary) the total 'yield' of secondary school age child numbers eligible for admission to John Summers would be 231. If this full cohort of children were assumed to be admitted to John Summers the school population would still only be in the region of 536 pupils (2016/17 projected number 305 + 231 max housing yield) when all of these projections are combined.
- 3.08 Appendix 1 sets out that the Northern Gateway will be developed over a period of time from 2016/17. The pace of the housing developments will be constrained by the pace of infrastructure development, the plans of the site owners/developers, the housing market, current economic climate and other factors which are unpredictable. The final housing dwelling numbers are likely to be well within the maximum referred to in 3.08 above, and will be constructed over a number of years. Therefore, any new cohort of children eligible for admission will be low in number in the early years ahead. These are maximum numbers which do not take into account parental preference for alternative school choices.
- 3.09 The representative group of governors felt strongly that the project should not be judged on data alone. They were keen to ensure that other factors should be considered including that the school is in a prime location as the gateway to North Wales and could be at the heart of regenerating an area of deprivation.
- 3.10 The group identified that the school has key strengths in meeting the needs of vulnerable learners and a community with high levels of social deprivation. The school has a high percentage of free schools meals. Data from mylocalschool.com records this at 31.9% over a 3 year average in 2014, which is the highest percentage amongst Flintshire's secondary schools.

- 3.11 The inclusive nature of the school is positively acknowledged. Successful inclusive practice is also evident at other local schools. Current performance information indicates that other nearby schools are getting better overall outcomes for learners, including those who are eligible for free school meals. Data outcomes in the recently published national school categorisation model were amongst the lowest in Wales.
- 3.12 Finally, the group also requested that a capital business case be submitted to the Welsh Government for them to make a decision, rather than the County Council. Cabinet is advised that it would not be justifiable for the County Council to submit a capital case based on inaccurate or less than resilient information in the knowledge that it will fail to meet the 21st Century Schools Programme criteria.
- 3.13 The Welsh Minister approved earlier proposals for the Queensferry Campus in August 2014. The Minister's letter states that approval was conditional upon a business case approval through the 21st Century schools programme by 31st March 2015. This means that the statutory proposals lapse as of that date unless such a case is in place and approved.
- 3.14 Current and projected pupil numbers at the school mean that it is imperative to review as a matter of urgency the secondary provision at John Summers High School. Any new proposals would have to be administered under the new School Organisation Code (July 2013) and would be determined by the Welsh Minister.
- 3.15 The Governing Body has expressed the view that they wished to avoid prolonged period of uncertainty for the school and the community. The Local Authority would want to continue to work with the Governing Body and wider community to meet this aim. Appendix 2 sets out a model timeline for the development and consideration of options and proposals. This process involving all parts of the school community will take between 6 and 12 months. Implementation of any proposal would be phased over the following years in order to safeguard curriculum continuity for examination year groups.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That on the basis that the data analysis does not support the continuation through to a Full Business Case for capital funding Cabinet is recommended to:
- (i) not proceed with the Full Business Case;
 - (ii) open a period of formal consultation with key stakeholders for the area on how best to secure resilient sustainable high quality education in the area for future report to Cabinet.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 The current value of the Queenferry Campus project is £18,264,000 in an overall programme of £64,200,000.
- 5.02 The decoupling of this project from the wider programme will have implications for financial profiling at local and national level.
- 5.03 Welsh Government officials have indicated that they are willing to work with the Authority, However, it is incumbent on the Authority to officially confirm its position to Welsh Government.
- 5.04 The Authority still has an in-principle agreement on the original funding envelope of £64m for Band A projects. However, any future proposals would require submission of new business case/s to Welsh Government for approval.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 School Modernisation is a key strategy in addressing the gap in achievement in some school communities due to poverty. Options will need to be informed by provision and outcomes in overcoming the impact of poverty.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 The environmental impact of educational provision is consistently improved through school modernisation projects. Environmental impacts are analysed, reported and considered as part of school organisational decisions.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report. School organisation proposals are assessed for their positive impact in relation to overcoming the impact of poverty and promoting better outcomes for all.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 There is no direct personnel impact in respect of a decision on the proposed capital project.
- 9.02 In terms of any proposed future options for education provision in the area, personnel implications would be considered as part of the review work. 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 No further consultation required in respect of the pause and review of the capital project.
- 10.02 In terms of developing and evaluating future educational models for the area, work will be undertaken with the secondary headteachers in the area, John Summers and a representative Group of Governors John Summers High school.
- 10.03 Formal Consultation will be required with key stakeholders, including dedicated approaches with children and young people, employees, governors and parents/ carers, in accordance with the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013, this will involve Key stakeholders. Progress and authorisation to proceed will be sought from the County Council's Cabinet at key stages in the process at Appendix 2.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.01 A total of 10 meetings with Local Members, Headteachers, Governors, representative group of governors & the Programme Board where held between 14th October 2014 and 7th January 2015.
- 11.02 The meetings informed key stakeholders of the rationale for the pause and review. They involved presentation of data, challenge and debate. The last meetings concluded with reporting on the recommendations to be made to the Cabinet on next steps. Correspondence is recorded in Background Document E.

12.00 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Northern Gateway Planning Information
Appendix 2 – Statutory Process Flowchart

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

The background documents have been placed into the members library, as follows:-

Background Document A – Local Authority Data Pack
Background Document B – Representative Governors Group Data Pack
Background Document C – Representative Governing Group Minutes
Background Document D - correspondence received between 14th Oct – 7th Jan 2015
Background Document E– correspondence received post 7th Jan 2015

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