

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **EDUCATION AND YOUTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **30TH JULY 2015**

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

SUBJECT: **SCHOOL MODERNISATION - SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ORGANISATION ACT 2013 – JOHN SUMMERS HIGH SCHOOL – STATUTORY PROPOSALS**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To inform the Education and Youth Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the responses from the statutory consultation period on the sustainability of John Summers High School, and options for future education provision and invite its comments in advance of the Cabinet being requested to conclude on a formal proposal.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 The Cabinet in February 2013 agreed to open a consultation on the sustainability of post-16 provision and opportunities, to make best use of school resources, in accordance with the requirements of the 21st Century Schools Programme and the agreed Strategic Outline Case. 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.
- 2.02 Following consideration of the risk posed by low current and projected pupil numbers for the John Summers High School the Cabinet later resolved, in February 2015, to open a further consultation with stakeholders on how best to secure resilient high quality education for the local area and its learners.
- 2.03 Under the School Organisational Code only those proposals which receive an objection from a local authority, or which propose the removal or establishment of sixth form provision, will be referred to Welsh Government Ministers. Any proposal for John Summers High School would therefore be determined at Ministerial level.

2.04 This most recent consultation ran from 5 June to 17 July. It should be noted that the formal consultation document included a proposal for school closure. No such formal decision has been passed at this stage; a consulting education authority is required under Welsh Government guidance to make a 'proposal' in this way to invite responses, through consultation, either for or against the proposal. Respondents are then able to suggest an alternative and provide argument and evidence in its support.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Sustainability of John Summers High School

3.01 Estyn in its response to the consultation has commented authoritatively that the consultation document provides a clear rationale for a proposal to close based on Council strategy and projected pupil numbers.

3.02 The Governing Body has submitted a written response to the consultation. The Governing Body assumptions rely on pupil intake from housing growth within the proposed Northern Gateway development and improved recruitment from local schools for the school to be sustainable and argue for an option to revert back to a new school on the Queensferry Campus. The Governing Body in its response has not directly addressed the immediate negative impact of low pupil numbers on the ability of the school to be viable both financially and academically. The Governing Body has not submitted a case which presents a viable alternative to closure.

3.03 During the community consultation the dominant concerns around any proposal to close the school were:-

- the capacity to accommodate current and projected pupil numbers in the schools network;
- access and transport to school; and
- transition for individual pupils and pastoral care

3.04 The Authority fully agrees that these are major concerns which have to be answered and managed in the event of a closure proposal.

3.05 The Governing Body has mounted its own set of pupil number projections. These are based on the intake of 70% of pupils from nearby primary schools, with an additional ten pupils coming from other areas. These figures vary from the 80% previously presented at the project 'pause and review' stage. The Governing Body has made assumptions about intakes from schools where current and past patterns of choice by parents and learners show a preference for selecting secondary schools other than John Summers.

- 3.06 There is a downward trend of pupils in neighbouring primary schools transferring to John Summers High School. Evidence confirms that the average transfer rate over the past two years was only 60% into John Summers High School from the closest schools.
- 3.07 The projections for housing yield for the Northern Gateway development were challenged and answered fully at the 'pause and review' stage. There is no new information to report on the intentions of developers and no reserved matters applications have yet been submitted to the Planning Authority as a precursor to the commencement of house-building. The Northern Gateway will be developed over a period of time from 2017-2028. 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. This remains the case.
- 3.08 The housing yield formula has been reviewed on the basis of new census information. In applying the new housing yield formula (0.15 per home for secondary without post 16) the total 'yield' of secondary school age child numbers eligible for admission to John Summers would reduce from the 231 maximum produced at pause and review stage to a new figure of 199. If this full cohort of children were assumed to be admitted to John Summers the school population would still be in the region of only 504 pupils (using a 2016/17 projected number of 305 and a maximum housing yield of 199) when all of these projections are combined. These are maximum numbers which do not take into account parental preference for alternative school choices.

Transitional Issues: Answers and Assurance

- 3.09 There is capacity in other schools to cater for all displaced pupils. As of September 2016 there are 586 projected unfilled places at Connah's Quay High School (307) and Saltney St David's High School (279).
- 3.10 Whilst Hawarden High School is currently full, the school will become the nearest school for some pupils currently in primary education who would normally transfer to John Summers High School. Preferences for Hawarden High School would be managed in line with current admissions criteria. Those for whom it is the nearest school will take priority for places, displacing intake to the school from pupils expressing a preference from further afield. Hawarden High School has an admission number of 195.
- 3.11 Estyn are required to report to decision makers on proposals for School Organisational Change. Their summary conclusion is as follows:

“The County Council has a legal duty to look at the number and type of schools it has in Flintshire and is required to make sure that they meet the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009. It is Estyn’s opinion that the impact of the proposal will at least maintain the current standards of education in the area. The development of a post-16 learning hub will offer a wider range of both academic and vocational courses for learners and the closure of John Summers High School will not disadvantage unnecessarily any current pupils.”

(A full copy of Estyn response is available in the Consultation Report Appendix 2)

- 3.12 The Authority has received positive responses on the need for school organisational change from Hawarden High School, Connah’s Quay High School and Coleg Cambria.
- 3.13 Local Secondary Headteachers have advised on plans for learner transition, which have been assessed as appropriate by Estyn. Transition plans focus on supporting learners through the period of change in accordance with their needs. They build on current joint curriculum delivery work at 14 to 16 with local schools, aligning the curriculum to ensure resilience, continuity and the potential for an improved range of curriculum options than could otherwise be afforded. Individual transition plans and support for vulnerable learners will include pastoral support across transition.

(See Draft Transition Plan Appendix 3)

- 3.14 On transport, whilst some pupils will be eligible for free home to school transport under the statutory three mile distance from home to school, the majority of pupils would not. The current cost of transport to John Summers High school is £59,470. The Authority could consider offering discretionary transitional transport arrangements for the current school cohort at an estimated annual cost of £135,125, a rise of £75,655 in 2017/18, reducing in following years. This would positively support transition plans and address a key area of concern of current students. The cost of transport to support GCSE continuity would be an estimated £20,000 for 2016/17.
- 3.15 Retaining the current post 16 provision through the current North Flintshire consortium arrangements is not possible. The Council has been progressing post 16 transformation change across this consortium and to this end has already successfully progressed statutory proposals in two areas, Connah’s Quay and Holywell, and is currently progressing proposals for both St David’s and John Summers High Schools. Additionally, two schools via their Governing bodies have formed their own consortium for post 16 provision within Flint.

Therefore the previous consortium arrangements in this area are no longer in place.

- 3.16 Within the transition to the new post 16 centre, governors and schools will be ensuring continuity of education for post 16 education students. They are already progressing with organisational and management arrangements for the planned opening in September 2016. It is not possible for John Summers High School to offer post 16 education independently and meet the requirements of the Learning Measure.
- 3.17 The risks of not proceeding with the proposed change based on current and projected numbers would include the school not being able to sustain the breadth of curriculum required by the Learning and Skills measure. This claim is independently supported by Estyn's evidence. School performance would be expected to be negatively affected.
- 3.18 National capital funding would not be available to the Council to modernise the school. A convincing case could not be made to Welsh Government for a 21st Capital allocation which would meet their criteria, as has already been recognised and agreed by Cabinet. This would leave the Council with a significant financial liability to address building issues at the school. The Council also risks failing to address national and local policy with regard to the reduction of unfilled places. The Council will not be adhering to its own policy for school modernisation (with 2292 unfilled places in the secondary sector at January 2015).
- 3.19 The School currently has an acting headteacher. There remain concerns about the ability of the Governing Body to recruit a suitable permanent headteacher in these circumstances.

Conclusion

- 3.20 Estyn's independent consideration of the consultation evidence is that proposed changes will at least maintain educational standards and offer better provision. The regulatory body also concludes that the Council has used the data appropriately, on educational standards, pupil projections and future housing developments, in the conduct of the consultation. They also affirm the outlined plans to support learners (including those with additional needs) through proposed changes.
- 3.21 Demographic and financial information shows that the present John Summers High School is not sustainable and will not be able to meet curriculum requirements in future years. No evidence and viable alternative proposal to closure have been submitted.

- 3.22 The Local Authority fully understands the anxieties of young people, parents and carers about any change in school provision. It recognises the need to support learners through any change with appropriate curriculum and pastoral arrangements, together with practical support on transport, as set out in the report.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 To assess both the responses from the statutory consultation period on the sustainability of John Summers High School and options for future education provision, and the evidence and analysis provided by officers within the report, and provide comments to the Cabinet in advance of it being requested to conclude on a formal proposal.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 In 2015/16 in line with Welsh Government ministerial expectations the Council increased the total schools budget by 0.6%. This represented a real terms reduction in funding for schools of around 2% due to pay awards and employer pension contribution increases.
- 5.02 Schools have had to absorb these pressures through efficiency measures. In 2016/17 these costs pressures will increase again with the implementation of the Single Tier Pension being a major cost pressure.
- 5.03 In order to provide John Summers High School with a budget which enables the school to meet its curriculum requirements a considerable subsidy is required. This is demonstrated in the differential per pupil funding between John Summers which receives the highest level of funding in the County at £5,180 per pupil and Castell Alun High School receiving £3,895 per pupil. This difference is £1,285 per pupil. As public finances reduce over the period of the next Parliament, the Council will not be able to continue to subsidise John Summers without adversely impacting on other schools which are already comparatively lowly funded.
- 5.04 Based on pupil number projections and the assessed impact of real terms inflationary pressures, John Summers High School could face a 16% reduction in funding over the next four years using the existing formula methodology. This level of reduced funding can be equated to the need to reduce the number of teaching posts by at least 6.5 which is around 20% of the current teaching workforce. This is unsustainable.
- 5.05 Assuming stable pupil intake figures, the school would require an extra £267,000 per year (6.5 x £41000) to support current provision. Any such amount would need to be part of the school funding formula, which must be fair to all schools.

5.06 A further loss of 10% of the pupil intake, based on current allocation and projections, would result in the school losing 8.7 FTE members of teaching staff by 2019/20. This would be a reduction of 26% of the current staffing levels. This is also unsustainable.

5.07 The proposal to remove the post 16 provision will result in the school not being able to draw down Welsh Government grant for this provision. However, as the school will not be providing post 16 provision either independently or through consortium arrangements, this will have a neutral financial impact. As Coleg Cambria will govern the post 16 hub, they will be funded directly by Welsh Government.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 School re-organisation change is part of our work to overcome the impact of poverty.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 School organisational change proposals are assessed for environmental impact.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 School modernisation plans to:

- provide equality of opportunity for all children to receive the best possible education in Flintshire schools; and
- sustainable options for education in Flintshire that meet the needs of children and young people now and in the future.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 Should the current proposals be implemented, the Council will work with the current members of staff at John Summers High School, including teaching and support staff, should they seek redeployment opportunities.

9.02 Staff displaced by the proposal may have the opportunity to be employed in the local Secondary network given the movement of pupils to other secondary schools.

9.03 A lead professional has been appointed to manage the new post 16 provision at Coleg Cambria and will commence his position in September 2015.

9.04 The 1st tranche of staffing appointments at the new Post 16 provision at Coleg Cambria will be to identify curriculum roles. Initially these roles will be ring-fenced to those staff across the consortia including John

Summers High School with post 16 experience in the current college and partnership schools.

- 9.05 Should the identified vacancies not be filled by the 1st tranche procedure, recruitment for unfilled positions will be filled in accordance with Coleg Cambria's recruitment and selection processes.
- 9.06 In the event that staff at John Summers High School are displaced as a result of the proposal then the relevant organisational change and redundancy policy will apply and will be applied as appropriate by the governing body of John Summers High School.
- 9.07 Any change will cause uncertainty for staff based at John Summers High School, and every attempt will be made by the Local Authority and School to support staff during the change process.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 If the Cabinet decision is to proceed, the consultation report is issued to the Welsh Minister and the Council will publish a Statutory notice providing a 28 day notice period for objections.
- 10.02 If objections are received, the Council must publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and their responses to them within 28 days of the end of the objection period;
- 10.03 In the case of the proposal for John Summers High school the proposals are sent for Ministerial determination, this is usually within 16 weeks of the end of the objection period;
- 10.04 If the proposals receive approval they should be implemented in accordance with that date.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.01 The 42 day period of consultation for the proposals at John Summers High School, commenced 5th June 2015 and ended 17th July 2015

12.00 APPENDICES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS INFORMATION ACT) 1985

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

The following are available in the Members' library:

- Appendix A – Timeline for the Statutory Code
- Pause and review Cabinet report 17th February 2015 with data pack

- Copies of consultation documentation and all responses
- Hawarden High School pupil map

Contact Officer: Damian Hughes
Telephone: 01352 704135
Email: damian.hughes@flintshire.gov.uk