

MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	24 SEPTEMBER 2009
TITLE OF REPORT:	SCHOOLS TASK GROUP UPDATE
PORTFOLIO AREA:	ICT, ACHIEVEMENT AND EDUCATION

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To note the progress made by the Schools Task Group (STG) and the proposals for the consultation process for the STG paper.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation(s)

THAT Cabinet:

- (a) **approve the process and timescale for consultation on Schools Task Group paper (Appendix 1); and**
- (b) **note the process followed and progress made by the Schools Task Group in preparing the paper for consultation.**

Key Points Summary

- The STG has met with the purpose of drafting a paper outlining the next steps in the planning of educational provision.
- The draft is now ready for formal consultation with all stakeholders with feedback to Cabinet in November 2009.

Alternative Options

- 1 There are no alternative options as the STG papers will affect both the schools and local communities it is wholly appropriate that a full and formal consultation now takes place.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Sharon Menghini, Director of Children's Services on (01432) 260039

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 It is appropriate that Cabinet are fully aware of both the progress made by the STG to date and the next steps in consultation.

Introduction and Background

- 3 Following the meeting in December 2008 of Head Teachers, Chairs of Governors and Cabinet, it was agreed that a STG would be established with appropriate membership to consider the issues pertinent to the future planning of school provision in Herefordshire.
- 4 Attached as Appendix 3 are the terms of reference for the STG.
- 5 The STG has met on 8 occasions between January 2009 and September 2009 to consider:
 - falling rolls;
 - statistical data
 - financial implications
 - possible alternative models, e.g. federation
 - governance and school leadership
 - rural considerations.
- 6 There have been regular press releases and opportunities to update the school community and engage them in discussion.
- 7 The independent chair, David Brown, has lead the group as well as facilitating other discussions with the Herefordshire Association of Governors (HAG), Primary Head Teachers Forum and Herefordshire Association of Secondary Heads.
- 8 Mr Brown has previously been a Director of Children's Services and, as well as bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge to the group, has also taken time to visit a number of our schools to better understand the context.
- 9 The STG has worked up an initial draft paper which has been shared with head teachers and chairs of governors over an extended summer period. The STG met recently to consider the responses which were wide ranging and an analysis of the issues which arose lead us to conclude that the main themes can be summarised as follows;
 - Broad support for the overall direction involving clusters and groups of schools, Governors and Headteachers being more directly engaged in the process of change
 - Majority support for criteria regarding reviews of schools with specific challenges, and recommendations around leadership
 - Concerns and suggestions about how some of the criteria and the overall approach will operate in practice and how improvements could be made
 - Desire for a local authority strategic plan in which or to which the above would have a relationship

- 10 The STG agreed that, taking account of these responses, the paper did not require re-drafting at this stage; a further meeting of the group is scheduled for November to consider the outcome of both the formal consultation and the consultation with schools before a report is prepared for Cabinet consideration in November
- 11 The attached paper at Appendix 1 is the final draft for formal consultation.
- 12 Following Cabinet consideration, it is proposed that the consultation period will be from 25 September to 2 November 2009 with feedback being brought back to Cabinet on 26 November for consideration.

Key Considerations

- 13 Communication and engagement of a variety of stakeholders will be key to the consultation. The Council's usual consultation mechanisms will be in place with press articles encouraging professionals and public to respond

Community Impact

- 14 The aim is to support all communities by ensuring they have the opportunity to consider the findings of the School Task Group and engage in planning the future provision of education in the county. Therefore we have arranged:
 - An all Members' seminar has been arranged for 2.00 pm on 18 September 2009 to ensure Ward Members have an opportunity to debate the issues as part of the consultation.
 - Schools have been encouraged to engage their local communities in the consultation

Financial Implications

- 15 At this preliminary stage, no financial implications have been identified

Legal Implications

- 16 At this preliminary stage, no legal implications have been identified.

Risk Management

- 17 Until the outcome of the consultation, the full analysis of risk is unknown.

Consultees

- 18 The first draft has been considered by head teachers and Chairs of Governors.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Final draft of STG consultation paper

Appendix 2 – List of formal consultees

Appendix 3 – Schools Task Group Terms of Reference

Background Papers

STG minutes of meetings

Financial paper / Schools Forum Minutes – July 2009