

MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	26 NOVEMBER 2009
TITLE OF REPORT:	HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS TASK GROUP CONSULTATION
PORTFOLIO AREA:	ICT, EDUCATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

- To note the feedback from the Herefordshire Schools Task Group (HSTG) formal consultation.
- To consider the recommendations of the Herefordshire Schools Task Group.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living and working in Herefordshire.

It was not included in the Forward Plan, however inclusion in the agenda gives the required notice in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) Regulations 2000.

Recommendations:

THAT Cabinet:

- (a) **Endorse the five Cluster Working proposals as detailed at paragraph 10 below;**
- (b) **Endorse the four School Leadership proposals as detailed at paragraph 12 below;**
- (c) **Endorse the principle of establishing sustainability criteria and thresholds and request that officers and partners produce a detailed analysis of Small Schools by Design models, including Sustainable Schools criteria and thresholds, which can inform judgements on suitability of cluster plans once submitted to be reported back within three months;**
- (d) **Endorse the five Finance proposals as detailed at paragraph 18 below and in addition request that officers progress the recommendation of the Task Group that further development be undertaken of the proposal at**

paragraph 17 (e) to ensure an appropriate balance of provision across the county;

- (e) **Endorse the implementation of existing policies by Local Authority (LA) and Diocesan officers implementing existing policies in their work with schools which face challenging circumstances and in addition that recommendations (a) and (b) above be implemented with immediate effect in order to further support this; and**
- (f) **Support the LA and Diocesan officers in their work with schools and clusters to develop local plans of partnership working to inform a long-term strategic plan for Herefordshire.**

Key Points Summary

- This is an area of critical consideration which requires careful analysis with clear recommendations relating to the design process for sustainable quality schools within Herefordshire.

Alternative Options

- 1 There are no alternative options.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 The pressure on all schools in delivering high quality provision for our children and young people in a time of falling pupil numbers and therefore reducing budgets is significant and increasingly unsustainable. A strategy for sustainable provision is required. This needs to be developed and implemented with all stakeholders involved. This consultation was a first step towards this.

Introduction and Background

- 3 Following a meeting in December 2008 of Head Teachers, Chairs of Governors and Cabinet the Herefordshire Schools Task Group (HSTG) was established, under the independent chairmanship of David Brown, to recommend to the Council a set of criteria to underpin the future of education and learning provision in the county, providing a framework within which decisions will be made.
- 4 At its meeting on 24th September Cabinet received the paper produced by the Herefordshire Schools Task Group outlining its proposals for the criteria, and approved that paper for formal consultation.
- 5 The formal consultation held on the Herefordshire Schools Task Group Interim Report ran from 25th September 2009 to 2nd November 2009.
- 6 The document (previously circulated with the Cabinet agenda for 24 September and available on the council website) was made available to all stakeholders and interested parties through a range of sources including schools, libraries, and the corporate council consultation website.
- 7 95 responses were received by the end of the consultation period and the analysis of these responses is attached in Appendix 1. A further 8 responses were received after the deadline, and whilst they are not included within the statistical analysis do not raise any new issues or

concerns.

Key Considerations

- 8 HSTG recognised that, in common with a number of rural counties, the challenges facing Herefordshire's ability to continually improve educational quality and outcomes for the county's young people include:
- The impact of falling pupil numbers, surplus capacity within schools and parental preference;
 - Consequential financial impacts (in a climate of reducing public funding); and
 - Changes in schools workforce.
- 9 HSTG developed proposals covering the following four key areas: cluster working, school leadership, sustainable schools, and finance. The proposals within each of these sections are detailed below, together with the recommendations of the HSTG taking into account the consultation responses.

Cluster Working

- 10 HSTG made five proposals in respect of cluster working which were:
- a) Engagement of all stakeholders is essential. Local communities and appropriate authorities must contribute to and take ownership of the outcomes of the process. The process should be open and inclusive where all those who seek to participate respect the views of others and treat those views with due regard to the differing faith, cultural and professional perspectives.
 - b) Co-operation is essential to meet the identified challenges. It is also a necessary part of retaining a widespread and diverse variety of education as currently chosen by parents. It is fundamental to the continued improvement of children and young people and a vital part of schools sharing leadership, teaching and wider support services. Co-operation can take a variety of forms including sharing physical facilities, staffing and resources. Governors, Head Teachers and appropriate authorities will work together through their cluster schools, to establish a firmer foundation for this. All schools must be pro-actively engaged in such discussions.
 - c) Provision planning is to be adopted and applied by all schools as part of annual self evaluation. Local Authority, Diocesan and Trust Representative officers alongside School Improvement Partners should support all Governing Bodies to undertake, by September 2010, a formal evaluation of different options to feed into the creation of a strategic plan for Herefordshire. This will inform a strategic map for Herefordshire.
 - d) Cluster Meetings of Governors, Head Teachers and Local Authority and Diocesan/Trust representatives will take place termly, with agenda and minutes of the meetings to be made available on Herefordshire Council Website. Accurate information relating to financial and pupil data and evaluation of standards relating to all schools and other members of the clusters will be made available to aid discussion and strategic planning.
 - e) Schools facing challenges have specific issues relating to their development and sustainability. Governing bodies have the responsibility to provide strategic direction for their schools in order to maximise the opportunities on offer for their children and young people and ensure continuous improvement of standards and delivery. As part of this duty governors should be required by the Local Authority, and Diocesan Boards if appropriate, to consider all options should such challenges face their school.

Cluster representatives and school leadership teams should be fully involved in such

developments and offer solutions and models for consideration. This will further support the consideration and development of new models of working.

Where agreements, models and/or solutions cannot be identified through this approach Local Authority officers will further support and challenge in order to bring about an agreed plan of action. If necessary the Local Authority will use its powers to intervene if no cluster engagement has been undertaken prior to appointing to leadership vacancies or developing solutions to school specific issues

- 11 HSTG have recommended that Cabinet fully support the five cluster proposals and, in making this conclusion the Task Group notes the wide support from both the public consultation and from earlier professional discussions. It was also noted that to fulfil these proposals the local authority and partners will need to have due regard to the broad comments made in the consultation from which the following are the key issues:
- Capacity in terms of people resource that will be needed system wide to support all Governing Bodies to complete, by September 2010 a formal evaluation of different options to feed into the creation of a strategic plan for Herefordshire
 - Capacity in terms of people resource that will be needed system wide to support clusters in discussions potential models and data to produce solutions to inform the strategic planning process Herefordshire.
 - Local authority and Diocesan officers to work with Head Teachers and Governors to clarify cluster working
 - Clarity over the quality of data used, with existing data being used for such discussions, with review of data if any statutory process is considered.

School Leadership

- 12 HSTG made four proposals in respect of school leadership which were:
- a) Change of leadership will require a review of different potential leadership options/models with Governors, cluster schools, Head Teachers and appropriate authorities. This will include different models of governance as well as design of staffing structures.
 - b) Succession planning will follow the evaluation of a school's future sustainability by Governors, Head Teacher, cluster schools, and appropriate authorities.
 - c) Changes to the leadership of a school will be discussed in Cluster Meetings prior to any recruitment process taking place. Recognising that solutions may not be limited to the host cluster all Head Teacher vacancies will also be shared with all Heads prior to recruitment so that every opportunity for alternative models are explored.
 - d) Resource and capital implications will be considered and prioritised throughout the planning process with Local Authority officer support.
- 13 HSTG have recommended that Cabinet fully support the four school leadership proposals and, in making this conclusion the Task group notes the wide support from both the public consultation and from earlier professional discussions. It was also noted that to fulfil these recommendations the local authority and partners will need to have due regard to the broad comments made in the consultation from which the following are the key issues:
- Clarity needed over process to guide (c) above. It is recommended that this starts in April 2010 after protocols have been agreed.
 - Local authority officers to provide guidance on different models of working between schools.

Sustainable Schools

- 14 HSTG recognised the difference between schools which are small by design and those schools with surplus capacity and/or falling rolls. This acknowledgement will enable a more strategic consideration of school provision in Herefordshire. Small schools 'by design' are those representing a specific and distinct model of education. This might relate to very isolated communities where cost of transport would be high even within an overall transport review. Such schools will be a continuing part of the pattern of education provision.
- 15 The Task Group sought views on the threshold for which three key indicators of sustainability would trigger discussion and monitoring with individual schools. These three elements were the level of surplus capacity within an individual school, the degree to which roll was falling within an individual school, and the total pupil numbers within a school.
- 16 HSTG recognised the support for the proposals in respect of the sustainability criteria of total pupil numbers as follows:
- Primary Schools 36 or less (Small Schools Policy)
 - Primary Schools 37-45 (Monitoring Threshold)
 - Primary Schools 45-60 (Financial Viability & Sustainability)
 - Secondary Schools 200 or less (Small Schools Policy)
 - Secondary Schools 201 - 350 (Monitoring Threshold)
- 17 However, the results of the consultation indicate that further clarity is required in respect of the proposals for thresholds re surplus capacity and falling rolls. HSTG has therefore recommended that cabinet request that, within three months, local authority officers with partners, produce a more detailed analysis of a 'small school by design', to include the thresholds recommended at paragraph 16 above and proposed thresholds in relation to the remaining criteria, which will then be used to judge the sustainability of plans produced by clusters.

Finance

- 18 HSTG made five proposals in respect of finance which were:
- a) Clusters should consider pooling Devolved Formula Capital monies to create centres of excellence in specialist areas with guaranteed access for all.
 - b) New builds of large Primaries and all High Schools should incorporate centres of excellence with guaranteed access to specialist facilities, as should all schools where these possibilities exist.
 - c) All strategic capital developments such as Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital planning should be coherent and align with any other developments, unless there is a risk to accessing the capital grant due to any external timescales.
 - d) Any new build needs to be consistent with surplus places planning.
 - e) Any new build should take account of the higher pupil density and closer proximity of schools in central areas of Herefordshire thus realising opportunities for different approaches.
- 19 HSTG have recommended that Cabinet support the five proposals, and in addition have recommended that further development of the proposal at 17 (e) above be carried out to take account of the concerns expressed in the qualitative responses to the consultation.

Next steps

- 20 HSTG have recommended that Cabinet endorse the full implementation of existing policies by Local Authority and Diocesan officers with schools facing challenges and that the proposals in relation to both cluster working and school leadership are used to support these processes with immediate effect.
- 21 In addition, HSTG has recommended that Cabinet support Local Authority and Diocesan officers in their work with schools and clusters to develop the local plans of partnership working to feed into a strategic plan for Herefordshire.

Community Impact

- 22 It is critical for the communities in Herefordshire that a long-term strategy is in place to guide the planning and delivery of sustainable quality educational provision across the county.

Financial Implications

- 23 A detailed analysis of the current and projected funding for schools, reflecting the negative impact of decreasing pupil numbers on Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was attached as an appendix in the formal consultation document. Implementation of the recommendations within this report will be met from within existing directorate budgets and DSG.

Legal Implications

- 24 There are statutory processes which would need to be adhered to should there be any remodelling or redesign of school provision.

Risk Management

- 17 Should there be no agreement on the implementation of the HSTG recommendations then the current challenges facing schools would remain unaddressed. The status quo has already been identified as unsustainable and unacceptable;

Consultees

- 20 All key stakeholders and partners including young people.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Analysis paper.

Appendix 2: Executive summary.

Background Papers

- Qualitative responses.
- Quantitative responses.
- Late submissions.
- Consultation Document.