

Executive Summary

The Herefordshire Schools Task Group has met since February and since July has been involved in discussions and then public consultation over its findings. Clearly Herefordshire faces many specific challenges as well as those faced by many similar counties in England. The Task Group has considered the results of the consultation as analysed below with responses included in appendix 1.

Recommendations

1. The Task Group recommend that Cabinet fully support Cluster Recommendations 1-5 (CWR 1-5) as covered in the Report, pages 6-7.

To support this recommendation 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 fulfill 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;

- a) 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' CWR 3
- b) 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. CW4
- c) Local authority and Diocesan officers to work with Headteachers and Governors to clarify cluster working
- d) 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.

2. The Task Group recommend that Cabinet fully support School Leadership Recommendations 1-4 (LR 1-4) as covered in the Report, pages 8-9.

To support this recommendation 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 fulfill 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;
due note should be made of the;

- (a) Clarity needed over process to guide 1.3. It is recommended that this starts in April 2010 after protocols have been agreed.
- (b) Local authority officers to provide guidance on different models or working between schools.

3. The Task Group recommend that Cabinet support the sustainability criteria as outlined in Recommendations 3.3, 3.4 and those facing challenging circumstance as in the Report, pages 10-11. Furthermore the Task Group recommend that local authority officers with partners produce a within three months a more detailed analysis of a 'small school by design' which will then be used to judge the sustainability of plans produced by clusters.

For section 3 of the Report, pages 10-11, the results of the consultation were more mixed than for the first two sections. The task group also believe after reading the results of the consultation that more clarity could have been useful in this section. Therefore the Task Group did not feel able to Recommend 3.1 or 3.2 as they stand.

However, it is clear is that there is support for a sustainability threshold in Principle but it has proved more difficult to isolate what that would look like in practice due to the complexities of the issues and the limited time for the Task Group. The Task Group wish for it to be noted clearly that 3.3. and 3.4 relate to the need for discussions to take place with schools concerned to ascertain the reasons for the pupil numbers concerned and the reasons for this. The Task Group believe that this should allow two alternative conclusions to apply;

- (a) This is a small school by design and is a necessary part of the pattern of schooling in Herefordshire but will need to work in partnership with other schools where appropriate.
- (b) Parents have chosen to educate the children who might come to this school elsewhere, and this is a trend in parental preference, not a short term issue.

4. The Task Group recommend that Cabinet fully support Finance Recommendations 1-5 (F1-5) as covered in the Report, pages 12-13

To support this recommendation 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 fulfill these recommendations the local authority and partners will need to have due regard to the broad comments made in the consultation.

There is a need to have particular regard to the responses on finance recommendation 5: *Any new build should take account of higher pupil density and closer proximity of schools in central areas of Herefordshire thus realizing opportunities for different approaches.* Whilst this received a supportive response rate of 52% some of the qualitative feedback identified areas requiring further development ie: *schools need to maintain control / it is just as important to maintain sustainability in rural areas as central areas.*

- 5. The Task Group recommend that Cabinet supports Local Authority and Diocesan officers fully implementing the existing work with schools facing challenges and that the work in Recommendations 1 & 2 could be used to support these processes and should begin immediately.**
- 6. The Task Group recommend 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.**