

MEETING:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	22 OCTOBER 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL PROVISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY -
PORTFOLIO AREA:	CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECTORATE

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive an update on progress.

Recommendation

THAT the Committee notes progress.

Key Points Summary

- Responses have been received from some school clusters.
- The responses contain a range of thoughtful, positive approaches and many explore opportunities for collaboration across schools. No responses set out detailed alternatives for school organisation in terms of numbers and sizes of schools.
- The responses together with any forthcoming from the remaining schools clusters, will be used to inform the development of educational provision in the county within the context of the overall development of localities that is being led by Herefordshire Public Services, and taking account of recent and expected changes to national policy made by the coalition government

Alternative Options

1. None are presented as this is an information item for Children's Scrutiny Committee

Reasons for Recommendations

2. To keep Children's Services Scrutiny Committee informed of progress.

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

Introduction and Background

3. Herefordshire has faced a decline in overall pupil numbers for a number of years. The immediate effect of this has varied between schools. Some schools remain full and parental preferences result in appeals to get into these schools. For other schools they have faced declining pupil numbers and there are significant numbers of surplus places. Herefordshire schools have put in place a range of initiatives at an individual school basis and in collaboration with other schools and the local authority to address the challenges that result. Many have been successful and are of benefit to the children and young people of Herefordshire. However, the situation has affected the quality of education, breadth of opportunity, finances and resources available, school staff including the pressures of the job, training and development opportunities, local authority services and funding, and transport.
4. The Herefordshire Schools Task Group established to consider the future of educational provision in Herefordshire undertook extensive work to engage with all schools and communities, and develop 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. These were approved by Cabinet in November 2009.
5. Four key areas were agreed by Cabinet to develop education and learning provision in Herefordshire. In summary these were:
 - Cluster working, promoting cooperation, collective planning and working together to address local challenges
 - School leadership, reviewing different methods as opportunities arise, succession planning and looking for solutions across clusters
 - Sustainable schools, thresholds for sustainability, small schools by design
 - Finance, including the exploring approaches to pool resources, capital projects and school developments
6. Cabinet requested further work be undertaken to establish a more detailed analysis of small schools by design including sustainable schools criteria and thresholds. A Small Schools Working Group was established from the Herefordshire Schools Task Group to consider these issues and contained representation from primary and secondary head teachers as well as the Diocese of Hereford. A discussion document was subsequently produced and has been circulated to all schools.

Key Considerations

7. In agreeing the recommendations in November, Cabinet invited every Herefordshire school cluster to consider sustainable education for the 21st Century and to report back to cabinet with ideas and proposals for achieving this. School clusters were asked to submit their reports by 30 September 2010.
8. At the time of writing this report, submissions have been received from 6 school clusters and one special school. Although no submission has been received from some clusters, officers are aware of, and are working with, other clusters and individual schools and it is therefore not appropriate at this stage to seek the views of the Scrutiny Committee on such a partial picture.
9. The local authority held a cluster conference on the 28th June titled "Sustainable School Provision for the 21st Century" to share the work of clusters, federations and collaborative

arrangements at that point and to develop common themes. An underlying theme, echoed from the Herefordshire Schools Task Group consultations is that the local authority, working with schools and clusters, should provide a strategic lead in the development of educational provision.

10. This will be taken forward by the Director for Children's Services in partnership with schools and on a locality basis, with a clear focus on the entitlement of every child and young person in Herefordshire to high quality education. Organisational issues involving faith, and the emerging picture regarding Academies and federations will also be taken into account, as will the impact on educational provision in Herefordshire of changes in national educational policy

Community Impact

11. Schools play an important part in the communities within Herefordshire. Any consideration of future provision will need to be carried out transparently and sensitively. It is important to recognise that collaborative cluster arrangements of schools do not necessarily match geographic localities and community identities. Through considering schools within their location as well as within their clusters and networks any long term planning can sensitively take these issues into account.

Financial Implications

12. The financial viability of some schools in Herefordshire is an increasing and pressing problem, not simply for the schools in budget terms but in terms of the quality of education and experience for pupils, the pressures on staff, and also in terms of the effects on other schools and Local Authority services and expenditure. Efficient school organisation enables resources to be spent more effectively for the benefit of the pupils in Herefordshire.

Legal Implications

13. There are no immediate legal implications contained in this proposal.

Risk Management

14. There are no issues of risk attached to this paper. There are risks to the effective educational provision available to pupils in Herefordshire now and in the future. These are being addressed immediately by schools in work with the local authority and their partner schools, and in the longer term will be addressed through a strategic planning approach based around the locality developments led by Herefordshire Public Services.

Consultees

15. All schools in Herefordshire were encouraged to take part in cluster developments and considerations.

Appendices

- None

Background Papers

- None