

MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME (MEP) BIENNIAL REVIEW

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Executive Board most recently approved an updated Modernising Education Programme (MEP) on the 1st December 2014 as part of an annual review of progress.
- 1.2 The County Council resolved in 2010 that the MEP *“be reviewed and revised in the future every two years or otherwise as required to ensure consistency with the timeframe of the national 21st Century Schools Programme”*. Furthermore, it has been a central feature of the MEP since its inception that it needs to retain flexibility at its core to ensure that the programme remains current and responsive to changes in the education policy framework and the needs of constantly developing society and communities.
- 1.3 This report provides a further update on the status of the MEP and an opportunity to review the forward programme in line with the decision to do this strategically every two years or so.

2. Progress to Date in the Delivery of the MEP

- 2.1 The MEP is by now well-established and widely acknowledged for its strategic vision and direction and the considerable progress that has been achieved to date.
- 2.2 By the end of the March 2016 the following investment successes have been delivered:
 - £234 million (approximately) of investment in the modernisation of school premises.
 - New secondary school premises for Queen Elizabeth High School and Ysgol Bro Dinefwr and significant investment in the extension and modernisation of the premises of Ysgol Dyffryn Aman.
 - Substantial completion of major investment at Ysgol Maes y Gwendraeth, with final completion due by September 2016.
 - Completion of a major extension and the refurbishment of existing accommodation at Ysgol y Strade as part of the strategy to meet increasing demand for Welsh medium education in the Llanelli area.
 - Completion of elements of the Llanelli Vocational Village network through investment at a number of secondary schools.
 - New primary school premises for Ysgol Y Bedol, Ysgol Bro Brynach, Ysgol Y Bryn, Ysgol Bryn Teg, Ysgol Brynsierfel, Ysgol Peniel, Ysgol y Felin, Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes, Burry Port Primary School and Ysgol Carreg Hirfaen.
 - Major refurbishment and extension projects completed at Johnstown School, Model School, Ysgol Brynsaron, Ysgol Llannon, Ysgol Nantgaredig, Ysgol Maes Y Morfa, Halfway, Swiss Valley, Tycroes and Ysgol Y Dderwen;

- Integrated children's centres created at Llwynhendy and within Ysgol Maes Y Morfa and Ysgol Y Felin (Felinfoel);
- Accommodation extensions and improvements at 13 other primary schools;

2.3 Furthermore, significant progress has been achieved in the rationalisation of the schools network, improving its educational and resource efficiency, including the following notable achievements:

- The removal of 5301 surplus places (3149 primary and 2152 secondary) through the proactive reconfiguration of provision.
- The formal federation of Bryngwyn and Glan-y-Môr schools under a single governing body and with one executive head teacher. This is the first federation of secondary schools in this way in Wales and is proving to be a considerable success, drawing notional recognition.

3. National 21st Century Schools Programme

3.1 Preparations for the national 21st Century Schools Programme commenced in 2010 through an invitation by the Welsh Government to local authorities to submit strategic outline plans for the modernisation of their whole schools estate, placed within four bands for investment, in order of priority according to most urgent need.

3.2 WG set out three key aims for the national programme, which have subsequently been revised, being to achieve:

- improved learning environments for children with better educational outcomes;
- greater economy through better use of resources to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the education estate;
- a more sustainable education system reducing the recurrent cost and carbon footprint.

3.3 The Welsh Government required local authorities to prioritise projects that would remove the greatest number of surplus places and address school buildings in the poorest condition.

3.4 School development projects under the 21st Century Schools Programme are funded equally by the Welsh Government and the County Council, subject to proposals being approved by the Welsh Government through a rigorous business case process.

3.5 The Band A programme was initially established to commence in April 2014 and extend for 6 years to 2020 but the Welsh Government subsequently announced its intention to bring forward the target date for the completion of Band A to 2019.

3.6 Through the initial submission process Carmarthenshire County Council's Band A programme was approved at a value of £86.7 million (funded 50% by grant from WG and 50% from the Council's own resources). Welsh Government requires this funding to be spent by 2019.

4. Mission of the MEP

- 4.1 The mission of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP) is to transform the network of nursery, primary, secondary and special schools serving the county into a strategically and operationally effective resource that meets current and future need for school education, at all times pursuing improvements in educational outcomes and the well-being of our children and young people.
- 4.2 This will require the rationalisation of the schools network and investment in the development and improvement of school buildings, infrastructure and spaces, so that schools are appropriately located, designed, constructed or adapted to foster the sustainable development of the people and communities of Carmarthenshire.

5 Strategic Objectives of the MEP

- 5.1 The following strategic objectives have been established for the MEP and will continue to direct its future delivery:
- To develop a schools network that is educationally effective, resource efficient and sustainable for the long term.
 - To develop a pattern of provision within which every learning setting is capable of facilitating a high quality education to all of its learners, either as an individual institution or as part of a federation or collaboration with other settings or providers.
 - To create school environments that allow every child within every school to access a curriculum and experience teaching that motivates them to achieve their full potential, whilst also facilitating a programme of extra-curricular activities that stimulate their physical and emotional well-being.
 - To develop infrastructure at all schools that is equipped for learning in the 21st century, facilitating the realisation of core objectives for raising educational standards and sustaining them at high levels of performance.
 - To deliver a strategic approach to capital investment, integrated with a programme for the rationalisation of provision across the schools network to effectively match supply with demand.
 - To rebuild, remodel, refurbish or modernise all school settings that are to be retained for the long-term, so that they conform as closely as practicable with adopted design standards.
 - To contribute to the achievement of wider policy objectives, for example, community regeneration and renewal, healthy lifestyles, etc, through the development of appropriate enabling infrastructure.
 - To improve the efficiency and educational viability of the schools sector by reducing the number of empty places to a reasonable level, whilst facilitating wherever practicable the expression of parental preference, responding effectively to demographic change.

- To develop infrastructure at schools that is fully accessible to all persons and enables all learners to access a high quality education, irrespective of individual needs.
- To develop individual and collaborative school solutions that contribute to a county-wide single comprehensive education system.

6 Educational Guiding Principles

6.1 The transformation of the schools network will be founded upon the principles, that every school will as a minimum:

- Have sustainable leadership, with leaders who are free to lead and manage, with no head teacher having a permanent teaching commitment.
- Have no more than 2 year groups per teaching class.
- Not have teaching classes that span the key stages of the curriculum, e.g. the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2.
- Have sufficient pupil numbers to sustain the above structural arrangements.
- Be financially viable under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding framework and able to operate for the long-term without a budget deficit.
- Have outdoor teaching facilities as required for the Foundation Phase and to support other areas of learning and physical well-being.
- Be fully inclusive and accessible for all.
- Be equipped with modern facilities to support digital learning.

7 Criteria for Investment and Prioritisation

7.1 Every school in Carmarthenshire has been evaluated against a set of evidence based criteria, which allow an assessment of the school's operational viability to be made and decisions taken on the relative investment need at all schools. This allows the Authority to **objectively** determine a programme for the strategic review of the schools network and investment in the modernisation of the schools estate in a manner that is transparent and demonstrably fair.

7.2 Long-established criteria, developed and adopted locally through consultation with representative head teachers, have been agreed and adopted as appropriate indicators of viability and investment need. They were formally adopted in 2008 and have directed the structure of the MEP since that time.

Viability Assessment

7.3 The criteria for assessing the viability of a school are:

- ***Pupil Numbers:*** the number of pupils attending the school, with the least numbers of pupils being a key indicator for review.
- ***Pupil Numbers Trends:*** the pattern of pupil numbers at the school over previous years, with a significantly changing roll being a key indicator for review.

- **Pupil Numbers Forecasts:** an assessment of estimated pupil numbers expected to attend the school from within the designated catchment area over the coming five years, with a forecast decline or increase being a key indicator for review.
- **Spare Places:** the number of empty places at the school and the prognosis for the future, informed by the factors above, with more than 25% of places unfilled being a key indicator for review.
- **Financial Viability:** the present and predicted financial position of the school under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding regime.
- **School Buildings Condition:** the state of the school's physical assets and the cost of bringing their condition up to an acceptable standard.
- **School Premises Suitability:** the appropriateness of the school's buildings and campus to support the effective delivery of the modern curriculum (e.g. the Foundation Phase).

7.4 Having been assessed against each of the criteria above each school is placed in one of seven categories, along a continuum of viability, to confirm the prognosis for that school looking forward:

- retain the school - investment to modernise the school's facilities is complete (or is in progress or is committed);
- retain the school and invest to provide new premises;
- retain the school and invest to modernise the school's existing buildings and facilities (this may involve some element of expansion of the facilities);
- create a new primary school to replace existing separate junior and infants schools – invest to provide new premises or to modernise existing premises as appropriate to local circumstances;
- continue to maintain the school subject to pupil numbers not declining significantly from their present levels and the school remaining viable – invest to modernise the school's existing premises where appropriate;
- review the future provision of education in the area served by the present school in the context of a possible strategic reconfiguration across a wider area to promote the more sustainable delivery of education for the long term – invest to deliver the chosen solution;
- review the future provision of education in the area served by the current school, which is not considered to be viable in its present form.

7.5 A copy of a summary of the viability assessment is attached at Appendix 1. This forms the basis for the identification of modernisation projects and rationalisation proposals within the overall programme.

Investment Prioritisation

7.6 The prioritisation of capital investment in the modernisation of school premises is founded upon consideration of a combination of the following criteria:

- **Strategic Need - Access to Education:** investment will be prioritised towards improving the sufficiency of the schools estate, at locations where the provision of additional space or the refurbishment of existing space is essential in order to accommodate pupil needs generated by the rationalisation of other schools or where demand for places is increasing naturally through demographic change or linguistic preference, and is consistent with the established schools admissions policy and legislation.
- **Improving Educational Outcomes:** investment will be prioritised towards projects where infrastructure improvements or developments are critical to creating opportunities for improvement in educational outcomes, e.g. to facilitate the rationalisation of provision to create viable and sustainable schools.
- **Efficiency:** investment will be prioritised towards projects that enhance the overall resource efficiency of the schools estate, especially projects that achieve the greatest reduction in the number of surplus places.
- **Welsh Language Development:** investment will be prioritised towards projects that promote the expansion of Welsh medium education or the development of bilingual education, in support of the objectives set out in the County Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.
- **Infrastructure:** investment will be prioritised to projects that can secure the greatest progress towards the objective of having high quality premises for the greatest number of learners, addressing deficiencies in the suitability of school premises, supporting the effective delivery of the curriculum, resolving concerns regarding premises condition and eliminating health and safety risks.
- **Opportunity:** investment will be prioritised to maximise opportunities to attract additional funding; to take advantage of school leadership changes where this is consistent with the vision of the MEP; or to deal with any extraordinary circumstances that may arise, e.g. the catastrophic loss or damage of school premises.

7.7 Officers have maintained a close dialogue with officials at the Welsh Government in connection with the structure of the programme and in particular the level of flexibility available to amend the programme to meet changing demands. WG officials have confirmed that it is possible to amend the projects within the Band A programme within the overall allocated funding envelope of £86.7 million.

7.8 Following a reassessment of projects in line with the criteria above a refreshed future investment programme has been drawn up, shown in Appendix 2.

7.9 The order for the delivery of projects reflects the outcome of the strategic re-assessment and has regard to the practicalities of delivery. The forward programme continues the general approach of the past but with some significant changes in the short to medium term. As work considering the feasibility and options appraisal of projects has progressed it has become apparent that a couple of the major school rationalisation and investment projects have experienced challenges that could not previously have been foreseen. This is particularly true of the schemes in

Ammanford and Llandeilo. These projects have to varying degrees experienced challenges relating to their scale and complexity, involving factors such as demographic pressures (related to changing pupil numbers), the availability of suitably located land of sufficient scale, aspirations to support wider regeneration objectives, etc. Furthermore, challenges such as the complexity and timescale of school reorganisation statutory procedures, the demands of Welsh Government business case approval processes have increased burdens on limited professional capacity. As a consequence of these mostly external factors it is not now possible to deliver these two major projects according to the timeline planned a couple of years ago and it is now necessary to re-profile their delivery programme.

7.10 As noted earlier there is a requirement from the Welsh Government that the funding approved for the delivery of the Band A programme be expended within the designated timeframe, which has been accelerated to 2019. For this to be achieved it is necessary to review the structure of the remainder of the programme and bring forward alternative projects for earlier delivery.

7.11 The reassessment of projects has identified that it is possible to accelerate investment in:

- a major strategic project to provide new premises for Ysgol Gymraeg Dewi Sant along with extended and modernised premises for Penygaer Primary School within a single integrated strategic scheme;
- a project to provide a new school for the Gorslas area in response to a dramatic increase in the demand for places at Ysgol Gorslas predominantly as a result of housing developments in the area;
- extension and modernisation of Laugharne Primary School, which will support rationalisation across a wider geographic area.

7.12 Also, urgent space pressures have arisen at Ysgol y Ddwyllan and a modest project to address these has been introduced into the programme. Various other adjustments have been made to reflect amended timings for the delivery of other projects according to the prevailing and predicted circumstances. These include the need to accelerate investment to improve accommodation for the PRU (which was recently criticised by Estyn during inspection) and at Ysgol Rhydygors to address shortcomings in the residential accommodation in particular.

7.13 It is important to emphasise that given the complex nature of the investment programme it is inevitable that the detail of the programme will change as time passes as it is impossible to predict several years ahead with any certainty, noting that society and communities continue to change and develop. The MEP remains a successful and robust strategic investment and transformation programme and with the amendments noted above this success is set to continue for many years to come.

7.14 A revised five year capital programme is attached at Appendix 3.

8 Recommendation

8.1 That the Scrutiny Committee endorses the updated Modernising Education Programme and capital programme.

