

FULL COUNCIL REPORT

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Service Area	Learning
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	15 th June 2016

FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL ORGANISATION

To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report proposes a framework for school organisation, which will form part of the Learning Strategy.
- 1.2 Schools and learning provision must be able to provide high quality educational experiences. School organisation is one of the means by which a local authority responds to changing circumstances that impact upon its ability to meet its duty to promote high standards and to ensure efficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the population of the area.
- 1.3 In order for the local authority to make well-informed decisions, a set of principles have been developed that identify important factors that will be taken into account in considering all proposals for change.
- 1.4 The local authority's strategic plans for effective and efficient school provision include consideration of different approaches and models.
- 1.5 The local authority will use the principles and framework when preparing, publishing, approving or determining school organisation proposals. This framework takes into account the key factors and the interdependencies between them.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 Approve the framework for school organisation.
- 2.2 Delegate powers to Cabinet to take forward proposals for consultation in line with the framework for school organisation.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 MTCBC focused on improving the quality of all its educational establishments through the School Organisation Plan, the Education Asset Management Plan, and the Education Capital Programme. MTCBC secured funding from the Welsh Assembly Government's 21st Century Schools programme that is a key part of the Assembly Government's One Wales commitment to deliver schools fit for purpose for the 21st century. The previous MTCBC school organisation plan ran from 2009-2014 Merthyr Tydfil and focused on planning the provision and supply of school places.
- 3.2 Effective planning of school places has ensured that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has:-
- robust strategies for managing surplus places; the Authority has reduced the capacity of its schools by over 13%. Surplus places are currently 15.8% (2016);
 - no school significantly overfull;
 - regular reviews of trends across the Authority informing school re-organisation proposals when appropriate;
 - developed community focused schools including the provision of community facilities in all new schools; and
 - supported schools in maintaining class sizes at the statutory level.

4.0 LEARNING STRATEGY

- 4.1 Schools must be able to provide high quality educational experiences for all pupils. In order for all children and young people to attain high standards the schools must have:-
- excellent provision;
 - efficient and economic use of resources;
 - sustainability; and
 - a suitable supply of places.

This means:-

- securing high quality leadership and succession planning;
- securing high quality learning and teaching;
- further reducing the number of surplus primary and secondary school places;
- ensuring all schools are run efficiently and hold balances of around 3%; and
- ensuring schools are well maintained.

5.0 SCHOOL ORGANISATION

- 5.1 School organisation is one of the means by which a local authority responds to changing circumstances that impact upon its ability to meet its duty to promote high standards and to ensure efficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the population of the area (Education Act 1996).

In order for the local authority to make well-informed decisions, a set of principles have been developed that identify important factors that will be taken into account in considering all proposals for change, including, where necessary, school re-organisation.

The local authority gives paramount importance to the likely impact of proposals on the quality of:-

- outcomes (standards and wellbeing);
- provision (learning experiences, teaching, care support and guidance, and learning environment);and
- leadership and management (leadership, improving quality, partnership working and resource management).

The principles are:-

- Continued commitment to high standards and excellence in provision
- Equality of opportunity, so that all pupils can access quality learning opportunities, regardless of which school they attend
- Inclusive schools, which cater for the learning needs of all their pupils
- Community focused schools, where the school actively engages with its local community
- Value for money as school places meet the identify population needs

5.2 These principles provide a structured approach to aid in consideration of the rationalisation of learning provision in MTCBC. They draw upon Welsh Government guidance:-

- School Organisation Code (Circular No: 006/2013)
- Federation process of maintained schools in Wales (Circular No: 011/2014)
- Measuring the capacity of schools in Wales, Circular No: 021/2011
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- A living language: a language for living – Welsh Language Strategy 2012-17
- Welsh- medium Education Strategy
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (made under part 4 of the 2013 Act)
- Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (issued February 2011 Information document number 95/2011), or any successor strategy
- Faith in Education
- One Wales: One planet, a new sustainable development scheme for Wales May 2009 or any successor strategy
- Local plans for economic or housing development
- Children and Young People's Plans (or successor plans)
- 21st Century Schools – Capital Investment Programme and the relevant wave of investment
- Learner Travel Operational Guidance - April 2009

5.3 The *School Organisation Code* imposes requirements and provides guidelines in respect of school organisation proposals. The Code came into force on 1 October 2013. Relevant bodies are asked to ensure that proposals comply with and support national policies and overarching aims, in particular the Welsh Government's commitment to increase school effectiveness, and narrow inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals.

5.4 School organisation models

Welsh Government guidance enables the local authority to consider a range of different approaches and models.

*'Local authorities **must** ensure that there are sufficient schools providing primary and secondary education for their area. Schools are regarded as sufficient if they are sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education.'*

School Organisation Code page 7.

In order to meet these criteria local authorities may consider-

- School catchment areas
- Changes to:-
 - Capacity and impact on surplus provision
 - Age range
 - Language category
 - Designated religious character
 - The nature of journeys and resulting journey times
- New schools
- Closure and alternatives.

5.5 The guidance states that:-

*'There is no presumption in favour or against the closure of any type of school. The prime purpose of schools is the provision of education and any case for closure **should** be robust and in the best interests of educational provision in the area. Nevertheless, in some areas, a school may also be the main focal point for community activity, and its closure could have implications beyond the issue of the provision of education. This may be a particular feature in rural areas if school buildings are used as a place to provide services to the local community.'* Page 12.

In addition local authorities should consider *'alternatives to closure, such as clustering, collaboration or federation with other schools'*. This also includes consideration of amalgamation where *'two or more existing schools become one school operating on more than one site (e.g. where former infant and junior schools become a primary school) the terms 'merger' or 'amalgamation' might be used'*.

The *Federation process of maintained schools in Wales* sets out the Welsh Government's advice and information to governing bodies of maintained schools and local authorities (LAs).

'The Welsh Government's policy objective is to promote collaboration between all parts of the education system to improve outcomes. School federation is a more formal way of extending collaboration and promoting closer working relationships and is the principal initiative for achieving formal partnership working amongst schools to improve performance and narrow the attainment gap for deprived pupils.' Page 3.

6.0 PLANNING FRAMEWORK

6.1 The local authority will use a planning framework when preparing, publishing, approving or determining school organisation proposals. This framework takes into account the key factors and the interdependencies between them (Appendix 1).

6.2 The local authority will consult on any proposals with all stakeholders in line with Welsh Government guidance.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 There are no financial implications within this report.

8.0 SINGLE INTEGRATED PLAN AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT SUMMARY

8.1 The single integrated plan and sustainability impact assessment has been completed and there are no negative impacts if the recommendations of this report are agreed.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full assessment is not required at this time. The form can be accessed on the Council's website/intranet via the 'Equality Impact Assessment' link.

LORRAINE BUCK
DIRECTOR FOR PEOPLE AND
PERFORMANCE

COUNCILLOR HARVEY JONES
PORTFOLIO LEAD LEARNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
School Organisation Plan 2009-2014		Council Offices
School Organisation Plan 2016-2025		Council Offices
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.

Key factors in the planning framework

The key factors are:-

- The quality and standards in education for all pupils including vulnerable groups.
- A school's effectiveness including advice from Estyn.
- How effectively the curriculum can be delivered i.e. a broad and balanced curriculum that includes scope for choice and diversity of provision.
- Accessibility of schools i.e. schools are sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education.
- Projected numbers, insufficient and surplus capacity.
- The extent to which existing provision in the medium of English and/or Welsh exceeds or falls short of demand or projected demand.
- The extent to which existing denominational provision or falls short of demand or projected demand, in association with the Diocesan Authorities.
- The promotion and active support for the use of healthy routes to school.
- Transport provision and costs.
- Local plans for economic or housing development.
- Delivery of sustainable schools for the 21st Century and the strategic management of the school estate i.e. building conditions.
- Fair and equitable distribution of funding between mainstream schools.
- Costs of proposals.
- School budgets.
- Ensuring that all schools have an active and coherent community focus including family learning, extended schooling and adult and community learning.
- Consistency with the Council's strategic plans.