

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 22nd March 2018

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Education, Children and Young People/Head of Education & Children Services

Report Author: Head of Education

Title: School Cluster Arrangements

1. What is the report about?

1.1 To provide feedback on development of a process whereby schools could request consideration be given, by the Local Authority, to moving cluster.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 At the Communities Scrutiny meeting of 15th June 2017, Members requested that officers give consideration to development of a process and report their findings in due course.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Members:

- Consider the information provided herein.
- Discuss the comments and outcomes of the working group; and
- Consider the recommendations made.

4. Report details

4.1 Background

4.1.1 Following development of the Authority's new Learner Transport Policy 2017 (which is effective from Sept 2018), a report was taken to Communities Scrutiny Committee on 15th June 2017. This report provided feedback on the consultation process undertaken.

4.1.2 Within the consultation feedback a specific concern was raised by the Head Teacher and Governing Body of Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch (Pentre Llanrhaeadr). This concern related to implementation of a new element in the policy, namely provision of discretionary transport for pupils on the basis of the feeder relationship; between the primary school and its secondary school in their cluster. Appendix 1 shows the relevant section of the new Policy.

- 4.1.3 This element of Denbighshire's new Learner Transport Policy was developed to support pupil welfare; allowing cohorts to stay together when transitioning to their Secondary school in the relevant Denbighshire cluster.
- 4.1.4 The specific concerns of the Head Teacher and Governing Body of Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch was that this element may reduce applications for entry to their school, with parents and carers choosing Ysgol Pant Pastynog (Prion) to ensure eligibility for free transport to Ysgol Glan Clwyd.
- 4.1.5 Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch were also concerned that requests for Ysgol Pant Pastynog could be made under Faith based arrangements as it is a voluntary controlled Church in Wales school. **Note:** Within the new Learner Transport Policy there is also discretionary transport provision for Faith based education, if that is the parental/carers preference. However, this would be dependent on available school places and the Authority would place pupils at the next nearest Faith based school for any such applications made. Appendix 2 shows the relevant section of the Learner Transport Policy 2017.
- 4.1.6 As part of the consultation, requests were also made to provide Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch with free transport to Ysgol Glan Clwyd on a discretionary basis and/or that the school should become part of the Glan Clwyd cluster.
- 4.1.7 Within the context of this request and the concerns raised, Members asked officers to consider development of a separate process which could be followed if a school wished to change cluster arrangements. Therefore Education Support developed a working group, with all clusters invited to attend, to discuss such a process.

4.2 Feedback from the Working Group

- 4.2.1 2 representatives were requested and put forward from each cluster. A cross section of representation was requested; including Head Teachers, Business and Finance Managers and Governors. Representation was also requested from Denbighshire's School Finance and Passenger Transport teams.
- 4.2.2 Education Support developed a scope for the initial discussion, and these considerations are shown in Appendix 3. The working group met on 15th December 2017, with comments and feedback noted from this meeting. There were some apologies at the meeting and it is noted that the Denbigh and Llangollen clusters were not fully represented.
- 4.2.3 In terms of the initial group discussion, there was considerable surprise that the Authority would consider having such a process.
- 4.2.4 During the meeting there were many concerns expressed by the working group regarding development of such a process. The main comments from the group were that *"the focus should continue to be Denbighshire's Modernising Agenda"* and that *"there was no requirement for such a policy"* as it could conflict with the Authority's approach in these areas. Within current arrangements *"Parents have freedom of school choice presently anyway"* and *"schools could choose to work with other schools anyway if they wish, and this happens now"*. The Authority

should continue to ask “*what should secondary education look like in the future and we plan accordingly towards this. The quality of Education across Denbighshire should be the driver, not a process such as this*”

- 4.2.5 It is noted that no positive comments were recorded as part of the working group discussion and all were of the view that such a policy was not required and the focus should be the Authority’s School Modernisation Agenda.
- 4.2.6 As requested by Members, Education Support took forward this work to consider the development of a process. As is shown in the scope in Appendix 3, the department took forward an open discussion regarding its development with all considerations put forward. However, the working groups concerns are indeed the same concerns of Education Support; having a process such as this would work against the Authority’s planned Modernisation Agenda for schools.

4.3 Recommendations

- 4.3.1 At the request of Members, Education Support has investigated the possibility of the developing such a process for schools. However, it is the recommendation that:
- Development of such a policy is not required, as per the working group; indeed this would work against the current coordinated approach to the modernisation of Denbighshire schools. However, such a policy could be developed with a significant amount work, time and resource; which would need to be reviewed by Scrutiny again.
 - That the implementation of the new Learner Transport Policy 2017 be monitored, in-line with the original resolution of the Committee on the 15th June 2017. The area of concern mentioned by Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch can also form part of this review process post implementation.
 - That the Authority respond to the Head Teacher and Governing Body of Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch outlining the above.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The services described herein are all in support of the priority of improving education, in-line with the priority on Young People, and Denbighshire being a place where younger people will want to live and work and have the skills to do so.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

No change in process recommended.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment (WIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed WIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

No WIA undertaken. Not required as part of this process.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

This report is provided as a result of a Member request from Communities Scrutiny 16th June 2017.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The report recommends no change to the current process and therefore there are no additional cost implications to consider. However it is noted that the revised policy reviewed by the working group could be developed but would require a significant amount work which would need to be delivered within existing resources and therefore may impact on other key outcomes. The recommendations of the report are supported.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

In-line with the original resolution of the Committee on the 15th June 2017, the implementation of the new Learner Transport Policy 2017 will be monitored. The areas of concern highlighted by Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch can form part of this process, as mentioned in section 4.3 above.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 7.4.1 of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers and functions in relation to policy development and review.

Contact Officer:

Head of Education and Children's Services

Tel: 01824 708009