

COMMITTEE	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
TITLE OF THE REPORT	Post-16 Education Project in Arfon
DATE OF MEETING	23 January 2024
RELEVANT OFFICER	Debbie Anne Williams Jones Assistant Head: Corporate Services
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Beca Brown, Cabinet Member for Education

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Post-16 Education has been identified as one of the main priorities in the Council Plan 2018-23, and it is also referred to as a part of the priorities of the current plan, namely the Council Plan 2023-28.
- 1.2 In January 2018, a report was submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee noting the intention to undertake an assessment of the current provision, noting the possibility that the findings of the assessment would form the basis for further discussions regarding the future pathway for post-16 provision in the county.
- 1.3 In addition, at its meeting on 12 June 2018, the Cabinet approved the principle of considering the current post-16 situation, ensuring that the Authority would not wish to miss the opportunity to strengthen the provision in Arfon, should there be a case to do so. To this end, a sum of £18m of the Band B Funding, Sustainable Learning Communities Programme.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As a part of the work of looking at the field, Iaith Cyf were commissioned to carry out research on behalf of the Department, in order to enrich and validate the evidence base gathered from desktop research.
- 2.2 After considering the evidence and information gathered as part of the research, a report entitled "Overview of Post-16 Education" was created, which confirmed that there was a case for change. A copy of the report can be seen by following this [link](#).
- 2.3 Consequently, on 10 March 2020, a report was submitted to the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet seeking permission:

"... to hold discussions with stakeholders in order to consider the current provision and highlight the key considerations in order to co-identify the direction and opportunities to strengthen the post-16 education provision in Arfon. Afterwards, a further report will be submitted to the Cabinet in order to report back on the outcomes of the discussions."

- 2.4 The period of informal engagement took place for six weeks between 10 November and 22 December 2020. The purpose of the engagement was to give stakeholders such as learners, parents, staff, governors and the wider community an opportunity to present observations and ideas regarding the post-16 education system in Arfon, within the context of the Council's vision and objectives.
- 2.5 As a part of the engagement process, the following background documents were published on the Council's website:
- Cabinet Report 10 March 2020
 - Overview of Post-16 Education (March 2020)
 - IAITH Cyf Report 'Assessment of the current post 16 education provision in Gwynedd' (April 2019)
 - Presentation (October 2020)
 - The Vision and Objectives
 - Response Form

These documents can be accessed by following this [link](#).

- 2.6 On 4 February 2021, a report was submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the informal engagement process on post-16 education. This report can be accessed by following this [link](#).

3. Cabinet 7 March 2023

- 3.1 On 7 March 2023, a report was submitted before the Cabinet, reporting back on the main messages of the informal engagement held. A copy of the report can be seen by following this [link](#).
- 3.2 In the report, the main observations received under the following themes are detailed -
- Quality of Education
 - The Welsh Language
 - Learners' well-being
 - Travelling
 - Facilities / Learning environment
 - Virtual Learning
- 3.3 Attention was also given to new considerations that emerged due to the pandemic, namely:
- Virtual Learning
 - E-Sgol
 - 16+ Travel Pass
 - Estyn Thematic Report '[Post-16 Partnership](#)'
- 3.4 As a result of the post-consultation feedback, the Cabinet's approval was sought "to undertake further work with stakeholders who make up the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium to develop possible models for post-16 education in Arfon following on from the informal engagement on post-16 education in Arfon that took place in the autumn term 2020."

4 Cabinet 28 November 2023

- 4.1 On 28 November 2023, a report was submitted before the Cabinet reporting back on two working groups held with the headteachers of Arfon secondary schools in the Summer Term 2023. A copy of the report can be seen by following this [link](#).
- 4.2 The following principles were noted by the headteachers, which likely followed the discussion in the working groups, as well as future aspirations for the system:
- Fairness for the learners
 - Standards
 - Welshness
 - The voice of the stakeholders
 - Joint ownership
 - Trying to see the bigger picture
 - The impact of any change on the community
 - Sustainable system
- 4.3 The headteachers generally noted that the existing partnership system (Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium) and collaboration between schools worked well.
- 4.4 On 13 September 2023, the Education Department shared the conclusions of the two working groups held with Arfon secondary headteachers, which highlighted the reasons why the case for change was not as strong, i.e.:
- The Estyn Thematic Report 'Post-16 Partnerships' (January 2021) acknowledges the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium as good practice.
 - Estyn Report on Cyngor Gwynedd Education Services (June 2023), noting that there are no obvious shortcomings in the Arfon Post-16 provision, although it is noted that there is a delay in moving forward with this project over the past years.
 - Arfon's secondary school A Level Results in the summer 2023 appeared to be positive on the whole - although it must be acknowledged that this initial data had not been verified and that differences remain between courses and between organisations.
 - Collaboration between Arfon secondary schools is good, and there is no desire to see any change in the system to have a harmful impact on some secondary schools in Arfon.
 - Ensuring learner well-being is key, and a key part of that is to enable the learners to continue with their post-16 education in their communities.
 - The need to look at the secondary system in its entirety, and that post-16 education cannot be considered in isolation, without considering the impact on KS3 and KS4 (11-16 years) also.
 - The need to consider the likely impact of the demographic change on the schools system in its entirety in the future.
 - The challenge of having to present a successful business case to Welsh Government in order to release the money (including match funding from the Council) when the case for change is weak, or more likely, the challenge of submitting a successful business case to Welsh Government in order to continue with the status quo.
- 4.5 As a result of the post-consultation feedback, the Cabinet's approval was sought *"to approve to redirect part of the Arfon Post-16 Education project's budget in accordance with*

the report, to address the financial deficit in Band B projects that cannot be progressed at present due to the insufficient budget for them as a result of increased costs."

- 4.6 The Cabinet's approval was also sought for the Head of Education to hold discussions on reviewing the memorandum of understanding with the stakeholders which form the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium with the intention of strengthening the arrangements and report back to the Cabinet with recommendations for the amendments agreed.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Education Department has also submitted an application to the Welsh Government to approve the redirection of the funding for the Post-16 education project in Arfon to meet the financial deficit in Band B projects, following the Cabinet's approval.
- 5.2 The Education Department will submit an application before the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Consortium Lead Group early in 2024 in order to seek permission to hold a discussion on reviewing the memorandum of understanding with the stakeholders which form the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Post-16 Education Consortium with the intention of strengthening the arrangements and report back to the Cabinet with recommendations for the amendments agreed.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 The members are asked to present any observations on the steps implemented and the next steps in terms of post-16 education in Arfon.