PROPOSALS TO MOVE TO AN ASYMMETRIC SCHOOL WEEK

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 This report gives members of Scottish Borders Council an update on the work of the primary and secondary education review programmes as part of the wider Education and Lifelong Learning Business Transformation programme and seeks approval for consultation on the impact of moving to an asymmetric week for schools.

1.2 Both review programmes have identified that, following several years of delivering efficiencies as a result of Transforming Children’s Services, the most effective way to meet the challenging savings targets over the next five years is to have the flexibility to look closely at teachers’ terms and conditions and also the number of teachers in the Authority. Both review groups have explored the potential in moving all schools to an asymmetric week as a tool to identifying and delivering these savings.

1.3 The Education and Lifelong Learning Business Transformation Board are now recommending that the Council consult with all stakeholders on the potential impact of the introduction of an asymmetric week.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that Council agrees:-

a) To consult with all key stakeholders on the impact of the proposal to move all schools to an asymmetric week from August 2014.

b) To bring a final report to Council in March 2014 which identifies concerns and issues around the proposal and sets out actions to mitigate these.
3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Within the five-year budget profile as agreed by Council in February 2013, Education and Lifelong Learning was set an efficiency target of £10.99m over the period 2013/14 – 2017/18 with £8.73m to be achieved through business transformation.

This target has been split across various areas of the Department’s work and is being delivered through six separate business transformation programmes:-

- Early Years
- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
- SJC staffing
- School Estate
- Cultural Services

3.2 Of these transformation programmes Primary (£2.4 million) and Secondary Education (£3.8 million) have the biggest efficiency challenges - £6.2 million in total.

3.3 After extensive work exploring options both the primary and secondary review groups have concluded a managed reduction in teacher numbers is the most viable route to achieving the savings targets. The £6.2m equates to a significant reduction in teacher numbers by 2018 although there may be other ways of finding some of this savings target. Both the Primary and Secondary sectors have successfully completed a series of efficiency measures as part of Transforming Children’s Services in 2009 including the restructuring of both primary and secondary management structures.

3.4 A range of alternative solutions has been explored to attain this efficiency target over the next four years.

4 THE CASE FOR AN ASYMMETRIC WEEK – SECONDARY EDUCATION

4.1 All secondary Headteachers support a move to an asymmetric week based on a 33-period week over four and a half days (based on the Lothian model). This will enable schools to timetable existing staff for maximum efficiency based on their contractual hours.

4.2 A modelling exercise has shown that for a larger school a move to more efficient use of staff over a 33-period week would save the equivalent of 3.5 FTE (£145,000) teachers in that school. For a small school the FTE equivalent saving is 1.0 FTE. (£41,500)

4.3 More importantly, a move to an asymmetric week would enable secondary schools to align timetables across all nine schools. Alignment would enable schools to plan curriculum delivery in different and more efficient ways. Secondary schools would have the opportunity to work together in the creation of appropriate courses for e-learning and shared teaching across schools.
5. THE CASE FOR AN ASYMMETRIC WEEK – PRIMARY EDUCATION

5.1 There is a consensus among primary and secondary Headteachers that an asymmetric week would allow for greater 3-18 collaboration and joint planning around key aspects of Curriculum for Excellence. It would enable all teachers to engage on a locality/cluster basis, helping the development of the Broad General Education and assisting in transition planning. It could also lead to shared extra-curricular programmes. (Appendix 1). Primary Headteachers recognise that although there are many benefits to having a joint asymmetric week with secondary, there are no significant savings for primary education in such a move.

5.2 While all secondary schools could move to an asymmetric week of 33 periods without disrupting the primary school week, a previous modelling exercise indicated this is likely to cost an additional £500,000 to pay for the revised school transport costs. If all schools moved to an agreed asymmetric week this transport pressure would be significantly reduced.

5.3 Partner agencies could provide opportunities for children and young people for alternative activities without impacting on learners’ attendance at school.

6. FUTURE CHALLENGES

6.1 It is acknowledged that a move to an asymmetric week for all schools will not, in itself, deliver all the savings targets over the next four years. The challenge of achieving the efficiency targets set out for Education and Lifelong Learning by 2017/18 remains. This is not just an issue for Scottish Borders Council but applies across all local authorities in Scotland while the agreement to maintain current teacher terms and conditions as well as teacher numbers remains in place. Scottish Borders Council will continue to work with CoSLA and Scottish Government to attempt to find a way forward around these issues.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Secondary Headteachers consider a move to an asymmetric week an essential tool if efficiency targets for that sector are to be met.

7.2 Primary Headteachers also see a range of benefits to having a joint asymmetric week with secondary although it has been identified there are no immediate financial savings for the primary sector in this proposal.

7.3 If secondary schools moved to an asymmetric week without primary schools, the additional transport costs would be in the region of £500,000.

7.4 The Education and Lifelong Learning Business Transformation Project Board consider the next appropriate step is to consult with parents, staff, pupils, local business and the wider community on the impact of a move to an asymmetric week and propose a paper is brought to Scottish Borders Council to seek authority to undertake that consultation. (Details of the consultation process are contained in Appendix 2).
8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial
There are no additional financial implications above those already identified in earlier sections of this report.

8.2 Risk and Mitigations
There is no doubt that a proposal to move to an asymmetric week for schools will cause a level of concern principally with parents, but also with staff and across the wider community. Through a consultation process with parents and other stakeholders these risks and concerns will be identified and mitigating actions will be prepared and presented as part of a final report of Council early in 2014.

8.3 Equalities
A full equalities impact assessment will be carried out when the final report is submitted to the Council for consideration in March 2014.

8.4 Acting Sustainably
At this stage no economic, social or environmental effects have been identified.

8.5 Carbon Management
At this stage no carbon management issues have been identified.

8.6 Rural Proofing
A full rural proofing exercise will be completed in relation to the final recommendations brought to Council.

9 CONSULTATION

9.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Head of Corporate Governance, the Head of Audit and Risk, the HR Manager, the Clerk to the Council and the Head of Strategic Policy have been consulted and their comments incorporated in the final report.

Approved by

Director of Education and Lifelong Learning Signature – Glenn Rodger

Author(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Designation and Contact Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colin Easton</td>
<td>Policy, Planning and Performance Manager (Education and Lifelong Learning) 01835 826775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background Papers:
Previous Minute Reference:

Note – You can get this document on tape, in large print and various other formats by contacting us at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies, or to arrange for an Officer to meet with you to explain any areas of the publication that you would like clarified. Contact the Communications Unit at Council Headquarters on 01835 826592.
APPENDIX 1

Benefits and challenges of moving to an asymmetric week

Feedback from Headteachers

BENEFITS

- Increased opportunities for joint working both among secondary schools and between secondary and primary schools
- Easier and improved transitions for pupils from primary to secondary
- Increased opportunities for teacher peer support
- Opportunity to share extra curricular activities
- Opportunities to plan for curricular development
- Dedicated time for teacher training and professional development
- The development of virtual learning, online courses, and web-based teaching will be enhanced through an asymmetric week with aligned timetables in secondary schools
- The number of learning opportunities for secondary school pupils will increase through collaboration between schools
- There may be the opportunity to provide additional extra curricular activities for young people if we engage effectively with partners

CHALLENGES

- Managing the change with staff
- Parents will have childcare concerns, particularly those with primary school children
- A longer primary day might be difficult for younger children
- Our partners may not have the capacity to provide out of school activities when they are needed
- There may be a negative impact on the local economy if parents have to reduce working hours
APPENDIX 2

Consultation process and timetable

It is proposed the consultation period runs for eight week from Monday 6 January 2014

1. We will engage with local media to ensure all stakeholders are aware of, and are able to participate in, the consultation.

2. A consultation document will be prepared and placed on the council website.

3. An online survey will be established to collect the views of individual parents, staff and other stakeholders.

4. Local meetings based on the six learning communities will be convened.

5. We will convene a special meeting of the Parent Council chairs forum in January 2014.

6. We will work with our parent council reference group at all stages of the consultation process to ensure we communicate the issues in an effective and accessible way and that all parents have the maximum opportunity to participate.