

## **DRAFT**

### **REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION POLICY PAPER 22**

#### **AREA-BASED PLANNING OF THE EDUCATION ESTATE**

##### **Overview**

- 1 The purpose of this paper is to set out the approach to area-based planning, which is being introduced to improve the strategic planning of education provision.
- 2 The Education Minister in her statement to the Assembly on 4 December 2007 emphasised the role of area-based planning in relation to delivering post primary reforms. In a subsequent statement on 4 March 2008, the Minister outlined interim measures to establish time-bounded groups focused on taking forward area-based planning in the post-primary sector. This paper deals with the policy relating to area-based planning in anticipation of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).
- 3 Area-based planning is about anticipating the future education needs of an area and planning to meet those needs. Its central objective is to provide a sufficiency of education places through the appropriate mix of facilities, of the right size, in the right locations. Area-based planning has a broader focus than just schools and colleges, covering youth services and early years' provision, and could potentially encapsulate other community provision. It reflects planning on a whole-system basis, working through the interactions between different areas and sectors to inform investment proposals and decisions. A recommendation of the Strategic Review of Education (the Bain Report) was that planning of the education estate could also be related to planning of other fields such as health, social services, adult education, youth provision, sports, arts and recreation and community regeneration and development.
- 4 A key driver underpinning an area-based planning approach is the objective to provide a system of strong sustainable educational facilities. For instance, the Bain Report explained that area-based planning is fundamental to a goal of communities

served by a set of educationally effective and efficient sustainable schools. When taken together they should meet the needs of all pupils in the community by optimising the use of their facilities for the benefit of all, including through sharing and collaboration.

5 Area-based planning covers the process that both determines and addresses the need for provision in an area, on a cross-sector basis, through the identification and procurement of specific projects. It covers the individual's requirements from early years through school, youth and Further Education provision, whilst accounting also for cross-sector issues and interdependencies between providers and areas. This approach should help address a number of problems associated with the traditional processes for planning facilities, including the lack of:

- integration, co-ordination and consistency between the planning activities of the different education authorities; and
- comprehensive strategic planning with a focus instead on the individual facility.

6 The identification of projects for funding within set allocations will be an output from area-based planning.

### **Key Components in Area-based Planning Process**

7 It is proposed that the area-based planning process will cover a number of key components as follows:

- Comprehensive Asset Management Information;
- Area Plans;
- Strategic Investment Plans; and
- Economic appraisals for individual projects.

8 Asset Management Information, derived from condition and suitability surveys of school buildings, has been identified as an important element of strategic planning of the schools' estate. It relates to the physical condition and suitability of the schools estate in each area on a common basis. The investment needs of facilities

can be categorised broadly in terms of condition, sufficiency and suitability as follows:

- Condition needs focus on the physical state of premises to ensure safe and continuous operation and other requirements that may involve building regulations or other non-educational statutory provision.
- Sufficiency needs focus on the quantity and organisation of pupil places within and across schools in the area i.e. are there sufficient places in the area taking account of anticipated need?
- Suitability needs focus on the ability of premises to meet curriculum and management needs for a particular enrolment and contribute to the raising of education standards.

9 It is proposed that Area Plans would be produced by the Education and Skills Authority, and would be important strategic planning tools, and along with Asset Management Information and Strategic Investment Plans, would be fundamental to an effective decision-making process.

10 Area Plans should be the manifestation of a consultation, challenge, and assimilation and aggregation process undertaken by the ESA at local level and informed by views of the individual sectors. The ESA would take a cross-sector view in determining proposals for the overall Area Plans for a local area.

11 Area Plans should relate to areas covering the following provision:

- Nursery schools;
- Primary schools;
- Post-primary schools;
- Special schools;
- Youth facilities; and
- Further Education provision.

12 Area Plans will be statements of need and will be based on an analysis of data which should include:

- the numbers of school places and spare capacity currently in the area;
- the numbers anticipated to be needed by sector;
- the need for any rationalisation and demands for new facilities; and
- opportunities for sharing and collaboration to deliver education.

They should demonstrate how pertinent synergies and cross-sector impacts have been accounted for in arriving at an overall position in relation to the scale and distribution of current and projected need for school places and youth facilities in each area. Their main output therefore is a forward-looking plan in relation to the provision of places to meet the anticipated need over the planning horizon.

- 13 Area Plans would be prepared in draft form, be the subject of consultation, and require Department of Education (DE), and as appropriate the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) approval. DEL and DE would work together to ensure that investments in the schools and further education sectors complement and do not duplicate provision.
- 14 Coherent plans will need to be developed for each area across sectors. A number of factors would help to do this:
- common data sets on numbers and places used by all the sectors;
  - common view of sustainability criteria for schools and facilities;
  - sharing/collaboration opportunities and proposals;
  - value for money/cost effectiveness of options considered;
  - views of parents/pupils/young people on preferences; and
  - views of sectoral interests.
- 15 Whilst the area-based planning process should provide a comprehensive assessment of anticipated need some of the identified need may only be addressed through capital investment. The ESA would therefore prepare Strategic Investment Plans which would be ‘statements of intent’ relating to these investment requirements. Strategic Investment Plans will be informed by both Area Plans and Asset Management Information. Critically they will depend on the (anticipated) level of resources available from the Investment Strategy and Budget decisions. A

Strategic Investment Plan will support the delivery of the recommendations in Area Plans, taking account of condition, suitability and funding issues, in detailing the way forward for investment in each area. The Strategic Investment Plans will need to consider budget impacts and constraints, both in capital and resource terms, and make recommendations regarding prioritisation and profiling of investment.

- 16 The approval of a Strategic Investment Plan by the DE should provide sufficiently robust commitment to allow for investment and procurement planning. Such commitment at this strategic level would be consequential upon approval of individual projects within the Strategic Investment Plan as economic appraisals are rolled out over the planning period. However, the Strategic Investment Plans in themselves will provide the (strategic) context within which such appraisals will be undertaken, with the Area Plans providing a high level need context that should lead to more consistent prioritisation and boundary setting for appraisals. It is envisaged that work on the individual project economic appraisals would commence at the time that the Area Plans were being prepared so that they could be completed and approved in reasonable timescales after the Strategic Investment Plan covering the next few years had been presented.

### **Steps Involved in the Process**

- 17 There would be a number of steps involved in the area-based planning process.

#### **General**

- Establish the detailed departmental policy and strategic context for area-based planning by the ESA;
- Specify local areas for area-based planning covering post-primary, primary and nursery schools within those areas. It is envisaged that there would be a number of plans covering the North;
- Set out parameters, assumptions and factors which must be taken into account for the planning of areas;
- Review information requirements and identify sources and constraints;
- Establish planning groups representing all educational interests which should assist in informing the ESA on how needs might best be addressed.

### **Specific Area**

- Production of Asset Management Information
- Production of an Area Plan
- Consultation on Draft Area Plan
- Submission of Area Plan to DE
- Approval of Area Plan
- Input to Strategic Investment Plan Production
- Approval of Strategic Investment Plan
- Production and Submission of project level economic appraisals
- Quality Assurance of economic appraisals
- Approval of economic appraisals.

### **Development Proposals**

- 18 The purpose of the statutory development proposal is to ensure that all interested parties are informed about proposed significant changes to schools and have an opportunity to comment on any proposed development that may affect them, before decisions are taken. In an area-based planning context, a development proposal should be consistent with an Area Plan and where relevant, a Strategic Investment Plan and economic appraisal, where a significant change in the schools estate is proposed.
- 19 There should be an opportunity for sectors, schools and interests to raise proposals with the ESA as draft Area Plans are being developed/ reviewed. A change that requires a development proposal should have been identified in the draft Area Plan for consultation, either initially or during annual reviews, and have been the subject of an approved economic appraisal where required, although it is recognised that exceptionally there may be situations which arise where unforeseen circumstances necessitate a change quickly. The point is that development proposals should not be independent of the Area Plan production and review process. The development proposal process would remain in legislation, with amendments or new provisions that would require any development proposal to be assessed in the light of an Area Plan. It is proposed that there would remain a requirement for local consultation on each development proposal for a significant change.

## **Local Areas**

- 20 The Bain Report recommended *“local areas should comprise coherent sets of nursery, primary and post-primary schools as well as accessible further education provision, and as far as possible lie within a single local council’s boundaries”*. The Bain Report did not define the areas which should be used; indeed, in planning facilities there should not be a rigid application of boundaries since enrolment at schools reflects both where children live and parental preferences which are not limited by, for example, local council boundaries. A set of planning areas is therefore required to provide complete geographical coverage of the region and it is recognised also that the extent of areas will likely be different between urban and rural areas.
- 21 It is proposed that Area Plans be based initially on present District Council areas, or groups of Council areas. There are a number of advantages to this approach, including data availability and the clustering of post-primary provision around district towns. It is recognised however, that there will need to be flexibility in planning for cross-boundary flows. It should also be the case that Area Plans link to new local council areas. The area-based planning groups for post-primary provision announced on 4 March 2008 are based on the five Education and Library Board areas which are aggregations of current District Council areas.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

- 22 As a regional authority, the ESA should be able to develop plans across sectors and boundaries in a way the present education bodies are not able to do and therefore bring greater consistency, efficiency and effectiveness to estate planning. DE and the ESA would have distinct yet complementary roles and responsibilities relating to area-based planning.
- 23 DE would be responsible for:-
- setting the policy and strategic framework and ensuring the ESA works within this;
  - determining the budget (along with others);
  - providing advice and guidance to the ESA on area-based planning;

- challenging and approving Area Plans, Strategic Investment Plans and economic appraisals where relevant;
- establishing and using educational indicators and other criteria (along with the ESA);
- the approval interface with the Department of Finance and Personnel for budgets and appraisals.

24 The ESA would have:-

- overall responsibility for planning of the estate within the policy and strategic framework set by DE;
- a central role in planning the estate on a local area basis engaging with sectors and stakeholders as necessary;
- responsibility for the production of Asset Management information, Area Plans and Strategic Investment Plans;
- responsibility for establishing and using educational quality indicators and other criteria (along with DE);
- responsibility for facilitating and encouraging cross-sector collaboration;
- responsibility for the production of economic appraisals;
- responsibility for implementation.

25 Education sectoral interests would:-

- represent interests, needs and perspectives within the area-based planning process, in the spirit and practice of an area-based approach, considering their contribution to the system as a whole;
- inform policy development through engagement in consultation exercises;
- be involved in local area planning groups;
- provide pertinent information;
- provide advice as required;
- engage with the ESA in monitoring exercises and identifying solutions; and
- seek to build consensus with other sectors.

26 An earlier RPA Policy Paper for consultation (Paper 21) deals with the issue of sectoral support post-RPA. Specifically in relation to the area-based planning process, Paper 21 notes that sectors would be supported through the provision of funding for professional capacity for:-

*“participating in the planning of the schools estate, assessing current and ongoing provision within the sector, participating in area-based planning co-ordinated by the ESA, and engaging where appropriate in strategic planning processes, including community planning.”*

27 The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) also will have an important role to play throughout the area-based planning stages including providing specialist advice as required and attending area-based planning groups in addition to their existing inspection and advisory roles.

28 These roles and responsibilities are summarised in the flowchart at Appendix A and in the table below:

	<b>Department of Education</b>	<b>Education and Skills Authority</b>	<b>Schools Sectoral Interests</b>
Policy	Provide policy and strategic planning framework and context reflecting the Bain Report Recommendations, including guidance on local areas and the factors that should be taken into account in compiling an Area Plan.	Contribute to the development of policy and guidance drawing on the experience of practical work on the ground.	Inform policy development through engagement in consultation exercises.  The Education Advisory Forum will also advise on policy issues.
Operational	Provide guidance to ESA as necessary on the production of Asset Management Information, Strategic Investment Plans and Area Plans.	Provide overall operational responsibility for the planning of the estate on a local area basis, within the strategic framework provided by DE.	Contribute to area-based planning process through involvement of sectoral interests in local area planning groups.
Production and Approval of Plans	Challenge and approve (sign off) Area Plans and Strategic Investment Plans, liaising as necessary with others, including DEL. Undertake proofing/assurance, audit and periodic health checks.	Produce draft Area Plans, which are subject to consultation, manage consultation process, and submit finalised Area Plans to DE for approval. Submit Strategic Investment Plans to DE for approval.	Contribute to the production of ESA Area Plans through involvement in local area planning groups.

Approval of Economic Appraisals	Approve project level economic appraisals and relevant development proposals as the investment period rolls out (subject to the ESA's delegated limits for capital spend). DFP will also have an approval role for projects above certain agreed value thresholds.	Undertake project level appraisals and submit those (above ESA's delegation) to DE for approval.	Assist ESA with the production of Economic Appraisals through provision of pertinent information.
Specification of Areas	Along with ESA, agree approach to local areas.	Along with DE, specify local areas.	Provide advice as required.
Planning Groups		Establish, lead and co-ordinate planning groups that are representative of all the educational interests as required.	Ensure appropriate sectoral representation on planning groups.
Quality Indicators, Data and Monitoring	Establish and use educational quality indicators and other criteria (along with ESA).  Access data collection and analysis capability availing of modern data gathering technology as a service to all the education partners.	Establish and use educational quality indicators and other criteria (along with DE).  Undertake a detailed area-based audit of provision (including that in FE), and, having done so, maintain and regularly up-date the resulting data.  Monitor area-based provision against the quality indicators and other criteria, identify factors that suggest a review of provision is required, promote innovative ideas for consideration, prompt and encourage linkages, initiate discussion with the sectors and community interests, and work with others to remove hindrances to desirable developments.  Establish and maintain a data collection and analysis capability availing of modern data gathering technology as a service to all the education partners.	Assist with the provision of information to enable ESA to undertake this task.  Engage with ESA in monitoring exercises and identifying solutions.
Sharing/ Collaboration	Along with DEL, develop incentives to encourage and support local schools to build on existing levels of shared facilities and staff	Facilitate and encourage cross-sector collaboration and identify opportunities and needs to develop and bring forward innovative	Seek to build consensus with other sectors. Engage with

	and to develop their partnership further across schools and FE.	ideas for consideration, prompting and proactively encouraging linkages and working with the education authorities to identify obstacles and ways of mitigating them.	and assist ESA with identifying solutions.
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### **Consultation on Draft Area Plans**

- 29 The Bain Report recommended *“In area-based planning, the Education and Skills Authority should have the option of consulting directly with communities to ascertain views on options for educational provision, with the information obtained being considered alongside the assessments of need made by the various school sectors.”*
- 30 In drafting the Area Plan, the ESA should be able to use area planning group(s) and other information sources as required. The education sectoral interests should be represented on these groups and will have important contributions to make to the production of Area Plans by the ESA. Following completion of the draft Area Plan it will be necessary to widen the consultation to cover all the relevant stakeholders.
- 31 An analysis of responses to the consultation should be reported in the Area Plan, including identification of any changes that have been made to the Area Plan as a result of the consultation exercise. The finalised Area Plan should then be submitted formally to DE for approval.

### **Approval of Area Plans**

- 32 DE will need to assess the Area Plan and liaise with the ESA and where appropriate other departments on issues it identifies. Pending satisfactory resolution of such issues, DE should approve the Area Plan subject to a proviso relating to the availability of resources to implement it and value for money considerations at project level.

### **Area Planning Cycle**

- 33 There will be a need to review Area Plans on a regular basis and show transparently the intentions for change. Area Plans should be capable of being reviewed/ updated as key data sets become available, perhaps annually, but there should also be recognition of the need to balance the desire for the latest position against the effort involved in updating Area Plans which take a longer term look.

### **Timescale for Implementation**

- 34 Area-based planning on a cross-sector basis will be the responsibility of the ESA when it is fully established. The timetable will be dependent upon the passage of legislation by the Assembly. Thereafter, it is expected to take some time for the first Area Plans to be put in place on this basis, given the processes involved.
- 35 In the interim it is possible to undertake aspects of area-based planning in terms of the analysis of data for local areas and the issues and criteria which are relevant to project identification and approval in an area-based planning model. The Education sector is also carrying out aspects of area planning which will be developed with the Department in the period leading up to the establishment of the ESA. The Minister's statement of 4 March 2008 set out proposals for the establishment of local groups in the interim period to undertake area-based planning for the post-primary sector with the Central Area Planning Group expected to report by February 2009.

