

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee**

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

### **REPORT OF HEAD OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION**

**RHIANNON CROWHURST**

#### **MATTER FOR INFORMATION**

**WARDS AFFECTED: All**

**Title of report: Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme Update**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To update members on the progress of the Strategic School Improvement Programme and the Sustainable Communities for Learning (previously 21<sup>st</sup> century School programme) projects.

#### **Executive summary**

2. In September 2008, Cabinet approved the introduction of the Strategic School Improvement Principles Paper, which presented the programme for school reorganisation and change.
3. The Welsh Government, through its Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (previously 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme) of grant funding, supports capital build projects for new and replacement schools. Since 2014 the Council has significantly benefitted from this programme, which has enabled c.£200m of capital investment to be made in new school builds in the county borough.

4. This report details the current position and the future plans for the Strategic School Improvement Programme.

## **Background**

5. In September 2008, Cabinet approved the introduction of the Strategic School Improvement Principles Paper, which presented the programme for school reorganisation and change.
6. The report set out the principles underpinning the process of school reorganisation in Neath Port Talbot County Borough. The principles were developed to support an overarching strategy for school improvement that aimed to provide 'fit for purpose' schools capable of delivering high quality educational experiences for all pupils. The principles provided clarity of purpose and transparency of approach, and determined the main factors that would be taken into account in considering all proposals for change, including, where necessary, school closures.
7. Implementing the Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) involves reviewing existing provision and determining the number and type of schools needed to deliver education effectively and efficiently across the County Borough. It has led to substantial change involving opening new schools, closing existing schools, merging or amalgamating schools, federating schools and promoting new initiatives that support collaborative working between schools. It has also involved re-organising education provision to ensure pupils gain access to and benefit from the specialist support, skills and expertise available within the County Borough.
8. The Council decided to review its provision on the basis of:
  - the need for places and the accessibility of schools
  - educational standards
  - the quality and suitability of school accommodation
  - effective financial management

8. Since 2008 the Council has demonstrated commitment to providing high quality education for all children and young people across the County Borough. The SSIP has been consistently implemented, ensuring that the right schools are in the right places and that they are capable of delivering an education fit for children and young people in the 21st Century. At the heart of the programme is the delivery of quality educational experiences that encourage and support pupil development - experiences that meet the aspirations of young learners, enhancing and enriching their lives and their life opportunities.
  
9. In recent years the SSIP has also focussed on the need to ensure that school reorganisation aligns closely with the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), ensuring that the opportunities for children and young people to be educated through the medium of Welsh have grown and developed. The development of the Welsh language is fully considered in all reorganisation and new build planning, and SSIP actively supports the work towards Gymraeg 2050 aspirations.
  
10. Additionally, it has also become a priority to ensure that new or remodelled schools are supported to make use of the improved facilities to encourage community use, providing greater opportunities not just for the pupils who attend the school but for the wider community also.

## **Welsh Government Sustainable Communities for Learning**

### **Band A and B Projects**

11. The Welsh Government, through its Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (previously 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme) of grant funding, supports capital build projects for new and replacement schools. Since 2014 the Council has significantly benefitted from this programme, which has enabled c.£200m of capital investment to be made in new school builds in the county borough.
  
12. The schools are
  - Awel Y Mor (3-11 primary) 2013
  - Ysgol Bae Baglan (3-16 middle school) 2016
  - Ysgol Cwm Brombil (3-16 middle school) 2018

- Ysgol Carreg Hir (3-11 primary) 2018
- Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera-Bro Dur
  - phase 1 and 2 Ystalyfera campus (3-19) 2018
  - complete new build Bro Dur campus (11-16) 2018
  - phase 3 Ystalyfera campus 2022
- Cefn Saeson Comprehensive 2021
- Abbey Primary School 2022

13. All projects were successfully completed on time and within budget. A portfolio of photographs of the completed builds can be seen at Appendix A.

14. Following completion of the build and subsequent occupation of the school by staff and pupils, an evaluation exercise is routinely carried out. This involves feedback from those involved in the build from the start, as well as the end users. SSIP officers facilitate a school review which involves interviews with teaching staff across the school, including the Headteacher and /or senior staff, support staff, pupils, parents and Governors. The findings from the reviews are used to help plan the next new build project and ensures that 'lessons learned' inform the process. Most recently, senior staff from future new build projects have been invited to join new build reviews, helping them to gain an understanding of the complexities of developing a new school. An example of a school review can be seen at Appendix B (Abbey Primary School).

### **9 Year Rolling Programme (2024-2033)**

15. In November 2022 members approved the next tranche of projects for submission in the NPT Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) for Welsh Government funding.

- Llangatwg Comprehensive School (replacement build)
- YGG Rhosafan (replacement build)
- Tywyn Primary (replacement build)
- Ysgol Gymraeg Newydd Dwyrain ( new WM school located in the east of the county borough)
- St Joseph's RC School and Sixth Form Centre and St. Joseph's Catholic Junior School (new build 7-19 school)

16. In May 2023 officers were notified that the YGG Rhosafan scheme had achieved success at the Sustainable Schools Challenge and

would now be 100% grant funded. This was an exceptional success for NPT as the scheme is one of only 3 across Wales to have been awarded the funding and has meant that the project can now incorporate an exciting community facility to replace the current Tirmorfa which shares the site and building as well as a new build school. As one of the first sustainable schools in Wales, the scheme has already gained much interest across the country and is expected to become an exemplar project for the future.

17. As a result of YGG Rhosafan being awarded funding, a substitute scheme was added to the SOP – a new build special school on one site to replace Ysgol Hendrefelin, which currently occupies 3 sites across Neath Port Talbot.
18. In April 2023, Cabinet determined not to progress the Ysgol Newydd Swansea Valley proposal, which meant that the £14.7m Welsh Government funding which had been approved for this scheme was potentially available for an alternative scheme/ schemes, subject to Welsh Government approval and the submission of a three stage, five case business model.
19. In November 2023 a variation request was therefore submitted to Welsh Government requesting a change to the programme. This involved
  - **Godre'rgraig**- a new build replacement Godre'rgraig Primary school, at Gnoll Road, Godre'rgraig
  - **Ysgol Maes y Coed**- an extension to Ysgol Maes Y Coed special school
  - **Vocational Hub** - heavy refurbishment of the vacated former Education Learning Resource Service (ELRS) building at Velindre, Port Talbot
20. In January 2024 Welsh Government approved the variation requests for Ysgol Maes Y Coed extension and the remodelled Vocational Hub, subject to business case approvals. The removal of the Swansea Valley scheme from the Band B envelope was also approved, but additional information was requested, including a Welsh Language Impact Assessment to further consider the replacement school for Godre'rgraig. This substantial piece of work has been commissioned and a final draft is expected early in January 2025.

21. In August 2024 the Strategic Outline Programme was approved by Welsh Government, and the strategic business cases (SOCs) for Llangatwg Comprehensive School, Ysgol Maes Y Coed and the Vocational Hub were submitted and approved. Work has now started on all three projects.

### **Additional Sustainable Communities for Learning Capital Funding**

22. Welsh Government Sustainable Communities for Learning also provides capital funding for other education projects through additional grants including Community Focussed Schools, Additional Learning Needs (ALN), Welsh Medium Provision, Child Care and Universal Free School Meals.

#### **Community Focussed Schools**

- Cwm Brombil Community Cafe and Food bank/Community Support Hub,
- Sandfields Primary Community Support Hub,
- Melin Primary Community Support Hub.
- Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera -Bro Dur (Bro Dur site) Skills Hub

#### **Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**

- Maesmarchog Primary School- Structural work and refurbishment to LSC
- Blaenhonddan Primary School- New 16 place Primary ASD LSC
- Ysgol Hendrefelin Special School – New additional 12 place classroom

Smaller additional capital work has also been undertaken across the school estate due to the funding received, to support schools to improve facilities and equipment for pupils with ALN.

#### **Welsh Medium Provision**

- YGG Pontardawe- new build extension for Foundation Phase, new Reception area and structural work to childcare provision to facilitate expansion
- YGG Tregales-Structural work and refurbishment to existing building to create a new Welsh-medium school.
- YGG Trebannws- structural work and refurbishment of ALN provision in preparation for transition to a Welsh-medium LSC; structural work and refurbishment to Foundation Phase building to include Welsh-medium childcare provision.
- YGG Tyle'r Ynn – new build extension and new childcare provision

- YGG Cwmllynfell – new build classroom extension and childcare provision

### **Child Care**

New child care settings to be completed at

- Blaendulais
- Cwmafan
- Ystalyfera

Smaller additional work has also taken place across NPT child care settings.

### **Universal Free School Meals**

Due to the increased numbers of primary aged pupils who are now able to access a free school meal, work has been completed in many school kitchens across NPT. Major kitchen replacement work has also taken place or is planned at

- Baglan Primary School
- Coedffranc Primary School
- YGG Tregeles
- Glyncorwg Primary
- Eastern Primary School

### **Financial Impacts**

5. There are no financial impacts as a result of this report.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

6. An integrated impact assessment is not required as this report is for information only.

### **Valleys Communities Impacts**

7. There is no impact on Neath Port Talbot's valley communities as this report is for information only.

### **Workforce impacts**

8. There is no impact on the workforce as result of this report.

## **Legal impacts**

9. There are no legal impacts as a result of this report.

## **Risk management**

10. No risks have been identified as a result of this report.

## **Consultation**

11. There is no requirement for consultation.

## **Recommendation**

12. That Members note the information provided in this report.

## **Reasons for proposed decision**

13. No decision required as this report is for information only.

## **Implementation of the decision**

14. This report is for information only.

## **Officer Contact**

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## Appendices

Appendix A	New school Portfolio
Appendix B	Abbey primary First Year review

## List of Background Papers

- a) Strategic School Improvement Programme Principles Paper: September 2008  
[https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/20080924/Agenda/\\$CAB-240908-REP-EL-KN.doc.pdf](https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/20080924/Agenda/$CAB-240908-REP-EL-KN.doc.pdf)
- b) STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME:PROPOSED PROJECTS FOR THE COUNCIL'S NEXT PHASE OF INVESTMENT UNDER WELSH GOVERNMENT'S SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME  
[Agenda for Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 24th November, 2022, 2.00 pm: NPT CBC](#)
- c) STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME – PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE COUNCIL'S SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING CAPITAL FUNDING PROJECTS AND REVISE THE CAPITAL SPEND PROFILE  
[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 20/11/2023 14:05](#)
- d) Welsh In Education Strategic Plan  
[Final WESP Report Nov 23.pdf](#)