

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board**

**9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

### **REPORT OF HEAD OF TRANSFORMATION ANDREW THOMAS**

#### **MATTER FOR INFORMATION**

**WARDS AFFECTED: All**

#### **STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME – GATEWAY REVIEW ASSURANCE – PROJECT ASSESSMENT REVIEW**

##### **Purpose of report**

1. To inform Members of the outcome of an independent assessment of the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme.

##### **Executive summary**

2. The Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) has recently been independently assessed for assurance by an external review team.
3. The key finding from the review is that successful delivery of Band A projects to: time, cost and quality, is highly likely and that there are no major outstanding issues that appear to threaten delivery. Delivery confidence is assessed as GREEN - the highest level of confidence.
4. The review team commented that delivery of the new builds is well managed and that there is an excellent team spirit and a common purpose which is very evident both within the SSIP team and across the wider stakeholder delivery interest.

5. In terms of the operational structure of the Council's SSIP, the review team noted that there is a 'core' team supported by a much wider 'virtual' team of subject matter experts from across the Council's services.
6. Relationships between partners are positive, including those with the trade unions and with the local communities.
7. As a Tier 1 priority for the Council, funding has been ring-fenced to ensure affordability.
8. The review team commended the Council and SSIP team for demonstrating a willingness to learn and adapt to changing circumstances and to adopt suggestions from others where these are felt to be appropriate.
9. The review team were encouraged to see that all those interviewed were focused not just on a new building itself but on the building as a facilitator of the true benefits of school organisation, i.e. improved educational experience and attainment.
10. The review team made two recommendations whose uptake should benefit the SSIP. Both have been accepted by the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO).

## **Background**

11. The Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. The Council has established a Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) to deliver its school organisation responsibilities which involves reviewing the existing school estate and determining the number and type of schools needed to deliver education effectively and efficiently across the County Borough.
12. Provision is reviewed on the basis of:
  - educational standards
  - the need for places and the accessibility of schools
  - the quality and suitability of school accommodation
  - effective financial management

13. In delivering parts of its school organisation programme of change the Council has accessed capital grant funding from the Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.
14. The Council's SSIP has recently been independently assessed for assurance via a Gateway Review process. The Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme expects Council's benefiting from capital grants to subject their management processes and operational practices to an independent review.
15. The Gateway Review process is used by the Welsh Government to evaluate and monitor progress with regard to delivery of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme in order to provide assurance that the Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools strategy is being delivered.
16. Exposing the plans and procedures of the SSIP to the external scrutiny of a Project Assessment Review will, undoubtedly, add value to current and future practice.
17. The external cost of the review will be met by the Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.

### **Review Process**

18. The review was undertaken by consultants commissioned by the Welsh Government's Integrated Assurance Hub and took place over three days between Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017.
19. It was agreed that the focus of the review would be on the progress of two high value, new build projects.
20. The review involved scrutiny of supporting documentation and interviews with stakeholders.

### **– Terms of Reference**

21. The review was commissioned by the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning as the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Council's SSIP and was undertaken in line with agreed terms of reference as set out below.

22. The purpose of the review was to inform the Council's practices and procedures in delivering high value school reorganisation projects and to provide assurance of benefits realisation.
23. The review assessed two projects in the Council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Band A programme, projects linked by procurement arrangements and build delivery. The two projects comprised:
  - a new build, 'all-though' English-medium school for 1455 pupils age 3-16yrs (*Ysgol Newydd Margam*); and
  - a new build Welsh-medium school for 650 pupils age 11-16yrs (*Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera – Bro Dur: south campus*)
24. Both schools are scheduled to be occupied in the autumn term 2018 (*note overall the Programme will be opening 4 schools on the same day*).
25. The review sought to inform the Council on:
  - Deliverability – The extent to which the projects are likely to deliver the expected benefits, including:
    - Capacity/capability
    - Complexity of approach
    - Resilience
    - Timelines(schedule)
    - Meeting expectations
  - Affordability – The extent to which the level of expenditure presents as an acceptable financial risk
    - Sufficiency of Budget (capital)
  - Value for money – The optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose)
    - Benefits approach
    - Lessons learnt approach

– ***Interviews***
26. A range of Council officers and other key stakeholders were interviewed by the review team. In total, 19 people contributed to the interview process, comprising: officers from across the Council's services, the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture, the head teachers of the two project assessment schools and a school governor

27. The selection of the interviewees ensured that the review team heard from a wide range of participants with differing stakeholder interests.

### **Review findings**

28. Delivery confidence is assessed as GREEN, i.e. successful delivery of the project/programme to time, cost and quality appears highly likely and there are no major outstanding issues that at this stage appear to threaten delivery.
29. The review team assessed two current new build projects and commented that the SSIP is managing delivery well for both builds. Whilst resources in the SSIP team are under pressure, there is an excellent team spirit and a common purpose which is very evident both within the SSIP team and across the wider stakeholder delivery interest.
30. Relationships between partners are positive, including those with the trade unions and with the local communities and the contractor for both builds has established a good rapport with local people.
31. The SSIP (including these two builds) has been established as a Tier 1 priority for the Council and funding has been ring-fenced to ensure affordability.
32. The schedule for both builds is tight in terms of when the construction periods are due to complete and the schools are scheduled to commence operation. The SSIP team and the head teachers for both schools are aware of this and are planning contingency activities to manage the situation. In addition, lessons have been learnt from the recent build at Ysgol Bae Baglan and are being actively applied to these two builds. The review team noted that part of the confidence both within the SSIP team/Council and underpinning the outcome of this review is the success of the Ysgol Bae Baglan project.
33. The review team noted and commended the Council and SSIP team for demonstrating a willingness to learn and adapt to changing circumstances and to adopt suggestions from others where these are felt to be appropriate.

34. The review team were encouraged to see that all those interviewed were focused not just on the new building itself but on the building as a facilitator of the true benefits of school organisation, i.e. improved educational experience and attainment.
35. The review team made two recommendations whose uptake should benefit the Programme. These are:
  - the SRO should ensure that:
    - a. the SSIP develops an overarching programme plan for all activities associated with delivery of the 2 projects, establishing the critical path across all activities and identifying dependencies (including with other schools projects); and
    - b. the SSIP develops a benefits management strategy and plan for both Ysgol Newydd Margam and Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera – Bro Dur

### **SRO response**

36. The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning in his capacity as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) has welcomed the outcome of the review and takes considerable solace from the fact that the review team assessed delivery to be at the highest level of confidence.
37. Such a positive outcome allows the Council to continue to plan and deliver major re-organisation projects on behalf of the communities it serves, knowing that this is being done from a position of significant strength.
38. The areas on concern identified by the review team are acknowledged and both recommendations are accepted.
39. Ownership of the report is with the SRO.

### **Impact on pupils/school staff/governors**

40. The outcome of the Project Assessment Review gives assurance that successful delivery of the remaining Band A projects to time, cost and quality is highly likely.

## **Financial Impacts**

41. The external costs associated with the Project Assessment Review will be met via the Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

42. There are no equality impacts directly associated with this report.

## **Workforce impacts**

43. The review highlighted that the SSIP relies heavily on individuals and team spirit.
44. The review team expressed concern at (a) programme reliance on a few key experts – which creates potential “single points of failure” for the SSIP and (b) the risk of over-burdening willing individuals, with the consequential risk of stress and ill health. The review team heard that the SSIP is aware of these issues and that there was some activity around succession planning for key individuals and, in some areas, potential for buying in additional support.
45. The review team appreciated that the resourcing situation generally in the Council is difficult and there is no “magic bullet” to alleviate the situation; commenting that in this instance, the situation is exacerbated by the need to open 4 new schools (including the 2 schools that are the subject of the review), on the same day which limits options to flex staff.

## **Legal impacts**

46. The Council's school organisation programme is being delivered in accordance with the requirements of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and associated School organisation Code.

## **Risk management**

47. Associated risks are addressed in the Project Assessment Review report accompanying this Cabinet Board report (appendix A).

## **Welsh Language Impact Assessment**

48. There are no Welsh language impact assessment issues directly associated with this report although it is to be noted that one of the projects in the Project Assessment Review was a Welsh-medium school, delivery of which will enhance the provision of Welsh-medium education within the County Borough.

## **Consultation**

49. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

## **Recommendation**

50. The report is for information purposes only.

## **Reasons for proposed decision**

51. Not required

## **Implementation of the decision**

52. Not required

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Project Assessment review report – October 2017

### **List of background papers**

- a) Cabinet Report: February 2017  
<https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/documents/s27994/Cabinet%20report.pdf>
- b) Cabinet Report: January 2016  
<https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/documents/s19456/Cabinet%20report%20130116%203.pdf>
- c) 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)
- d) Welsh Government - School Organisation Code: July 2013  
<http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/130719-school-organisation-codes-en.pdf>
- e) School Standards & Organisation (Wales) Act 2013  
[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/pdfs/anaw\\_20130001\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/pdfs/anaw_20130001_en.pdf)