

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board

24th November 2022

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, LEISURE AND LIFELONG LEARNING ANDREW THOMAS

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME: PROPOSED PROJECTS FOR THE COUNCIL'S NEXT PHASE OF INVESTMENT UNDER WELSH GOVERNMENT'S SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME

Purpose of report

1. To obtain approval of the Council's submission for the next phase of investment to Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme of capital funding.

Executive summary

2. The Welsh Government, through its Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (previously 21st Century Schools and Education 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.
3. An outline programme has been developed for further new and replacement school projects for inclusion for the next imminent phase of investment and early member approval of the proposed programme is sought.

4. The projects in the proposed outline submission for consideration in the next phase of investment under Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme comprise:

a. Llangatwg Comprehensive c.£30m

A replacement 11-16 Secondary school for 850 places and new 16 place Learning Support Centre (LSC). Llangatwg Comprehensive is a building condition category C- with backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to approximately £6.8m. The school has significant surplus capacity. It is proposed to construct the new school on the playing fields of the existing site. On completion, the existing buildings will be demolished to make way for new playing fields, ATP and hard play areas.

b. YGG Rhosafan c.£10.2m

A replacement 3-11 Primary school for 465 places (incl. 45 place Nursery) and 16 place LSC. YGG Rhosafan is a Welsh-medium primary school located in the Sandfields area of Port Talbot and is a building condition category C- with backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to approximately £1.4m. The existing school is nearing capacity and pupil numbers are projected to increase. It is proposed to replace the school with a new build 21st Century school to accommodate increased numbers of Welsh-medium pupils in the area. The replacement school will be built on the playing fields of the existing site. On completion of the new build the existing building will be demolished to make way for new playing fields, MUGA and hard play areas.

c. Tywyn Primary c.£10.8

A replacement 3-11 Primary school for 465 places (incl. 45 place Nursery) and a 48 place LSC for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Tywyn primary school is located in the Sandfields area of Port Talbot and is a building condition category C- with backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to approximately £2.7m. It is proposed to replace the school and LSC with a new build 21st Century school. The replacement school will be built on the playing fields of the existing site. On completion of the new build the existing building will be demolished to make way for new playing fields, MUGA and hard play areas.

d. Ysgol Gymraeg Newydd Dwyrain c.£10.2m

A new Welsh-medium 3-11 Primary school for 465 places (incl 45 place Nursery) and 16 place LSC Total 481 places. A review of Welsh-medium provision has identified the need to establish a new school in the East of the County Borough. The new school will provide for 465 pupils (including a 45 place Nursery) and incorporate a 16 place LSC. There is a need to identify a suitable area of land of approximately 24,000m² along the A48 corridor between Port Talbot Town Centre and Margam.

e. St Joseph's RC School and Sixth Form Centre and St. Joseph's Catholic Junior School c.£45m

A new build 21st Century 7-18 Middle School for 1130 places and a 16 place LSC. St Joseph's RC School and Sixth Form Centre is condition category C- with backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to approximately £7.5m. St. Joseph's Catholic Junior School building is condition category C with backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to approximately £470K. The replacement school would be built on the playing fields of the existing sites. On completion of the new build the existing buildings will be demolished to make way for new playing fields, ATP, MUGA and hard play areas.

5. These projects address the poorest condition school buildings whilst seeking to improve service delivery and address potential risks to business continuity. There are many more schemes that need be tackled with the support of future funding initiatives. Authorisation is sought for officers to explore with Welsh Government Officials the grant funding opportunities available and secure the most beneficial option for the Council.

Background

6. The Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. Having the right schools in the right place and ensuring that they are fit for the 21st century learner is the ongoing challenge facing the Council. Achieving this involves reviewing the number and type of schools the Council has in its area and assessing whether or not best use is being made of resources and facilities. This will include ensuring suitable provision for those pupils with special educational needs/additional learning needs.

7. The Council established a Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) in 2008; a programme that has brought about significant change to the school estate during the ensuing period, including new build schools supported by Band A of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme of capital funding.
8. The SSIP is supported by a principles paper that sets out a programme of development ensuring that schools are "fit for purpose" and capable of delivering high quality education. Proposals for change are to be based on:
 - educational standards
 - the need for places and the accessibility of schools
 - the quality and suitability of school accommodation
 - effective financial management
9. Implementing the SSIP has involved reviewing existing provision in order 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.
10. School reorganisation involving capital build projects has been supported by Welsh Government grant funding since 2014 through the 21st Century Schools Programme (from January 2022 Welsh Government rebranded the programme and it is now referred to as the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme). This has provided grant funding at intervention rates of 50% for previous Band A and 65% (75% for Special Schools) for Band B capital schemes, with the remaining balances being found from the Council's own resources, substantively from its prudential borrowing capacity.
15. The following schemes have already been successfully delivered and occupied:
 - Awel Y Mor (2013)
 - Ysgol Bae Baglan (2016)
 - Ysgol Carreg Hir (2018)
 - Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur (North and South) (2018, 2022)

Ysgol Cwm Brombil (2018)
Cefn Saeson Comprehensive (2021)
Abbey Primary (2022)

School estate – the context

11. In 2010, Neath Port Talbot supported 71 primary schools, 11 secondary schools and 3 special schools providing for a school based population of approximately 21,000. Backlog maintenance and accessibility costs were estimated to be c.£110m.
12. For Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, the next phase of investment through Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme commences with a more efficient and much improved school portfolio which, at September 2022, consists of 52 primary schools, 5 secondary schools, 3 'all through' middle schools and 2 special schools providing for a school based population of approximately 21,000. Backlog maintenance and accessibility costs were estimated to be c.£64m.

The need for change

13. Despite making excellent progress, the Council, like many other authorities across Wales, continues managing an ageing school estate. Maintaining a school building portfolio where many premises are experiencing deteriorating internal/external fabric and end of life mechanical and electrical services presents a dilemma for the Council financially and operationally.
14. With limited finances to support this area of work the identified backlog maintenance requirements for schools still significantly exceeds the amount of capital resources available annually.
15. In very many schools the mechanical and electrical services are in need of replacement due to their age and condition whilst leaking windows, deteriorating kitchens and utilities, damp and flat roof replacements pose challenging problems requiring costly refurbishment solutions. In some instances it may not be fully practicable to undertake a complete refurbishment scheme of the building, due to the dated systems of the original construction and inadequate site conditions.

16. Backlog maintenance costs have been calculated to provide a 'like-for-like' replacement of the element. The maintenance costs only considers the work to be undertaken within the next five years and does not include for future works outside this timescale. Once the identified work is developed into a scheme, these costs can rise considerably to allow for the upgrading of areas for modern and future use, and reorganising layouts to address the current teaching requirements of the school.
17. Undertaking backlog maintenance works identified in the condition reports will have a significant effect on the service delivery of the schools e.g. some schools would have to close for a substantial period and in certain cases, there would be a need to construct a temporary building of similar size, for teaching pupils in the interim. These costs are not allowed for within the backlog maintenance estimates.
18. Even if the work was affordable, the effect would be to make good the sustainability of the building but is unlikely to result in the delivery of a 21st century school environment or address provision and sufficiency of places, i.e. having the right school in the right place.
19. Investment in the proposed projects within the next phase of Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme will result in 6 new build schools, 4 replacing 5 existing builds. This will remove a further c.£19m of backlog maintenance and accessibility costs.
20. This next phase of investment does not aspire to fully address building condition liabilities across the school estate as capital investment is limited, not least by the ability of the Council to match fund from its own resources and borrowing capacity.
21. Projects proposed for this next phase of investment aim to address the poorest condition school buildings whilst also seeking change to improve service delivery. They also address risks to business continuity (as best that they can be predicted). There are many more schemes that will still need to be tackled with the support of future funding initiatives.
22. Through the two completely new schools the Council will seek to address Welsh in Education Plan targets to increase the number of

pupils accessing Welsh-medium education, as well as addressing challenges of providing specialist education for pupils with Additional Learning Needs

Consultation

23. This report seeks Member approval for a submission to the Welsh Government for the next round of funding under its Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.
24. As the proposed programme develops each project will be subject to consultation with the respective school communities. Should a project involve the closure of a school formal consultation will be undertaken in line with legislative requirements.

Financial Impacts

25. Although final details have not yet been published, in supporting the next phase of investment of their Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, it is likely that Welsh Government will continue to offer two grant funding options: the traditional capital grant funding route based on a 35% contribution from the Council (25% for Special Schools) and a Mutual Investment Model (MIM) requiring a 19% contribution from the Council.
26. Discussions will take place with the Welsh Government over the most beneficial route for the Council to follow.
27. One of the projects contained within the Council's outline Band B submission will generate annual revenue savings. Savings generated as a result of the Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP), of which Sustainable Communities for Learning is a significant component part, are ring fenced for further reinvestment in the Education Service. In order to assist with the funding of this programme, opportunities to convert the revenue savings into 'Prudential Borrowing' using its powers under the 2003 Local Government Act and corresponding WAG regulations will be maximised. In addition to utilising Prudential Borrowing, the Council will supplement its funding through the use of capital receipts where available.

28. Should sufficient match funding not be secured then the programme of projects will need to be revised in line with the resources available.
29. The proposals outlined may result in existing school sites being surplus to requirements. Assumptions in relation to potential capital receipts have not been made as there is too much uncertainty surrounding the timing, alternative usage and the amounts of any potential receipts that might be generated. Land values within the County Borough are not generally high, however and as appropriate, receipts will be included as schemes develop and as design details lead to greater cost certainty.

Management of programme

30. Since September 2008, the Council has adopted a structured approach to the rationalisation of educational provision in the County Borough – the Strategic Schools Improvement Programme (SSIP). This Programme is underpinned by four key principles: standards in education; the need for places and the accessibility of schools; the quality and suitability of school accommodation; and effective financial management.
31. This approach enables the Council to meet its statutory duties to provide ‘fit for purpose’ schools that deliver high quality education across the County Borough. The SSIP sets the context in which decisions on the organisation of school places in Neath Port Talbot are made. It facilitates the planned delivery of a managed programme for change.
32. The programme of projects is overseen by the Council’s Corporate Directors’ Group (CDG) reporting to the Council’s Executive. The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) is the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning who sits on the CDG.
33. To ensure decisions are informed by a wide base of stakeholders key officers of the Council from Finance, Education Improvement, Inclusion and Early Years , Human Resources, Corporate Strategy, Environment, ICT and Legal Services will be engaged as necessary as will Service Users. Additional stakeholders and project sponsors are involved on a specific programme/project basis.

Integrated Impact Assessment

34. A first stage Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 the Environment (Wales) Act 2016).
35. The first stage screening assessment is attached as appendix A. This indicates that there is no requirement for a full IIA at this stage, however as each individual scheme is progressed an IIA and, as appropriate, a Welsh Language Impact Assessment will be developed.

Valley Communities Impacts

36. There is no impact on valley communities as result of this report.

Workforce impacts

37. Across the proposed programme of projects contained in this report, there are likely to be changes that could potentially impact on the employment of school staff, particularly where existing schools might close.
38. Staff impact will be scheme specific and, as such, will be managed on a scheme by scheme basis. However, in all cases staffing structures will be the responsibility of the head teacher and the school's governing body. In the case of a new school, this will be the temporary governing body. In relation to school closures, the Council's policy is for the posts of head teacher and deputy head teacher to be advertised nationally. For other school based staff, i.e. teaching and support, as part of any re-organisation process staff will be supported by the relevant school policies and procedures which will include full consultation. Previous experience has shown that some staff wish to secure employment in the new school but others take the opportunity to take on new challenges elsewhere. Employees identified at risk of redundancy will be given access to the Council's prior consideration register.
39. The Council is committed to supporting staff at risk of compulsory redundancy and has secured the support and goodwill of the teacher associations/trade unions and governing bodies across the

Council, via an employers' pledge. The Council has a good track record for supporting staff in such situations.

Legal impacts

40. Where required school reorganisation processes will be undertaken in line with the Welsh Government's School organisation Code 2018.
41. Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for learning funding is granted subject to specific conditions.
42. Procurement of contractors in respect of Sustainable Communities for Learning schemes will be in line with the South West Wales Regional Contractors Framework.

Risk management

43. The potential risks associated with the proposals comprise the Council's reputation, educational standards, service delivery, financial management of public money, procurement and contractual arrangements.
44. The Council will work to manage the risks and associated dependencies and constraints through strong programme/project management and robust governance arrangements.
45. A risk mitigation strategy will be employed to lower the likelihood of the risk occurring and/or to minimise the impact on the programme if the risk did occur.
46. Effective risk management will be fundamental to the successful delivery of the programme and as such, the programme risk register will be reviewed regularly throughout and identified risks arising from the projects will be scrutinised, evaluated and mitigated.

Recommendation

47. Having given due regard to the first stage integrated impact assessment, it is recommended that:

- a. Members approve the projects contained in this report to be submitted to the Welsh Government for grant funding consideration under the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme; and
- b. Officers be authorised to explore with Welsh Government Officials the grant funding opportunities available within the programme and secure the most beneficial option for the Council.

Reasons for proposed decision

48. This decision is necessary to access Welsh Government Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme grant funding for capital projects.
49. Subject to the outcome of the grant funding application, implementation of the programme of projects will enable the Council to promote high educational standards and the fulfilment of every child's potential. It will also enable the Council to meet its duty to secure efficient education in its area.

Implementation of the decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

Appendix A: First stage IIA

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) Welsh Government - School Organisation Code: November 2018
<https://gov.wales/school-organisation-code>
- c) School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/pdfs/anaw_20130001_en.pdf

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