

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1ST FEBRUARY, 2022

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HOLT (IN THE CHAIR)

Councillors J. Holt (Vice-Chair)
D. Bevan
M. Cook
M. Day
L. Elias
S. Healy
J. Hill
C. Meredith
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
T. Smith
B. Summers

WITH: Strategic Education Improvement Manager
Service Manager Education Transformation &
Business Change
Service Manager Young People & Partnerships
Press & Publicity Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H. Trollope (Chair), G. Collier and D. Wilkshire.</p> <p><u>Co-opted Member</u> T. Baxter</p> <p>Corporate Director of Education</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p> <p><u>COVID UPDATE POSITION IN EDUCATION AND ACROSS THE SCHOOL ESTATE</u></p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair the Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change gave a brief verbal Covid update position in relation to Education and the school estate.</p> <p>The Service Manager advised Members that the number of cases across the school estate within the last five days was 183, the total within the last 28 days was 697 cases.</p> <p>There was still a high proportion of cases throughout the school estate, and over the last two weeks 3 nurseries and 1 special needs class had been affected, however, there were no class closures at present. There were 54 staff cases across schools, of the 45 confirmed cases 7 were working from home and 1 self-isolating due to TTP advice. The overall absence across schools was 103 which included long and short term sickness absence and Covid absence, broken down this was 64 school based staff (excluding teachers) and 39 teachers. Currently there were no classes or schools that had moved to blended learning, however, that was a temperamental and changing situation.</p> <p>In response to a Member’s question regarding staff returning to work after isolation, the Service Manager confirmed that staff were returning as soon as they were clear and the reduction in the self-isolating timeframe had assisted with that. Supply cover had also been affected and they had worked with the Welsh Government and the EAS to look at supporting schools on a national level as</p>	

well as localised support to gain supply cover as and when required.

A Member commented that pupils were preparing for examinations this year and enquired out of the number of staff that were on sick leave how many were not involved with revision classes. The Service Manager said she did not have that information to hand as currently they were collecting information on a local authority basis and working with individual schools where there was pressure. Currently all of the classes were able to be delivered as programmed but she would gather a more detailed breakdown on a school by school basis particularly with regards to secondary provisions and feedback to Members.

A Member commented that the last two years had been challenging for schools and requested that the Service Manager forward a letter of appreciation to all Headteachers and staff, on behalf of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee, thanking them for doing an excellent job and working tirelessly during the pandemic to deliver education in Blaenau Gwent. The Service Manager said it had been a huge undertaking by staff and would draft correspondence on behalf of the scrutiny committee reinforcing the positive messages that had already been made around retaining provision during extremely challenging times throughout the last two academic sessions.

All Members endorsed these comments and added that over the last two years the Education Directorate had done an excellent job in supporting schools through this challenging period.

No. 4

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS BAND B PROGRESS

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change which was presented to provide Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the 21st Century Schools Programme, along with the opportunity to scrutinise progress in line with the delivery of the Band B Programme.

The Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

In relation to the development of the new 360 primary school to

replace Glyncoed primary, a Member thanked all Departments on the creation of a pick-up and drop-off area off Allotment Road which would alleviate traffic congestion and improve access to the site.

A Member enquired regarding the car park extension at Six Bells school site. The Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change explained that a sustainable drainage application had been submitted retrospectively as legislation came into force after construction of the school had been initiated. An Ecology Management Plan was required and they were working with the Ecology team towards construction on site in line with the extension in the summer period.

A Member commented that £10m for remodelling and improving secondary schools would not go far and enquired regarding the rationale for the timescales moving forward with this work. The Service Manager explained they were looking at long term investment in secondary school remodelling, future bandings in the 21st century schools programme would look to incorporate remodelling. It was a long term vision for the Local Authority who would look to allocate funds on the basis of the needs of each school. The timeline had been constructed as some schools needed more in depth consideration of the options around remodelling projects. An outline budget had been allocated to each secondary school on the basis of condition, suitability and need, they then work with the school to produce a project brief which feeds into the business case development and the associated timelines.

The Service Manager added that they take a holistic approach with regard to minor works maintenance and planned works programme and the Welsh Government capital maintenance funding which had been allocated to support schools. They look to address the condition and suitability issues to the greatest degree possible by looking at some of the fundamental works associated with maintenance of school buildings which would then impact upon the transformational changes brought about by the 21st century schools programme.

The Member reiterated that £10m for remodelling secondary schools would not go far especially with the amount of work that was needed to improve schools built in the 1970's. Glanhwy school would be the oldest school in Blaenau Gwent after

completion of the Band B programme and the Member enquired what Band Glanhwy would fall into. The Service Manager stated that the banding for Glanhwy school was not yet known but she would look to bring this forward via the prioritisation programme that was being discussed for Band C going forward.

Councillor R. Summers left the meeting at this juncture.

A Member referred to Rhos-y-Fedwen primary school and enquired regarding work being undertaken aimed at foundation phase. The Service Manager clarified the work was aligned to a larger scheme being undertaken to the external play area and was particularly relevant to foundation phase and had now been completed. She confirmed this work did fall outside of the programme as the programmed works focused on internal remodelling to improve the suitability of the teaching and learning environment and condition of the school.

With regard to the new Welsh medium school, a Member raised concerns regarding pupil numbers for the school. The Service Manager said that after a detailed consultation exercise had been undertaken and which was then followed by the Welsh Government school organisation code and associated statutory processes the school had been approved. She advised that pupil numbers at Bro Helyg primary were increasing and over the next few years could exceed capacity. There was a requirement upon the Local Authority to increase Welsh medium education provision with a commitment to achieving the vision of one million Welsh speakers. The school was being developed as a seedling growth model to allow a period of time for the school to grow and they would look at modelling the pupil population accordingly. The impact upon schools had been captured throughout the consultation and post consultation period and was also covered within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

Councillor M. Day left the meeting at this juncture.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report be accepted.

No. 5 **BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION/SCHOOLS ICT STRATEGY AND PROJECT UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change which was presented to provide Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise progress in relation to Blaenau Gwent Education/Schools ICT Strategy, along with associated projects.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Authority's responsible officer for ICT, the Service Manager advised that the Chief Officer Commercial & Customer had overall responsibility for the Transformation team who dealt with corporate ICT. Education colleagues worked closely with SRS around education ICT ensuring alignment between corporate and education aspects.

A Member commented that this was a digital age and ICT was at the centre of learning and enquired regarding Welsh Government initiatives to ensure that every child was equipped for the future. The Service Manager said that the Hwb Ed Tech programme focused on provision of devices for schools during the pandemic and extensive funding had been available to support digitally disadvantage learners to ensure that if there was a move to blended learning, no learners would be disadvantaged. Welsh Government were keen for local authorities and schools to take over that project moving forward. They were currently building in the monitoring and management of digitally disadvantaged learners, in line with the Welsh Government digital learner journey into the ICT Strategy.

The Service Manager Young People & Partnerships joined the meeting at this juncture.

A Member enquired if the IT equipment that had been distributed during the pandemic for blended learning was going to be recalled. The Service Manager said that they were working with schools to revisit devices to look at whether or not they were suitable for continued use and look to undertake any necessary adaptations. Devices would only be brought back in to school for technical monitoring or in order to replenish licenses. If it was identified that a family still needed their device, then the school and the Local Authority would continue to support that.

	<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report be accepted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 15TH MARCH 2022</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee which presented the Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on the 15th March 2022.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 15th March 2022 be approved.</p>	