

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 21ST APRIL, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

**PRESENT: Leader of the Council/
Executive Member Corporate Services
Councillor N.J. Daniels (CHAIR)**

**Deputy Leader/Executive Member –
Regeneration & Economic Development
Councillor D. Davies**

**Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins**

**Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins**

**Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason**

**WITH: Chief Officer Resources
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Head of Corporate Compliance and Legal Services**

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
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:-</p> <p>Managing Director Interim Chief Officer Commercial</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declaration of interest was raised:-</p> <p>Councillor J. Wilkins – Item No. 7 - Business Rates Relief – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2021/22</p>	
	<p><u>DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS</u></p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>WELSH-MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOL: STATUTORY NOTICE PERIOD OBJECTIONS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Education advised that the purpose of the report provided an overview of the Statutory Notice/objection period outcomes and recommendations, in relation to the proposal to build a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school with co-located childcare provision, in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley. The Corporate Director recalled previous decisions taken in relation to formally consult and approval for the outturn report by the Executive Committee.</p> <p>The Corporate Director outlined the consultation process and noted that the proposal was largely supported. The Corporate Director further highlighted the correspondence received and outlined the next steps. It was felt that the wide spread support was further demonstrated by the Statutory Notice period with only 1 letter of objection being received. This had been mainly in relation to how the development impacted the resident and the correspondence indicated that the resident supported Welsh-Medium education.</p>	

The Executive Member for Education noted that the report was self-explanatory and concurred that the report highlighted that there was high levels of support for the new Welsh-Medium school.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely the Objections report, associated documents and course of action, be agreed and proceed to Decision Notification stage (which was required within 7 days of the decision being made, as per the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018, version 2).

No. 5

PROPOSAL TO CONSULT ON PEN Y CWM CAPACITY INCREASE

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the purpose of the report was to request that the Executive Committee approved that the Authority formally consult in relation to the proposal to extend the capacity of Pen y Cwm Special School from 120 to 175 pupils which would accommodate the demand for places. The Corporate Director informed that Pen y Cwm catered for pupils between the ages of 3-19 years across a broad spectrum of complex special educational needs. The placements were available for both Blaenau Gwent pupils as well as pupils from other local authority areas. At present the School was over capacity and currently had 141 pupils on roll, which included a wide range of disabilities and difficulties.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the proposal to extend the capacity at Pen y Cwm Special School from 120 to 175 places from September 2021 was to facilitate the extended capacity. The Council would remodel the existing learning environment to create additional classroom spaces and associated facilities. In addition, the Council would work with the school to develop a long-term plan to support sustained growth and development.

The Corporate Director added that the proposal would be delivered in two parts, as follows:-

Part 1, to increase the capacity of Pen y Cwm Special School from 120 to 175 places in preparation for 2021/22 academic year, which would involve physical works to the existing building including:-

- Re-location of the Post 16 base (including 3 classrooms, a common room, life skills room, toilets and hygiene facilities)
- Re-location of the current administrative area and office space (including a staff room, PPA room, conference facility and a small meeting room)
- Creation of 2 additional primary classrooms
- Creation of 1 additional secondary classroom and associated Facilities
- Re-location of the soft-play area to the ground floor
- Re-development of the Science and Technology room

Part 2, the development of a long-term plan to secure additional capacity to facilitate sustained growth and development.

The Corporate Director noted the benefits and advantages of the proposal and outlined the consultation requirements. The Corporate Director reported a correction to the date outlined which should read 6th June, 2021 and not 6th May, 2021 as noted. This consultation period was inclusive of 20 school days.

RESOLVED accordingly.

The Corporate Director further outlined the capital and revenue implications and noted that the capital costs would be funded through Welsh Government grants, however in terms of revenue it was reported that Pen y Cwm Special School was funded in accordance with Blaenau Gwent Council's Fair Funding policy and would receive resources on the same basis as any other school within Blaenau Gwent, based upon pupil numbers and the area of the school building. In April 2020/21 pupil funding at Pen y Cwm Special School for Age Weighted Pupil Unit and Category funding was £2,277,494 this figure was based upon the 141 pupils on roll. It was noted that based on the average pupil cost of £16,925, the AWPU/ category funding costs for 175 pupils would be circa £2.9 million, which was an increase of £575,450, if all places were to be fully allocated.

The Corporate Director also noted that the Authority currently had 20 ALN pupils educated outside the Local Authority at a cost of £896,000. If Pen y Cwm Special School was able to increase capacity, there would be opportunities to consider making education provision for some of the 20 pupils back in Blaenau Gwent.

The Corporate Director referred to Appendix 2 which detailed the sensitivity analysis around the mix of pupils and outlined a range of funding options from the Individual School Budget. The report also detailed the risks if the proposal was not taken forward in terms of placements and financial risk of Out of County Places for the Authority.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report and felt that the proposal would benefit more children and young people by ensuring they had access to learning closer to home. The Leader concurred with the comments raised and felt that the report demonstrated Blaenau Gwent's continued commitment to our learners.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; associated documents be accepted and the Executive Committee formally agreed to consult upon the proposal.

DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 7

BUSINESS RATES RELIEF – RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY RATES RELIEF – 2021/22

Councillor Wilkins declared an interest in this item and remained present during discussions.

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources noted the lateness of the report which had been due to the confirmation from Welsh Government that the scheme would be extended to 2021/22. The Chief Officer referred to the report which sought adoption from the Executive Committee on behalf of the Council, of the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2021/22 scheme (RLHRR), as a section 47 discretionary rate relief for 2021/22.

The Chief Officer advised that during the Covid-19 response and recovery Welsh Government had frozen business rates for 2021/22 at 2020/21 levels. In order to provide a fiscal stimulus for businesses in Wales, Welsh Government announced the extension for grant funding to provide the RLHRR scheme for 2021/22. The actual funding allocation for Blaenau Gwent for the 2021/22 scheme had yet to be confirmed, however an estimated allocation of £3.5M to allow delivery of the scheme was anticipated which based on an initial assessment would benefit 328 business as a result of adoption of the RLHRR scheme.

The Leader welcomed the report and the continued support from Welsh Government in this area.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2021/22 scheme be adopted on behalf of the Council, to supplement the Council’s discretionary rate relief scheme.