

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **Tuesday 1st February 2022**
 Report Subject: **21st Century Schools Band B Progress**
 Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Cllr. Joanne Collins**
 Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education – Lynn Phillips and Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change – Claire Gardner**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
13.1.22	13.1.22	18.01.22			1.2.22	02.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is 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.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The 21st Century Schools Programme is a long-term strategic investment in the education estate throughout Wales. The Programme is broken down into phases of investment, categorised as Bands. The Band A Programme in Blaenau Gwent, successfully concluded in the autumn-term of 2019, with the delivery of the final project, Six Bells Campus. The Band A Programme realised an investment of £20.25m in school estate between 2014-19 (50/50 WG and Council funded).

2.2 Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme has an established programme management structure, delivered in line with the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) methodology. The Programme Board who oversee it, is comprised of key Council Officers, along with external partners, and is accountable to Corporate Leadership Team, who act as Programme Sponsor. Projects are managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent’s Corporate Project Management Framework and PRINCE 2, and each has a dedicated project management team.

2.3 Welsh Government encourages and expects councils to participate in a Gateway Review process. A Gateway Review is a form of peer review, which tests the Council’s readiness and capacity to successfully deliver projects and programmes. The Education Transformation team agreed with the review team that, due to the programme status, the delivery confidence assessment should be split as follows, one for Band A and one for Band B respectively. For Band A, based upon a Gateway 5, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Green. For Band B, based upon a Gateway 0, the review team considered that the delivery

confidence assessment as Amber, due to fact that Band B was in its infancy at the time. The outcome report (Please refer to **Appendix 1**), highlighted that the 21st Century Schools programme management arrangements are to be commended, as follows:

'...all of the projects within the Portfolio have been successfully completed... ongoing monitoring and realisation of benefits is well-evidenced. The positive impact of these projects on education and wider societal outcomes in the Blaenau Gwent area is also clearly evidenced... the very high quality of programme management in evidence is impressive'

- 2.4 An Internal Audit of the 21st Century Schools Programme was undertaken during the 2019/20 academic year, the outcome of which was a grading of 'reasonable assurance'. Only 2 weaknesses were found which pre-date the existing programme team. The weaknesses found were pertaining to the Band A SOP (submitted in 2010), along with business case submissions pre-2014. Both of these weakness have subsequently been addressed by the current Programme team (for more information please refer to **Appendices 2 (a), (b) and (c)** containing the audit reports).
- 2.5 The Blaenau Gwent Band B Strategic Outline Programme was approved in 2018. Blaenau aims to address the following key priorities:
- I. Raising standards, particularly at KS4;
 - II. Improving suitability and condition of the school estate;
 - III. Programme deliverability-match-funding and affordability;
 - IV. Sustainability and reducing revenue costs; and,
 - V. Increasing Welsh medium learning opportunities.
- 2.6 The Blaenau Gwent Band B Programme investment objectives are as follows:
- **Investment Objective 1:** to raise standards and achievement in line with localised targets at foundation phase, KS2, KS3 and KS4; and secure improved transition into post 16 learning.
 - **Investment Objective 2:** to create a sustainable model for the 21st Century school estate in consideration of both capital and revenue investment, along with the condition and suitability of buildings.
 - **Investment Objective 3:** to establish effective management and provision of school places, by having the right schools in the right place at the right time.
 - **Investment Objective 4:** to implement the 21st Century Schools Programme in line with local, regional and national school organisation policy; ensuring synergy between progression, development and implementation.

- **Investment Objective 5:** meeting the needs of vulnerable learners.

2.7 The Band B Programme commenced in April 2019 and is set to conclude in 2025. The Programme will realise an investment of £19.6million throughout the Blaenau Gwent school estate. The Welsh Government intervention rate for Band B is a 65/35 split, in favour of local authorities.

2.8 In November 2021, the Education and Welsh Language Minister announced that all new schools and college buildings, major refurbishment and extension projects, will be required to meet Net Zero Carbon targets from January 1st 2022. The Council meets with Welsh Government on a monthly basis in line with programme monitoring. At the last meeting, it was discussed that although the application of Net Zero Carbon is not required retrospectively, Welsh Government would commit 100% funding where application to existing schemes which are under development is possible. Therefore, the team have been investigating this, as detailed within the update below.

2.9 The Band B Programme seeks to deliver the following key projects in line with the investment objectives:

- Continued secondary school re-modelling within the following priority schools:
 - Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus
 - Brynmawr Foundation School
 - River Centre Learning Community
 - Tredegar Comprehensive School

This project will be a continued focus in line with future bandings of the 21st Century Schools Programme, due to the level of investment required – **Good progress has been made in identifying the priority works at the schools, via initial site visits and discussions. Further detailed assessments are programmed for development throughout the spring-term 2022. The assessments will be used to inform the options appraisal process and associated business case development, with business case submission is programmed throughout 2022.**

- The development of a new 360 primary school to replace Glyncoed Primary, which is the only category 'D' building in terms of condition within County Borough – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government. Significant progress has been made in relation to the Glyncoed project, the stage 3 design is complete, and the pre-planning application process concluded in September 2021. A full planning application has been submitted and the tender process initiated. The project team is currently assessing the potential application of Net Zero Carbon, along with the associated implications and impact from**

both a programme and financial profiling perspective. This is being explored further via the tender process, and will be progressed accordingly in line with contractor appointment. Finally, a pick-up and drop-off area has been developed off Allotment Road, with the aim of easing congestion and improving access to the site. The scheme was taken forward via the Highways Department, Education and Community Services, in line with feedback resulting from the Pre-Application Consultation process.

- Primary School remodelling within the Ebbw Fawr Valley consisting of Beaufort Hill, Cwm and Rhos y Fedwen Primary Schools – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government. The Rhos y Fedwen Primary remodelling project brief has been developed and agreed. Planning applications and tender documents are currently under development. We aim to submit relevant planning applications in the Spring 2022, and initiate the tender process during the Summer period 2022.**
- Remodelling of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to address ongoing condition and suitability issues – **The business case has been submitted and approved by Welsh Government. The internal works commenced at the end of the Summer period 2021, and are nearing completion. We plan to re-initiate the tender process in January 2022, to secure a provider to undertake the external works. The project is on track for completion during the Spring 2022.**

2.10 In addition to the Band B funding envelope, Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million from the Welsh-medium capital grant, along with £200,000 from the Capital Childcare Grant. The grants were awarded in line with the proposal to create a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility in the Tredegar/ Sirhowy valley – **Design work has commenced and the project development phase is progressing well, along with tender document preparation. The project team aim to submit the pre-planning application at the end of January 2022, and initiate the tender process during the Spring 2022. Welsh Government has agreed the latest cost profile in principle - subject Ministerial sign off. The latest cost profile has increased due to COVID, market forces, design development associated with site constraints, along with additional information which emerged as a result of the site investigation process. In addition, Education has engaged Welsh Government who has stated that they would provide 100% additional funding in order to deliver a Net Zero Carbon school.**

2.11 The delivery programme/timeline has and continues to be subject to regular review. The financial profile has also undergone review in discussion with Welsh Government, with the latest profile having been submitted in December 2021 (Please refer to **Appendix 3(a)** for the overarching delivery programme/timeline and **Appendix 3(b)** for the funding forecast).

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers and accepts the report.

Option 2: Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made prior to reporting to the Executive Committee.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

There is a statutory requirement upon the Council to deliver the Band B Programme in line with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018). Education is a strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Plan and the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan, of which 21st Century Schools is an essential component in securing: improved access to education, education facilities (including condition and suitability), provision and standards throughout the school estate. The 21st Century Schools Programme is a key element in responding to the Council's wellbeing goals for all learners, particularly learners with Additional Learning Needs.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**

There are no new or additional budgetary implications for the Council. The financial profile was last reviewed and submitted to Welsh Government in December 2021. The total programme cost currently stands at £19.6million, with the Council's 35% contribution being £6.86million which has been secured and approved via the Council's Capital Programme.

In addition, the Welsh Medium Project which has received 100% funding from Welsh Government is currently estimated to be £8.2million. Discussions have taken place with Welsh Government, who have approved the cost increase on an 'in principle' basis, subject to Ministerial approval. Ongoing detailed cost review processes are in place, to support effective financial management of the project. The programme is currently on profile, with regular reviews taking place with all relevant representatives on a monthly basis.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

Raising educational standards is a strategic risk on the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). The 21st Century Schools Programme proposals presented within this report will contribute to mitigating this risk. Moreover, there are robust risk management arrangements in place for the 21st Century Schools Programme, with identified risks regularly monitored reported and escalated via the 21st Century Schools Programme Board.

The high-level risks associated with programme delivery at present, include: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with financial, resourcing and programming implications. Project Groups have been established for all live projects monitoring development, delivery and associated requirements. Programme Board are monitoring programme delivery, with core project

team (Education, Finance and Community Services) monitoring and reviewing programme resourcing, progress, timelines and financial profiles on a monthly basis. 2 business cases have been approved to date, with the remainder on track for submission as programmed. Monthly meetings continue to take place with Welsh Government, in order to review and consider the financial profile and delivery programme.

5.3 **Legal**

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report, other than the requirement for the Local Authority to follow the statutory processes set out within the Welsh Government School Organisation Code.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct human resource implications associated with the report, staffing and other resources have been secured in line with programme delivery, and contingencies built-in. Resourcing is subject to regular review at both a programme and project level, with transition plans established to oversee school organisation priorities (including OD/HR).

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Band B projects are currently on profile and programme. To date the following outcomes have been achieved:

- All 4 projects have been delivered, securing successful conclusion of the Band A Programme, on programme and profile.
- The Band A programme has been subject to internal review and evaluation, internal audit, along with 4 external Gateway Reviews. The latter demonstrates excellent progress and strong programme/project management arrangements are in place. Learning from the Band B Programme has been used to inform Band B development and implementation.
- Welsh Government have approved all Business Case submissions to date in line with delivery of the Band B Programme.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

The 21st Century Schools Programme will contribute to raising the standard of education throughout the school estate, promoting pupil and staff wellbeing and attainment, whilst ensuring fit for purpose teaching and learning environments.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

The 21st Century Schools Programme contributes heavily to the strategic direction for the school estate across the County Borough. The 21st Century Schools Programme Board has representation from across all services within the Council. There are also statutory requirements to involve stakeholders in school organisation proposals linked to the WG's School Organisation Code (2018).

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The 21st Century Schools Programme is a long-term investment programme that at present, spans the period 2014 to 2034. The Band B element covers the period 2019 to 2025. The Programme takes account of facilities management and asset condition and suitability, along with key strategic and policy developments, at both a local and national level.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The 21st Century Schools Programme will take a preventative approach in line with the needs of school staff and learners, placing an emphasis on delivering a school estate that is fit for purpose and contributes to raising educational standards, which is a Council priority.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The Vision for Education is based upon a school led, self-improving, collaborative approach. The 21st Century Schools Programme plays a fundamental part in improving partnership arrangements with the schools and their respective communities e.g. the community focussed school's agenda. In addition, the programme itself is delivered via a team officers from across all Council directorates, along with external partners such as the Shared Resource Service Wales and contractors.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The project is being progressed and managed by a multi-disciplinary team with dedicated officers from key services.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

All capital schemes and associated remodelling projects undertaken within schools, seek to contribute to CO₂ carbon reduction and decarbonisation. Prior to design development, the project team establish key targets, with evidence provided via BREEAM trackers, benefits realisation plans, closure reports and other relevant project management documentation. The Council are committed to ensuring that all new schools and college buildings, major refurbishment and extension projects meet Net Zero Carbon targets from January 1st 2022. Although the application of Net Zero Carbon is not required retrospectively, Welsh Government has confirmed that they will look to commit 100% funding where the application to existing schemes under development is possible.

6.9a **Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment**

The Band B Programme was created prior to the socio-economic duty commencing. However, the impact of each project will be considered.

6.9b. **Equality Impact Assessment**

An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EQIA) has been completed, which determined that there is no negative impact upon the protected characteristics.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1 The Education Directorate has established a 21st Century Schools Board that has a strategic oversight for the programme, in line with the requirements of the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) good practice guidelines. The 21st Century Schools Programme team reports to Education Department Management Teams (DMT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). The Education and Learning Scrutiny/Executive Committees monitor progress via their forward work programmes and Scrutiny are also consultees on any statutory school re-organisation consultation exercise. Furthermore, the 21st Century Schools Programme is independently assessed through the WG facilitated Gateway Review process.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Gateway Review Report

Appendices 2 (a), (b) and (c) – Audit Reports

Appendix 3 (a) and (b) – Programme/timeline Version and Financial Profile