



ALN Resource Base Capacity Review

Business case

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this business case is to ask Cabinet to recommend to Council the proposal to increase the capacity for Resource Bases across the County Borough in both Primary and Secondary settings for Additional Learning Needs pupils, accommodating the demand for places in both Primary and Secondary settings.

1.2 In addition, the business case is seeking approval to commission Brynmawr Foundation School to provide wellbeing support, which will be accessible to learners across Blaenau Gwent that are presented at the Vulnerable Learner Panel. This support consists of a full time Teaching Assistant and a part time administrator who will co-ordinate the support timetable. The wellbeing support will be part funded by the Whole School Approach to Wellbeing element of funding from the LEAG. The estimated cost for this support is: £48,667 and the LEAG can fund £22,305, which leaves a total of £26,362 to fund for the 2023/24 financial year.

1.3 *The business case is seeking revenue funding to support this of:*

2024/25 - £178,611 and a further £113,000 in 2025/26 as the implementation of the Resource Bases covers academic years.

2. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

2.1 Scope & Background

There are currently 7 Resource Bases across Blaenau Gwent accommodating 61 learners in Primary settings and 62 at Secondary settings. There is an increasing need for Resource Base placements in mainstream settings for children and young people within the Borough both at Primary (aged 3-11) and Secondary settings (aged 11-16).

All current resource bases in the County Borough are full to capacity. The recent Estyn inspection highlighted 'In the planning of provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), data is not always used effectively enough to inform long-term planning'. The Education Transformation and Inclusion teams have therefore undertaken a review of the current provision and have used this data to project the demand going forward, under this proposal Education are seeking to set up new bases in line with the projected demand (**Appendix 1**), with the aim of also reducing Out of County placements in the medium term and having a more localised strategy for learners.

The Council is committed to providing all children and young people with high quality education and training tailored to meet their needs, which will develop their potential, extend aspirations, promote social inclusion and contribute to the economic regeneration of the area. Resource Bases are essential for pupils with identified ALN requirements to enable them to fulfil their potential.

Both Welsh Government and the Authority's Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) partnership have identified that there is no ALN provision for Welsh medium education across the Borough, this can result in learners having to transfer into English medium settings when an additional learning need is identified, therefore highlighting the need for a Welsh medium resource base to be established.

In light of the new ALN reform and the need to establish a Vulnerable Learner Panel to align with the new legislation, the Local Authority must offer provision for those learners being brought to panel. Learners at panel require something additional in terms of wellbeing support, in order to prevent disengagement and exclusions, or to support integration back into school where they have been absent for a period of time.

2.2 The Proposal

Education has recently undertaken a formal consultation exercise to extend the capacity of resource bases in line with the following proposal:

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council propose to increase the capacity for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Resource Bases across the County Borough in both Primary and Secondary settings. The Council will work with the schools to develop a long-term plan to support sustained growth and development. Therefore, this proposal will be delivered in 2 phases:

Phase 1 (based on immediate demand) - To increase resource base capacity within schools as follows:

- To recognise the transition group established in Ebbw Fawr 3-16 Learning Community-Secondary Phase as a 6-place extension to the current LRB from September 2023
- To create a 6-8 place ASD Resource Base at Tredegar Comprehensive School from September 2023
- To create a 15 place ASD/ALN Resource Base at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg from April 2024
- To create a 10 place ASD/ALN Resource Base at Sofrydd Primary School from September 2024

The Council will also remodel learning environments to create additional classroom space and associated facilities to accommodate the proposal and will also develop nurture provisions in schools in order to create a more inclusive environment and to support the majority of learners with additional learning needs in a mainstream setting to prevent the requirement of additional learning need support.

The local authority Education Directorate (Inclusion Team) are also proposing to commission wellbeing support operating from Brynmawr Foundation School. This will enable engagement of learners and ensure the local authority's ability to ensure that a full-time education (statutory requirement) is offered, in place, and maintained. This provision will consist of a full time TA (Teaching Assistant)

with a part time administrator to co-ordinate the support timetable for all learners in receipt via the Vulnerable Learner Panel. The support offered can be flexible and delivered at appropriate venues and will depend on the current education situation. As an example the learner may still be accessing school but is at risk of disengaging/becoming excluded; support would likely be offered to take place at the current school setting. Another example may be that the learner is already disengaged or excluded and requires support for reintegration; support may then be offered in a local setting i.e. library.

Phase 2 of the proposal – This has been included as part of the consultation exercise. However, it should be noted some/all of these will only be implemented if required following a review of the impact of Phase 1.

The development of a Medium-term plan to secure additional capacity to facilitate sustained growth and development in Primary and Secondary settings. This will include provision at the following schools between 2025 and 2029:

- To create an ASD/ALN Resource Base at Brynmawr Foundation School for up to 10 pupils
- To create an ASD/ALN Resource Base at Cwm Primary School for up to 10 pupils
- To create an ASD/ALN Resource base at a faith based primary school in Blaenau Gwent (yet to be determined) for up to 10 pupils.
- To create an ASD/ALN Resource Base at Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community - Roseheyworth Road Primary Campus for up to 10 pupils

2.3 A review of Phase 1 will be undertaken in September 2025. As a result, this business case considers the implications of Phase 1 only and a further business case will be prepared (if required) for phase 2 during the Autumn term 2025 following a detailed impact assessment of Phase 1.

2.4 **Alignment with Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities etc**

Education is a strategic priority within the Corporate Plan. In order to enable people to 'Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'.

The proposal would support the Education Directorate's purpose to deliver:

'Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities'

2.5 **Collaboration Partnership working**

The consultation along with the development of the business case has been developed collaboratively with both the Inclusion Team, Headteachers, Finance, Health & Safety colleagues and Community Services. Following implementation there will be further collaborative work with the schools that have the additional resource bases to support other schools across the local authority.

2.6 Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions

By having provision locally, it will address the climate change agenda reducing carbon emissions for learners travelling excessively for their educational needs. Any physical works planned and undertaken within education settings will take account of decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions and are firmly aligned to the work of the Council.

2.7 Expected Benefits and Advantages

- Creation of a local solution which will address the increased demand for ALN provision.
- Continuity and sustainability in terms of local education for learners with specialist and medical needs.
- The structure will build confidence and self-esteem in pupils' parents and staff.
- Pupils will benefit from local provision enabling them to remain within their locality rather than attending provision out of county.
- Reduced costs associated with out of county placements, whilst securing local investment within the Blaenau Gwent school estate.
- Improve access to and facilities for learners who meet the criteria for ALN provision across the county borough.
- Reduced travel time for learners and the carbon footprint.

2.8 Risks

Should nothing change, the Local Authority will be unable to meet the needs of many learners, particularly those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Additional Learning Needs (ALN) within Blaenau Gwent. Therefore, they would need to be placed Out of County. The costs of Out of County specialist provision would increase significantly year-on-year, and learners are likely to be traveling longer distances to receive specialist education extending their school day, care etc. and placing further pressures on the Home-to-School Transport budget which is already pressured and so represents a significant risk to the Council. However, there is also a risk that implementation of the proposals could incur additional costs associated with building work and or resources if for example inflation continues to rise.

3. OPTIONS ANALYSIS

3.1 Options Considered

A detailed option appraisal was undertaken to explore ways in which the requirement for additional ALN provision could be addressed in line with primary and secondary need. The critical success factors below were considered.

3.2 Critical Success Factors:

- Strategic fit & business needs - ensuring the provision meets the vision for education i.e. a localised, accessible and high-quality Education provision
- Achievability - Securing places needed in line with demand.

- Affordability - Financial viability and optimising value for money

3.3 Long list of options

The long list of options detailed within **Table 2**, were evaluated by the project group and a short-list drawn up.

Long List of Options

Options	Description:	Conclusion:
1	Business as usual maintain the status quo - As all resource bases are full this would result in sending pupils who require support to Out of County Resource Bases	Not enough capacity exists, and this would not support the vision for education in securing localised, accessible and high-quality provision. Also, very costly. Discounted
2	Implement Phase 1 of the proposal at this stage only - Build capacity immediately in resources bases in both Primary and Secondary settings, whilst also developing further nurture provisions and wellbeing support	Preferred way forward in, this will address Secondary need and Welsh Medium demand Imminently and plan medium and long-term growth. Possible
3	Implement Phase 1 & Phase 2 of the proposal by increasing capacity in resource bases over a number of Primary and Secondary provision	Preferred way forward in, this will address Secondary need and Welsh Medium demand Imminently and plan medium and long-term growth. Merits further consideration, but financial constraints, would not permit effective and timely implementation. Possible
4	Tackle capacity issues in just secondary school settings	There is currently immediate demand in the secondary sector for places also, as illustrated in the demand analysis. Discounted
5	Tackle capacity issues in just Primary school settings	There is currently immediate demand in the secondary sector for places also, as illustrated in the demand analysis. Discounted

Based on the Critical Success factors, options 1, 4 and 5 have been discounted as they would potentially:

- Not address the immediate and medium-term need
- Result in increased costs to the Council for ALN pupils if they had to be educated out of county.
- Cause disruption within the existing education system
- Negatively affect provision and access to specialist facilities and services

3.4 The short list of options

- **Option 1** Maintain the status quo (business as usual) This is a standard baseline comparator which must be considered - As all resource bases are full this would result in sending pupils who require support to Out of County placements

- **Option 2** Implement Phase 1 of the proposal only by increasing capacity in resource bases in Primary and Secondary provision. Whilst also providing the wellbeing support immediately to learners being presented at the VLP in order to ensure maximum engagement at school and developing further nurture provisions to support pupils in the mainstream environment.
- **Option 3** Implement Phase 1 & Phase 2 of the proposal by increasing capacity in resource bases over several Primary and Secondary settings.

3.5 **The Preferred Option**

Option 1 - A detailed financial analysis was undertaken for Option 1 but it was not considered to be financially viable. In addition, there would unlikely be sufficient capacity in the private sector and this would not support the vision for education in securing localised, accessible and high-quality Education provision.

Option 3 - Was discounted in terms of achievability and meeting the business needs, as this would result in the creation of more places in resource bases than are required in the medium term. As there are plans to develop wellbeing and nurture provisions to create a more inclusive ALN environment in mainstream this could impact on the requirement for the growing the number of places in the medium term

Option 2 - Implement Phase 1 of the proposal at this stage only – Building capacity immediately in resources bases in both Primary and Secondary mainstream settings was therefore considered to be the preferred option. It was considered that it met all the critical success factors in terms of a localised, accessible and high-quality education provision. It would secure places in the short term and potentially impact on the requirements for places going forward. It is the most financially viable option in terms of securing value for money.

- 3.6 As a result, this business case considers the implications of Option 2 only (Phase1). Following a detailed impact assessment of Phase 1, a further business case will be prepared for phase 2 in the Autumn term 2025, should it be required.

4. **PROCUREMENT ROUTE**

- 4.1 All project related procurements will be via competitive tendering in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

4.2 **Procurement Plan**

If successful all projects will be procured where appropriate via a single stage, design and build procurement tender process. Tenders will be assessed on a cost/quality basis, and the Contractor appointed at tender stage as the most economically advantageous tender.

4.3 **Contract**

A suitable form of contract will be adopted. Under the SEWSCAP Framework, both NEC and JCT forms are available for use with the design and build/develop and construct approach.

4.4 Community Benefits

Community benefits will be set out in the tender documents for all projects and will be assessed as part of the quality evaluation process and will follow the Welsh Government Guidelines. The community benefits process will be managed by experienced officers within the Council and will work with the Contractor's community liaison representative to deliver the outcomes. The community benefits registered will be developed with colleagues from the regeneration team at the next stage of the EOI.

5. FUNDING AND AFFORDABILITY

Table 1: Cost and Funding for the recommended option

Lifespan		Year 1 23/24 £	Year 2 24/25 £	Year 3 25/26 £	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Capital Expenditure							
1	Fixed assets	100,000	140,000				240,000
2	Software						
3	Other Capital items	100,000	60,000				160,000
4	Total Capital costs (CAPEX)	200,000	200,000				400,000
Operating Expenditure							
5	Personnel	102,428	458,281	504,915	504,915	504,915	2,075,454
6	Depreciation						
7	Maintenance						
8	Operating licences etc.						
9	Training						
10	Other Operating costs						
11	Total Operating costs (OPEX)	102,428	458,281	504,915	504,915	504,915	2,075,454
Total Expenditure							

12	Total Project Costs (CAPEX + OPEX)	302,428	658,281	504,915	504,915	504,915	2,475,454
Funding							
13	CAPEX funding						
14	OPEX funding						
	Reduction in current	49,176	198,700	194,915	314,760	314,760	1,072,311
	OOO Placements	80,970	80,970	197,000	197,000	197,000	752,940
	Other – CP awarded						
15	Third party funding (CAPEX if any)	200,000	200,000				
16	Other Funding						
17	Total funding	330,146	479,670	391,915	511,760	511,760	1,825,251
Affordability Assessment							
18	Shortfall/Overage CAPEX (CAPEX Costs – Total CAPEX Funding)	0	0				
19	Shortfall/Overage OPEX (OPEX Costs – Total OPEX Funding)	(27,718)	178,611	113,000	(6,845)	(6,845)	250,203

5.1 Capital Funding

There are capital financial implications associated with Phase 1 of this proposal for the Council of approximately £400,000. This will be met via contributions from the Welsh Government ALN Grant funding and Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme over a 2-year period.

5.2 Revenue Funding

Blaenau Gwent currently has 11 ALN pupils that are educated outside the Local Authority at a cost of £600,000 per year (22/23 price base), the budget for 2023/24 is £720,000. Increasing capacity within Blaenau Gwent resource base provisions would result in opportunities to consider making education provision for some of the 11 pupils back in Blaenau Gwent reducing costs.

Revenue implications associated with Phase 1 of the project have been modelled (Appendix 2) - If pupils are unable to be placed locally in a resource base, then they would need to be placed in Out County placements which could see these annual costs incrementally increase in line with the projected demand by approximately £3.3m over the next 5 years

It is anticipated the proposal will begin to impact on the requirement for Out County placements from the 2024/25 financial year, therefore reducing this expenditure and allowing funding to be vired accordingly.

Costs associated with home to school transport for out county placements are increasing for ALN pupils, the costs are forecast to be £158,569 for the 2023/24 financial year. These costs are regularly reviewed and subject to change in line with pupil placement. Should the proposal be implemented the Council should also see an incremental reduction in the transport costs associated with Out County placements every year as learners naturally leave education, however as this funding is released it will be assumed that this will be used to mitigate any cost pressures that may arise in transporting learners to the new Resource Bases.

Under option 2 In the short term there will likely be a shortfall in years 2 and 3 when compared to the current budgets however the proposal is predicted to avoid significant cost increases in terms of Out of County placements. It is proposed these additional costs be funded from an award of a cost pressure for 2 financial years as follows:

2024/25 £178,611

2025/26 £113,000

6. DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 The projects will be managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent Corporate Project Management Framework, which is based upon PRINCE 2 methodology. Risk, issues, dependencies and benefits registers will be compiled in line with project delivery and are monitored on a monthly basis and/or in line with key developments.
- 6.2 The Project Team (inclusive of Education, schools, community Services directorate and finance) will be led by the Service Manager - Education Transformation and Business Change and will report into the Education Transformation Programme Board on a quarterly basis or more frequently if required and form part of the programme board overall risk register. Along with detailed project risk registers on project level being reviewed and monitored on a monthly basis, including risk escalation and de-escalation agreed at Project Group Meetings.
- 6.3 All risks will be considered in line with any lessons learned, issues, dependencies and assumptions logs. Project development and implementation is operationally managed via the Education Transformation Team Leader in respect of client, finance and education matters and the Architectural Project Manager from a technical, and construction perspective.
- 6.4 Although the Education Transformation Team have gained extensive knowledge over the years of Planning and delivering post occupancy evaluations in line with grant funding requirements, and have developed series

of questions, systems and analysis tools such as snap surveys to capture all comments. The Closure report system for Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and small projects delivered under the Educational Transformation change agenda requires feedback after year 1, 2 and year 5. This means that project benefits may not be realised fully until the end of year 2 or 3 of the finalised project.

- 6.5 Post occupancy evaluation sessions will be planned with all relevant parties, (Schools, pupils, staff and Community etc) along with a dedicated lessons learned session. These will be used to inform closure reporting, benefits realisation and support the Programme lessons learned register.
- 6.6 Contingency planning is built into each project timeline, financial profile and programme – all of which are monitored on a monthly basis by the Project team.

Appendices.

Appendix 1 – Demand Analysis



Demand Analysis.pdf

Appendix 2 - Financial appraisal table



Financial_Annex1_all_
Business-Justification-