

Committee: **Cabinet**
 Date of meeting: **21st February 2024**
 Report Subject: **Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cabinet Member – People & Education – Cllr Sue Edmunds**
 Report Submitted by: **Joanne Watts – Service Manager Education Transformation**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
14.11.2023	x	07.02.24			30.01.24	21.02.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme (formerly 21st Century Schools) and agree the proposals to be submitted to Welsh Government as part of the rolling programme requirements.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 When the Band B 21st Century School programme was agreed by Welsh Government (WG) in February 2019 for the period 2019/20 to 2025/26, a £19.6million programme was agreed for investment throughout the Blaenau Gwent school estate. The general Welsh Government intervention rate for Band B is a 65/35 split, in favour of Local Authorities. The Band B Programme agreed the following projects in line with the investment objectives:

- Continued secondary school re-modelling
- Ebbw Fawr Primary Redevelopment, including the development of a new 360 primary school to replace Glyncoed Primary, which is the only category 'D' building in terms of condition within the county borough
- Remodelling of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to address ongoing condition and suitability issues

2.2 In January 2022 Welsh Government renamed the 21st Century Schools Programme to the 'Sustainable Communities for Learning (SCfL)' programme, the aim of this was to make a clear statement about their commitment towards the environment, community cohesion, and future generations.

2.3 Lessons learned from Band A, the transition into the Band B programme and post pandemic issues highlighted to Welsh Government the complexity and protracted nature associated with the delivery of a number of projects through the 'fixed' programme timelines and cost envelopes. This approach posed challenges for both the Welsh Government and Local Authorities in the management and delivery of strategic infrastructure investment for the education estate in Wales.

2.4 In November 2022 the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced that the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme would now transition away from fixed bands of funding to a more agile rolling programme (**see Appendix 1**). With the expectation that Local Authorities would review and resubmit their new Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) Programme by March 2024, in line with the following investment objectives:

- Transforming learning environments and learner experience
- Meeting demand for school places
- Improving condition and suitability of the education estate
- Developing sustainable learning environments
- Supporting the community

2.5 The expectation of projects submitted under the rolling programme are as follows:
 Projects in years 1-3 are expected to reach full business case within the first 3 years
 Projects in years 4-6 are being developed and going through statutory consultation
 Projects in years 7-9 are pipeline projects

Local Authorities will then be expected to review their rolling programme at least every 3 years thereafter

2.6 The proposed Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme (**Appendix 2**) to be submitted with the Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) is summarised below:

Years 1-3 (2024/25 – 2026/27)

School	Anticipated Cost	Rationale / Current Status
Currently Delivering		
Glyncoed Primary School & Welsh Medium Childcare Facility - New Build	£13.5m (BG match funding £3.9m)	Jointly funded Sustainable Communities for Learning & Childcare project Full Business Case Approved as part of Ebbw Fawr Primary Redevelopment in February 2021 Contractor appointed December 2022 Scheduled for completion May 2024
Rhos y Fedwen Primary School remodelling of foundation phase, small extension with 3G pitch	£1m (BG match funding £350,000)	Full Business Case Approved Ebbw Fawr Primary Redevelopment February 2021 Scheduled for completion June 2024
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Remodelling and development of a Resource Base	£1m (BG match funding £350,000)	Business Case approved November 2020 Project completed Summer period 2022 Ministerial opening 5 th June 2023
New Welsh Medium Seedling School Chartist Way - New build	£13.5m (100% WG funding)	100% WM Grant Full business case approved October 2018, delays in appointing a contractor as a result of the pandemic and market forces Contractor appointed July 2023, works have commenced on site Scheduled completion date May 2025

Projects rolled over from Band B/New		
School	Anticipated Cost	Rationale / Current Status
Ebbw Fawr 3-16 Learning Community – Secondary Phase Extension	£5.0m	A capacity review and accommodation audit highlighted that the internal footprint of the school could no longer accommodate the numbers of pupils it was built for. The school has been experiencing significant sufficiency issues since Jan 2022 Planning approval submitted in July 2023 Full business case to be submitted to WG April 2024
Tredegar comprehensive School – Extension (Subject to planning approval)	£3-£4m	A project brief is being developed with the school; this is being planned in line with anticipated sufficiency issues for September 2026 Business Case to be submitted to WG May 2024
Pen y Cwm Special School	£8-£15m	Currently undertaking an options appraisal and a forecast demand analysis to inform a business case to Welsh Government. Outline Business Case to be submitted to Welsh Government Summer 2024

Years 4-6 (2027/28 – 2029/30)

School	Anticipated Cost	Rationale / Current Status
Welsh Medium Primary Development	TBD	Commitment given in Blaenau Gwent's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to undertake a feasibility study once the seedling provision in Chartist Way Tredegar is opened for 3-4 years to determine if a further welsh medium provision is required
Cwm Primary School Remodelling	TBD	Rolled over from Band B Low Condition and Suitability
Faith Based School – New build potential 1 school to replace 3 schools	TBD	Formal consultation required 85% funding intervention rate, 15% (Diocese could contribute to this) Initial discussions have taken place with Diocese
WM Secondary Planning	TBD	Due to the development of a Seedling school in Torfaen, Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw will no longer be able to accommodate Blaenau Gwent Learners from September 2028/2029, currently discussing on a Regional basis with Merthyr, Powys and Monmouthshire to determine a solution
Brynmawr Foundation School	TBD	Currently the lowest condition and suitability Secondary school. School not suitable for Secondary School remodelling, phased or full replacement needed. Site access issues has been the immediate priority, further discussions to resume with the school and technical colleagues in the Spring term

Years 7-9 (2030/31 -2032/33)

School	Anticipated Cost	Rationale / Current Status
Replacement Primary School	TBD	To be determined subject to school condition and suitability assessments, likely to be in Tredegar area
Brynmawr Foundation School	TBD	Depending on the outcome in years 4-6 may need to feature in years 7-9 also
WM Secondary Planning	TBD	Depending on the outcome in years 4-6 may need to feature in years 7-9 also

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 The People Scrutiny Committee considered and supported Option 1 on 30th January 2024.

3.2 **Option 1:** (Preferred option)

Cabinet considers and approves the Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme proposals to be submitted to Welsh Government in March 24 (**Appendix 2**).

Option 2: (Not Preferred option)

Cabinet considers the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme proposals to be submitted to Welsh Government in March 24 (**Appendix 2**) and provides any comments or amendments to be incorporated prior to approval.

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

4.1 Education is a strategic priority for the Council and key to achieving the outcomes within the Council's Corporate Plan. the Sustainable Communities learning Programme (Formerly 21st Century Schools) is an essential component to support Education in ensuring there is improved: standards, access to education, education facilities throughout the school estate.

5. Implications Against Each Option

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

5.1.1 Lessons learned from Band A, the transition into the Band B programme and post pandemic cost escalation highlighted to Welsh Government the issues associated with the delivery of a number of projects through the 'fixed' programme timelines and cost envelopes. Welsh Government have therefore introduced the rolling programme to allow both Local Authorities and Welsh Government to plan more effectively and in line with demands, ensuring that funding is available to delivery partners when required.

5.1.2 When the Band B 21st Century School programme was agreed by Welsh Government (WG) in February 2019, £19.6million of funding was awarded, with the Council's 35% contribution of £6.86million being secured and approved via the Council's Capital Programme. This funding is allocated in line with the programme identified in 2.6 as and when business cases are approved by Welsh Government.

5.1.3 The establishment of the Sustainable Communities for Learning rolling programme will inform the Blaenau Gwent's Capital Programme Planning and resourcing requirements

going forward, should these proposals be agreed, they will form part of the review and update of the capital programme during 2024/25.

5.1.4 The Welsh Medium Seedling Project has received 100% funding from Welsh Government and is currently estimated to be £13.5million and has been fully approved by the Minister. Other intervention rates associated with the programme are as follows:

	%
Community, voluntary controlled and foundation schools	65
Voluntary aided schools of religious character	85
Special schools and pupil referral units	75

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

The historical high-level risks associated with programme in recent years has always been associated with the impact of the cost escalation resulting in resourcing and programming implications. The establishment of a rolling programme will largely mitigate this and allow both Welsh Government and Local Authorities to plan more effectively. In addition, project Groups are established for all live projects monitoring development, delivery and associated requirements. Programme Board monitor programme delivery, with a core project team (Education, Finance and Community Services) monitoring and reviewing programme resourcing, progress, timelines and financial profiles.

There are significant financial pressures on Welsh Government and Local Authorities going forward, the provisional settlement indicated general capital funding will be maintained at current levels for 2024/25. Whilst there are no indications at the moment, there is a risk that capital grant funding, could be significantly reduced going forward. The establishment of the rolling programme by Welsh Government aims to mitigate this as it will allow Welsh Government and Local Authorities to plan more effectively. In addition the Local Authority meets with Welsh Government on a quarterly basis to discuss project progress and requirements going forward.

5.3 **Legal**

The Local Authority has a duty under the School's Organisation Code v2 2018 to ensure 'it has the right schools in the right place at the right time'. 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. The Education Transformation & Technical Services teams are small teams across the Council, resourcing is monitored and reviewed at both a programme and project level and planned in line with programme delivery.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

There are no direct health and safety implications associated with this report, all projects in the rolling programme are designed in line with health and safety regulations.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Performance Information and Data

- 6.1.1 Market forces associated with the pandemic has caused resource and programming issues of the Band B programme. Welsh Government has recognised this as a national issue and has introduced the Sustainable Communities for Learning rolling programme to allow Local Authorities and Welsh Government to plan more effectively
- 6.1.2 Two business cases have been agreed under the Band B programme with projects either being completed or in the process of delivery
- 6.1.3 In December 2022 the Welsh Government announced the extension of the Community Focussed Schools initiative, planning for further capital investment over the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Local Authority were invited to submit expressions of interest (EOI) which would ‘invest in the learning environment of Community Focused Schools, co-locating key services, and securing stronger engagement with parents and carers outside traditional hours.’ The EOI’s were to demonstrate support for the following objectives:
- Family Engagement – whereby schools engage well with families and involve parents/carers in supporting their children’s learning in both English and Welsh language contexts.
 - Community Engagement – where the facilities of the school are used as the basis for family, adult and community learning and a range of community activities.
 - Multi-Agency Engagement – working in close partnership with universal parenting and early intervention services, like Families First. Co-location of support services, providing a single point of contact, can help ensure nobody gets left behind.

As a result, the Local Authority have been successful in securing agreement for the following projects:

School	Funding	Rationale / Current Status
CFS 2023 – 2025 funding		
Cwm YC Remodelling	£200,000	Project proforma approved April 2023
Coed y Garn – Development of 2 Community Rooms, Remodelling & Development of Outdoor provision	£350,000	Project proforma approved April 2023
Brynmawr Foundation – Development of Community Focused Home Economic area	£550,000	Project proforma approved April 2023
Sofrydd Primary – development of a community room and the development of the outdoor area	£450,000	Project proforma approved April 2023
Projects still under consideration by Welsh Government		
Abertillery Learning Community & Abertillery Youth Centre, remodelling to develop community focussed schools facilities	£1,100,000	Awaiting approval from WG to progress to full business case stage, if agreed business case to be submitted in Spring term 2024

6.2 Expected outcome for the public.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning 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 Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme contributes heavily to the strategic direction for the school estate across the County Borough. The Education Transformation 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) which is currently being reviewed by WG.

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

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme is an investment programme that at present spans a nine-year time period, allowing Local Authorities to plan into the longer term.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling 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 Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme plays a fundamental part in improving partnership arrangements with the schools and their respective communities e.g. the community focussed school's agenda. A collaborative approach between the Council, schools, staff, pupils, parents and governors, is essential in securing effective delivery which takes account of the needs of end users.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The programme is being progressed and managed by a multi-disciplinary team with dedicated officers from key service areas, including (Education, Finance and Community Services).

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The Council are committed to ensuring that all new schools buildings, major refurbishment and extension projects meet Net Zero Carbon targets. 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, therefore all projects agreed after this date are designed in line with this objective.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

An Integrated Impact Assessment is considered for each project individually as part of the business case submission process.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The Education Directorate has established a Sustainable Communities for Learning board that has a strategic oversight for the programme, in line with the requirements of the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) good practice guidelines. The Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme team reports to Education Department Leadership Teams (DLT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). The People Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet monitor progress via their forward work programmes and Scrutiny are also consultees on any statutory school re-organisation consultation exercises

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Rolling Programme

Appendix 2 – Sustainable Communities Rolling Programme