

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **15th December 2020**
Report Subject: **Welsh-medium Education Consultation Proposal**
Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Joanne Collins**
Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education – Lynn Phillips**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
3.12.20	3.12.20	03.12.20			15.12.20	15.12.20		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to seek the views of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee, in relation to the proposal to consult upon the creation of a new 210 places Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar /Sirhowy valley. Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee Members will be statutory consultees, should proposal to proceed to consultation be granted by the Executive Committee.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The Welsh Government (WG) vision is to secure 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. To achieve this, one of key associated objectives of Welsh Government is to increase Welsh-medium education provision. According to the most recent census (2011), there are approximately 562,000 Welsh speakers in Wales.

2.2 The aim of the national strategy is to almost double the number of Welsh speakers by the middle of the century. This aim is consistent with the Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-20, which is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language strategic frameworks. The strategic priorities highlighted in the WESP include:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2020, to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year's provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg by 50% in 2020.
- Work regionally with South East Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision between 2017-2020 and beyond.

2.3 Blaenau Gwent has a low percentage of Welsh speakers, with only 7.8% of the population able to speak Welsh (Census, 2011). The area is the 2nd lowest out of the 22 Councils in Wales and the Blaenau Gwent average is well under the national average of 19%.

- 2.4 Blaenau Gwent is the only authority in Wales with one Welsh-medium primary school and so should the Council not look to grow Welsh education; there is limited scope for growth and development of the Welsh language locally in line with the Welsh Government aspiration for 1 million Welsh Speakers by 2050. In addition, all neighbouring authorities have already consulted upon and/or propose to consult upon increase Welsh-medium primary provision.
- 2.5 The Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced on 16th January 2018 that £30 million (100% funding, with no match requirement from Councils), would be allocated to support capital projects dedicated to and growing Welsh language in education (the grant was to be administered in addition to the capital allocations confirmed in Band B). Proposals were required to create additionally and contribute to meeting the Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. The grant application process was initiated in March 2018 for return by the 1st June 2018. As Blaenau Gwent is the only Council area in Wales with only 1 Welsh-medium primary school, an ambitious bid for £7 million was put forward.
- 2.6 Blaenau Gwent Council's Education Directorate 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 order to develop a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility in the Tredegar/ Sirhowy valley.
- 2.7 Extensive research has taken place both internally and externally with other authorities throughout Wales, including neighbouring Councils such as: Newport, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil, regarding models, site options and governance structures. This has been used to inform the development of both the proposal and consultation document contained within (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.8 Discussions have also taken place with Ward Members for the Tredegar/ Sirhowy valley, the existing Welsh-medium primary headteacher, along with headteachers from within the Tredegar cluster. In addition, extensive consultation has taken place with Welsh-medium interest groups.
- 2.9 **The Proposal**
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council proposes to develop a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley, along with co-located childcare provision. The preferred option seeks to develop the school building on the Chartist Way site via a seedling/growth model, whereby the childcare facility, along with the nursery and reception year groups, would come in effect from September 2023; with 28 childcare, 24 nursery and 24 reception places. The school would grow thereafter year on year. By 2029 the school will be fully established, with all year groups from Nursery to Year 6 operational.

- 2.10 The new seedling school would be designed and purpose built in line with 21st Century Schools standards. The preferred option includes a governance and leadership structure developed as an extension of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg. This would mean that there would be one Governing Body across the 2 schools, along with relevant amendments to the staffing structure.
- 2.11 There are 4 core components of the preferred proposal as follows:
- I. To create a new 210 place Welsh-medium Primary School in the Tredegar Sirhowy valley.
 - II. To develop the new Welsh-medium primary school as seedling/growth model where the childcare facility, nursery and reception year groups come into effect in September 2023, with additional year groups opening for pupil progression each year thereafter. The school would be fully functional with all year groups in operation by September 2029
 - III. To secure a suitable location. Based upon an extensive site review, detailed discussions with Planning, Community and other relevant services, along with initial site investigations; the preferred site has been identified as Chartist Way in the Sirhowy area, due its location, size, use, and known constraints.
 - IV. To develop a leadership and management structure aligned to that of the existing Welsh-medium primary school.
- 2.12 The proposal is indirectly linked to the Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme which seeks to:
- Address growth in demand for Welsh-medium education;
 - Reduce surplus capacity and inefficiency in the system; Secure expansion of schools and colleges in areas of increased demand;
 - Address condition and suitability of schools; and,
 - Make education assets available for community use where demand exists, to optimise the infrastructure and resources for public services.
- 2.13 The Council's Education Transformation team has a proven track record of delivering complex school organisation proposals, along with successful delivery of the Band A 21st Century Schools Programme, which concluded in March 2019, when the Band B programme came into effect. Blaenau Gwent has recently had a Business Justification Case approved for the remodelling of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, to address suitability and condition issues, whilst also creating parity in terms of provision throughout the school estate.
- 2.14 **Consultation Requirements**
The Welsh Government School Organisation Code – second edition (2018), dictates that proposals **must** be published for the following elements of school reorganisation:
1. the opening of a maintained school (including a special school);
 2. the closing of a maintained school (including a special school);

3. to make a regulated alteration to a maintained school; and,
4. to change the category of a maintained school.

The proposal to create a new Welsh-medium primary school will involve the opening of a maintained school. Section 48 of the 2013 Act requires that before school organisation proposals are published under sections 41-45, they **must** first be subject to consultation.

- 2.15 The proposed consultation document and timeline take account of the publication and other statutory requirements as set out within the aforementioned code. The proposed consultation timeline - if approved is as follows:
- Consultation to commence on –Thursday 17th December 2020
 - Consultation to conclude on – Friday 29th January 2021 (inclusive of 20 school days)

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 There are 2 options associated with the consultation, as follows:
- **Option 1** – Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers and accepts the report, associated document and course of action.
 - **Option 2** – Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee provide comments in relation to improvements that can be made in relation to the associated document and proposed course of action, in consideration of the School Organisation Code (2018) and established timeline.

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

- 4.1 In accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018), there is a statutory requirement for Councils to consult upon and publish school reorganisation proposals. Education is a strategic priority within the Corporate Plan, of which the growth, development and sustainability of Welsh-medium education is a key component.
- 4.2 The WESP is instrumental in securing continued access to and development of the Welsh language in line with Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Education is also a major contributor to the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan in that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires public bodies to work towards seven well-being goals, one of which is 'A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language'. The Council has a duty to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh and work towards the well-being goals. The process for planning Welsh-medium education also has a statutory basis under Section 84 of the 2013 Act.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

There are no capital financial implications associated with this proposal for the Council, as the £6million awarded is 100% funding with no match funding requirement. Welsh Government also awarded £200,000 as 100% funding from the Childcare Capital Grant.

In the medium to long-term, there will be revenue budget implications associated with the proposal, in that the Individual School Budget will need to be established in 2023/2024 financial year and the funding required will grow annually as the school grows to capacity. The financial impact, if the proposal is agreed, will be included within the Medium Term Financial Strategy moving forward.

Revenue funding and expenditure has been modelled over 7 years **Appendices 3 and 4** for further information (which is the proposed length of time for the school to reach capacity), based on a number of assumptions, to determine the financial viability of the school and the potential impact for the Council.

The assumptions used in the modelling include an assumption that overall there would be no growth in the pupil population resulting from this proposal, the ISB would need to increase by £265,000 in 2023/2024 with a further increase of £189,000 in 2024/2025 in order to fund the new school. The remaining ISB funding required would come from within the existing ISB, as pupils chose the new setting over other schools.

There is likely to be a positive financial impact on Home to School Transport and an assessment would need to be undertaken in order to quantify the likely cost reduction benefits should the proposal be implemented. Home to School Transport:

- **Current spend** per annum on Welsh medium education is approximately:
 - Primary - £150,000 (4 Buses & 1 Taxi)
 - Secondary - £220,000 (6 Buses & 1 Taxi)
 - **2 buses to Bro Helyg from Ebbw Fawr & Tredegar area** - £67,000 per annum
- **Potential phased reduction in transport costs** i.e. Tredegar/Ebbw Fawr pupils to Bro Helyg - average cost per bus per annum £33,000

5.2 **Risk** - There is a risk that the Council will lose the £6million that has been allocated to Blaenau Gwent in line with the development of a new 210 place Welsh medium primary school, which builds upon the seedling concept/model, should the proposal and concept not proceed. In addition, the Council would lose the £200,000 allocated in line with the Capital Childcare Grant.

- 5.3 **Legal** – There are no direct legal implications associated with this proposal.
- 5.4 **Human Resources** - There are no direct staffing or workforce implications associated with the consultation process. Should the proposal proceed, however, the governance and leadership aspects will be developed in partnership with Organisational Development, Finance and the school directly affected.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 **Performance Information and Data** – Please refer to the consultation document (**Appendix 1**), for the date performance data relating to the proposal.
- 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public** - The public can expect a fair and equitable consultation process, which is fully compliant with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018)
- 6.3 **Involvement** - Stakeholder engagement is a key focus of all school organisation proposals. The proposal will be subject to consultation in line with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018), which will then be used to inform decision making processes moving forward.
- 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term** - The consultation details a proposal which looks to secure additional Welsh-medium education provision in line with the long-term development, and sustainability of the education system in Blaenau Gwent.
- 6.5 **Preventative focus** – The proposal seeks to address sustainability issues associated with the future growth and development of Welsh-medium education.
- 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working** - The consultation along with the development of the proposal have been developed collaboratively with both the local and regional Welsh Education Forums, Planning, Social Services, Community Services, Finance, Schools, other authorities etc.
- 6.7 **Integration** - The proposal seeks to secure integration between new and existing Welsh-medium education and childcare provision, supporting growth and sustainability.
- 6.8 **EqIA** - An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EQIA) has been completed in line with the consultation, which determined that there is no negative impact upon the protected characteristics. The proposal promotes equality of opportunity within Blaenau Gwent for families and Welsh learners, having a positive impact upon the Welsh language.
7. **Monitoring Arrangements** – Should the consultation proceed, there will be extensive monitoring in line with the consultation processes, responses and outcomes; which would be answered, analysed and taken via the Council's political processes. In addition, the project would be established

and managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent Corporate Project Management Framework and the PRINCE 2 methodology.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent Welsh-medium Proposal Consultation Document

Appendix 2 – School Organisation Code Checklist

Appendix 3 – Revenue Implications 7-year Plan

Appendix 4 – Sensitivity Analysis