

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd February 2021**
Report Subject: **Welsh-medium Primary School: Consultation Out-turn Report**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member Education**
Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
04.2.2021	11.2.21	16.02.21				22.2.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide a detailed overview of the statutory consultation associated with the proposal to build a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school with co-located Childcare provision, in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley. The report provides an overview of the consultation:
- methodology;
 - process; and,
 - outcomes including key themes emerging from the responses received
- 1.2 A determination is sought from Executive Committee in line with the proposal to proceed to Statutory Notice consultation outcome.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Consultation Process and Methodology

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Blaenau Gwent's Consultation Strategy and associated methodology was reviewed in 2017, at which point the decision was made to move from formal meetings to more engaging informal drop-in sessions. The rationale behind this approach, was to generate consultative conversation on a one-to-one and smaller group basis, in order to garner a broader range of views via a more engaging and inclusive approach.

- 2.5 However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council along with other authorities throughout Wales, have had to adapt accordingly by undertaking formal consultation via virtual means. In order to ensure maximum engagement opportunities for consultees to learn more about and understand the proposal, Education offered a series of virtual meetings and engagement sessions for both established groups and individuals upon request. This was not, however, a formal requirement. Consultation sessions were planned and co-ordinated by Education via Microsoft Teams. At each of the sessions:
- a presentation was delivered, providing an overview of the proposal; and,
 - officers from, Education, Organisational Development and where possible, the Headteacher of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg were present to answer questions posed.
- 2.6 The consultation was initiated and conducted via a formal consultation document and accompanying online survey (please refer to **Appendix 1** for the consultation document), which was fully compliant with the statutory requirements set out within the aforementioned code.
- 2.7 The purpose of consultation was to establish the views and opinions of consultees in relation to the proposal, in order to inform the Council's decision making process and next steps.
- 2.8 In accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code, the Authority must now publish a consultation report (at least 2 weeks prior to the publication of statutory notice) which:
- summarises the issues raised by consultees;
 - responds to these by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons;
 - sets out Estyn's response to the consultation in full; and,
 - responds to Estyn's response by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons.
- 2.9 Formal consultation commenced on Thursday 17th December 2020, upon publication of the formal consultation document on the Council's website. The process then concluded on Friday 29th January 2021 at 5.00pm. Consultees were asked to provide their views, opinions and feedback via one or more of the following methods:
- completion of an on-line survey; and/or,
 - via email to the 21st Century Schools email address.
- 2.10 Contact numbers for the Education Transformation team were also provided, to ensure consultees requiring support and/or assistance in responding can access help and information to enable them to do so.
- 2.11 The Council targeted consultees as directed by the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (please refer to **Appendix 2** for a list of the statutory consultees who were provided with the necessary documentation). Electronic letters were distributed:

- via Blaenau Gwent schools to staff, parents and pupils;
- to Governing Bodies via the Education Achievement Service; and,
- other consultees as detailed within Appendix 2

2.12 In total, 198 formal responses were received electronically. The responses were submitted via one of the following: letter, email or survey.

2.13 **Public Engagement Overview**

Due to the COVID-19 Tier 4 restrictions, direct public engagement within the affected communities could not take place. However, the consultation document stipulated that, should individuals or groups wish to engage with officers to discuss the proposal, a virtual session could and would be arranged. There were no requests received from the public and/or other key consultees for a dedicated session. Neither were there any phone calls pertaining to the consultation. However, Education planned 8 meetings with key consultees (including those directly affected by the proposal), which were attended by a total of 83 consultees (for more information please refer to **Appendix 3**). As a result of these meetings a series of questions were posed and addressed by Council officers, for a detailed overview of questions and responses, please refer to **Appendix 4**.

2.14 **Written Response Overview**

The Council received 8 email responses, 5 in English and 3 bilingually. Please refer to **Appendix 5** for the redacted correspondence log with reference to individuals removed.

2.15 Unlike previous consultations, there were no petitions received. The Council received 190 survey responses, 16 of which were completed via the medium of Welsh, with the remainder submitted via the medium of English. An analysis of and associated responses can be found in **Appendix 6**; however, the data below provides a summative picture of the outcomes i.e. fully support, partial support and

- Fully support the proposal - 177 (93%)
- Partially support the proposal - 2 (1%)
- Do not support the proposal - 11 (6%)

2.16 98 (52%) participants provided additional comments relating to the proposal. 92 (48%) participants chose not to comment, but instead to express their preference. Of the 177 respondents who were in support of the proposal:

- 76 indicated that they were local residents
- 35 indicated that they were parents
- 43 indicated that they were school staff (teaching and non-teaching)
- 3 indicated that they were school governors
- 9 interested parties

2.17 Of the 11 respondents who did not support the proposal:

- 6 indicated that they were local residents
- 5 indicated that they were parents

2.18 Of the 2 respondents who partially support the proposal:

- 1 indicated that they were a local resident
- 1 indicated that they were a parent

2.19 **Social Media Engagement**

The Corporate Communications team were able to establish social media interactions and engagement with consultation posts.

- The Council posted consultation references throughout the consultation period, via Facebook and Twitter
- The Facebook posts detailing the consultation document and processes had a total of 178 interactions (i.e. shares and likes), along with a series of comments which can be viewed on the Council's Facebook page
- The Twitter posts had approximately 50 interactions (i.e. shares and likes)
- The cumulative reach of the consultation posts via Twitter is in excess of 20,000
- The cumulative reach of the consultation posts via Facebook is in excess of 7,500.

2.20 **Thematic Analysis**

The Education Transformation team employed a thematic analysis methodology in assessing the views of the consultees. This method is one of the most common used in qualitative research and is utilised to identify patterns emergent throughout a dataset i.e. key themes such as language. The emergent themes and patterns are important to the questions posed, in highlighting the impact of the proposal, which in turn will support Executive Committee to make an informed decision on how to proceed. This process is interpretive; however, interpretation risks are largely mitigated by the presentation of all responses received (please refer to **Appendices 5 and 6** for a full overview of responses).

2.21 The primary emergent themes arising from the analysis of written responses including – emails and surveys, along with the frequency of each of the aforementioned themes is detailed below (from the most to the least prevalent issues noted):

Theme	Frequency
Positive Change and Opportunity A number of respondents detailed the positives changes and opportunities associated with the proposal i.e. job opportunities, language acquisition, local developments etc.	41
Additionality and Growth Respondents noted the need for additional Welsh-medium education options and associated growth opportunities at all education stages, along with transition.	37
Language & Culture It was felt by respondents, that the proposal had the potential to positive influence and enhance the Welsh language and culture locally.	34
Accessibility Respondents noted that a local development would increase access to Welsh-medium education and bi-lingual opportunities.	32
Choice It was felt that the proposal would promote increased choice in terms of education options and preference.	12
Impact Respondents expressed their views around and sought to enquire about the potential impact upon existing schools and the local area as a result of the proposal	12
Viability A small number of respondents expressed that the proposal may not be viable from a land and sustainability perspective.	7

2.22 During recent years, school organisation consultations have received a higher proportion of negative than positive responses. However, it is important to note that this consultation received a greater level of support than challenge.

2.23 **Children & Young Peoples responses**

Schools, BG Youth Service, the Urdd along with the Council's Policy and Partnerships team, were engaged in the consultation process, in order to support the Education Transformation team to gauge the views of children and young people. It was difficult to co-ordinate dedicated sessions, due to the current Tier 4 restrictions and the availability of children and young people to actively participate.

2.24 Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg sought the views of pupils upon the proposal, which included the following comments and observations submitted by pupils from within Years 4, 5 & 6:

- 'A great idea, nice to have another Welsh school nearby, it's good for the future to speak Welsh.'

- ‘Good for the language, it would have been closer for me to go because I live in Tredegar.’
- ‘There’s a shortage of Welsh schools in Blaenau Gwent so it would be great to have another one.’
- ‘A brilliant idea but I’d like a secondary too because Gwynllyw is so far away.’
- ‘A good idea because we need more Welsh speakers.’
- ‘Very good – it’s good for people to be able to speak Welsh.’
- ‘This should have happened ages ago!’
- ‘A brilliant idea because there’s only one Welsh school in Blaenau Gwent.’
- ‘A really good idea so that children don’t have to travel so far on the bus.’

2.25 **ESTYN Response**

An Estyn response was received during the consultation period and based on the consultation document a full response is provided in **Appendix 5**. (response 5). Estyn’s summary/conclusion to the proposal is below:

The proposer has consulted widely, including with children and young people, parents/carers, school staff, a wide range of interested parties and members of the general public. Estyn is of the opinion that the current proposal will improve the accessibility of Welsh medium provision for pupils in the area’.

2.26 **Summary of Views Against the Proposal**

- Comments regarding the money spent on this new school would be better spent on the established schools in the area
- Views that there are enough schools in Tredegar. This would have detrimental effect on their pupil numbers, and therefore, their budgets.
- Welsh is hardly spoken in this area.
- The land on which they plan to place this primary school offers amazing views over Tredegar but the lovely green space is going to be taken up by yet another concrete building. The traffic build up at the bottom of Beaufort Road is already awful at school times, this new school is going to be a stone's throw from Glanhwy Primary and so the traffic will be doubled.
- As Blaenau Gwent is a small local authority, views on the issue in families making the small journey to Blaina to attend the existing Welsh-medium school.
- The proposed site has multiple and uncharted mines.
- Ysgol Bro Helyg is not full. This could take numbers from other schools and there doesn't seem to be the demand for the school. Is it financially viable to have a full school building with only two classes?
- Concern on the negative effects it will have on the existing primary schools in the Tredegar area. These schools are among the best providers of primary education in Wales. Most are categorised as Green and none are in Special Measures.

A full list of questions posed and comments can be found in **Appendix 7**

3 **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 There are 2 options associated with the consultation outturn report, as follows:

- **Option 1** – The Executive Committee considers and accepts the out-turn report, associated documents and course of action, including proceeding to Statutory Notice
- **Option 2** – Executive 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 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 pupil led funding required would come from within the existing ISB, as pupils chose the new setting over other schools (reducing pupil led funding in existing schools).

Based on the modelling above, there will be a cost pressure for the Council of £265,000 in 2023/2024 and £189,000 in 2024/2025, which will need to be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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 not deliver against the priorities laid out in the Welsh Education Strategic Plan. Furthermore, there is the potential to 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.

8. **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

Appendix 1 Consultation Report
Appendix 2 Consultee's List
Appendix 3 List of Participants attending Microsoft Teams meeting
Appendix 4 All questions posed at these consultation events.
Appendix 5 Redacted Correspondence
Appendix 6 Analysis of online Survey
Appendix 7 Views not supportive of the Proposal and responses