

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd February 2021**
Report Subject: **Welsh-medium Primary School: Statutory Notice
Period Objections Report**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member Education**
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)
	7.4.21	13.04.21				21.4.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Executive Committee with an overview of the Statutory Notice/objection period outcomes and recommendations, in relation to the proposal to build a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school with co-located childcare provision, in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 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.

- 2.2 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.

- 2.3 Executive Committee met on 16th December 2020 and agreed to consult on the above proposal, with the consultation processes commencing on Thursday 17th December 2020, concluding on Friday 29th January 2021. 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 School Organisation Code 2018 (V2). 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.

- 2.4 The consultation out-turn report was presented to Executive Committee on 22nd February 2021. At which point, approval was granted for Education to proceed to Statutory Notice.
- 2.5 The consultation process determined that there was wide spread support for the proposal among consultees, with over 93% of respondents in favour of the new school development, citing the positive impact that the proposal is likely to have upon: The Welsh language, education, employment, the local community and economy. In summary, during the 42-day consultation period:
- The Council received 8 email responses, 5 in English and 3 bilingually
 - 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
 - The responses can be broken down as follows:
 - **Fully support the proposal - 177 (93%)**
 - **Partially support the proposal - 2 (1%)**
 - **Do not support the proposal - 11 (6%)**
- 2.6 The Statutory Notice period (please refer to **Appendix 2** for the document), was conducted over 28 days as per the requirement set out within the School Organisation Code (2018, version 2), as such it:
- commenced on Monday 1st March 2021; and,
 - concluded on Monday 29th March 2021.
- The Statutory Notice period, provided the opportunity for anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal with the opportunity to do so. The objections report containing a summary of any statutory objections must then be published, along with the proposer's response to the objections.
- 2.7 The outcome of the Statutory Notice period is detailed in section 2.8, the fact that only one objection has been received throughout, indicates a high-level of support for the proposal, which is consistent with the findings of the consultation.
- 2.8 **Statutory Notice Period (Objection Period)**
The wide spread support for the proposal was further demonstrated by the outcome of the Statutory Notice period, with only 1 objection letter being received. The response detailed concerns regarding the potential impact upon the individual as a local resident, rather than stating a formal objection to the proposal. The content of the correspondence has been broken down within **Appendix 3**, and all concerns fully addressed. A summary of the main concerns are as follows:
- impact upon the view from the respondent's home;
 - impact i.e. noise, mess and access, resulting from the construction and subsequent opening of the school; and,
 - parking and associated traffic implications.
- The correspondence did however indicate that the respondent was in support of Welsh-medium education.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

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

- **Option 1** – Executive Committee considers and accepts the Objections report, associated documents and course of action, and agrees to proceed to Decision Notification stage (which is required within 7 days of the decision being made, as per the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018, version 2).
- **Option 2** – Executive Committee rejects the proposal to proceed to Decision Notification.

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, version 2), there is a statutory requirement for Councils to consult upon, publish and follow the statutory processes associated with 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 Welsh Education Strategic Plan (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**

5.1.1 **Impact on Budget**

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

5.1.2 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.

5.1.3 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).

5.1.4 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.

5.1.5 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

5.1.6 Should savings be generated via the Home to School Transport Budget, these saving will be used to offset any potential cost pressures identified.

5.2 **Risk** There is a risk that the Council will not deliver against the priorities laid out in the WESP. Furthermore, there is the potential to lose the £6m 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 performance data relating to the proposal.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public** The public can expect a new 21st Century school facility with co-located childcare provision, which enhances and develops Welsh-medium Education opportunities and access within Blaenau Gwent.

- 6.3 **Involvement** Stakeholder engagement is a key focus of all school organisation proposals. The proposal was subject to consultation, along with an objections period aligned to Statutory Notice in line with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018). The outcomes of which will and have been used to inform decision making process.
- 6.4 **Thinking for the Long-term** The proposal 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 statutory processes along with the development of the proposal, has involved collaboration 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 proposal proceed, the project would be established and managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent Corporate Project Management Framework and the PRINCE 2 methodology. A project management group would be set-up to oversee development and implementation of the proposal.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 Consultation Document
Appendix 2 Statutory Notice
Appendix 3 Objection Report