

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st September, 2023**

Report Subject: **ALN Resource Base Capacity – Proposed Implementation of Additional Resource Bases**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member for People & Education**

Report Submitted by: **Joanne Watts, Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	24.8.23					04.09.23	21.09.23	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is:

- a) To provide the outcome of the Statutory Notice on which concluded on 26th July, 2013.
- b) To seek approval for the implementation of proposals to increase the capacity of ALN Resource Bases through a phased approach as follows:

1.2 Phase 1 (based on immediate demand)

- To recognise the transition group established in Ebbw Fawr 3-16 Learning Community - Secondary Phase as a 6-place extension to the current Learning Resource Base from September 2023
- To create a 6-8 place Resource Base at Tredegar Comprehensive School from September 2023
- To create a 10 place Resource Base at Sofrydd Primary School from September 2024/25
- To create a 15 place Resource Base at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg from September 2024

In addition, to provide increased wellbeing support from September 2023 to support learners who are presented to the Vulnerable Learner Panel (VLP).

Phase 2 (subject to further business case)

The development of a medium-term plan to secure additional capacity to facilitate sustained growth and development. It should be noted some/all of these will only be implemented if required following a review of the impact of

Phase 1. This proposal suggests provision at the below schools between 2025 and 2029:

- To create a Resource Base at Brynmawr Foundation School for 10 pupils
- To create a Resource Base at Cwm Primary School for 10 pupils
- To create a Resource base at a Faith Based Primary school (such as Roman Catholic/Church in Wales Schools) in Blaenau Gwent (yet to be determined) for 10 pupils
- To create a Resource Base at Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community - Roseheyworth Road Primary Campus for 10 pupils

A determination is sought from Council to proceed to implementation, in line with the outcome of the Statutory Notice.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 The Welsh Government School Organisation Code (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.

Therefore, the proposal to increase the capacity for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Resource Bases across the County Borough **must** be subject to a formal consultation.

2.2 On Wednesday 19th April 2023, the Cabinet agreed to endorse a formal consultation on proposals to increase the capacity for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Resource Bases in both Primary and Secondary settings.

2.3 Formal consultation commenced on Monday 24th April 2023. The process then concluded on Tuesday 6th June 2023 at 5:00pm. Consultees were asked to provide their views, opinions and feedback via one or more of the following methods:

- attending a drop-in session.
- completion of an on-line survey; and/or,
- in writing via the 21st Century School's email address.

2.4 In accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code, the Authority is required to publish a consultation report 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; and
- sets out Estyn's response to the consultation.

This report was presented at a Special Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 21st June 2023 and Cabinet agreed to proceed to the next stage, to publish a Statutory Notice (**Appendix 1**).

2.5 This report presents the summary of the issues arising from the publication of the Statutory Notice and proposes the next steps in relation to increasing the capacity for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Resource Bases. As part of the Statutory notice, the public were given a period of 28 days to object to the proposals. The Statutory Notice period concluded on the 26th July 2023 and there were no objections to the proposals.

2.6 A full business case has been prepared in relation to the implementation of the proposal and is attached as **Appendix 2**.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

CLT considered the proposals at their meeting on 24th August, 2023. Special Cabinet endorsed the proposals at its meeting on 4th September, 2023 and recommends that Council accepts the Objections report and grants approval to proceed to implementation stage and accepts the full business case in relation to the resources bases from September 2023 onwards.

3.1 Option 1 - It is recommended that:

- Council considers and accepts this Objections report, with evidence from the Statutory Notice (**Appendix 1**) and grants approval to proceed to the implementation stage;
- The full business case (**Appendix 2**) be accepted in relation to the implementation of the resources bases from September 2023 onwards.

Option 2 – Council does not accept the Objections report and business case in relation to implementation of the resourced bases from September 2023.

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. In order to enable people to 'Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'. In addition, the proposal would support the Education Directorate's purpose to deliver:

'Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities'

The Local Authority also has a statutory responsibility to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners, including ALN learners in line with the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. This proposal would support the Education Directorate to fulfil this statutory responsibility.

5. Implications Against Each Option

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

5.1.1 Capital

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.

5.1.2 Revenue

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. If Blaenau Gwent was able to increase capacity in resource base provisions, there would be opportunities to consider making education provision for some of the 11 pupils back in Blaenau Gwent.

5.1.3 Revenue implications associated with Phase 1 of the project have been modelled as part of the business case (**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 £1.288 million by the 2025/26 financial year:

Impact each financial year			
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Rising Costs of Out County Placements if do nothing	£273,624	416,280	598,253

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

In the short term the proposal will likely result in a shortfall 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 award of a cost pressure for 2 financial years as follows:

2024/25- £178,611

2025/26 - £113,000

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 would also see an incremental reduction in the transport costs associated with Out of County placements every year. These savings would be used to mitigate any transport costs to transport pupils to the new ALN resource bases which would prevent any long-term additional cost pressure associated with transport. However, there may be a short-term transport cost pressure if none of the 11 pupils currently in Out of County placements change to a Blaenau Gwent placement.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

If this proposal is not taken forward, 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 will 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. The cost associated with Out of County placements and home to school transport represents a significant risk to the Council. However, there are also risks associated with implementing the resource bases, in particular costs of necessary building/adaption rates which may increase if inflation continues to be high or rises further.

5.3 ***Legal***

Legal advice has been sought in relation to the Statutory Notice. In accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018), there is a statutory requirement for the Council to undertake formal consultation with all interested and affected parties.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The proposed increase in pupil numbers will require the Governing Body of all affected schools to plan for the workforce requirements in readiness for the respective expansions. Organisational Development will provide advice, support and guidance to the Governing Bodies for the workforce planning and consequential recruitment processes.

5.5 ***Health & Safety***

The Corporate Health and Safety Team have initially been consulted with regards to the impact associated with any physical works planned within education settings and will be further consulted as the projects are progressed.

6. ***Supporting Evidence***

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 The Statutory Notice was published for the statutory 28-day period plus the 1 day of publication from 26th June 2023 until 26th July 2023. This timeframe is known as the objection period. During the objection period the Council did not receive any objections to the proposal.

6.1.2 Please refer to the full business case (**Appendix 2**) relating to the implementation of 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 (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Stakeholder engagement is a key focus of all school organisation proposals. The proposal has been subject to consultation in line with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018), which has been used to inform the decision-making process. In addition, in line with the code, pupils have been consulted with via the school councils of the affected schools.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The proposal looks to secure additional provision for both Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ALN Resource Base (ALNRB) provision in line with local demand for places for 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 the ALN reform Act and resource base placements in the County Borough, preventing the need to utilise costly Out County placements.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working.***
The consultation along with the development of the proposal has been developed collaboratively with both the Inclusion Team, Headteachers, Finance, and Community Services.
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The proposal seeks to secure integration for new and existing pupils in ALN placements supporting growth and sustainability of provision for the future needs of learners.
- 6.8 ***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.
- 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment***
A full impact assessment has been prepared and published as part of the consultation exercise.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 There has been extensive monitoring in line with the consultation processes, responses and outcomes which have been answered, analysed and taken via the Council's political processes.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 Statutory Notice



STATUTORY NOTICE
FV 21.6.23 signed.pdf

Appendix 2 Full Business Case



ALN Resource Base
Business Case.docx