

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **Tuesday 9th February 2021**

Report Subject: **21st Century Schools Band B Progress**

Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Cllr. J. Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Claire Gardner, Education Transformation Manager**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
14.1.21	21.1.21	26.01.21			09.2.21	24.02.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise progress in line with the delivery of the Band B Programme.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The 21st Century Schools Programme is a long-term strategic investment in the education estate throughout Wales. The Programme is broken down into phases of investment, categorised as Bands. The Band A Programme in Blaenau Gwent, successfully concluded in the autumn-term of 2019, with the delivery of the final project, Six Bells Campus.

- 2.2 The Band A Programme realised an investment of £20.25m in school estate between 2014-19 (50/50 WG and Council funded) as follows:

- **Tredegar Comprehensive School Remodelling Project £2.3m:**
The project concluded in 2017. A project closure/ evaluation workshop session with Construction Excellence Wales (CEW) deemed the project to be an example of best practice in terms of:
 - value for money;
 - partnership working;
 - project management arrangements; and,
 - effective delivery on a live site.

The project closure report has now been submitted to Welsh Government.

- **Abertillery Learning Community (Tillery Street Campus) New Build Primary School - £9.8m:** The new school was occupied by staff and pupils June 2016. Phase 4 of the project, which involved demolition of the former school and external works, concluded in November 2016. The Welsh Government Minister for Education officially opened the Tillery Street Campus in January 2017. The closure report has been finalised and submitted to Welsh Government.
- **Ystruth Primary School Remodelling Project - £635,900:** The focus of the project was to remodel key areas of the school to meet the changing needs of the pupil population. The project had a specific

focus on the transformation of provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The project commenced in October 2017 and concluded in August 2018 on programme and profile.

- **Abertillery Learning Community (Six Bells Campus) New Build Primary School - £8.8m (inclusive of an additional £150,000 of funding secured from Welsh Government in January 2019):** The project involved the development of a 360 place new build primary school along with a 60 place nursery and a 9 place resource base, to accommodate pupils from Queen Street and Bryngwyn Primary Campuses. Sewer diversion works concluded in July 2018, and the formal school build process commenced. Education was successful in securing an additional £150,000 to increase community parking on the site. This falls outside of the project and is planned for delivery between 2021 and 2022. The Minister for Education opened the Six Bells Campus in September 2019.

2.3 In July 2017, Welsh Government requested an ambitious Strategic Outline Programme (SOP). The Blaenau Gwent Band B SOP was later approved in 2018. Blaenau Gwent's submission aimed to address the following key priorities:

- I. Raising standards, particularly at KS4;
- II. Improving suitability and condition of the school estate;
- III. Programme deliverability-match-funding and affordability;
- IV. Sustainability and reducing revenue costs; and,
- V. Increasing Welsh medium learning opportunities.

2.4 The Blaenau Gwent Band B Programme investment objective are as follows:

- **Investment Objective 1:** to raise standards and achievement in line with localised targets at foundation phase, KS2, KS3 and KS4; and secure improved transition into post 16 learning.
- **Investment Objective 2:** to create a sustainable model for the 21st Century school estate in consideration of both capital and revenue investment, along with the condition and suitability of buildings.
- **Investment Objective 3:** to establish effective management and provision of school places, by having the right schools in the right place at the right time.
- **Investment Objective 4:** to implement the 21st Century Schools Programme in line with local, regional and national school organisation policy; ensuring synergy between progression, development and implementation.
- **Investment Objective 5:** meeting the needs of vulnerable learners.

2.5 Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme has an established programme management structure, delivered in line with the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) methodology. The Programme Board who oversee it, is comprised of key Council Officers, along with external partners, and is accountable to Corporate Leadership Team, who act as Programme Sponsor. Projects are managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent's Corporate Project Management Framework and PRINCE 2, and each has a dedicated project management team.

2.6 Welsh Government encourages and expects Councils to participate in a Gateway Review process. The Gateway Review is a form of peer review, which tests the Council's readiness and capacity to successfully deliver projects and programmes. 4 reviews have taken place to date within Blaenau Gwent, with the latest having taken place in 2019.

2.7 The Education Transformation Team agreed with the review team that, due to the programme status, the delivery confidence assessment should be split as follows, one for Band A and one for Band B respectively. For Band A, based upon a Gateway 5, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Green. For Band B, based upon a Gateway 0, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Amber, due to early stage of the programme. The outcome report (Please refer to **Appendix 1**), highlighted that the 21st Century Schools programme management arrangements are to be commended, as follows:

'...all of the projects within the Portfolio have been successfully completed... ongoing monitoring and realisation of benefits is well-evidenced. The positive impact of these projects on education and wider societal outcomes in the Blaenau Gwent area is also clearly evidenced... the very high quality of programme management in evidence is impressive.'

2.8 An internal audit of the 21st Century Schools Band A Programme was undertaken during the 2019/20 academic year, the outcome of which was a grading of 'reasonable assurance'. Only 2 weaknesses were found which pre-date the existing programme team. The weaknesses found were pertaining to the Band A SOP (submitted in 2010), along with business case submissions pre-2014. Both of these weaknesses have subsequently been addressed by the current Programme team (for more information please refer to **Appendices 2 (a), (b) and (c)** containing the audit reports)

2.9 The Band B Programme commenced in April 2019 and is set to conclude in 2025. The Programme will realise an investment of £19.6million throughout the Blaenau Gwent school estate. The Welsh Government intervention rate for Band B is a 65/35 split, in favour of Local Authorities. The Band B Programme seeks to deliver the following key projects in line with the investment objectives:

- Continued secondary school re-modelling within the following priority schools:
 - Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus
 - Brynmawr Foundation School
 - River Centre Learning Community
 - Tredegar Comprehensive School

This project will be a continued focus due to the level of investment required, in line with future bandings of the 21st Century Schools Programme – **Business case submission is programmed throughout 2021.**

- The development of a new 360 primary school to replace Glyncoed Primary, which is the only category 'D' building in terms of condition

within county borough – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government**

- Primary School remodelling within the Ebbw Fawr Valley consisting of Beaufort Hill, Cwm and Rhos y Fedwen Primary Schools – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government.**
- Remodelling of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to address ongoing condition and suitability issues – **The business case for which has been submitted and approved by Welsh Government.**

2.10 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).

2.11 In addition to the Band B funding envelope, Blaenau Gwent Council 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 line with the proposal to create a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility in the Tredegar/ Sirhowy valley. This proposal is currently subject to statutory consultation, which is scheduled to conclude on the 29th January 2021.

2.12 The delivery programme/timeline has and continues to be subject to regular review throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. The financial profile has also undergone review in discussion with Welsh Government, with the latest profile submitted in December 2020 (Please refer to **Appendix 3(a)** for the delivery programme/timeline and **Appendix 3(b)** for the financial profile).

3. **Options for Recommendation**

Option 1: Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers and accepts the report.

Option 2: Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made prior to reporting to the Executive Committee.

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

4.1 There is a statutory requirement upon the Council to deliver the Band B Programme in line with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018). Each project requires approval via the Welsh Government Business Case Scrutiny Group and Capital Panel. The Business Case documentation has to be developed in accordance with the HM Treasury Green Book, Five Case Model.

4.2 Education is a strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Plan and the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan, of which 21st Century Schools is an

essential component in securing: improved access to education, education facilities (including condition and suitability), provision and standards throughout the school estate. The 21st Century Schools Programme also features as a priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and consequently, has generated a high-level of support from the capital programme.

5.1 **Impact on Budget** - There are no new or additional budgetary implications for the Council. The financial profile was last reviewed and submitted to Welsh Government in December 2020 (see **Appendix 3 (b)** for the financial matrix). The total programme cost currently stands at £19.6million, with the Council's 35% contribution being £6.86million which has been secured and approved via the Council's Capital Programme. In addition, the Welsh Medium Project which has received 100% funding from Welsh Government is currently estimated to be £7.5million, which has been reflected in the attached matrix. Discussions have taken place with Welsh Government, who recognise the likely cost increase as a result of both COVID-19 and delayed implementation. More detailed cost reviews are currently underway with Education, Finance, Technical Officers (i.e. Quantity Surveyors) and Welsh Government, who are currently collating the national cost implications and uplift, with a view to identifying grant funding to address this. The programme is currently on profile, with regular reviews taking place with all relevant representatives on a monthly basis.

5.2 **Risk** – Raising educational standards is a strategic risk on the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). The 21st Century Schools Programme proposals presented within this report will contribute to mitigating this risk. Moreover, there are robust risk management arrangements in place for the 21st Century Schools Programme, with identified risks regularly monitored reported and escalated via the 21st Century Schools Programme Board.

The high-level risks associated with programme delivery at present, include: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with financial, resourcing and programming implications. Project Groups have been established for all live projects monitoring development, delivery and associated requirements. The Programme Board is monitoring programme delivery, with the core Project team (Education, Finance and Community Services) monitoring and reviewing programme resources, progress, timelines and financial profiles on a monthly basis. 2 business cases have been approved to date, with the remainder on track for submission as programmed. Monthly meetings are taking place with Welsh Government, to consider the financial profile and delivery programme in line with the pandemic, along with Welsh Govt. grant and wider support.

5.3 **Legal** – 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. Education is supported by the Council's Legal section, along with Clarks Legal as required, in fulfilling the obligations associated with regulated activity.

5.4 **Human Resources** – There are no direct human resource implications associated with the report, staffing and other resources have been secured in line with programme delivery, and contingencies built-in. Resourcing is subject to regular review at both a programme and project level, with transition plans established to oversee school organisation priorities (including HR).

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

To date the following outcomes have been achieved:

- All 4 projects have been delivered, securing successful conclusion of the Band A Programme, on programme and profile.
- The Band A programme has been subject to internal review and evaluation, internal audit, along with 4 external Gateway Reviews. The latter demonstrates excellent progress and strong programme/ project management arrangements are in place. Learning from the Band B Programme has been used to inform Band B development and implementation.
- Welsh Government have approved all Business Case submissions to date in line with delivery of the Band B Programme.
- Band B projects are currently on profile and programme.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public (This section is mandatory)** - The 21st Century Schools Programme will contribute to raising the standard of education throughout the school estate.

6.3 **Involvement** - The 21st Century Schools Programme contributes heavily to the strategic direction for the school estate across the County Borough. The 21st Century Schools 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).

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term** - The 21st Century Schools Programme is a long-term investment programme that at present, spans the period 2014 to 2034. The Band B element covers the period 2019 to 2025.

6.5 **Preventative focus** – The 21st Century Schools 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 Vision for Education is based upon a school led, self-improving, collaborative approach. The 21st Century Schools Programme plays a fundamental part in improving partnership arrangements with the schools and their respective communities e.g. the community focussed school's agenda. In addition, the programme itself is delivered via a team officers from across all Council directorates, along with external partners such as the Shared Resource Service Wales.

6.7 **Integration** – The 21st Century Schools Programme is a key element in responding to the Council's wellbeing goals for all learners, particularly learners with Additional Learning Needs.

6.8 **EqIA** – There is no adverse impact upon the protected characteristics.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Gateway Review Report

Appendices 2 (a), (b) and (c) – Audit Reports

Appendix 3 (a) and (b) – Programme/timeline and Financial Profile