



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

25TH FEBRUARY 2021

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME – UPDATE ON THE PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE CYNON VALLEY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, COUNCILLOR J ROSSER

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the projects to improve education in the Cynon Valley, following the report brought before Cabinet in September 2018, these were:

- The investment in a new school for Hirwaun Primary School;
- Improving Welsh medium education provision in the Cynon Valley by:
 - Increasing the supply of places in the Upper Cynon Valley by making Penderyn Primary School, currently a dual language school, a Welsh medium Primary School;
 - Investing £4.5M to improve and increase the capacity of Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar to meet the demand for Welsh medium school places;
 - Investing £12.1M to increase the capacity and improve the educational facilities at Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun to meet the demand for Welsh medium places.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the progress made to date on the projects.
- 2.2 Note and approve the variations to the Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun proposals since the last report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To continue to improve and extend the education provision in the Cynon Valley area of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4. BACKGROUND

Investment in Hirwaun Primary School

- 4.1 Funding to invest in a new school for Hirwaun Primary School was approved by the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme Board in July 2019. Project costs total £10.2M.
- 4.2 Works to construct the new school started in September 2019 and have continued to progress well. The works are being delivered through a phased programme, the demolition of the infant block and the installation of temporary classrooms enabled the build to commence.
- 4.3 The school building itself is now complete and staff and pupils moved in after half term in November 2020. Phase 2 is now underway with the demolition of the junior block, and the external works have commenced. The new on-site Flying Start provision has also been completed and opened in January this year.
- 4.4 In accordance with the School Organisational code, following the outcome of extensive consultation, in April 2019 Cabinet approved Penderyn Primary to become solely Welsh medium in September 2021.
- 4.5 There are currently 26 learners in the English medium stream at Penderyn Community Primary School and it is anticipated that all will transfer to Hirwaun Primary in September of this year.

Investment in YGG Aberdar

- 4.6 21st Century Schools and Colleges funding for this project has been approved by the Welsh Government with the investment totalling £4.5M. The project will comprise a 4 classroom extension, an extension to the existing hall, increased on-site parking, plus a new Meithrin. The funding to create a new Meithrin, £810k, had already been secured from the Welsh Government's Welsh Medium Capital Grant and is included within the total project costs. Funding for this project was approved by Cabinet in November 2020.
- 4.7 The detailed design for this project is nearly complete, and a local consultation will be undertaken prior to the submission of the planning application to ensure that the views of the school community and local residents are fully captured. A start on site in the summer of 2021 is currently programmed.
- 4.8 This project will create an additional 48 pupil places at the school and the childcare facility will offer pre-school Meithrin sessions for 2-3 year olds. The childcare provision

will be supported to extend the current after school childcare provision and to extend services to offer holiday provision. Both elements of the project, the increase in capacity at the school, plus the new Meithrin, support the targets set by Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 as well as the Council's new ten-year WESP currently under development.

- 4.9 As a part of the project design process, the Council will undertake a traffic impact assessment to identify any improvements required for the 'Safe Routes' in the community which will improve traffic and road safety management in and around the school curtilage. The Council will also work with the school and the community to promote and encourage sustainable travel such as promoting walking and cycling to reduce the impact of traffic around the school at key times of the day.

Investment in Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun

- 4.10 The plans to increase capacity at Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun are significantly advanced and have recently been subject to a formal Pre-Application Consultation process, no school or community concerns were raised. The works were tendered on a design and build basis and Wilmott Dixon were the successful contractor appointed to take the project forward. The planning application for this project has been submitted with the on-site start date currently programmed for April 2021.
- 4.11 Both the Strategic Outline Case and the Outline Business Cases to secure investment for this project have been approved by the Welsh Government, with the Final Business Case submitted in early January. A decision on the Final Business Case is expected from the Welsh Government this month. The total project costs are anticipated to be circa £12.1M.
- 4.12 The total estimated cost presented to Cabinet in September 2018 was £10.2M. Since submission of these costs a significant amount of work has been undertaken developing the project including a curriculum analysis, intrusive site investigations and detailed design. As a result, the scope of the project has developed and now includes a significant refurbishment of a number of areas within the existing school to enable the effective delivery of the curriculum to accommodate the increase in capacity. The project costs for these proposals now total £12.1M.
- 4.13 The funding package has also changed. In September 2018 the WG 21st Century Schools Band B grant intervention rate was 50%, which therefore required the Council to fund 50% of the cost. The WG intervention rate has now increased to 65% and the Council's funding requirement has decreased to 35%. Therefore even though the project scope and costs have increased, the Council's contribution to the overall investment has in fact decreased from an estimated £5.1M to £4.2M.
- 4.14 The project will deliver a new teaching block on the school site incorporating 8 general classrooms, community rooms, new drama and music facilities plus a sports hall, fitness suite and changing rooms to deliver the PE curriculum. The block has been designed in such a way to allow community access to the sports facilities without compromising the security of the rest of the school. The new block will provide the new reception to the school and the proposals will improve both the security and safety

of the site, with traffic improvements, additional parking, and new pupil routes planned. These works will increase the school's capacity, adding an additional 187 Welsh medium pupil places.

- 4.15 These proposals will significantly improve the sporting facilities at the school and builds upon the £600k investment in a 3G pitch at the school which was delivered in 2019.
- 4.16 The refurbishment works will include provision of new specialist teaching areas such as science labs and technology areas, new dining facilities, general improvements, plus the creation of a dedicated Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) and Wellbeing area within the school to support the delivery of the New Curriculum for Wales.
- 4.17 This project links strategically with the investment at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar, and the change in language medium of Penderyn Community Primary to Welsh only, as it too will support the targets set by Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 as well as contributing to the new ten-year WESP currently under development.
- 4.18 It was reported in the Cabinet report in September 2018 that discussions with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council would take place to consider future planning of Welsh medium places for both Councils which the school serves. To confirm a letter has been sent to the Director of Education and Chief Executive to discuss a mutual way forward to equitably fund the future growth of pupil numbers.
- 4.19 In addition to this, questions regarding Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's future plans for managing their Welsh medium education were formally raised during Merthyr Tydfil's Local Development Plan statutory consultation in June 2019, with representations made by RCT officers from both the Education and Planning Department. In response, a written statement provided by Merthyr CBC advised that *'longer term requirements in regard to both Primary and Secondary Welsh Medium Education will need to be monitored by the Council and considered as part of Band C of the 21st Century Schools programme which commences in 2026'*.

Additional investment in the Cynon Valley

- 4.20 In addition to the large-scale projects highlighted above that are jointly funded by RCT and the Welsh Government, there continues to be significant RCT investment throughout the education portfolio. It has long been the Council's priority to continually improve and upgrade the facilities in all of our schools for the benefit of our staff and learners. Since March 2019, over £2M has been spent on a number of schools in the Cynon Valley alone through the successful delivery of our Capital and School Modernisation Programmes, such works include roof replacements, new boilers, new toilets and hygiene rooms, and the general upgrading of classrooms and external play areas.
- 4.21 Also, as has been previously reported to Cabinet, £250k has been secured from the Welsh Government's Welsh Medium Capital Grant to reopen a Meithrin on the site of Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Abercynon. Works are planned for this summer.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Welsh Language, Equality and Community Impact Assessments were prepared in respect of the Hirwaun/Penderyn proposal and were published on the Council's website as a part of the school organisation consultation process.
- 5.2 Both Business Cases for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar and Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun have included an Equality Impact Assessment and a Children's Rights Impact Assessment, and a Welsh Language Impact Assessment was appended to the Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun Full Business Case in accordance with the latest Welsh Government guidance.
- 5.3 All works carried out will be fully compliant with the Equalities Act 2010 which will ensure that all of the new facilities are fully accessible.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The consultation processes in respect of the Hirwaun/Penderyn proposals was undertaken as outlined in the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code. Cabinet approval to proceed with these proposals was granted in April 2019.
- 6.2 A formal school organisation consultation on the proposals to extend Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar and Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun is not required as the increase in capacity at both schools is below the threshold at which a statutory consultation is necessary. We will, however, continue to undertake local, informal consultation with both schools, including with pupils, staff and governors throughout the duration of the projects,
- 6.3 This has commenced in respect of the works at Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun as the staff, pupils, governors and local residents have been engaged in the PAC (Pre-Application Consultation) in relation to the plans for the new facilities. The consultation for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar is currently underway and will end shortly.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 These proposals require a significant capital investment of £26.8M, of which it is proposed that a minimum of 35% will be funded by the Council and up to 65% by the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme. Details of the borrowing calculation and funding of the annual revenue cost will be included in a further report brought to Cabinet in due course.
- 7.2 During the course of the consultation and design periods any revenue and capital costs accrued were met from within existing budgets. The expenditure accrued has been included within the overall project costs and retrospective funding sought from the Welsh Government on approval of the Full Business Cases.

8. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND THE WELL BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 8.1 The Council's Corporate Plan commits to "Continue to invest in improving school buildings, to ensure the County Borough's pupils have the learning environment fit for the 21st Century."
- 8.2 The proposals considered in the report contribute to all seven wellbeing goals within the Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015 and due regard has been made to the Five Ways of Working, as contained within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This is well documented in the Business Cases submitted to the Welsh Government.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Members will have already seen the results of the Council's 21st Century schools investment in new and improved schools across the whole of the County Borough. These investments have been well received by our school communities, parents and the local community.
- 9.2 The proposals discussed in this report continue to progress the momentum gathered through the improvements and investment delivered in our schools through Band A of the Programme. We seek to continue to improve education provision in the Cynon Valley, offering significantly more Welsh medium provision with an investment of £26.8M in new and considerably improved facilities through the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme.
- 9.3 It is recommended therefore, that Members continue to support these proposals and any further proposals that are brought before Cabinet, as we continue to strive to provide the best possible learning experiences in the best possible learning environments for the children of RCT.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY**

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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