

Report to	Cabinet
Date of meeting	12 th April 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr. Huw Hilditch- Roberts/ Geraint Davies
Report author	Lisa Walchester/ James Curran
Title	Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn Project - School Organisation formal consultation proposal and draft Strategic Outline Case

1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report is to seek approval to submit the Strategic Outline Case to the Welsh Government and to commence consultation on school organisation proposals in regards to the proposal to increase its capacity from 116 to 220.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. To enable the required approvals to be gained to progress the Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn project.

3. What are the Recommendations?

Cabinet are asked:

3.1 To approve proceeding to formal consultation on a proposal to increase its capacity from 116 to 220;

3.2 To approve the submission of the Strategic Outline Case for consideration by the Welsh Government and

3.3 That the Committee confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment, Appendix 1, as part of its consideration.

4. Report details

- 4.1. This is a Band B project in the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme, previously 21st Century Schools and College programme. Commitment to this proposal was outlined in a revised Strategic Outline programme, which was approved by Welsh Government in September 2020. The programme included an overall allocation of £23.8m for this project. As this project is for a special school Welsh Government, subject to the approval of the relevant Business Cases, will provide 75% of the funding with the remaining 25% to be provided by Denbighshire as per the Corporate Plan commitments.
- 4.2. Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn is a 3-19 school which provides specialist provision for pupils with autism. The proposal is to bring 3 of the 4 current sites in Denbigh together in a purpose built building and to increase the capacity of the school as demand for these specialist places increase.
- 4.3. The proposed site for the new build is the field next to Denbigh Leisure centre and currently used by Denbigh High School. It is owned by the Local Authority.
- 4.4. Capacity at a special school is always difficult to determine as it depends on pupil needs, which can vary greatly. The nominal capacity at the school is 116, the school currently has 136 pupils on roll (September 2021 numbers) The school currently have 10 pupils on a waiting list, with a possible further 10 that will need to access a place at the school very soon.
- 4.5. The Covid pandemic has impacted on the number of assessments that have been undertaken. Currently there are 63 pupils awaiting assessments. Based on previous trends this would take the number of pupils eligible to attend the school close to 180 pupils. The impact of the pandemic is yet to be fully realised however the Local Authority believe that demand for these types of places will increase over the next few years and therefore the 220 proposed capacity in the new building to open late 2024 is reasonable.
- 4.6. Due to the increase in capacity the Local Authority are required to undertake school organisation formal consultation. This process follows regulatory guidance as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018. The draft formal consultation document is Appendix 2 along with the draft Community, Equality and Welsh

Language Impact Assessment- Appendix 3. Expected consultation will commence May 22.

4.7. The report also seeks approval of the Business Case for the project which follows the 5 case model adopted by the Welsh Government based on the HM Treasury approach. This requires a three phased approach for approval, namely the progression of the Strategic Outline Case, Outline Business Case and Full Business Case. Each phase considers the Strategic Case, Economic Case, Commercial Case, Financial Case and Management Case for the project.

4.8. The first stage, the draft Strategic Outline Case (SOC) is attached as Appendix 4 for consideration and recommendation for submission to the Welsh Government. The current proposal is for a combined Outline Business Case and Full Business Case to be submitted for approval in the autumn and this will be based on the proposals submitted for planning with updated costings being provided.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. The project links with the Young People Corporate priority in the Corporate Plan 2017-2022- Continue to modernise schools to improve school facilities and enhance pupils learning.

5.2. The proposed new build will have a positive contribution to the Council becoming Net Carbon Zero by 2030. Welsh Government announced that from 1st January 2022 all new build projects will be required to demonstrate delivery of Net Zero Carbon in operation. Welsh Government have stated that they will fund 100% of this in line with current benchmarks that they have detailed. This will form part of the business case as the design develops and costs become clearer.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. The cost of undertaking the consultation on the proposals would be relatively small and would mainly be officer time. There may be some printing costs for those that require a hard copy of the document, the majority will receive a link to the report via email.

6.2. The current forecast for capital spend on the project is £23.8m. Denbighshire will be required to contribute 25% of this funding and this is currently included within the Corporate Plan funding.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. Please see attached Appendix 1- New build- Ysgol Plas Brondyffyn.

7.2. The main conclusions of the report are:

7.2.1. The proposal scored 3 out of 4 stars and 28/36,

7.2.2. The proposal is considering the long term future of the school as demand for these types of school places will increase. The new build will allow the school to use the space flexible and bring all staff and pupils onto one site.

7.2.3. The build itself will help the local economy and will have a strong emphasis on community benefits.

7.2.4. As the project develops the assessment has been revisited and updated. The school and other officer within education have been consulted.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. The project went to SIG on 15th February in regards to the Welsh Government Strategic Outline Case and was approved to go to Cabinet for approval.

8.2. The project was presented to the Denbigh Member Area Group on 8th February 2022.

8.3. A Site visit took place on 11th March 2022, members of the Denbigh MAG along with the Lead member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement were in attendance as well as officers from highways, planning, education, property, Denbighshire leisure, Wates Construction and the school. The site visit enabled Councillors to discuss the proposals and understand how the site would operate should the project proceed. It was agreed to provide regular updates to the Denbigh MAG.

8.4. The school staff and Governors are aware of the project and have engaged in the design meetings with Wates.

8.5. Internally highways, planning, leisure and ICT have all been made aware of the project and feedback received.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 As stated in the report the Strategic Investment Group considered the Strategic Outline Case to Welsh Government on 15th February 2022 and it was approved to go to Cabinet for approval. The capital funding implications of the Band B programme are factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan, although it is important each scheme goes through the capital approval process. This project will also have revenue implications due to the increase in Special School pupils as their funding needs are greater. This is likely to lead to a pressure in the short to medium term, while in the longer term we should see Out of County Placement costs reducing slower than currently projected. The revenue implications will be factored into future budget processes.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. The formal consultation process needs to proceed alongside the new build design and funding approvals.

10.2. The mitigating risk is that formal appointment of the lead contractor for the build itself will take place following completion of the formal consultation process. Therefore should there be significant opposition to the proposal at an early stage the Council could seek to delay the appointment of the lead contractor as appropriate.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides the legislative requirement for local authorities to review school proposals and to progress proposals to reconfigure school provision.