

Local Authority response to Welsh Government following queries raised at Business Case Scrutiny Group meeting on 11 November 2020.

1. Welsh in Education

Query –

Coed Darcy

The previous response to WG only estimates that the statutory process for establishing the school will take place during 2022. What we need is confirmation regarding the language medium of the school.

It is our intention to open a designated Welsh-medium primary school in Coed Darcy. This decision would be subject to member approval and compliance with the extant criteria of the Schools' Organisation Code. It is anticipated that statutory processes for establishing the new school at Coed Darcy, including the medium of instruction, will take place during 2022.

WLIA

We have received the FBC but we need the WLIA before we can assess the document. As noted previously, the type of points which we would expect you to include in your detailed impact assessment are:

- In planning the school development, the impact assessment needs to consider both the positive and negative impacts on the Welsh language for the proposal in Cwmtawe and the wider area.
- Percentages of population that are Welsh speaking in the area/comparison with national population percentage;
- Consider potential impact on inward and outward migration from Welsh speaking area and where this is found, to put mitigation measures in place.
- Effect of the proposal on the authority's Welsh language strategy, Welsh in Education Strategic Plan targets and the national strategy of creating a million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- Provide further details and next steps for the current situation on surplus places and transition rates for WM schools in this particular area.
- Analysis of both positive and negative impacts of any housing developments in the area
- Offer opportunities to promote and support the use of the Welsh language and create resilient and sustainable Welsh speaking communities.

Response –

As we have previously stated we are aware of the requirements of the WLIA. Our Members have approved consultation on our proposal to establish a 3-11 school at Pontardawe and as part of that process they will be expecting us to undertake a comprehensive WLIA. The consultation findings will help inform our WLIA and will then be reported back to Members at the next stage in the process. Unfortunately the WLIA will not

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be completed before we have obtained all the information gathered from the consultation responses.

As stated in previous responses – At this point in time a first stage impact assessment has been prepared which recognises the potential for an impact on the Welsh language in the area and advises a more detailed assessment to follow during the consultation period.

The Swansea Valley area is a linguistically significant area as it contains the highest number and percentages of Welsh speakers in NPT, and is amongst the highest in Wales as a whole. There are concerns however that the number of Welsh speakers is declining and work has been ongoing to ensure the language is promoted and grows.

Alltwen, Godre'rgraig and Llangiwg primaries teach Welsh as a second language and this will also be the case for the new school. Currently 25% of staff across the three schools are fluent or fairly fluent Welsh speakers. By combining the three schools Welsh language provision could be improved as there could be greater impact on having a more concentrated group of Welsh speakers able to support pupil and staff language development skills through the medium of Welsh. This aspect will need to be explored in more detail as part of the full assessment to better understand possible impacts.

This scheme seeks to create one EM school to replace 3 existing EM schools, one of which is housed in temporary accommodation, and it is not intended that pupils currently in WM schools would move from their current school into the new EM one. Estimated pupil numbers have been based on current pupils at the three schools along with pupils at other EM schools in NPT and neighbouring authorities, and is not based on any numbers of pupils in WM schools.

Significant work is being undertaken in a number of the WM schools in the area which will improve provision for teaching and learning and provide extra pupil places, which may mitigate against the impact of a new school. At YGG Pontardawe, which is approx. 1 mile away from the proposed site of the new school, significant remodelling work is taking place to improve facilities for primary aged and preschool children at a cost of £1.62m, and when finished will increase the overall capacity of the school by 60 F/T pupils and the childcare setting by 12 part time places.

At YGG Cwmllynfell, which is approx. 8 miles away from the proposed new school, work is taking place to extend the school by providing 1 new classroom to accommodate 30 full time pupils, and one new childcare facility of approx. 100m² which could cater for up to 40 full day care places or up to 43 afterschool places depending on age, at a cost of £640k.

In terms of Ystalyfera Bro Dur the northern campus at Ystalyfera has greatly benefitted from over £26m of investment and has seen the school site transformed into a 3-19 campus by increasing capacity and ensuring that WM pupils have access to 21st century teaching, learning and sporting

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facilities. A further £19.5m has been invested in the south campus to provide a new build 21st century School for 11-16 year olds.

It is to be expected that the significant work being undertaken would impact positively on pupils attending these schools and prove attractive to parents making choices about future education for their children.

Currently it is the case that demand for Welsh medium education is greater in the south of NPT than in the north. Despite the significant investment in WM schools in the area, outlined above, surplus places exist and transition rates from WM primary schools in the north need to improve.

In contrast transition rates in the south are consistently high with almost 100% of children moving from Y6 WM primaries into Y7 at the south campus. Greater capacity is needed in the southern areas of the county to ensure that growing pupil numbers can be accommodated now and for the future. This will be a key factor of the Councils strategy for increasing the number of Welsh speakers in the future.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) in WM primary and secondary schools in NPT are provided with support at school level and from specialist staff.

Centrally based Welsh speaking specialist teachers provide assessment and support in the areas of:

- Learning difficulty
- Speech and language and communication
- Hearing Impairment
- Vision Impairment

An LSA, trained by the authorities additional learning needs support team (ALNST), has also been appointed to work with identified children and will work closely with them to ensure pupils receive appropriate support and provision.

2. Digital Inclusion

Query –

I would actively encourage the school to consider community Wi-Fi along with any future need for digital skills lessons for the community.

Community Wi-Fi doesn't mean access to the school is required, it could be for example, a school within a close proximity which has children in receipt of free school meals is able to access the schools Wi-Fi to undertake homework etc.

Response –

NPT Policy to enable access to additional IT activities to enhance learning, in and out of the school environment, to occur in a safe environment means

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that, currently, there is no public Wi-Fi available in schools, but a 'guest' facility can be set up where required. Any community use of ICT is usually accessed via the school system which has the necessary firewalls in place. At this point in the process it is not evident whether there is a requirement for digital skills lessons for the community, however it is anticipated that as the proposal develops should a need for this be identified then the planned ICT facilities would enable this to take place, and the school would be actively encouraged to provide a full range of learning opportunities for all members of their community.

Comments are noted and when the school is established further discussions will take place to explore the provision of community Wi-Fi facilities.