



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MA/JMEWL/3317/23

From:

Cleared by:

Date:

[REDACTED]
Sustainable Communities for
Learning Programme
Emyr Harries
Education Business Planning and
Governance
12 January 2024

[REDACTED]

MINISTERIAL ADVICE -

For decision by: Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Subject	Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme - Neath Port Talbot – Programme Variation
100 word summary	You are asked to approve the recommendations of the Education Investment Panel regarding Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B, programme variation for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
Timing	Project funding is time dependent; we would request a decision at the earliest opportunity.
Recommendation	The Minister is asked to approve the recommendations of the Education Investment Panel regarding Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's variation request as outlined on pages 3 and 4.
Decision report	This decision does require a Decision Report, which may be published in due course.

ADVICE

BACKGROUND

1. Variation requests are considered by the Education Investment Panel and recommendations forwarded to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language for consideration.

REQUEST

Neath Port Talbot CBC - SOP

2. Neath Port Talbot CBC has submitted a variation request with 2 main components:
 - a. Seek approval in principle for the revised proposal for Swansea Valley; and
 - b. Seek approval in principle for two new projects to meet demand for learners with additional learning needs.

Swansea Valley Revised Proposal

3. The Ysgol Newydd Swansea Valley proposal involved the amalgamation of three English medium primary schools in the Swansea Valley, which included Godre'rgraig, Alltwnen and Llangwig. The proposal would have resulted in a new 630 place primary school building being constructed with a 25m swimming pool for learner and community use.
4. The FBC for the project was previously approved subject to a satisfactory Welsh Language Impact Assessment (WLIA) being approved by the Welsh Government.
5. The statutory consultation on the proposal was highly controversial and was subject to a successful Judicial Review from RhAG. Following the judgement, the local authority determined to reconsult on the same proposal, which took place earlier this year. Whilst local authority officers recommended that the proposal be approved, the local authority's Cabinet determined to abandon the proposal.
6. The local authority has been undertaking a full review of the project since that decision and is now formally requesting we remove the Swansea Valley project from their programme. There will be a small clawback of just over £100k.
7. The revised proposal is to progress with a rebuild of just one of the three schools, Godre'rgraig Primary School. The school was temporarily relocated from its existing site due to landslide risk and is currently in temporary accommodation. This proposed new build would provide a 210 place primary school building which would increase capacity by 48 learners with an estimated

cost of £17m. There are no alternative proposals for the other schools that were included in the original proposal.

8. Programme Team and Cymraeg 2050 officials have reviewed the request and do not consider there to be sufficient evidence provided to approve the revised proposal. The main concerns (which were also echoed on the original Swansea Valley Proposal) are around the potential impact on the Welsh Language as a result of increasing English medium provision within the area. There are currently 112 learners on roll at Godre'rgraig so the revised capacity would provide significant scope of expansion. The proposal needs to be considered in the context of the wider primary education provision with the four nearest English medium primary schools having 153 surplus places.
9. The variation request was considered by Education Investment Panel, which recommends that the revised proposal is not approved in principle without sight of a full WLIA which considers the wider primary education provision. The Programme Team also note that the proposed project cost is very high for the proposed building size which would need greater justification to demonstrate value for money.

New projects to meet demand for learners with additional learning needs

10. The local authority is also requesting approval to add two additional projects to meet demand for learners with additional learning needs as outlined below.
11. **Expansion of Ysgol Maes Y Coed:** Special school for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) / Social Communication Difficulties in addition to Severe and Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD). Expansion is required to meet growing demand for specialist provision.
12. **Establish the Skills and Vocational Hub:** Providing provision for young people requiring an alternative to the more usual academic route the hub will offer a skills and vocational curriculum. It is proposed to create the hub in the vacant former Education Learning Resource Service (ELRS) building at Velindre. Learners will remain on roll at their mainstream school but will be able to access the provision as required.
13. The two projects form part of the local authority's education strategy to best meet the needs of learners with additional learning needs. Education investment Panel was supportive of the proposed projects and recommend approval in principle, subject to completion of the relevant business cases. The projects will form part of the local authority's rolling programme.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the Education Investment Panel are outlined in the table below.

Project	Estimated Cost	Request	Recommendation
Ysgol Newydd Swansea Valley	£22.7m	Remove	Approve
Godre'rgraig Primary School	£17.0m	New Project	Not Approve
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	£10.0m	New Project	Approve, subject to business case approval
Skills and Vocational Hub	£9.0m	New Project	Approve, subject to business case approval

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. [REDACTED]
15. [REDACTED]
16. [REDACTED]
17. This advice is not committing any Welsh Government funding as the projects would be subject to business case approval. Further advice will be submitted to approve the funding at the point of business case approval.
18. The removal of the Ysgol Newydd Swansea Valey project would result in a clawback of £105,118 prior to the end of the financial year.
19. Any associated staff costs will be met from within group staffing allocations and other administration costs can be met from existing administrative budgets.

Annex 1: ASSURANCE AND COPY RECIPIENTS

CLEARANCE TRACKING

[REDACTED]

DEPUTY DIRECTOR, STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

In clearing this MA, I confirm that I, Emyr Harries have quality assured this advice, ensuring it is provided on the basis of evidence, accurately presents the options and facts and I am accountable for the recommendations made.

I am satisfied that the recommended decision or action, if agreed, would be lawful, affordable and comply with all relevant statutory obligations. Welsh Government policy priorities and cross portfolio implications have been fully considered in line with delivery of the government objectives.

I have fully considered the statement of assurance contained in the MA guidance to ensure all relevant considerations have been taken into account and that the actions and decisions take account of regularity, propriety and value for money.

I [REDACTED], PSWL Operations Group Finance team have considered this advice and confirm that it can be accommodated within the revised funding limits for 23/24 set by Cabinet on Tuesday 1 August 2023 and within indicative budgets for 24/25 set outlined in Draft Budget 2024-25 on 19 December 2023.

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