

**EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

26/06/2024

MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME (MEP) STRATEGY

THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IS ASKED TO:-

To consider and comment on the following issue:

- The draft Modernising Education Programme Strategy as outlined in the report.

Reasons:

- To provide an overview of the draft strategy.
- In order to be able to formulate an investment and school organisation programme in line with Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:-

Cllr. Glynog Davies, Education and Welsh Language

Directorate: Education & Children	Designations:	Tel Nos. / E-Mail Addresses:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26/06/2024

MODERNISING EDUCATION PROGRAMME (MEP) STRATEGY

Background

Carmarthenshire's Modernising Education Programme was approved by the County Council in November 2004 as a strategic investment and rationalisation plan to transform school provision across Carmarthenshire. The aim is to transform the network of nursery, primary and secondary schools serving the county into a strategically and operationally effective resource that meets current and future need for a school based and community focused education. Since its inception, the Modernising Education Programme has drawn widespread recognition for its strategic vision, transformational planning and impressive record of delivery.

Band A / Band B

Carmarthenshire's preparations for the national 21st Century Schools Programme (now known as the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme) commenced in 2010 through an invitation by the Welsh Government (WG) to Local Authorities to submit a Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) for the modernisation of their whole schools estate, placed within four bands for investment (A-D), in order of priority according to most urgent need.

During 2010, a major review of the MEP was completed as part of the process of developing the County Council's submission and the Authority's Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) identified the preferred option for programme delivery to implement on a local area basis.

Through the initial submission process Carmarthenshire's Band A programme was approved at a value of £86.7 million (funded 50% by grant from WG and 50% from the Council's own resources).

Carmarthenshire's Band A commenced in 2014/15 following approval of Band A projects as part of the MEP update in 2013. Band A was updated again in 2016 following a reassessment in line with the approved MEP investment criteria and the practicalities of delivery.

Subsequently, Band B began in April 2019 and was expanded to include further education colleges and as such was renamed, 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme. This programme was expected to see a further £2.3 billion investment in school and college infrastructure and was expected to run until 2024/2026.

In December 2017, Carmarthenshire's Band B was approved at a value of £129.5 million. The Band B intervention rate is currently 65% grant for mainstream and 75% grant for Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units. Band B will come to a close in February 2024 prior to the implementation of the new rolling programme.

Rolling Programme

Following the close of Band B, a rolling programme of investment is being implemented to improve efficiency and delivery for both partners (local authorities, colleges etc.) and the Welsh Government. The rolling programme will strengthen one of the key attributes of the Programme, that of projects being taken forward at the pace of and to the priorities of delivery partners, removing the environment of 'over-optimism' or the need for delivery partners to put forward overly ambitious proposals during what is typically a narrow bidding window.

A nine-year capital programme, including an indicative funding forecast for the 9 years, is required to be submitted to the Welsh Government for consideration towards providing a commitment and support for the first 3 years along with in principle support for years 4, 5 and 6. Years 7 to 9 will reflect a longer-term project pipeline. If appropriate, Band B projects can be included at the beginning of the nine-year capital programme.

At the latest, delivery partners must have reviewed and resubmitted their programme by March 2024.

MEP Strategy

In 2010, the County Council resolved that the MEP be reviewed every two years or otherwise as required to ensure consistency with the timeframe of the national 21st Century Schools Programme (Renamed Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (SCfLP)).

This has been a central feature of the MEP since its inception that it needs to retain flexibility at its core to ensure that the programme remains current and responsive to changes in the education policy framework and the needs of constantly developing society and communities. This is truer than ever in the current climate/post pandemic.

As such, the Local Authority are currently undertaking its review of the MEP, in line with the requirement to submit a strategic outline programme for the new rolling programme by March 2024. Consequently, a new MEP Strategy has been developed (attached) to direct the future delivery of the new Modernising Education Programme. It is guided by a set of strategic objectives and underpinned by the department's purpose pieces and educational principles to ensure cohesion with the 8 Education Priorities for 2022-2025 and the Education Sir Gar 2022-2032 strategy. The MEP strategy includes a set of viability and investment criteria to ensure an appropriate and transparent method of developing school organisation and investment proposals. A public consultation on the draft strategy was held between 13th February 2024 and 12th March 2024.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Education, Young People and Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee considers the draft strategy as outlined in the report.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES – MEP Strategy document

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Signed:



Head of Access to Education

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets	Bio-diversity & Climate Change
YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

Any school organisation or federation proposals determined by the MEP Strategy will be subject to a completed Integrated Impact Assessment and any other impact assessments as determined by the School Organisation Code 2018.

2. Legal

In line with the Modernising Education Programme and Welsh Government requirements, any proposals to invest in school buildings will be subject to approval following the 5 case business case process. Likewise, any school organisation proposals will be subject to adherence with the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013, the School Organisation Code 2018 and the Local Authority's own democratic process for approving school organisation proposals. In addition, any federation proposals will be subject to adherence to the Federation Process of Maintained Schools in Wales – Guidance for Governing Bodies and Local Authorities.

3. Finance

Capital – Any projects considered for capital investment will require approval and inclusion within the Local Authority's 5 year Capital Programme in order to provide match funding.

Revenue – All schools, regardless of whether they are subject to capital investment will continue to be funded in accordance with the Fair Funding model.

Capital Maintenance – Capital maintenance will continue to be provided and will be determined and agreed on a priority basis, regardless of whether schools are subject to capital investment.

4. ICT

ICT requirements will be considered for any school subject to investment intervention.

5. Risk Management Issues

The MEP strategy will determine school organisation proposals and investment intervention based on a wide range of criteria such as: leadership, pupil numbers, financial viability, school building condition and suitability, sustainability and accessibility. Any risk associated with above criteria for any school will continue to be managed via the Local Authority's existing procedures and groups such as through Change Review Panel and the Departmental Management Team, until it is determined whether a school is subject to school organisation or investment intervention.

6. Staffing Implications

In any instance where a school organisation proposal and/or project has an impact on staffing, staffing implications will be addressed in accordance with the County Council's Policy and Procedures.

7. Physical Assets

New School Buildings – The Local Authority may gain a new stock of school buildings, should it be determined that a school requires investment to provide a new school building.

Existing School Buildings (Current Stock) – All existing school buildings will continue to be maintained as per current arrangements. Existing responsibilities will remain for Governing Bodies and the Local Authority. Capital maintenance will continue to be provided and will be determined and agreed on a priority basis, regardless of whether schools are subject to capital investment.

Surplus School Buildings – Any school building deemed surplus to requirements will be managed in accordance with the latest Surplus Schools' Disposal Policy.

8. Bio-diversity & Climate Change

As with all new school developments, the enhancement and maintenance of bio-diverse and habitat areas will be considered in line with the Environment Act and to promote the vision of the new curriculum. To support Carmarthenshire County Council's vision of becoming net zero carbon by 2030, all school developments will be developed through sustainable approaches and methodologies to ensure cohesion with this vision.

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED: YES	Include any observations here
Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:	
Title of Document	File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Sustainable Communities for Learning Website	https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-communities-for-learning-programme
School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013	http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/contents/enacted
School Organisation Code 2018	https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/school-organisation-code-second-edition.pdf
Federation process of maintained schools in Wales – Guidance for governing bodies and local authorities	https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/federation-process-of-maintained-schools-in-wales-guidance-for-governing-bodies-and-local-authorities.pdf