



Report of the Director of Education

Education & Skills Service Transformation Committee –
27 September 2023

Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places

Purpose:	The report presents information regarding the Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places programme in relation to the current position and future plans.
Report Author:	Kate Phillips
Finance Officer:	Aimee Dyer
Legal Officer:	Stephanie Williams
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar
For Information	

1. Background

- 1.1 The purpose of Service Transformation Committees is to contribute to the ongoing development of the Council's agreed transformation activities (specifically in relation to the council's corporate plan, policy commitments, Corporate Transformation Plan, and Medium-Term Financial Plan) for consideration and adoption by Cabinet Members, Cabinet and/or Council as appropriate.
- 1.2 At the meeting held on 14 June 2023, it was agreed that Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places would be a key area for consideration by the Education and Skills Service Transformation Committee.
- 1.3 This report will set the context for the Supporting Sufficient Specialist Places programme and will outline how the council can enhance the provision for all children with additional learning needs to ensure those who need additional, specialist support can access it within a truly inclusive system that provides a local, quality assured, equitable offer to all. The aim is to achieve this goal within five years.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 All schools in Swansea are expected to provide learning environments where the needs of all children can be met, wherever possible. This includes children with additional learning needs and is in line with the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act 2018 (ALNET).
- 2.2 In addition to the school offer, there are also 34 specialist teaching facilities (STFs) within Swansea schools. These STFs are hosted by schools on behalf of the local authority and provide specialist educational provision for children and young people who need additional support to the mainstream offer. There are also two special schools.
- 2.3 The STF provision in Swansea has been added to over a period of years, as levels of need have increased or new areas of need have been identified. STFs have usually been established where there is space, or interest, in a school. This has been beneficial in terms of providing a quick response however, it has not been a strategic, whole system approach.
- 2.4 There is a variation in approach to inclusion across Swansea schools with many examples of excellent practice. Whilst there is a significant amount of training, support and guidance for schools, we do not currently have an adequate resource or structure to offer a comprehensive programme of regular quality assurance which would in turn lead to support for improvement where needed alongside the highlighting and sharing of best practice. This has resulted in some inconsistencies in relation to referrals to STFs.
- 2.5 STFs in Swansea are full and we do not currently have the appropriate number of places in all locations, meaning some children have to travel long distances to attend a provision that can meet their needs. We are committed to improving this position. We would like all children and young people to be able to access the provision they need within their local communities, wherever possible. Long journey times impact on learner wellbeing and we know that in some cases the cost of transport to is equal to, and sometimes more than, the cost of the provision itself.
- 2.6 We know that there are increasing needs across the spectrum of additional learning needs with increasing demands on mainstream schools, our special school and STF places. There is currently a waiting list and the impact of the pandemic, alongside a national increase in autism has further impacted on pressures.

3. Progress To Date

- 3.1 Since 2020, we have undertaken an extensive period of review and redesign of the current provision.
- 3.2 There has been a high level of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and co-design. Stakeholders include the Swansea Parent Carer Forum, headteachers, Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCOs), Local Health Board colleagues, Child and Family Services colleagues and officers from across the Education Directorate.
- 3.3 A Change Team has been established with members of the Education Directorate Senior Leadership Team (EDSLT) Strategic Leads.
- 3.4 The collaboration period resulted in a set of principles which will underpin any new model of provision. These are detailed in Appendix A.
- 3.5 During the academic year 2022-2023, four development school clusters worked with officers from the ALN and Inclusion Team on transferring these aspirational principles into an operationally deliverable model. The outcome of this work was a proposed model of provision which could be applied across all school clusters in Swansea.
- 3.6 This proposed model of provision is currently being finalised and will be shared with the Change Team who will consider its viability in terms of deliverability.
- 3.7 The new model is likely to be more resource intensive than the current model, however, this reflects the increasing demand, emerging needs of learners, the shift in societal pressures and increased legal responsibilities of schools and the local authority.
- 3.8 The preferred, proposed model is likely to reduce transport costs and enhance local authority provision within the county thus reducing the need for costly, out of county options which necessitate learners being educated out of their local communities. It had been hoped that savings achieved in these areas could be redistributed to support the new model. Current budgetary constraints make this more challenging however, we are committed to finding solutions that will enable our proposed model to succeed.
- 3.9 The STC could provide helpful insight into prioritising elements of the proposed model to support decision making around how best to resource the plans within the available funding.

4. Pilot Projects – Dylan Thomas and Minibus

4.1 Given the scope and complexity of the work it has been helpful to explore emerging proposals with pilot projects in order to test the new thinking, identify strengths and challenges in the proposals. This in turn has supported planning for how best to take them forward. There are currently two pilot projects underway:

- Minibus pilot
- Dylan Thomas cluster enhanced cluster provision

4.2 The minibus pilot developed from the stakeholder workshops. An emerging theme from headteachers with larger STFs was the number of taxis transporting individual learners, the impact on both site safety and site management and the wellbeing implications for learners having an extended start / end to their school day due to journey times.

4.3 There were concerns around equity of opportunity with the usual opportunities afforded to families of daily informal contact with the school being prevented by the taxi journey.

4.4 Alongside this the increasing fuel prices, limited number of taxi tenders and short notice for placements is resulting in beyond inflation costs associated with ALN home to school transport.

4.5 Following a period of extensive work to ensure all safe, legal, efficient and appropriate planning was undertaken a minibus pilot began with two schools initially. The pilot involved schools using their own minibuses, staffed by school staff, to undertake home to school transport arrangements for STF pupils.

4.6 Following evaluation of the pilot the following benefits have been identified:

- Financial – the trial has been very small scale and we have not maximised the number of pupils accessing the transport, however, even at this small scale there are financial savings with indications that scaling up will yield even greater savings.
- Wellbeing – an important consideration in this pilot was the impact that long taxi journeys have on learner wellbeing and the lack of access to school staff that families have when children are transported by taxi. During the pilot questionnaires were issued to children and parents taking part in the trial. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive with children and families welcoming the contact with school staff and identifying a much more positive start and end to the school day. Schools reported less behaviour challenges and children arriving at school ready to learn.
- Site safety – the pilot project has reduced congestion and parking issues at the schools concerned and has meant less

vehicles needing to access the school site at the start and end of the school day.

- Environmental impact – whilst the pilot is currently very small scale there is potential in the future to reduce the number of vehicles providing home-to-school transport and also exploring options for electric vehicles.

- 4.7 Given the success of this pilot we are keen to scale it up. The biggest challenge is the resource in central teams to undertake the work needed to achieve this so we are currently exploring options and can update the committee further.
- 4.8 The second pilot project emerged from the development phase which took place in the academic year 2022-2023. During this work it was identified that some learners could benefit from shorter term placements in specialist provision. This would not be appropriate for all learners who may require specialist input. However, it was identified as an option to explore for some to provide an additional step in the graduated response to meeting need.
- 4.9 In addition, it was identified that there was potential for specialist staff to operate in more of an outreach model to support some learners in their current settings and, perhaps more significantly, upskill staff across schools to support learners with different needs on the basis that ALN is everybody's business.
- 4.10 The combination of the approach of shorter-term placements in a specialist setting and enabling specialist staff to take their skills, experience and expertise out of the specialist settings led to a proposal for inreach/outreach provision which would be offered on a locality basis. This is being trialled at a cluster enhance provision within the Dylan Thomas cluster.
- 4.11 The proposal has been planned with all primary headteachers and ALNCOs in the cluster along with the ALNCO from the secondary school. Very clear parameters are in place and parental agreement is a critical element to any potential placement. The plans are still at early stages. Grant money has been identified to support the pilot and guidance documentation is being developed. It is anticipated the provision will be available in the new calendar year.
- 4.12 The provision will be carefully reviewed and effectiveness assessed to help inform future developments. There has been a high level of commitment from the cluster and updates can be provided to the STC to ensure the committee is apprised of progress and can support the shaping of future plans.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Draw together all predictive data and finalise projections of future provision requirements. Ensure that the proposed model sufficiently aligns to predictions while also allowing flexibility and ensuring a responsive model which is less restrictive than current arrangements
- 5.2 Once the Change Team have agreed the proposed model, it will be necessary to share with all relevant stakeholders and seek Cabinet approval to proceed. It would be helpful to have the views, comments and observations from the STC prior to submission of a final report to cabinet.
- 5.3 It will also be necessary to identify funding to secure the long-term future of the model. This is challenging in the current financial situation as many of the potential funding sources are needed to be offered as wider savings. It may be necessary to identify the elements of the model which will need to be prioritised to match available funds.

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 6.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 6.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.
- 6.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community

cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

6.1.3 This report is for information only. Any initiatives developed following this review will be subject to the IIA process as required.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix A – Agreed Principles