



CABINET REPORT

Date of meeting: 14 February 2023

Cabinet Member: Councillor Beca Brown

Liaison Officer: Debbie Anne Jones, Assistant Head of Education Department:
Corporate Services

Item title: Ysgol Hirael

1. DECISION SOUGHT:

- 1.1 To allow the allocation of **£3,000,000** from a total of £18m from the Bangor Phase 2 budget, Sustainable Learning Communities Program (Band B) in order to invest in Ysgol Hirael. The budget would be subject to submitting a successful business case to the Welsh Government.
- 1.2 Ask the Cabinet to assume the review of the Assets Plan by confirming a contribution of £1,050,000 from the Assets Plan for 35% of the match funding to fulfil the Ysgol Hirael project.
- 1.3 Subject to the Cabinet's decision in 1.1 above, and following that, the support of the Welsh Government to transfer the budget for Ysgol Hirael, the permission of the Cabinet is sought to prepare and submit a business case to the Welsh Government in order to release the funds required.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 YSGOL HIRAEI

Ysgol Hirael is centrally located within Bangor town and has a capacity of 208 pupils, with 188 learners aged 3-11 on the register (September 2022). There are seven classes in the school averaging 21 learners per class. In 2022-23, Ysgol Hirael received a financial allocation of £624,000 with a cost of £4,312 per pupil.

Ysgol Hirael is the only primary school in the Bangor catchment area that has not received any investment as part of Band A or Band B funding. Investing £3m in Ysgol Hirael would continue to enable the Department of Education to invest sufficiently in the secondary provision in the Bangor area. The budget for Ysgol Hirael and Bangor secondary schools is subject to submitting a successful business case to the Welsh Government.

By now, the condition and suitability of Bangor's primary schools is generally very good following recent investment, but the condition and accessibility elements of Ysgol Hirael require specific attention as it currently falls into category C, which is significantly lower

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than the rest of the schools (except for Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes which has received investment as part of Band B funding).

Ysgol Hirael’s needs came to the attention of the Education Department during the Review of Education Provision in Bangor Catchment Area that was held in June 2017. During the meetings many options were considered for the vision for education in Bangor, and the condition of Ysgol Hirael was raised during some of those catchment area review panels and it was noted then that the building was insufficient.

As part of the arrangements in the Bangor catchment area relating to the Band A programme, Ysgol y Faenol had a significant extension, Ysgol Glancegin, which is located on the outskirts of the city, received a brand new school, and recently a new school was built for Ysgol y Garnedd. Unfortunately, the request to extend the budget that was available at the end of the Band A period to invest and meet the needs of Ysgol Hirael was unsuccessful, and due to the recent investment in the other primary schools in Bangor, the needs of Ysgol Hirael and the inequality that exists between the school and the condition and learning environments of the other primary schools in the city have been increasingly exposed.

As a result of the pandemic there has been some delay to the Band B programme, but the Council recognises the need to invest and improve the condition of Ysgol Hirael’s buildings and learning environment, and that is reflected in the commitment set out in the [Council’s Plan](#) (page 21). The need to invest and improve the resources and the learning environment at Ysgol Hirael is noted in order to eliminate the inequality that exists between primary schools in the Bangor catchment area.

In addition, the Council is committed to ensuring that the condition of our schools across the estate will be in Category A or B, and investment in new buildings will lead to reduced expenditure on building maintenance together with less energy costs.

Refer to the table below for the condition categories of primary schools in Bangor.


	Ysgol Hirael	Ysgol Cae Top	Ysgol Faenol	Ysgol Garnedd	Ysgol Ein Harglwyddes	Ysgol Glancegin	Ysgol Llandygai
Building conditions category (Council’s criteria)	C	A	A	A	C	A	B

It is estimated by the Property Development Unit that a budget of £3 million is needed to undertake the work at Ysgol Hirael with the intention of:

- reducing the inequality in the condition and suitability of primary school buildings in the city of Bangor

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- raising the condition category of Ysgol Hirael to A
 - improve the adaptability and accessibility elements
 - improve the building for community use
 - demolish and rebuild one of the school's buildings which is of vic hallam construction.
 - ensure a learning environment that meets the requirements of the twenty-first century and the Curriculum for Wales.

2.2 COMPLETED STEPS

2.2.1 Application to the Welsh Government for an adjustment to the Band B budget

Subject to the decision of the Cabinet, permission will be required from the Welsh Government to transfer £3m within the Band B envelope in order to move forward with the project and draw up a business case for the Welsh Government in order to release the money.

2.2.2 An application to set aside a budget of £3,000,000 for Ysgol Hirael has been submitted to the Welsh Government on 13 January 2023. The Cabinet's decision will need to be confirmed before their Investment Panel meeting on 16 February 2023 for them to consider supporting our application to transfer funding to the Ysgol Hirael project from another project in the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

2.3 CAPITAL FINANCE

2.3.1 Sustainable Communities for Learning Grant

A Strategic Outline Programme was presented to the Welsh Government in 2017 in order to realise the Department of Education's projects (Band B). The method of funding the programme means that the Welsh Government contributes 65% of the costs, while the Council contributes the remaining 35%.

In regards to Ysgol Hirael's budget, £1,950,000 is the sum required from the Welsh Government, which is 65% of a full budget of £3,000,000 for making improvements to Ysgol Hirael, with Gwynedd Council contributing the remaining 35%.

2.3.2 Childcare Grant

In addition to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme funding, the Children's Department has included the needs of childcare provision at Ysgol Hirael for the next phase of capital funding in order to incorporate a dedicated space for the service at the school. No financial commitment has been agreed to date.

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3. REASONS FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

3.1 Unsuitable learning environment and school resources

By now, the resources and the learning environment at Ysgol Hirael do not meet the requirements of the 21st century because the condition of the school has deteriorated. Maintenance costs would likely increase due to a lack of timely investment which is an obstacle for the school to be able to introduce innovative learning models.

3.2 Ensure investment within the Band B timetable

Securing the support of the Cabinet in order to move forward with Ysgol Hirael as a project would enable the Education Department to draw up and submit a business case for Ysgol Hirael without hesitation (as there is no statutory process or re-organisation involved).

4. NEXT STEPS AND TIME TABLE

4.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision and the support of the Welsh Government, to transfer £3,000,000 from the remaining budget of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme envelope (Band B) in order to invest in Ysgol Hirael.

4.2 Subject to the decision of the Cabinet in 1.1 above, and following that, the support of the Welsh Government to transfer the budget for Ysgol Hirael, it is anticipated that it would be possible to proceed immediately to create a business case for the Welsh Government in order to release the money.


5. ANY CONSULTATIONS HELD PRIOR TO THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE DECISION

Future Missions Wellbeing Act

The Education Department has a role to promote the well-being goals of the Act among the county's learners through its activities and projects. The Act places a duty on public bodies in Wales to improve economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. As part of the duty the Council has published well-being objectives which outline how we will improve well-being in the "Gwynedd Plan 2018-2023". It is intended to give consideration to the requirements of the well-being act and carry out an assessment in the context of the 7 well-being goals of the Act as a result of the engagement with the relevant stakeholders.

Equality

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The Education Department has a responsibility to promote equality together with general duties to ensure fairness and foster good relationships. The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to consider the effect of any change to a new policy or procedure on people with protected equality characteristics, namely race, gender, disability, language, religion or belief and age.

An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been drawn up and will be updated regularly as a result of the discussions. See **Appendix 1**.

6. THE OPINIONS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

6.1 Monitoring Officer

“No observations to add in relation to propriety.”

6.2 Head of Finance

“I have no objection to the decision sought. Clearly, the result of this would be a reduction in the resources available to implement other schemes, and the author of the report will need to convince the Cabinet that prioritising the Ysgol Hirael scheme is appropriate.”

6.3 Local Member – Concillor Niger Pickavance.

“It gives me great pleasure to provide an input into the report to be put before the Gwynedd Council Cabinet and the Welsh Government. It is of the opinion of School governing body and me as the local member that Ysgol Hirael has been left behind in terms of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and as a result the School faces increasing maintenance costs, the building is dated and crumbling away and most important of all, this is having a detrimental effect on the education of all the pupils. I therefore welcome this report and thank the officers who were instrumental in putting it together. The report highlights all the issues we have raised as a school and governing body and the improvements the investment will have on the school.

It was particularly good to read that the school will contain modern resources that will be suitable for pupils and staff who have any specific physical needs, that the school will offer better resources and facilities for extra educational needs to strengthen the Welsh language.

I have had three daughters who have experienced education at Ysgol Hirael and given the poor standard in the facility the teaching standards and professionalism is outstanding. From the headteacher to the management and all staff, they certainly deserve the tools to further their offering of perfect teaching.

I finish in expressing gratitude for the improvement of the experience for every pupil at Ysgol Hirael and they are at the forefront when it comes to priority and educational opportunities. The new investment will improve the standard of school life for the pupils, offer them new opportunities and better experiences both in and out of school times.

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On behalf of the constituents I serve, the pupils of Ysgol Hirael and all the staff who form the family ambience, I wholeheartedly hope that Ysgol Hirael receives the funding it deserves so that it can continue to thrive whilst catching up with the rest of Bangor.”