

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **26th November 2018**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent - Welsh in Education Strategic Plan**

Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Cllr. Clive Meredith**

Report Submitted by: **Head of Education Transformation – Lynn Phillips**

Report Written by: **Education Transformation Manager – Claire Gardner**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	6.11.18	14.11.18			26.11.18	19.12.18		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise progress in relation to the Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP); the work of the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) and the alignment of the plan to national/regional developments.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Section 84 of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, requires each Council to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).
- 2.2 Welsh Government issued revised guidance in 2016 in respect of the development of the revised format associated with the 3-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plans for the period 2017- 2020. The purpose of the WESP is to set out the Council's strategic approach and direction in the development and delivery of Welsh-medium provision and Welsh education. The plan is to be approved by the Executive Committee and signed by the Corporate Lead Director with the responsibility for Education within the Council. The plan also needs to be underpinned and informed by Welsh Government's current Welsh-medium Education Strategy (April 2010) and policy statement for 2015-16.
- 2.3 The revised guidance has been established within the context of Welsh Government's wider strategy for the Welsh language. The Welsh Government vision is to see one million Welsh speakers by 2050. To achieve that, WG believe that the following needs to happen:

- more children in Welsh-medium education;
- better planning in relation to how people learn the language;
- more easier-to-access opportunities for people to use the language;
- a stronger infrastructure and a revolution to improve digital provision in Welsh; and,
- a change in the way we speak about the language.

2.4 According to the most recent census (2011), there were 562,000 Welsh speakers in Wales. On that basis, the aim of the national strategy will be to almost double the number of Welsh speakers by the middle of the century. Consequently, the Welsh Government's prioritises 6 key areas for action:

1. Language planning and policy
2. Normalisation
3. Education
4. People
5. Support
6. Rights

2.5 The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20 (please refer to **Appendix 1** for more information), is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language strategic frameworks. The strategic priorities highlighted in the draft WESP document for the next three years can be summarised as follows:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2020, to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year's provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg by 50% in 2020.
- Work regionally with South East Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision between 2017-2020 and beyond.
- Improving Welsh medium learner outcomes by 2020 so that learners raise aspirations and improve their life chances.

2.6 The revised Blaenau Gwent WESP was initially submitted to WG in line with the new guidance, on 20th December 2016. Welsh Government then undertook an initial review of the plans submitted by all Council's, and commissioned an external consultant, Aled Roberts; to analyse the plans in identifying gaps and opportunities to strengthen them. The consultant then met with all Council's throughout Wales on an individual basis, to discuss his initial findings. Post discussions with the consultant, the Education Transformation team collated a response to the initial enquires in May 2017. Formal feedback was then provided in letter format to each Council on 4th August 2017, to which a response was collated and reviewed by the local WEF, resulting in submission of the updates to Welsh Government for review.

- 2.7 A summary of the feedback from Welsh Government is detailed below, all of which has been addressed within the context of the appended plan:
- More detailed information about closer working with Mudiad Meithrin and the identification of areas to develop new Welsh medium pre-school provision;
 - Intentions for capital investment for new Welsh medium provision in the authority need to be clearer;
 - Plans for any dual stream provision need to be clearer;
 - The plan should note any Welsh medium pre-school provision within the context of the 30 hour childcare pilot;
 - Outcome five needs to reference any mapping activities as well as the framework; and:
 - Outcome 6 requires additional detail addressing the most recent assessment of need as well as highlighting any gaps in provision.
- 2.8 The revised draft of Blaenau Gwent WESP was then subject to consultation, which commenced on 30th October 2017 and concluded on 17th November 2017. Throughout the consultation process, only 1 response was received with an update in relation to the Cylchoedd Meithrin, from the Deputy Manager for South East Wales Mudiad Meithrin. The limited response demonstrates the high levels of partner engagement within the local Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Forum, along with the effectiveness of regular action planning and review processes. The revised plan was approved and submitted to Welsh Government in December 2017. The BG WESP was then formally approved by Welsh Government in March 2018 (Please refer to **Appendix 2** for the Welsh Government's approval letter). Blaenau Gwent was the first and only Council within the SEWC region at the time, to have the plan approved with no further amendments.
- 2.9 Alongside a review of the WESP, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation were reviewed and strengthened in the autumn-term of 2017. The terms of reference has been streamlined and is now more reflective of the groups focus and remit (please refer to **Appendix 3** for more information). As a result of the review, there are now Lead Officers with the relevant skills, knowledge and expertise assigned to each of the outcomes. A new reporting format has been devised, which has been extremely effective in ensuring that up-to-date information is collated and used to inform progress against each outcome in line with implementation.
- 2.10 5 WEF meetings took place throughout the course of the academic year 2017/18 with membership, attendance and engagement improving on previous years. Partners have commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which has in turn had a positive impact upon membership, attendance and outcomes.

- 2.11 One of the outcomes of the improved partnership approach includes planning and delivery of a series of parent / carers engagement events entitled 'Bi-lingual Children' throughout 2017 and 2018. The events programme was co-ordinated by the Education Transformation team in line with Outcome 1, and in partnership with:
- Blaenau Gwent Early Years Childcare and Play team
 - Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg
 - Mudiad Meithrin
 - The Urdd
 - Blaenau Gwent Welsh Language Support Officer
 - Mentrau Iaith Cymru
 - Cymraeg i Blant
- 2.12 The 'Bi-lingual Children' events programme was developed with the aim of promoting and ensuring that parents are fully aware of the Welsh-medium education and childcare options available to them. The events also served to establish the barriers parents perceive that they face with regards Welsh-medium childcare and education; the results of which will inform future marketing, promotion and engagement work. The initial event held at Bedwellty House in October 2017, was attended by approximately 20 parents / carers and children from within and around the Tredegar and Ebbw Vale areas. Feedback has been extremely positive, with Mudiad Meithrin commenting that Blaenau Gwent are leading the way in terms of family and parent engagement. The event has also generated interest from parents in other authorities (please refer to **Appendix 4** for more information).
- 2.13 The South East Wales Regional Welsh in Education Forum, structure, membership, purpose and focus have also been reviewed. The Forum is now much more effective in terms of recognising and supporting both regional and local developments, along with their involvement in the Wales-wide context.
- 2.14 The ET team have represented Blaenau Gwent (BG) at all regional Welsh in Education Strategic Forum meetings throughout the last academic year; as such BG Council has cemented itself as a firm partner. In addition, the Education Transformation Manager is the chair of the Regional Planning of School Places and Demand Sub-group of the WEF Strategic Forum. The group has met 5 times in the course of the 2017/18 academic year and have focused on the following priorities / areas of work:
- Co-ordination of Welsh-medium demand survey arrangements
 - Review and draft a single questionnaire and booklet for distribution
 - Ensure that there is a 3-yearly demand assessment programme in place with the first taking place in the autumn-term of 2018
 - Undertake an audit of other assessments and the associated delivery timescales i.e. CSA
 - Explore the development of an incentive scheme, to support parental engagement within the demand survey process
 - Compare percentage return rates and undertake monitoring on a regional basis to further inform the development of Welsh-medium education provision

- Regional review of Welsh-medium primary school progression, development and organisation present and future
 - Review capacities and pupil place planning in respect of Welsh-medium primary provision throughout the region
 - Discuss Band B and future plans, explore progression and development opportunities
 - Explore cross border arrangements and associated opportunities
 - Regional review of Welsh medium transport arrangements
 - Compare, policies plans, provision, uptake, limits, management etc.
 - Review terminology and meaning within policies and plans i.e. Concessionary
 - Explore faith arrangements
 - Explore opportunities for links on a regional level
- 2.15 The group are presently planning the regional demand survey arrangements for implementation the autumn-term 2018. A future focus for the group will be to explore secondary school place provision, in line with the regional growth of Welsh-medium primary education.
- 2.16 The Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Band B Programme (agreed in 2017) involves the delivery of a Welsh-medium seedling school. The seedling provision is focused on addressing the latent demand for Welsh-medium education identified within the Tredegar / Sirhowy valley, whilst also increasing the provision of Welsh-medium education within Blaenau Gwent, which is presently the only Council with 1 Welsh-medium primary school.
- 2.17 The Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced on 16th January 2018 that £30 million would be allocated to support capital projects dedicated to and growing Welsh language in education, (the grant will be administered in addition to the capital allocations confirmed in Band B). Proposals were required to create additionality and contribute to meeting the Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. The grant application process was initiated in March 2018, for return by the 1st June 2018. Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million. The grant has been awarded in line with the growth of the seedling school proposed under Band B, along with the development of a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school, which will accommodate seedling pupils moving forward. It is the intention to instigate statutory consultation for the new Welsh medium provision early in 2019 and Scrutiny Committee will form an integral part of the consultative process, in line with the forward work programme.
- 2.18 Significant progress has been made in relation to the development of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, along with the processes and partnerships including the Welsh in Education Forum, which underpin its delivery. Continued management and monitoring is required in ensuring that the plan and targets are reflective of need and key objectives are achieved within the 2017-20 period.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Blaenau Gwent WESP 2017-20 – along with the aforementioned revisions in line with Welsh Government feedback, have been formally consulted upon and approved by both the Council and Welsh Government. The plan is now within its implementation phase. Therefore, the following options for consideration are associated with the WESP monitoring procedures:

Option 1: to continue to implement the existing monitoring procedures, which are reviewed annually in line with lessons learned.

Option 2: to make recommendations for changes to the monitoring process, for review and implementation in the 2019/20 academic session.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory obligation to produce a WESP document in line with Section 84 of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.
- 4.2 Education is a priority in the Council's Corporate Plan, of which the planning of school places and access to Welsh-medium education in line with parental preference are essential components.
- 4.3 The WESP is instrumental in securing continued access, along with development of the Welsh Language in line with Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- 4.4 Education is also a major contributor to the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan and it is the role of the Education Transformation team to ensure that the right schools are in the right place, at the right time.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

- 5.1 The following implications are relevant to the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20:
- Failure to meeting the outcomes and targets established within the plan – this is mitigated by the extensive monitoring arrangements that are in place. The ET team review progress on a monthly basis, which is then reported to the WEF on a termly basis, taken via the Council's political processes and reported to Welsh Government annually.
 - Compliance with statutory duty and legislative obligations - this is managed in line with policy and guidance review and development; along with renewal of the WESP every 3 years and annual reporting.
 - Sustainability issues within the school estate in relation to Welsh-medium education – this is managed and mitigated against by annual promotion drives, administration of the annual demand survey, capacity

assessments and projections. The seedling model also provides the opportunity to address latent demand, whilst eliciting further growth.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 The ET team have recently undertaken a review of the associated action plan, which serves the purpose of monitoring progress against outcomes (each outcome along with the associated actions is detailed within **Appendix 1**). The Council are currently 10 months into the first year of the 2017-20 WESP. The status in terms of progress against all of the outcome-related actions for 2017/18 is currently 73% complete, with the remaining actions programmed for completion by November 2018 in line with the Welsh Government statutory return. Figure 1 below, highlights the outcome progress as at 24th October 2018.

6.2 Figure 1

	No. of Outcome Actions	Completed Actions	Percentage Complete	Actions in Progress	Percentage Outstanding
Outcome 1	16	11	68%	5	32%
Outcome 2	11	11	100%	0	0%
Outcome 3	2	2	100%	0	0%
Outcome 4	4	3	75%	1	25%
Outcome 5	14	7	50%	7	50%
Outcome 6	5	3	60%	2	40%
Outcome 7	6	5	84%	1	16%
Totals	58	42	73%	16	27%

6.3 The WESP serves to provide a strategic approach in underpinning the direction and delivery of Welsh-medium provision and Welsh education in Blaenau Gwent over the next 3 years. This in-turn will inform future development that will secure long-term sustainable Welsh-medium education.

6.4 The WESP aims to establish targets, shape, inform and improve the delivery of Welsh-medium provision and Welsh education; in-turn supporting the delivery of key wellbeing goals. The plan also serves to address issues and gaps that exist, preventing a negative impact upon delivery, engagement and cohesion.

6.5 The WEF is a collaborative partnership, which aims to promote improved wellbeing as a result of planning, development and delivery.

6.6 Engagement and participation are a key focus in terms of the WESP. The delivery phase engages with, staff, pupils, parents / carers and the wider community, to shape delivery and ensure that the plan delivery takes account of stakeholder wellbeing.

6.7 An EqlA was carried out in the former template upon creation of the WESP in 2017, highlighting a positive impact upon the Welsh Language protected characteristic. A further EqlA will be undertaken in the revised template in

early November and published on the webpage.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The Welsh Government expects an annual update on the progress made against the WESP. Consequently, the ET team review and monitor the WESP monthly; providing termly reports to the WEF and annual reports to Welsh Government. In addition, WEF development and progress reports are taken via the Council's political processes annually. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is also a key focus of the 21st Century Schools Programme Board and Admissions Forum.

8. Background Documents / Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20
- Appendix 2 – Welsh Government Approval Letter
- Appendix 3 – WEF Terms of Reference
- Appendix 4 – Cymraeg i blant webpage/ feedback

REF: WESPU.166