

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **10th November 2021**

Report Subject: **Education Directorate – Recovery and Renewal Plan**

Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member of Education, Cllr. Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education, Lynn Phillips,
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| Reporting Pathway | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| 30.9.21 | 30.9.21 | 20.10.21 | | | 19.10.21 | 10.11.21 | | |

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Executive Committee with an overview of the Education Directorate's identified priorities for recovery and renewal, as part of the response to the COVID-19 situation. Please note additions to this report include the areas of progress in the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan (Appendix 3) as well as the inclusion of an Education Recovery One Page Overview (Appendix 4)

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Executive Committee will be aware that the Corporate Director of Education provides a verbal update to Scrutiny Committee regarding the response to the COVID-19 emergency. In addition, Education has reported on key outcomes, challenges and implications at each stage of the response, including the repurposing and subsequent reopening of schools.
- 2.2 This report provides an overview of progress made during the planning phase of Education recovery, along with information on identified priorities for recovery and renewal. The draft recovery and renewal plan is in development and will be a working document, which outlines how the Council will continue to support schools, both during and beyond the pandemic. It is, however, highly likely that we will continue to move between alert levels and thus response and recovery throughout the remainder of this and the next academic year. Therefore, an effective approach to business continuity at each level is required. This is dealt with via the development and review of local COVID-19 Education Guidance document, operational plans and risk assessments. It is also a key feature of the aforementioned plan. An alert level information paper has been produced, which details the operational implications and changes at each stage (please refer to **Appendix 1** for more information).

2.3 **Impact Assessment**

Until the latter part of Spring-term, the Education Directorate was firmly focused on working with and supporting schools to continue to effectively adapt and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant shift in practice, delivery and learning has occurred throughout the course of the pandemic, affecting every aspect of education and all associated provision. Therefore, in order to inform the development of a recovery and renewal plan, the Education Directorate undertook a detailed Impact Assessment to identify key impacts on education from the COVID-19 emergency. Each impact has been RAG rated to measure its seriousness. The following impacts have been identified (please refer to **Appendix 2** for more information):

- 2.4
- **Learners** - Education, social, emotional, physical and mental health implications (short and long-term).
 - **Vulnerable learners** - For those with disabilities and additional needs, provision and processes have been restricted.
 - **School staff** - Professional development, social, emotional, physical/mental health and general wellbeing in line with the need to adapt to blended learning. Staff childcare implications relating to school closure. LA's and schools have been required to establish and implement control and safety measures to support clinically vulnerable staff. This has impacted upon both staff and school operations.
 - **Childcare** - After school and pre-school provision which has been reduced and/or is not available due to COVID restrictions
 - **Education staff training** - Staff training needs aligned to operations are not all currently adapted to be delivered online e.g. first aid
 - **Education assets and site management** - Statutory functions, testing and inspection (Health and Safety, Fire Risk Assessment, maintenance and site management, ventilation), operations are regularly reviewed in line with the latest guidance and governed by risk assessments
 - **School operations** – Catering, cleaning and access to school sites, movement in and around the school, trips and visits, visitors, refuse, PPE and resources are all under continual review. These areas are subject to risk assessment and reduced operation in line with the COVID alert level implementation. Changes to the school day have been implemented throughout the school estate to support staggered start and finish times. Changes to statutory functions and regulations which affect school operation e.g. school admissions. ICT infrastructure, devices, access to resources, systems and software for both pupils and staff in line with digital exclusion and blended learning are continually reviewed to support inclusion. Home to school and post 16 transport operations, have been restricted, reconfigured and subject to detailed risk assessment.
 - **School support services** - School support service operation i.e. Educational Psychology, ALN, Social Services etc. has been prohibited on site due to lack of access, which has affected pupil and family engagement and progress. Transition at all phases has been affected by key support services having restricted/no access to schools. Human Resource management processes and engagement via OD are now online focused, but will require review to support effective school operations that were paused due to COVID. Wellbeing support services

require monitoring in terms of access and uptake. Additional insurance and financial implications for schools as a result of the pandemic. EAS support for schools has transitioned to online with a deficit to levels of engagement and to the brokerage of relevant support at all levels e.g. Learning Network Schools (LNS) arrangements.

- **School accountability services** - EAS Challenge Advisors have not been able to hold schools to account and school's data monitoring has been suspended. Estyn has suspended school inspections resulting in risks to school progress – particularly those in a category, who are in a category for longer than planned.
- **School leadership** - School governance has been adapted online, therefore, the evidence base is largely restricted to Headteacher report and narrative. Support for current and new school leaders has been limited to online, and school to school working opportunities have mainly focused on wellbeing and operational issues.
- **Poverty** - Family entitlement to benefits has increased across Blaenau Gwent and the region, including free school meals. Additional funding has been allocated to support these families, however, many schemes are not sustainable and so the ongoing impact will need to be assessed.
- **School community** - Limited face to face contact and the shift to online engagement has challenged communication and relationships.
- **School development** - School development plans have had to be largely adapted in order to react to COVID-19.
- **Safeguarding** - School closure has meant that children and young people have had limited access to on-site school support e.g. adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Service support intelligence and capability has been restricted. Vulnerable adults are more exposed to risk factors with limited access to support services.
- **Voluntary/Third Sector/ Charities work and engagement** - Opportunities to engage partners in school based education delivery and support activities have been restricted significantly due to operational implications associated with COVID-19. Members have both recognised the pressures and supported both education and schools throughout the pandemic, need to continue to develop this work.
- **Preventative health measures** - School-based preventative strategies to support healthcare needs of pupils have either been stopped or largely disrupted by COVID-19 i.e. vaccinations, growth and development checks, dental health, period equity etc.
- **COVID-19 control measures** - LA's and schools have implemented a series of control measures in order to manage community health i.e. vaccinations, Lateral flow tests, use of PPE, positive case management and risk assessment.
- **Improved school-to-school partnership working** – need to ensure this continues and is further developed.
- **Significant progress in professional development of staff, and upskilling of pupils e.g. IT/blended learning** – need to ensure this continues and is further developed.
- **Streamlining of services and operations in line with emergency response has been really positive and this has supported schools**

to provide continuity - need to ensure this continues and is further developed.

2.5 The impact assessment process provided the opportunity for reflection and review, learning from which has been taken forward to inform recovery and renewal priorities and planning.

2.6 The relationship between the Council and its schools is stronger than ever before. Our aim is to create a shared vision and associated plan to address key priorities for the future of Education within Blaenau Gwent.

2.7 Recovery – Priorities

The Education Directorate's Recovery and Renewal plans are in line with the corporate approach led by the Director of Regeneration and Community Services. It needs to be acknowledged that the impact of the last 18 months on all aspects of our school communities, and in particular the disruption to teaching and learning, is far reaching. Recovery will need to be planned in the short, medium and long term for learner development and progression. The Education Directorate's top priority in the EAS business plan is to:

2.8 *Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.*

2.9 Renewal – Priorities

Through schools having to adapt to new ways of working, a number of positive outcomes have been evidenced. The Education Directorate will work with relevant stakeholders, including schools and the EAS, to use these outcomes to shape new ways of working across the Education Directorate and throughout the school estate. The core purpose of all schools in Blaenau Gwent will be to provide excellent learning and teaching for all our learners, but this will not mean a return to doing things as they were pre-pandemic, but to use the experience of the pandemic to shape education provision as we move forward.

2.10 Next Steps and Progress

- Impact assessment completed
- Key measures to indicate progress identified (**Appendix 4**)
- Baseline and data collection on key measures, September 2021
- Recovery and Renewal targets set, September 2021
- Established protocol September 2021 to support schools under current Operational Guidance
- School Operations Management Group continues to meet (fortnightly/monthly)
- Curriculum Reform and Recovery and Renewal groups set up September 2021 to ensure a strategic approach to the delivery of the Recovery and Renewal Plan
- Detailed action plan for each impact area to be shared with relevant stakeholders by end of September 2021

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report has been discussed by Education DMT, CLT and Scrutiny Committee prior to submission to the Executive Committee. There are two options, namely:

- **Option 1** – Executive Committee considers and accepts the report, associated documentation and proposed course of action.
- **Option 2** – Executive Committee considers the report and provides comments in relation to improvements that can be made in relation to the associated documentation and proposed course of action.

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

4.1 Education is a strategic priority and key to facilitating effective delivery of the Corporate Plan.

4.2 One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan is for every child to have the best start in life. The Council seeks to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress is in line with ambitious expectations. This is particularly pertinent in an emergency crisis situation.

4.3 There are both statutory and regulatory functions and responsibilities associated with Education. The recovery and renewal plan is an essential component in securing effective and compliant delivery.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, however, it should be noted that the impact of the COVID-19 emergency response on both Council and school revenue budgets is being closely monitored. The school balances have increased and the overall Education portfolio had a favourable position at year-end for financial year 2020-21.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

There are two strategic risks associated with this report:

1. The impact of COVID-19 on learner progression and pupil regression. This is being mitigated through the Council, EAS and Schools working in collaboration to support learners across the board; and,
2. The risks associated with the provision of safe learning environments to minimise the potential transmission of COVID. There are comprehensive risk assessments in place to mitigate the risks, but the situation is constantly under review and appropriate remedial action is taken e.g. self-isolation protocols are implemented.

5.3 **Legal**

This report provides information relating to the emergency response requirements as well as the specific Education obligations set out in the School Standards and Organisation Act Wales (2013) to support strategic and operational activity to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Education are in the process of mapping existing and required datasets (both qualitative and quantitative), analysis of which will inform planning and performance. The two lead officers are working closely with the Policy and Performance team and the Corporate Recovery Group, to develop performance indicators which will be used to monitor and report on progress.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

There is a commitment from the Council and its schools to provide quality education for our children and young people to improve their life chances, despite the challenges faced during the emergency crisis.

6.3 **Involvement**

There has been extensive involvement of key stakeholder both corporately and across the school estate. The planning groups for secondary, primary and special schools that are established, including Headteacher representation has secured a collaborative and corporate response. This collaborative approach will continue throughout the recovery and renewal period.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term**

This report largely reflects on the emergency response to date, however, there are robust governance arrangements in place to support the next stages of the emergency for the foreseeable future.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The Council's emergency response has facilitated a preventative approach to minimising the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The report outlines the significant amount of partnership working at a strategic and operational level. This has resulted in a strengthening of the working relationships between the Council, schools and other key partners.

6.7 **Integration**

The emergency response has been a 'One Council' approach.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

Any physical works planned and undertaken within education settings are planned in order to take account of decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

The existing impact assessment and action plan was created prior to the socio-economic duty commencing. However, an assessment will be carried out in relation to each priority area during the autumn-term review process.

6.9b **EqlA**

The application of EqlA's to each priority has been considered as part of the Education impact assessment process. EqlA's will be undertaken in line with development and implementation of the recovery and renewal plan.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The report has been presented to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee for monitoring purposes.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Alert Level Implications

Appendix 2 – Education Directorate Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – Draft Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

Appendix 4 – Education Recovery One Page Overview