

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **Wednesday 2nd March 2022**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Draft 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Consultation Report**

Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – 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)
11.02.22	14.02.22	15.02.22				2.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide the Executive Committee with an overview of the draft Blaenau Gwent 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, providing views, comments and responses in line with the consultation process.

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). 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.

2.2 Blaenau Gwent 10-year Plan

In 2017, Welsh Government carried out a rapid review of the proposed Local Authority plans. The review acknowledged the need for change, not only in terms of individual plans' ambitions, but also in terms of the legislative framework set out by Welsh Government. The review highlighted a need to change the regulations and guidelines, along with a significant change in the Welsh Government and Local Authority approach to planning. Consequently, Welsh Government reviewed the legislative framework associated with the WESP, with the key focus being the creation of a framework which enables Local Authorities to develop long-term strategic plans.

2.3 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government required Local Authorities to submit their first draft 10-year plan to the Welsh Ministers by 31 January 2021; however, in light of the pandemic and associated emergency response requirements, the submission timeline has been updated. Following the drafting and subsequent consultation period, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019, along with the draft guidance were laid on 5 December 2019 and came into effect on 1st January 2020. Local Authorities must submit their first draft 10-year plan

to the Welsh Ministers on 31st January 2022, with the plan operational from September 2022. The current BG WESP will remain in force until that date.

- 2.4 The Welsh Government expects Local Authority 10-year plans to encompass the following:
- A clear and concise vision based on the target agreed;
 - Local education profile (numbers of school age learners, the number of each school under each category, and the number of learners within each school category);
 - Key data for each outcome (current baseline and projections);
 - Any high level plans or factors which impact education in the county
 - Clear aims and objectives under the 7 outcomes;
 - A clear link between how each aspect of the plan contributes to the vision and the overarching target; and,
 - A clear link between the plan and other Local Authorities strategies and relevant policy areas.

- 2.5 Blaenau Gwent Council's Vision for Welsh-medium Education is as follows:

'To build upon the strong progress made to date, by creating a sustainable education system which enhances provision, uptake and use of the Welsh language; creating skilled and empowered citizens who are proud to live and work both within and outside of Wales'.

- 2.6 The strategic aim of which will be to create:

A community who embrace the Welsh language and culture with confidence and pride.

- 2.7 We will seek to achieve our vision by promoting, developing and enhancing Welsh-medium education provision and services. We will do so by working closely with the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF), along with other key strategic partners including Welsh Government, and other Local Authorities. Our strategic objectives include:

- To raise the profile of Welsh medium Education, along with the benefits of being bi-lingual;
- To create high quality, thriving learning establishments which support effective pupil, staff, community and partner engagement;
- To support integration of services and create an immersive experience for learners;
- To secure improved school to school and partnership work, facilitating wider use and development of the Welsh language;
- To create a skilled and sustainable workforce, committed to continuing professional development;
- To ensure inclusive teaching and learning environments and opportunities for all learners; and,
- To improve progression opportunities by reviewing and implementing a curriculum which is firmly aligned to further and higher education.

- 2.8 The Council seeks to achieve the following outcomes as set out by Welsh Government, which reflect the learner's education journey, and are consistent with the policy areas of Cymraeg 2050 and Education in Wales: Our National Mission:
- Outcome 1 – More nursery children/three year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.
 - Outcome 2 – More reception class children/five year olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.
 - Outcome 3 – More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another.
 - Outcome 4 – More learners study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh.
 - Outcome 5 – More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school.
 - Outcome 6 – An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) (in accordance with the duties imposed by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.
 - Outcome 7 – Increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh (as a subject) and teach through the medium of Welsh.
- 2.9 In order to ensure that we achieve the aforementioned vision and objectives, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are committed to working towards the ambitious Welsh Government target, to increase the Year 1 cohort taught via the medium of Welsh to 75 pupils. When compared with the 2019/20 baseline data used by Welsh Government, this would equate to 10% (an increase of 6 percentage points increase) of the total Year 1 cohort being taught via the medium of Welsh by 2032.
- 2.10 The Education Transformation team established an engagement plan/strategy to ensure that, key stakeholders and partners, effectively contributed to and informed development of the 10-year plan. This included:
- Developing and regularly reviewing a stakeholder map and engagement plan
 - Undertaking reflection sessions with WEF members and key partners, with the aim of reviewing the development and implementation of the BG WESP (2017-2020) including an appraisal of: outcomes, achievements, targets, barriers, challenges, progression opportunities, partners/stakeholders and data
 - Establishing a sub-group of the WEF to agree a timeline and approach to drafting and reviewing the 10-year plan, whilst also monitoring progress aligned to it's development
 - Working with neighbouring authorities via the Regional WEF Planning and School Places and Demand Group, to ensure alignment whilst also identifying and exploiting opportunities
- 2.11 Working closely with BG Welsh Education Forum, along with other key stakeholders e.g. Health and neighbouring Authorities, the Education

Transformation team produced a draft 10-year WESP. The document was developed in accordance with Welsh Government regulations and guidance. The team then initiated a formal consultation process, whereby the document was issued to all consultees identified within the Welsh Government WESP Guidance, whilst also being made available on the Council's Webpage. A Communications plan was drafted, which included Corporate Communications regularly promoting the consultation via the Council's social media pages, and Education doing so via schools and key partners. The consultation period commenced on Friday 5th November 2021 and concluded on Monday 3rd January 2022.

2.12 **Consultation Out-turn**

The outcome of the consultation processes was reflective of the effective engagement undertaken by both the Welsh Education Forum and the Education Transformation team, in ensuring that stakeholder views were captured and incorporated within the final draft. During the 8-week consultation process:

- 6 written Responses were received, including one out of time (for more information please refer to **Appendix 1**)
- 6 survey responses, of which 5 strongly supported the plan (for more information please refer to **Appendix 2**).

2.13 A number of respondents referenced the positive progress made to date, whilst also recognising the commitment of the Council in line with the development and growth of both Welsh Education and the Welsh language. All responses were considered, including areas whereby consultees had suggested that the draft plan could be strengthened, and the document was updated accordingly (please refer to **Appendix 3** – with additions reflected post consultation in red). Education, along with the WEF also plan to take account of the comments in line with development of the WESP delivery plan.

2.14 The draft document was submitted on Monday 31st January to Welsh Government, subject to Executive Committee approval. The final version will be submitted in March, post Executive consideration.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** Executive Committee accepts the draft 10-year WESP; or,

3.2 **Option 2:** Executive Committee provides comments and/or revisions to the 10-year WESP.

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. For more information, please refer to the strategic context set out within the plan (Page 3 and 4 of **Appendix 1**),

4.2 The WESP is instrumental in securing continued access to and development of the Welsh language in line with Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Education is also a major contributor to the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan in that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires public bodies to work towards seven well-being goals, one of which is 'A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language'. The Council has a duty to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh and work towards the well-being goals. The process for planning Welsh-medium education also has a statutory basis under Section 84 of the 2013 Act.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**

In line with effective implementation of the BG Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, we will be seeking to deliver a series of projects to enhance the provision of Welsh medium education. One such proposal being the new 210 place Welsh medium primary school, which is planned for implementation from the autumn-term 2023. Capital funding for this project (at an intervention rate of 100%), has been secured via the Welsh Government Welsh Medium Capital Grant. In addition, the Executive Committee has approved the revenue funding to support implementation.

5.1.1 Capital funding for future schemes will be sought via the Welsh Government Welsh Medium Capital Grant and/or 21st Century Schools Programme. There will also be revenue implications for future project proposals. We will apply for short-term revenue funding for these proposals via Welsh Govt. Should the revenue funding not be forthcoming, any additional revenue costs (both in the short-term and long-term), will be met from within the Individual Schools Budget (ISB). Proposals will be reported via the Council's political processes in line with invitations for the submission of each business case.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

The following implications are relevant to the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan:

- Failure to achieve 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 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, demand-based assessments, school capacity and projection calculations. The proposed seedling model also provides the opportunity to address latent demand, whilst eliciting further growth.

5.3 **Legal**

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The ET team reviewed progress in line with the current Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (2017-2020), the outcome of which was reported via the Council's political processes in December 2020. Blaenau Gwent 2019/20 self-assessment was based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment was Amber, with the rate of completion against the 2019/20 action plan as follows:

- 84% (or 49 actions) are complete;
- 7% (or 4 actions) ongoing; and,
- 9% (5 actions) actions in development

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

The WESP aims to secure, facilitate, develop and improve Welsh medium education, along with access to associated provision locally.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Stakeholder and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance, and a key focus of the WESP, its implementation and monitoring. The plan is subject to consultation during the production phase, and reviewed on an annual basis. In addition, public and partner consultation processes are used to inform development, progression and learning relating to delivery of the plan.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The WESP serves to provide a strategic approach and underpins the direction and delivery of Welsh-medium provision and education in Blaenau Gwent over the next 10-years.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The WESP aims to establish clear targets, shape, inform and improve the delivery of Welsh-medium provision and education. The plan also serves to address issues and gaps that exist, improving delivery, engagement and cohesion.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

The BG Welsh in Education Strategic Plan requires a collaborative approach in terms development, implementation, monitoring and progression. This is carried out via the Welsh in Education Forum, which has wide ranging representation from partner organisations and stakeholder groups; and is assured via the Council's political processes and reporting to Welsh Government.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is aligned to early year's childcare, education and play; pupil place planning, school organisation, 21st Century Schools, the work of Social Services and the Environment and Regeneration Directorates. Service integration is essential to ensure effective implementation, whilst also securing appropriate access to Welsh medium education and associated provision. The plan is monitored by the Welsh in Education Forum, whilst also feeding into other

key forums i.e. School Admissions, 21st Century Schools Programme Board etc.

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.

6.8.1 The Minister for Education and Welsh Language Jeremy Miles, announced on November 2nd 2021 that all new school and college buildings, major refurbishments and extension projects, will be required to meet Net Zero Carbon targets from January 1st 2022. The Council are committed to and have begun working with Welsh Government in planning implementation of this agenda.

6.9a Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment

A Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment will be carried out on the final draft of the plan prior to approval. Having undertaken an assessment of the draft, the impact overall is neutral. The WESP seeks to improve equality of access to Welsh-medium education.

6.9b. Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EQIA) has been completed in line with the WESP, which determined that there is no negative impact upon the protected characteristics. EqIA screening and impact assessments are also carried out in line with each project associated with the WESP.

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.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 - Written Responses

Appendix 2 - Survey Responses

Appendix 3 – Blaenau Gwent Draft 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan