

Committee: **Executive Committee**
 Date of meeting: **16 March 2022**
 Report Subject: **EAS Business Plan 2022-2025**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J. Collins, Executive Member for Education**
 Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**
 Report Written by: **Debbie Hartevelde, Managing Director, EAS**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
√	24.02.22	01.03.22			15.03.22	16.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

This report asks for Members to consider the full contents of the draft EAS Business Plan 2022-2025, as part of the regional consultation process. Through this activity Members will ensure that the plan enables appropriate support for schools and settings in Blaenau Gwent.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The EAS delivers, through an agreed Business Plan, a wide range of school improvement services to all schools (all key stages, including all through schools and special schools), pupil referral units and funded non-maintained nursery settings on behalf of each LA. This plan supports the role LAs have in delivering their statutory function, addressing their individual improvement priorities and promoting improved pupil outcomes.
- 2.2 Joint Executive Group (JEG) Members agreed that the EAS should move to a 3-year Business Plan model with a detailed annual update for Members to agree as per the requirements within the Collaboration and Members Agreement (CAMA). Prior to the consultation version of the Business Plan being completed a series of 'Visioning Sessions' have been held with all key partners invited to attend.
- 2.3 As an organisation, the EAS have reviewed how we have written the Business Plan and communicated this to our partners. The EAS and LAs decided it was timely to review and adapt this process and to make it more accessible to a wider audience. It was determined to use the 'Theory of Change' approach to help us articulate the changes and impact we want to make as the regional school improvement service for South-East Wales and the connections and actions needed that will allow that change and impact to be successfully achieved. This Business Plan spans a three-year period and will receive annual reviews each year.
- 2.4 However, this plan also considers how schools and educational settings continue to face the challenges of the pandemic. The EAS will remain sensitive and responsive to the needs of the workforce and will continue to be a highly supportive, reflective, and responsive organisation.

2.5 The EAS will build upon what has worked well during this period, particularly the aspects of our role that have been successful within the virtual environment. The support that the EAS will offer will fully align to the expectations set by local authorities, Welsh Government (WG) and links to emerging research. The pandemic has reminded us that positive change is and has been possible. Schools, settings and the EAS have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working and delivering meaningful learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach. These experiences should be built upon to avoid a 'snap back,' keeping the positive learning that has been developed during this time.

2.6 Members are asked to take the opportunity to comment on the contents of the Business Plan as part of the consultation process and provide a written response as appropriate

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report has been approved by Education DMT, CLT for submission to Education and Learning Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

3.2 This report will be considered by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee on 15th March 2022, and any feedback will be presented verbally to the Executive Committee.

3.3 **Option 1:**

For Members to receive the report for information and accept the Business Plan

Option 2:

For Members to consider the plan and offer further comment for consideration by the EAS; this can be done via a written response back to the EAS. Written feedback on the draft Business Plan should be provided to the EAS Managing Director following the Education and Learning Scrutiny meeting and Executive Committee. This can take the form of the notes from the Member meetings. This feedback will be taken into consideration in the final version of the Business Plan.

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

4.1 **Statutory Responsibility**

4.1.1 The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan.

4.1.2 **Corporate Plan Education Aims**

- 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.
- Ensure high quality leadership and teaching that secures good progress for all learners, particularly the vulnerable and those who are eFSM.
- Improve wellbeing for learners at all stages of development.
- Secure strong progress in skills, particularly in English and Mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.

4.1.3 **Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan**

The content of the EAS business plan is clearly aligned to the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan which aims for everyone to have the best start in life. Through this plan it seeks to ensure that the education provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people so that their progress is as good as it ought to be.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

5.1.1 Section 4 of the Business Plan details the EAS activities for 2022-2023 and Section 5 details the governance and financial arrangements. Indicative LA Core Contributions have been added into this section. The EAS is subject to a robust governance model that is underpinned by the Articles of Association and a Collaboration and Members Agreement (CAMA). These governance documents essentially link the five Local Authorities to the EAS both operationally and through the commissioning of regional school improvement services.

5.1.2 The delegation rate to schools increased to 95.5% in 2021/22, whilst the EAS staff profile has reduced by 53.1% since 2012.

The local authority's indicative core contribution for 2022/23 is as follows: Blaenau-Gwent's contribution for 2022/23 is £350,046, compared with £351,806 in 2021/22, £358,985 in 2020/21 and £364,452 in 2019/20.

5.1.3 At the time of writing this report, there is uncertainty with regards to the regional grant funding from WG for 2021/2022. As a result of the pandemic, it is likely that there will be reductions in the regional grant profile. When the grant position has been confirmed the EAS detailed delivery plan will be updated accordingly.

5.2 **Risks**

5.2.1 In writing this plan a number of assumptions have been made. If these are not in place, then they become a risk to the successful delivery of this plan. The EAS risk register will be reviewed and refined following the agreement of the final EAS Business Plan. These are:

- Operate with integrity, honesty and objectivity.
- Partners understand our role in the education system.
- Professional learning has a positive impact on practice and behaviour.
- We are one part of the much wider system.
- Schools / education settings positively engage with us.
- Schools / education settings use funding effectively.
- We have the capacity and resources to undertake our activity effectively.
- When the conditions in a school / education setting can secure improvement, readiness for support results in positive change.
- Our partners provide us with timely and appropriate information.

- We work with schools / education settings to ensure priorities for improvement are based on robust, accurate self-evaluation.

5.2.2 These risks are mitigated through the identification of priorities as seen in the priority areas above and within the detailed EAS Business Plan, Blaenau Gwent LA Plans and the Education Strategic Plan.

5.2.3 Blaenau Gwent will have its own risks linked to the delivery of the strategic objectives within their corporate plans.

5.3 ***Legal***

The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

None for this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 Please note that a mid-year evaluation of the current revised COVID Business Plan (2021/22) has been submitted to each of the EAS governance groups and has been available for local authorities to share as appropriate within their own democratic processes. Within the context of evolving accountability arrangements and the COVID-19 Pandemic, school and aggregate LA performance data has not been available for presentation to this committee. A separate paper detailing the implications of this has been provided to local authorities.

6.1.2 The delivery model for the Business Plan is on a regional basis, the needs of each school and trends within Blaenau Gwent will continue to be met through bespoke work with each school, both virtually and when safe to do so physically.

6.1.3 The EAS will offer an evolving Professional Learning Offer (PLO) to all schools and settings across the region, in order to meet development needs as we emerge from the pandemic. We will continue to fund schools (grant permitting) to deliver a large proportion of the professional learning activity, where appropriate virtually.

6.1.4 All schools will continue to be provided with a bespoke support package that compliments the priorities identified within their own School Development Plans (SDPs) in line with the levels of support they require. There is a degree of flexibility within the deployment model to allow for in-year changes in circumstances and to allow for changes in light of the pandemic.

6.1.5 The centralised model of service delivery that has been adopted across the South East Wales region has enabled efficiencies to be realised, economies of scale to be secured, particularly in relation to avoiding duplication of functions and the ability to secure a range of educational expertise within the region.

6.1.6 The talent and expertise that resides in schools within and beyond the region is incentivised and used effectively to support professional learning and school improvement activity. There has been inevitable fragility in the ability of schools to

offer support beyond their own settings because of the pandemic, this situation will be managed with sensitivity and will be constantly reviewed.

- 6.1.7 For sustained school improvement to happen, it is essential that all partners work together more closely than ever recognising that each partner (school, LA and EAS) has its role to play in providing support to secure improvements.
- 6.1.8 The Business Plan is in the consultation process. The draft business plan was created following feedback provided in a broad range of 'Visioning Sessions'. These virtual and physical meetings were offered to a range of stakeholder groups including, headteachers, governors and elected members. Feedback has been incorporated within the plan. The final version of the Business Plan will be supported by a range of supporting documents:
- Detailed Business Plan 2022–2023
 - Regional Grant Mapping Overview 2022–2023 (to follow once detailed received from WG)
 - Regional Self-Evaluation Report (Executive Summary)
 - EAS Risk Register (Executive Summary)
 - Regional Professional Learning Offer 2022–2023
 - Local Authority Strategic Education Plans
- 6.1.9 **South East Wales Vision 2025**
All young people are confident, ambitious, resilient and have a love of lifelong learning and realise their full potential. (*The SE Wales vision/purpose statement is currently under development*)
- 6.1.10 **EAS Vision 2025**
Working in partnership with LAs supporting and enabling schools and education settings to thrive as effective learning organisations. (*There is an existing vision/purpose statement that is currently under development with all stakeholders*).
- 6.1.11 **What will the EAS do to Achieve our Vision?**
All schools will be able to access a universal offer of professional learning support in each of the following areas: School Improvement, Leadership and Teaching, Curriculum for Wales, Health Wellbeing and Equity and School Governors, which are intrinsically linked. As well as a holistic professional learning offer, this will include a set number of days to work with their School Improvement Partner (SIP) and a professional dialogue with the EAS and LA to agree and or amend improvement priorities and support requirements as part of an annual professional discussion. In addition to the universal offer, schools will be able to access specific and targeted support as determined through ongoing professional discussion with their SIP and in line with their school improvement priorities. This professional learning support may be related to a task and finish activity, an option for further work with their SIP or an option for peer working. Bespoke support will also be available for schools who require more intensive support. This could include more support from the SIP or the use of a Learning Network School to School Partnership.

School Improvement: Bespoke support to schools and settings aligned to need. Create and facilitate collaborative networks of professional practice.
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Leadership and teaching Professional learning and support for the development of leadership and teaching across the entire workforce.	Curriculum for Wales Professional learning and support for Curriculum for Wales.	Health, Wellbeing and Equity Professional learning and support for health, wellbeing, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
Governors: Provide a broad range of professional learning and support for Governors.		

- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
High Quality education is a fundamental pre-requisite of ensuring future local and national prosperity through the provision of an informed and well-educated workforce and society. The Local Authority’s statutory role to monitor and evaluate school performance and the quality of provision, coupled with its statutory powers of intervention in schools causing concern is fundamental to ensuring that all schools provide high quality education provision.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Involvement of partners is fundamental to securing and sustaining school improvement. The statutory framework advocates this and the work of the Local authority, its commissioned school improvement service (EAS) and schools evidences the positive impact of working in this way.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The EAS Business Plan that is being consulted upon for 2022/25 aligns to the strategic priorities within Blaenau Gwent.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
A key element of the Council’s work is to monitor settings and ensure appropriate support to secure continuing high standards. Estyn Inspection reports reflect the extent to which settings and Local Authorities has been effective in achieving this.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
Educational improvement in Blaenau Gwent is delivered on a regional basis through the South East Wales Consortium in collaboration with Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Blaenau-Gwent Councils.
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The Estyn Inspection Framework is aimed at promoting high standards and high-quality education provision. This aim is fundamental to the Council’s well-being objectives and is fundamental to the joint work between Education and Social Services Directorates.
- 6.8 ***EqIA***
Not required for this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The EAS is required to submit to the Business Plan to Welsh Government, this plan covers the period 2022-2025. As noted above, the EAS will be sensitive and responsive to changing priorities as a result of the pandemic and may need to change direction and repurpose priorities as required. The support will be made available to all schools and settings, there is an understanding that schools and settings are likely to be facing continuing challenges. It will be the decision of leaders to determine the most appropriate type and timing of at any of the support on offer in line with their priorities.
- 7.2 The progress on the implementation and impact of the Business Plan will be reported formally at a mid-year basis to the Joint Executive Group and Company Board. These reports, as in previous years, will be suitable for scrutiny activity at local authority and national level. In addition, the progress made towards the implementation of key actions will be reported at each meeting of the Joint Executive Group and Company Board.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 - Education Achievement Service: Regional Business Plan 2022-2025 (Consultation Version – Accessible)

Appendix 2 – Education Achievement Service: Regional Business Plan 2022-2025 (including Annual Plan 2022-2023)

Appendix 3 – Education Achievement Service – Integrated Impact Assessment