

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **19th April 2023**

Report Subject: **EAS Business Plan 2023-2025 (Consultation Version – Accessible)**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member for People and Education**

Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
√	16.03.23	30.03.23			28.03.23	19.04.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report contains the draft EAS Business Plan 2023-2025 (June 2023 – March 2025). The consultation period for this plan is from 13th March 2023 to 19th April 2023. Through this consultative activity, Members will ensure that the plan enables bespoke support for schools and settings in Blaenau Gwent.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 As a result of the uncertain financial situation and funding for the EAS, Joint Executive Group (JEG) members agreed that the next iteration of the EAS Business Plan should be delayed starting in June 2023. JEG members agreed an accompanying timeline that includes a full consultation period.
- 2.2 The current Business Plan spans three years, 2022-2025, this was agreed by the Joint Executive Group (JEG) and through each Local Authority (LA) Cabinet in the summer term 2022. This document contains the next iteration of this three-year plan and covers the period from June 2023 to April 2025 (**Appendix A**).
- 2.3 This version of the EAS Business Plan is underpinned by the already agreed three-year Business Plan (**Appendix B**). It builds upon the progress and identifies priorities that have resulted from robust EAS self-evaluation processes. The plan will enable flexibility so that the specific needs within Blaenau Gwent are contributed to.
- 2.4 This consultation version of the Business Plan 2023-2025 has been constructed using the best available financial information at the time of writing. This could be subject to change once the final funding profile from local authorities and Welsh Government are known. The LA has also agreed with the EAS to establish 2 priorities over the three terms of the academic year to ensure that we can do insightful and quality work. The two priorities include reading and support for eFSM learners. The Education Directorate are also in discussion with the EAS around whether BG (and the region) can move to a cluster model of School Improvement Partner (SIP) support and look at supporting with cluster

priorities to have more joined-up thinking. This would also help with self-evaluation within our services. The LA's priorities outlined above are draft and we want to consult more widely with our schools once Action Short of Strike (ASOS) is concluded with the Trade Unions.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report has been approved by Education DMT and CLT.

3.2 This report will be considered by the Partnership Scrutiny Committee on 28th March 2023, and any specific comments will be provided verbally to Cabinet.

3.3 **Option 1:**

For Members to consider and accept the report and Business Plan.

3.4 **Option 2:**

For Members to consider the plan and offer specific comment for consideration by the EAS; this can be done through the meeting or 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 meeting. 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 Statutory Responsibility**

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

4.1.1 **Education Improvement Plan (EIP) Priorities/Aims**

- Improving educational standards and wellbeing for pupils, particularly at KS4;
- Securing quality ALN/Inclusion provision, particularly to support vulnerable groups of learners and those who are eFSM;
- Transforming education in line with responsive school support services and a school estate that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Delivering effective young people and partnership provision, with a focus on lifelong learning and leisure/recreation provision to meet community need; and,
- Enhancing the performance culture for Education that delivers better educational outcomes and improved value for money.

NB. These priorities will include the response to the Estyn inspection and the 3 recommendations.

4.1.2 **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)

As noted in 2.4 - This consultation version of the Business Plan 2023-2025 has been constructed using the best available financial information at the time of writing. This could be subject to change once the final funding profile from local authorities and Welsh Government are known.

5.1.1 EAS Funding Sources:

The main funding sources to the EAS budget are:

- Annual core budget contributions from each of the 5 LAs – this fund approximately 50% of total costs.
- Annual Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant and Education Improvement Grant – grants from WG fund approximately 50% of total costs.

5.1.2 The EAS Company Board have taken a series of steps to reduce operational costs and restructure EAS staff. One of the main factors in the EAS being able to achieve the efficiencies required and increase the breath of support to schools over the past 8 years has been the increased use of the school-to-school model. The move to Headteachers undertaking the role of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) from EAS employed SIPs has realised efficiencies and brought additional benefits to the model. In addition, the use of schools to support others through our Learning Network Schools (LNS) model has enabled reductions in the core team.

5.1.3 There has been a continued reduction in the combined LA core contributions to the EAS since inception in 2012. The EAS has faced significant challenges in being able to set a balanced budget for 2023-2024. Whilst there are some discussions still being undertaken with LA partners regarding their contributions, the EAS is working on a circa 10% reduction totalling £302,132, this is set alongside cost pressures equalling a total reduction of circa £504,000 for the budget in 2023-2024. Across the region, productive discussions have taken place with Corporate Directors of Education and JEG Members about how the delivery model will look for the forthcoming year.

5.1.4 The EAS Business Plan has been constructed with a view to protecting front line services to schools and settings for 2023-2024. Additionally, a phased approach will be taken over the next 2 years to explore potential additional cost savings to the delivery model. The current approach to set a balance budget for 2023-2024 does not present a long-term sustainable funding model for the EAS and represent a short-term solution.

5.1.5 The following proposals have been devised assuming a common percentage funding model from LAs can be reached. If LAs cannot agree on a common percentage reduction in core contributions, it will be essential to demonstrate how an equitable service is being delivered for those LAs who are contributing more / less into the model.

5.1.6 The table below shows the current known position of the LA core contribution funding for 2023-2024:

Local Authority Core Contribution	2022-23	2023-24	Contribution Cut
Percentage Cut		-10%	
Blaenau Gwent	£350,046	£315,041	(TBC)
Caerphilly	£980,663	£882,597	£98,066
Monmouthshire	£403,815	£363,434	£40,382
Newport	£783,291	£704,962	£78,329
Torfaen	£503,498	£453,148	(TBC)
Total	£3,021,313	£2,719,182	

5.1.7 The EAS remains committed to work closely with LA partners to respond appropriately in the context of a collectively challenging financial position and ensuring we remain flexible to meet the needs within each LA and in schools and settings. Blaenau Gwent's savings target agreed at Full Council falls well within the 10% reduction under discussion with the EAS on a regional basis.

5.2 Risks including Mitigating Actions

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

- The funding from both LA contributions and Welsh Government grants is sufficient to enable the effective delivery of the Business Plan.
- 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.
- We have the expertise, capacity and resources to undertake our activity effectively.
- When the condition 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.

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

5.5 **Human Resources**

None for this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Last year the EAS reviewed how we constructed and communicated our Business Plan. We decided it was timely to review and adapt our processes to make them more accessible to a wider audience. The EAS used a new 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.

6.1.1 This year we have further refined our success criteria so that we can better report on the impact of our work so that it aligns more explicitly to the EAS vision of developing all schools as learning organisations. We have made sure that our own evaluations, trends in school and LA needs and priorities, national policy and inspection findings are captured. These directly inform our priorities and success criteria.

6.1.2 We have also strengthened the plan by including a Partnership Annex that is specific to each LA's needs and priorities for the coming year. This section is also draft and further discussion is required with LA Officers to reach a final version. This will also be significantly determined by the EAS final financial position for 2023-2024.

6.1.3 We have prioritised our high level and high-risk areas, and further details and activities are in our Detailed Delivery Plans. We have captured several important 'Assumptions: Processes that should be in place' for each Business Plan priority to ensure this activity is visible in the system and that expectations are clear.

6.1.4 We fully recognise the importance of collaboration and fostering effective partnerships with the local authority and schools to realise the full potential of our actions. The plan identifies the aspects that the EAS would request that the local authority undertake to support the delivery of this plan.

6.1.5 As we review our work in schools, we are looking for indicators to demonstrate:

- Changes/ Improvements at leadership and governance levels;
- Improved teaching and learning;
- School wide improvement in policy and practice;
- Learner progress
- Growing capacity in the system.

6.1.6 Our expectations are clear and are set out in the EAS Business Plan success criteria and in our vision and values.

6.1.7 The EAS uses three models to help us frame the Intent, Implementation and Impact of our work. This model allows us to use a common language to plan, implement and evaluate the impact of the work of the EAS in schools and settings across Blaenau Gwent.

6.1.8 **EAS Business Plan: Success Criteria 2023-2025**

Welsh Government have set out 8 contributory factors to support schools to navigate the changing education landscape. These factors describe the key attributes that schools that are successfully realising the curriculum will possess.

6.1.9 These describe the factors that support reform and which, where absent, are likely to act as barriers to success. The factors cover learner progress and the curriculum itself, as well as wider processes and priorities. The factors are captured below and are interwoven into our priorities for 2023-2025.

6.1.10 As part of our work to develop a strong approach to evaluation, and in particular the evaluation of learning, the EAS has developed a guide to help identify the wide range of evidence available for review and analysis. This builds on the work to look at the intent, implementation and impact of our interventions. It will support both School Improvement Partners and schools to consider how best to respond to the WG guidance quoted above. In particular, how to build the enabling conditions around the Curriculum for Wales and define its impact through embedded and accurate reflection and self-evaluation. Our approach to evaluating learning will focus on progress, attainment, wellbeing, social capital and equity and fairness.

6.1.11 The final version of this iteration of the 3-year plan will be accompanied by a detailed delivery plan which incorporates timescales, resource implications, accountabilities and evaluation. In addition, the evaluation following the Quarter 4 review of progress from the current Business Plan will be added in the final version of the new plan.

6.1.12 Following the consultation period and certainty on the EAS funding position, this draft plan will be updated, and the final version will be presented to JEG for final agreement on 24th May 2023.

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 2023/2024 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 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

No specific impact related to this report.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

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 2023-2025. The progress on the implementation and impact of the Business Plan and the related LA Partnership Annex will be reported formally 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 A - Education Achievement Service: Annual iteration - Business Plan 2023-2025 (Consultation Version – Accessible)

Appendix B - Education Achievement Service: Current Overarching 3-year Business Plan 2022-2025