

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **15th December 2020**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2019/20 and Welsh Medium Grant Proposal Progress Report**

Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Cllr. Joanne Collins**

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

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
25.11.20	25.11.20	27.11.20			15.12.20	15.12.20		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise progress in relation to the Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-2020 and the associated Welsh medium grant proposal.
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 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 was approved by the Executive Committee and signed by the Corporate Director in 2016. The WESP is underpinned and informed by Welsh Government's current Welsh-medium Education Strategy (April 2010), along with the policy statement for 2015-16.
 - 2.3 The Welsh Government vision is to secure one million Welsh speakers by 2050. To achieve this, they believe that the following key areas require address:
 - more children in Welsh-medium education;
 - better planning in relation to how people learn the language;
 - 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 are approximately 562,000 Welsh speakers in Wales. The aim of the national strategy is to almost double the number of Welsh speakers by the middle of the century.

- 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 frameworks and strategies. The strategic priorities highlighted within the BG WESP document 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 Blaenau Gwent WESP was formally approved by Welsh Government in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent was the first and only Council within the SEWC region at the time to have the plan approved with no further amendments.
- 2.7 Alongside a review of the WESP, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation are reviewed and strengthened annually. (please refer to **Appendix 2 – WEF Terms of Reference** for more information).
- 2.8 Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, 3 out of 4 WEF meetings took place throughout the course of the academic year 2019/20 with membership, attendance and engagement sustained to a high standard throughout. Partners have commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which has in turn had a positive impact upon membership, attendance and outcomes.
- 2.9 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 met twice out of a possible 4 meetings throughout the course of the 2019/20 academic year. The focus of the group is as follows:
- Co-ordination of Welsh-medium demand survey arrangements
 - Consultation outcome and analysis
 - Promotion and communication
 - Regional review of secondary provision, Welsh medium grant and Band B proposals
 - Consultation and promotion strategy/plan
- 2.10 The Council has worked with neighbouring authorities via the aforementioned forum, to develop a booklet promoting the benefits of being bilingual. The document is reviewed annually and shared with the families of prospective pupils. The booklet is also linked to the admissions process and

is shared via health professionals, early year's settings, schools and other relevant partners/professionals, in order to promote Welsh language opportunities and education locally. A copy of the booklet is also available via the Council's website.

- 2.11 It has been a difficult year to sustain the strong progress made in relation to the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan throughout 2018/19. However, the LA and its partners have remained committed to the delivery of the WESP, whilst also supporting the development of resources and engagement throughout the LA during the emergency response period and subsequent reopening of schools.
- 2.12 Blaenau Gwent 2019/20 self-assessment is based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment has been sustained at an 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.
- 2.13 Please refer to the attached Annual Report for a more detailed appraisal of the outcomes (**Appendix 3**).
- 2.14 **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.
- 2.15 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 (please refer to **Appendix 4** for more information), along with the draft guidance were laid on 5 December 2019 and came into effect on 1st January 2020, with revised guidance now expected in January 2021. 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.
- 2.16 The Welsh Government expects local authority 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
- A clear link between the plan and other Local Authorities strategies and relevant policy areas.

2.17 Education has already begun working with the BG WEF in order to establish a draft 10-year plan for consultation and approval by 31st January 2022. Following ministerial approval, the plan will come into effect on 1 September 2022. A workshop has been programmed with relevant services and partners in December 2020, to begin working on the priorities and associated consultation process.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers and accepts the report and associated course of action.

3.2 **Option 2:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee provides comments relating to improvements that can be made, in line with implementation of the existing WESP and development of the BG 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. 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.

4.2 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)

There are no direct budgetary implications associated with this report; however, there are revenue implications associated with the Welsh medium grant proposal. These implications will be outlined in a separate report and within the consultation document.

5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

The following implications are relevant to the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20:

- 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

The Council are legally required to prepare, implement and update the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

5.4 Human Resources

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017/20 has been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee implementation and reviews of the plan within Blaenau Gwent.

The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, has a key role in ensuring the key staff-related actions are effectively delivered.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Performance Information and Data

The ET team have recently undertaken a review of the associated action plan (please refer to **Appendix 3** for more information), which serves the purpose of monitoring progress against outcomes.

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 is aligned to the Corporate Plan and presently covers the period 2017 to 2022, with a further review programmed during 2021/22, followed by implementation and publication of a new 10-year Plan in 2022. The WESP serves to provide a strategic approach and underpins the direction and delivery of Welsh-medium provision and education in Blaenau Gwent.
- 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 EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)**
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, with a positive impact upon Welsh language. The policy promotes equality of opportunity for all, with regards to accessing Welsh medium education and associated provision.
- 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.

- **Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20**
<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/policies-plans-strategies/blaenau-gwent-welsh-in-education-strategic-plan-20172020/>
- **Appendix 2 – WEF Terms of Reference**
- **Appendix 3 – WESP Annual Report 2019**
- **Appendix 4 –Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019**
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2019/1489/made>