

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **9 March 2021**

Report Subject: **EAS Business Plan 2021-2022
(Draft for consultation)**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J. Collins, Executive Member for Education**

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

Report Written by: **Debbie Harteveld, 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)
√	25.02.21	22.02.21			09.03.21	14.04.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

This report asks for members to consider the full contents of the draft EAS Business Plan 2021-2022, 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 The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan. This document contains the main priorities that the EAS believe will be relevant to focus upon in the next iteration of the regional Business Plan for 2021-2022. It is challenging to try to predict the way in which society will be operating from summer 2021 with regards to managing the spread of coronavirus. The priorities contained within this document assume that the EAS will build upon the learning and momentum from the past few months.
- 2.3 However, this plan will also need to consider how schools and settings will operate in a COVID-19 recovery phase and the support that will be required. Consideration will also be given to the priorities that were set and agreed prior to the pandemic in the previous Business Plan 2020-2021 depending on their relevance in the current climate.

- 2.4 The EAS will work collaboratively with local authority partners, schools and settings to implement the Business Plan. It is critically important that the EAS remains sensitive and responsive to the needs of the school 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.
- 2.6 The EAS understands the need to over communicate with clarity to provide reassurance regarding advice, guidance, support and expectations. As a result, the EAS will work with local authorities to minimise any unnecessary bureaucracy for schools and settings to ensure they are able to focus on their important priorities and their support for learners.
- 2.7 The timing, delivery and focus of the support will be carefully considered considering the challenges that are likely to continue into the summer and autumn terms 2021.
- 2.8 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 Committee:

Option 1:

For members to receive the report and accept the Business Plan as presented.

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 scrutiny 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**

4.1 **Statutory Responsibility**

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

Corporate Improvement Plan

4.1.2 **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.

Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan

- 4.1.3 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 The EAS is subject to a robust governance model that is underpinned by a Collaboration and Members agreement (CAMA) and Articles of Association. Ensuring that the EAS provides value for money is of utmost importance. As recipients of public funding, it is important that budgets are allocated wisely. We will endeavour to deliver even better value for money through achieving financial balance and delivering services within the constraints of our budget, making further efficiency savings wherever possible and ensuring delegation rates to schools are maximised.
- 5.1.2 The EAS is funded on an annual basis from three sources: Local authority core contributions, regional school improvement grants and a service level agreement for governor support services. A spending plan will accompany the Business Plan and will be intrinsically linked to all actions contained within it. A detailed overview of the regional distribution of all grants will be available for all schools to view and compare allocations and rates of delegation through the regional grant monitoring tool.
- 5.1.3 Delegation rate to schools has increased to 94.4%, whilst the EAS staff profile has reduced by 53.1% since 2012.
- 5.1.4 The local authority's indicative core contribution for 2021/22 are as follows: Blaenau-Gwent LA's contribution for 2021/22 is £351,806 compared with £358,985 in 2020/21 and £364,452 in 2019/20.
- 5.1.5 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**

EAS Regional Risks: As part of the internal EAS risk management process several aspects have been identified as potential barriers to the successful implementation of this Business Plan. These clearly set out the elements that will be important to ensuring optimum impact of the work of the EAS in partnership with LAs. These are:

- Full use is not made of consultation events to help shape the direction of the Business Plan to ensure collective regional ownership of priorities and actions for improvement.
- Uncertain financial grant projections may destabilise the ability to deliver the agreed business plan.
- The uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and the effect this will have on schools and settings.

5.3 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 Strategic Plan.

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

5.4 **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 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 Please note that a mid-year evaluation of the current revised Covid Business Plan (2019/20) 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 (created in January 2021). 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.

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.
- 6.1.7 The Business Plan is currently in the consultation process. The Consultees are noted below:
- EAS staff
 - Directors of Education (within South East Wales) and Diocesan Directors
 - Regional Joint Executive Group
 - EAS Company Board
 - EAS Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
 - Individual local authority education scrutiny committees
 - All Headteachers from within the region
 - All Chairs of Governors from within the region
 - School Councils from within the region
 - All school based Professional Learning Leads
 - EAS Supporting School Trade Union Group (SSTU Group)
- 6.1.8 The final version of the Business Plan will be supported by a range of supporting documents:
- Detailed Business Plan 2021–2022
 - Regional Grant Mapping Overview 2021–2022
 - Regional Self-Evaluation Report (Executive Summary)
 - EAS Risk Register (Executive Summary)
 - Regional Professional Learning Offer 2021–2022
 - Local Authority Strategic Education Plans
- 6.1.9 This Business Plan addresses each local authority strategic priority that are indicated with *. These priorities fall within the remit of the work of the EAS. The EAS will work in partnership with local authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate and those that arise from the changing local and national situation.

6.1.10 The improvements that are required at regional and local authority level require a strong commitment of partnership-working to be successful. Where local authorities and the EAS work in close partnership, there is evidence, that rapid and sustainable school improvement can be achieved. This joined up approach will be even more critical as we work in partnership to support schools and settings during this challenging time.

Blaenau-Gwent Strategic Priorities 2021-22 (as provided by the LA):

Strategic priorities for 2021/2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure high quality leadership and teaching that secures good progress for all learners, particularly the vulnerable and those who are eFSM.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve wellbeing for learners at all stages of development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure strong progress in skills, particularly in English and mathematics at key stages 3 and 4.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.

6.1.11 **Regional Priorities 2021-2022**

The EAS will endeavour to be a professional partner working with schools to provide support using external expertise and experience. All schools and settings will be offered a range of professional learning and bespoke support which aligns to their school improvement priorities. Full consideration will be given to the current climate in which schools and settings are operating. Within this context the priorities of the EAS will be to:

- A. To ensure that the wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings is paramount.
- B. Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.
- C. Provide support to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including continued use of blended learning approaches, particularly in identified secondary schools.
- D. Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures.
- E. Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise Curriculum for Wales, as appropriate.

- F. Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards.
- G. Consolidate, promote and further develop the regional school and practitioner networks, enabling effective routes of communication and support.
- H. Continue to support the development of leaders at all levels in schools and settings.
- I. Further build the capacity of governing bodies through the regional professional learning offer and bespoke support, as appropriate.
- J. Further develop a culture around accountability that identifies and values a broad spectrum of characteristics of effective schools and settings.
- K. Embed the EAS internal evaluation model, continue to welcome external challenge and support, ensure the effective and efficient support to schools and settings and adhere to legislative requirements that fully supports the wellbeing of staff.

Ambitions for 2021/22

6.1.12

Working in partnership with local authorities, schools and setting the ambitions for 2021/22 and beyond are challenging to capture without having clarity around the changing nature of the pandemic and the effect it will have on schools and settings. In this regard, the ambitions below need to be read within the context they have been derived:

- The EAS has placed wellbeing at the forefront of its work.
- There is a clear strategy to improve the quality of distance and blended learning experiences for learners. There has been good engagement in the regional strategy and many opportunities have been provided for schools to share to develop more effective teaching across and within schools and settings.
- Where schools and settings have engaged in the regional wellbeing support offer it has helped to support improvement in their provision for wellbeing.
- Schools and settings receive the right type of support, as appropriate to help them make progress against their school improvement priorities.
- Most schools can identify and provide the most appropriate support to specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, including those who have been disproportionately affected by school closures, to help them to progress.
- A regional strategy developed in collaboration with practitioners provides a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals.
- The quality and impact of the provision for professional learning for educational practitioners and governors is good and those schools that have engaged are able to evidence the impact of this.
- Refined and extended networks ensure effective collaboration and communication to support school improvement.
- A range of professional learning and bespoke support provided to schools and settings helps them realise Curriculum for Wales.

- Working with schools and local authorities, a regional model of support will be developed and implemented, focusing on accurate self-evaluation using a broad range of characteristics, aligned to school improvement priorities.

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 2021/2022 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 2021-2022. 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 A - Education Achievement Service: Regional Business Plan (Post Covid Recovery: April 2021-March 2022) (Consultation 2nd Draft)