

Committee: **Education and Leisure Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **20<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Report Subject: **School Organisation Policy (2021/24)**

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

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

| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| 31.3.20                     | 31.3.20                   | 08.04.21                 |                 |                               | 20.4.20            | FWP 2021/22         |         |                      |

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek the views of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee in relation to the review of the School Organisation Policy (2021-24), prior to presenting the policy to the Council's Executive Committee. It is proposed that the revised policy is adopted and implemented from the start of new academic year 2021/22.

**2. Scope and Background**

- 2.1 The Council's Education Directorate and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board take the view that well-planned changes of the school estate contributes to raising standards. The Council initially developed and adopted the School Organisation Policy in January 2015, which provided the strategic blueprint for managing the school estate. In 2017, the document was reviewed and approved by the Council's Executive Committee. It is now time to carry out a further review to reflect the policy, especially in light of key strategic developments over the last 4 years and the impact of COVID-19.
- 2.2 Blaenau Gwent CBC has a proven track record of delivering significant school transformational change, such as Abertillery Learning Community, the Works developments and Home to School and Post 16 Transport consultations. The Education Directorate remains focussed on improving educational performance. Blaenau Gwent's schools have untapped potential to improve themselves, and there is significant potential to transform the current approach into a model that is determined by schools for schools; where the reliance on external agencies to improve is reduced and the capacity for schools to work with others in order to improve is increased.

- 2.3 The School Organisation Policy (2021-24) reflects the changing national, regional and local landscape and strategic developments, which shape and inform school organisation. The changes that have been made are indicated within the red text (please refer to **Appendix 1** for further information). The revised School Organisation Policy (2021-24) sets out 8 strategic priorities in line with the future direction and associated areas of development, which will inform and underpin school organisation and planning processes. The policy and associated priorities will be subject to annual review. These include:

- 2.4
1. Duty – Planning and Provision of School Places
  2. School to School Support and Collaboration
  3. Management of the School Estate – School Organisation
  4. School Size, Suitability, Condition & Operation
  5. Promoting Access to Education
  6. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
  7. Information and Communication Technology in Schools

- 2.5 The Council remains committed to providing children and young people with high quality education and training to contribute to the economic regeneration of the County Borough in line with the Corporate Plan vision and outcome statements.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

There are two options presented for consideration:

- 3.1 **Option 1:** Members of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee agree with the proposed changes to the Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** Members of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee provide feedback/contributions relating to improvements that can be made to the policy, prior to the policy being considered by Executive Committee in May 2021.
4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 There is a statutory requirement upon the Council to ensure that all relevant school organisation proposals are compliant with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018, version 2). For proposals requiring a business case, all such documents are developed in accordance with the HM Treasury Green Book, Five Case Model.
- 4.2 Education is a strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Plan and the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan, of which school organisation is an essential component in securing: improved access to education, education facilities (including condition and suitability), provision and standards throughout the school estate. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme also features as a priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and

consequently, has generated a high-level of support from the capital programme.

## **5. Implications Against Each Option**

### **5.1 *Impact on Budget***

There are no direct budget implications associated with this report.

### **5.2 *Risk***

5.2.1 Raising educational standards is a strategic risk on the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). Effective school organisation will contribute to mitigating this risk. Moreover, there are robust risk management arrangements in place whereby school organisation priorities and associated identified risks are regularly monitored, reported and escalated via the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board, Department Management team and Corporate Leadership team.

5.2.2 The high-level risks associated with programme delivery at present, include: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with financial, resourcing and programming implications. Effective monitoring and reporting processes have been established have been established for all priorities. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board monitor policy implementation, with core groups established to monitor and review resourcing, progress, timelines and finance on a monthly basis.

### **5.3 *Legal***

5.3.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report, other than the requirement for the Local Authority to follow the statutory processes set out within the Welsh Government School Organisation Code. Education are supported by the Council's Legal section, along with Clarks Legal as required, in fulfilling the obligations associated with regulated activity.

### **5.4 *Human Resources***

The School Organisation Policy has been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee implementation and review of the policy within Blaenau Gwent.

The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, will have a key role in ensuring the key human resource-related actions and activities are effectively supported and delivered.

## **6. Supporting Evidence**

### **6.1.1 *Performance Information and Data***

Education has a track record of successfully delivering significant school organisation proposals.

6.1.2 To date the following outcomes have been achieved in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme:

- All 4 projects have been delivered, securing successful conclusion of the Band A Programme, on programme and profile.
- The Band A programme has been subject to internal review and evaluation, internal audit, along with 4 external Gateway Reviews.

The latter demonstrates excellent progress and strong programme/ project management arrangements are in place. Learning from the Band B Programme has been used to inform Band B development and implementation.

- Welsh Government have approved all Business Case submissions to date in line with delivery of the Band B Programme.
- Band B projects are currently on profile and programme.

6.1.3 Capacity calculations were determined for each of the schools in November 2019, which informed the final admission numbers published within the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy 2021/2022. The School Admissions Policy consultation, review and capacity assessments for 2022/23 admission round have been successfully implemented.

6.1.4 Surplus places in both the primary and secondary sector are projected to decrease further over the next 2 years, taking the primary percentage to 9% and secondary to 12%, by the 2023/24 academic year – with the overall combined projected status falling from 14% in Jan 2020 to 10% in 2024.

6.1.5 The Division of Responsibilities Guidance and associated procedure were successfully implemented during the 2019/20 academic session.

6.1.6 Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2019/20 self-assessment is based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment overall RAG rating has been sustained at 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.

6.1.7 In relation to ICT developments, to date the following outcomes have been achieved:

- Over 1,500 devices and 141 Mi-Fi units have been distributed to digitally disadvantaged learners.
- 2,247 devices have been ordered to replace end of life devices throughout the school estate. Set-up and distribution is programmed throughout the autumn-term 2020 and spring-term 2021 in line with Welsh Government procurement timelines.
- All school sites have been fully migrated and their connectivity addressed under the ICP
- Infrastructure upgrades have been completed in all school sites.
- Device and infrastructure audits have been completed and updated for all schools.

6.1.8 Excellent progress has been made overall, with school organisation priorities on track for 2021/22.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Ensuring equality of access to quality education opportunities and facilities for all children and young people.

6.3 ***Involvement***

Partner, stakeholder and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance and a key focus of both policy development, ongoing school organisation priorities and associated processes. Consultation and statutory processes in line with school organisation priorities and proposals, seek to ensure that all decisions are informed by the views, opinions and needs of stakeholders and those affected by the proposals.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term***

The policy seeks to provide a medium to long-term strategic direction for school organisation, ensuring a sustained focus on key priorities and activities, whilst also securing appropriate resources to support effective delivery.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The policy seeks to ensure that key priorities are determined and achieved, to ensure that Blaenau Gwent has the right schools, in the right place at the right time; to effectively facilitate high quality provision and outcomes for staff, children, young people and communities. There is a key focus on collaboration and improvement to support development and growth within each school setting.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Vision for Education is based upon a school led, self-improving, collaborative approach. The School Organisation Policy plays a fundamental part in improving partnership arrangements with the schools and their respective communities. In addition, the Policy details key priorities which will be delivered via a team officers from across all Council directorates, along with external partners such as the Shared Resource Service Wales.

6.7 ***Integration***

Service integration is essential to ensure effective policy implementation, particularly between the Council and its schools. The Policy established a framework for systematic integration.

6.8 ***EqlA***

- 6.8.1 An equality impact screening assessment has been undertaken, the results of which indicate that there is no adverse impact upon the protected characteristics, but a positive in terms of disability, whereby provision is set to be reviewed and improved.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

- 7.1 Policy implementation will be the responsibility of the Education Transformation team, overseen by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme Board and Education Directorate Management team, with assurance

provided by Corporate Leadership team. The Policy will be subject to annual review.

### **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- **Appendix 1** – Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021-24