

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 7 April 2021

Subject Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2021-2022

Purpose This report seeks agreement from members for the EAS Business Plan 2021-2022

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Ward All

Summary The EAS is required to submit an annual overarching regional Business Plan on an annual basis. This report asks for members to consider the full contents of the EAS 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.

Proposal Members are requested to:

- Ensure that the Business Plan enables appropriate support and challenge for schools and that it addresses the areas for improvement that have been identified within Newport's Education Strategic Plan; and
- Approve the EAS Business Plan 2021-2022.

Action by The Education Achievement Service in partnership with the LA

Timetable The Business Plan will commence from 1 April 2021

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer)
- Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships, 24 February 2021.

Signed

1. Background and Report

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. In previous years the Business Plan has been accompanied by a LA Annex document. At a recent meeting of the Joint Executive Group it was agreed that the production of LA Annex documents would be paused for this year (2021/2022) as a result of changes to the accountability arrangements and the lack of available data / information e.g. categorisation, target setting. However, the main Business Plan will continue to contain LA specific priorities.
- 1.3. 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.
- 1.4. 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.
- 1.5. 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.
- 1.6. 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.
- 1.7. 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.
- 1.8. 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.
- 1.9. Members were 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.
- 1.10. 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).
- 1.11. The delivery model for the Business Plan is on a regional basis, the needs of each school and setting within Newport will continue to be met through bespoke work in line with their improvement priorities, both virtually and when safe to do so physically.
- 1.12. 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.

- 1.13. 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.
- 1.14. 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.
- 1.15. 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.
- 1.16. The Business Plan has been through a thorough 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)
- 1.17. 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

The regional priorities and actions contained within this plan will support the implementation of each of the strategic priorities (that fall within the remit of the EAS) that have been identified by Newport City Council. The EAS will continue to work in partnership with local authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate, and those that arise from the changing local and national situation.

- 1.18. 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.

1.19. Newport Strategic Priorities 2021-22 (as provided by the LA):

Strategic priorities for 2021/2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design

Regional Priorities 2021-2022

1.20 The EAS will endeavour to be a professional partner working with schools and settings. All schools and settings will be entitled to 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:

1. Ensure that the wellbeing of practitioners and learners in schools and settings remains paramount. Regional professional learning will be provided to support the social and emotional needs of the workforce and learners.
2. Provide bespoke support to schools and settings to address the impact of the pandemic on individual learners, as appropriate, in line with their improvement priorities.
3. Continue to provide support to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the continued use of, and evaluation of blended and distance learning approaches, particularly in identified secondary schools.
4. Continue to provide support to leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by the pandemic.
5. Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise Curriculum for Wales.
6. 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.
7. Consolidate, promote and further develop regional practitioner networks, enabling effective routes of communication and support.
8. Continue to support the development of leaders at all levels in schools and settings.
9. Further build the capacity and capability of the knowledge and skills of governing bodies (as appropriate), through the regional professional learning offer and bespoke support.
10. Further develop a culture around accountability that identifies and values a broad spectrum of characteristics of effective schools and settings.
11. Embed the EAS internal evaluation model, continue to welcome external challenge and support, ensure the effective and efficient support to schools and settings and adheres to legislative requirements that fully supports the wellbeing of staff.

Ambitions for 2021-22

- 1.21 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 and has provided a range of professional learning to schools and settings that has provided support to the social and emotional needs of the workforce and learners.
 - 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.
 - Schools and settings receive the right type of support, as appropriate to help them make appropriate 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, digital and personal and social skills of learners who have been 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.
 - Evaluations of the impact of regional policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic will be used to inform future ways of working and curriculum design.

2. Risks

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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, Newport LA Plans and the Education Strategic Plan.
- 2.3 Newport LA will have its own risks linked to the delivery of the strategic objectives within their corporate plans.

3. Resource Implications

- 3.1 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.

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 Delegation rate to schools has increased to 94.4%, whilst the EAS staff profile has reduced by 53.1% since 2012.
- 3.4 The local authority's indicative core contribution for 2021/22 are as follows: Newport LA's contribution for 2021/22 is £787,227 compared with £803,293 in 2020/21 and £815,526 in 2019/20.
- 3.5 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.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. The Business Plan has been through a 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)

5. Background Papers

- A. Education Achievement Service: Regional Business Plan (Post Covid Recovery: April 2021-March 2022) (Final)

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The EAS Business Plan supports the Education Service Plan, the PSB Wellbeing Plan and the NCC Covid Recovery Plan.

Options Available and considered

- Accept the EAS Business Plan 2021/22
- Request amendments to the EAS Business Plan 2021/22

Preferred Option and Why

- Accept the EAS Business Plan 2021/22 following consultation with a range of partners

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The contribution of £787,227 is included within the revenue budget for 2021/22, therefore there are no additional financial pressures arising from this report.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report. The EAS Business Plan reflects national priorities and standards for educational improvement and the final Business Plan will be approved as an EAS strategic document by the Company Board and the Joint Executive Group. The draft Business Plan has already been the subject of extensive consultation with key stakeholder, including Performance Scrutiny Committee (Partnerships). Cabinet are being asked to confirm that the specific elements of the plan properly reflect and are correctly aligned to the priorities for school improvement as set out in Newport's Education Strategic Plan.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

Newport City Council recognises that it is our duty to work with partners such as the EAS to provide future generations with the skills and knowledge they need to play a full and active role in their communities and wider society. Both Newport's and the nation's economic prosperity, social cohesion, fairness and wellbeing are built on the foundations of a strong effective education system. The EAS Business Plan sets out a framework for challenge and support to drive school improvement and raise pupil attainment whilst closing the gap between learners from different socio-economic backgrounds.

As required the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 has been considered in this report and the EAS will play a part in creating a fairer more prosperous Wales.

Comments the Chair of Cabinet

The local priorities for Newport schools detailed in the Business Plan align with the Newport City Council Covid recovery objectives, Wales-wide Estyn recommendations to support recovery from the Covid pandemic and dovetail with key objectives of teams within Newport City Council Education Services.

The focus on both the academic progression of learners and support for schools to promote the health and wellbeing of their community as part of the Covid recovery is a key component of this business plan. Within this, the prioritisation of support for vulnerable learners who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic is also highlighted.

I note that consultation is taking place with a range of stakeholders including Local Authority and Diocesan Directors, regional head teacher and governor strategy groups and teachers from across the region.

Local issues

Not applicable

Scrutiny Committees

The draft EAS Business Plan was examined by Partnerships Scrutiny in February 2021.

The Committee **agreed** to forward this Minute as a detailed record of its consideration of the EAS Business Plan 2021-21 to the Cabinet to consider, in particular the following comments and commendations:

- The committee wanted to extend a massive thank you to EAS and the Education department for all the work that has taken place
- The Committee remarked that it was very encouraging to hear of the strength of the partnership, and about the adaptability and what they are learning.
- The Committee noted that it was very clear that the EAS, Education Department and schools are learning together and taking steps forward. There is clearly a strong partnership between EAS and LA, who seem happy working together and this relationship is getting stronger and stronger.

- The Committee noted that both organisations know Newport schools well. It is evident that they do speak with each other about issues and have good understanding. Comment was made that historically it has not been that way- schools have wanted to improve by themselves. The Committee voiced that it was important to maintain this new outlook going forward.
- The Committee wanted to raise that it is important for governors to be well aware of the wellbeing and mental health of students. It is essential that schools should be very aware of the resources available there.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 contains a Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force on 06 April 2011. The Act identifies a number of 'protected characteristics', namely age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership. The new single duty aims to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the regular business of public authorities. Compliance with the duty is a legal obligation and is intended to result in better informed decision-making and policy development and services that are more effective for users. In exercising its functions, the Council must have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Act is not overly prescriptive about the approach a public authority should take to ensure due regard, although it does set out that due regard to advancing equality involves: removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these differ from the need of other people; and encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

Although no targeted consultation takes place specifically aimed at children and young people, consultation on planning applications and appeals is open to all of our citizens regardless of their age. Depending on the scale of the proposed development, applications are publicised via letters to neighbouring occupiers, site notices, press notices and/or social media. People replying to consultations are not required to provide their age or any other personal data, and therefore this data is not held or recorded in any way, and responses are not separated out by age.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

All local authorities have a long-term duty to develop a prosperous Wales by developing skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities. Enabling and facilitating academic attainment for all learners provides a foundation for access to employment and helps break a cycle of deprivation.

Furthermore, regardless of the socio-economic demographic of an individual school community, all schools will be challenged and supported to improve pupil attainment with a view to create "more equal wales" that enables pupils to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances. A specific focus of the draft EAS Business Plan is improving the attainment of vulnerable learners and closing the gap in attainment between those learners eligible for free school meals and those not eligible for free school meals.

Improvement of pupil outcomes is supported by collaboration of schools, the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service (EAS) including the involvement of pupils, teachers, governors and wider community members in the planning and implementation of school improvement initiatives.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Section 17(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on the Local Authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

Consultation

The EAS Business Plan is currently undergoing consultation with all Local Authorities within the South East Wales Consortium (SEWC)

Background Papers

The South-East Wales Regional Mission: Business Plan (2020-2021) (First Draft for Consultation)

Dated: 7 April 2021