

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

WELSH LANGUAGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Welsh Language Steering Group with the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-2020 as part of the consultation on the plan and prior to its consideration by the Cabinet on the 15th December 2016 and submission to Welsh Government by 20th December 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group note and discuss the draft objectives contained within the WESP.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The draft WESP has been prepared according to revised guidance issued by Welsh Government in mid-August 2016. Timelines set out in the guidance outline that the consultation period should run between the 4th October and the 29th November, with the WESP being submitted by the 20th December to Welsh Government.
- 3.2 In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the WESP has been prepared in consultation with key internal and external stakeholders, with a formal consultation period running between Monday, 3rd October and Monday, 28th November.
- 3.3 This allows for the WESP Strategic Group, comprising of key officers and partners, to meet and approve the document on Wednesday, 7th December, prior to Cabinet approval on the 15th December and submission to Welsh Government by the statutory deadline.

4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 placed a duty on Local Authorities to consult, produce and review three year plans that provide the strategic direction for the planning and delivery of Welsh medium and Welsh language education in the Authority. The Act set out that the plans should be reviewed annually.
- 4.2 This year, Welsh Government have acted on feedback from local authorities, the publication of the national Children, Young People and Education Committee's report into the effectiveness of WESPs and the wider context of the Welsh Government's strategy for the Welsh language. As such, new guidance (under section 87 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act) was issued to Local Authorities in August 2016 on the necessary arrangements to complete WESPs covering the period 2017-2020. The aim of the guidance is to provide a more meaningful plan for Local Authorities and their partners to deliver together, in the context of changing national legislation and introduction of Welsh Language Standards.
- 4.3 Although the revised guidance aims to assist Local Authorities in producing a more succinct and manageable WESP, the statute remains in that its main aims are to:
- Reflect locally on the Welsh Government policies and strategies relating to the Welsh language, including the Welsh Medium Education Strategy (2010);
 - Provide an overview of the current Welsh medium estate through illustrating the current situation locally, outlining activities, demonstrating improvement and challenges;
 - Be a manageable and useful plan to the Local Authority, schools, Elected Members and external organisations providing childcare / early years provision, youth services, further education, higher education, adult education etc. to act upon together; and
 - Demonstrate clear progress over three year periods in each Local Authority and Consortia area towards achieving Welsh Medium Education Strategy targets.
- 4.4 As such, the guidance for completing WESPs continues to be based around the five outcomes of the Welsh Medium Education Strategy 2010 and requests that Local Authorities set their own challenging local targets with respect of these:

Welsh Medium Education Strategy outcomes:

- More seven year old children being taught through the medium of Welsh as a percentage of the Year 2 cohort;*
- More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary school to secondary school;*
- More learners studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh;*
- More learners aged 16-19 years old studying Welsh and subjects through the medium of Welsh; and*
- More learners with improved skills in Welsh.*

In addition, Welsh Government also ask that Local Authorities seek to address through their WESP:

- vi. Welsh medium provision for learners with additional learning needs; and
- vii. Workforce planning / continuing professional development for Education Authority staff.

5. RCT WESP 2017-2020

- 5.1 It follows that the draft WESP for Rhondda Cynon Taf is set around these seven outcomes; related data and local targets relating to the achievement of these outcomes. Each outcome is underpinned by up to four objectives and a supporting statement, providing the current position and rationale for the objectives.
- 5.2 As in previous years, Welsh Government have requested that Local Authorities and their partners provide data to add context and background information. The data is provided at Appendix I of the WESP, but is also referred to in the body of the plan.
- 5.3 Welsh Government guidance states that draft WESPs must be consulted upon with a list of stakeholders, set out in regulation 9 of the WESP statutory guidance, for a period of at least eight weeks. In RCT, an early draft of the WESP was circulated to these stakeholders and a number of other interested parties, in order to collaboratively produce the WESP with those that will be part of its delivery.
- 5.4 The draft WESP is also produced to be complementary to the [draft RCT Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2016-21](#), which provides an over-arching framework and action plan for promoting the Welsh language in Rhondda Cynon Taf and contributing towards the Welsh Government target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- 5.5 Many of the objectives and targets within the WESP directly read across to the ambitions within the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2016-21. As with the Promotion Strategy 2016-21, the WESP will require the support of partners and members of the community to be successful and meet its aims.

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 The WESP has been co-ordinated centrally but contributed to by a number of stakeholders. Many of the comments and observations received during the formal consultation period have, therefore, already been incorporated into the draft before the Group today. However, it is likely that further changes will be made following the closing consultation on the 28th November and the WESP Strategic Group meeting on the 7th December.

- 6.2 An updated version of the WESP, comprising comments and observations following consultation and the Steering Group meeting on the 7th December will be presented to Cabinet on the 15th December, prior to submission to Welsh Government for approval by the 20th December.
- 6.3 The Ministers are required to respond to the submitted WESP by either approving the plan; approving the plan with modifications; or rejecting the plan and requesting the LA co-ordinate the preparation of another one by the end of January 2017.
- 6.4 WESPs are expected to be implemented from 1st April 2017, with the plan being published by 1st June 2017.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The WESP seeks to promote equality of opportunity between people who wish to access Welsh medium education and those who access English medium education. Therefore, as an over-arching plan, it promotes equality of opportunity. However, continued due regard will need to be exercised to the equality duties of the Local Authority and its partners in implementing the plan.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 As stated above, the WESP is currently out to formal consultation and has been produced alongside internal and external stakeholders.
- 8.2 Consultation feedback has also been utilised from the consultation on the Welsh Language Standards, which led to production of the Promotion of the Welsh Language Strategy 2016-21; and the recent national study undertaken by Nico and Menter Iaith, regarding the usage of Welsh across Wales.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Not at this time, but implementation of the WESP will require allocation of Local Authority and partner resources.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1. The Schools and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013;
- 10.2 Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – in relation to a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; a healthier Wales and a prosperous Wales – as referenced in the WESP introduction and vision statement.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 11.1 As set out in the introduction of the draft WESP 2017-2020, in *'The Way Ahead: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Corporate Plan (2016-20)'*, the Chief Executive and Leader have set out the ambition that:

"Rhondda Cynon Taf's schools will be the amongst the best in the country, and with all children achieving the best they can."

This ambition applies to all schools in the County Borough, with a target that by 2020, every school will be amongst the best in the country and the attainment of children will continue to exceed Welsh Government benchmarks, with the progress of disadvantaged pupils accelerated.

The Council believes in the educational value of individuals being proficient in both English and Welsh and that the ability to use Welsh as well as English language skills can be a significant advantage for young people seeking work.

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 Although the WESP continues to be in draft prior to Cabinet on the 15th December 2016, the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group are asked to note the objectives and the draft plan.