

## **South East Wales Special Educational Needs (SEWSEN)**

### **Regional Planning Project**

**Report to:** Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

**Report by:** SEWSEN Steering Committee

**Subject:** Six Monthly Progress Report – Initial Report November 2000

#### **1. Background**

The South East Wales SEN Regional Planning Project has been established to improve and enhance effective collaborative working for children and young people with special educational needs across the five authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouth, Newport and Torfaen. The project was established as a result of Welsh Office circular EDC 32/02/23 which invited consortium bids from local education authorities (LEAs) to develop multi-agency regional planning arrangements for special educational needs (SEN). As such the bid was successful in obtaining funding for three years to October 2002.

Whilst it was LEAs who were invited to take an initiative to bid, as funding was under GEST arrangements, the Gwent Consortium recognised, as did the Green Paper (The Best for Special Education), that a variety of other agencies have an interest, and a part to play, in developing and sustaining planning mechanisms which have a SEN focus. Hence this bid was representative of both Education and Social Services Departments across the five authorities as well as Gwent Health Authority.

## **2. Project Management**

The structure of the project centres around the work of the Steering Committee, the Project Co-ordinator and Task Groups (see diagram attached Appendix 1).

### **2.1 Steering Committee**

The project is led by a Steering Committee (see Appendix 2) that is fully representative of consortium partners and the voluntary sector.

It is the role of the Steering Committee to give the project a strategic steer, to monitor its progress and make recommendations to changes in service provision based on its findings.

At its inaugural meeting the Committee appointed a Chairperson (Mike DeVal – Director of Education, Torfaen) to oversee matters and guide discussion. Members meet on a monthly basis, for which minutes and attendance is recorded. All minutes are distributed to the Directors and Chief Officers of all Partner Agencies

### **2.2 The Project Co-ordinator**

In February 2000 the Steering Committee appointed a Project Co-ordinator (Mair Watkins- previously Head of Raising Standards, Caerphilly LEA). The project is managed on a day to day basis by the co-ordinator who brings together all the various strands of SEN across the area and ensures that the Action Plan for the project is implemented. Duties include leading the project management and development, co-ordination of the various task groups, the collection and analysis of data, the preparation of reports based on findings to the Steering Committee, monitoring expenditure, reporting to the National Assembly for Wales.

### **2.3 Task Groups**

The Steering Committee agreed to the establishment of various task groups to ensure an active multi-agency approach in delivering the project. The task groups (see attached appendix 3) are to be established on a phased basis to meet priorities as outlined in the Action Plan. Each group will have a specific remit in relation to the plan and will be reviewed regularly. The Task Groups will be asked to nominate a lead officer to co-ordinate the work of that group and action points are taken of each meeting.

The progress of each Task group is reported at the monthly meeting of the Steering Committee. As the project develops there may be a need for cross task group representation and this will need to be monitored to ensure that all groups are fairly represented and that undue burdens do not fall on individual members.

### **3. Action Plan**

The project co-ordinator's initial task was to develop an action plan for the project (appendix4). This was to ensure that the various constituent parts of the initial bid were brought together in a coherent manner and that a timescale and resource base was identified for the project. In view of suggestions received from partner agencies and WAGSEN, this initial plan has now been developed further. As the project progresses there may be a need for further revisions and the Steering Committee reserve the right to make such amendments as and when they feel necessary.

Due to the serious ill health of the project co-ordinator timescales needed to be altered accordingly. Fortunately the co-ordinator has resumed her duties and sound progress is being made against timescales.

### **4. Performance Measurement**

As measured against the aims and objectives outlined in the Project Action Plan, Members are asked to note the following progress made to date:

#### **4.1 – Raising the Profile of the Project**

This is a continuous process and has involved attendance at a number of meetings across the area to inform and encourage participation in the project. The project co-ordinator will meet shortly with voluntary organisations to ensure their input into the project and co-ordination of public and voluntary services for SEN. Consideration is also being given to early years and childcare partnerships and issues relating to Special Educational Needs Pre school. A series of presentations for community consortia will be arranged as soon as these groups are fully established.

The web site is currently under development and we are on target to meet our November deadline for the launch of the site.

A project logo has been established as a map of the combined areas of Blaenau Gwent,

Caerphilly, Monmouth, Newport and Torfaen.

## **4.2 – Effective communication**

A communication strategy has been adopted by the Steering Committee.

Regular monthly meetings of Steering Committee established.

Task Groups established on a phased basis to meet priorities in Action Plan – to date groups have been very useful and enabled like professionals to discuss systems and procedures operating across the region.

Web site under development.

Newsletter to be reviewed following launch of web site

Comment and E mail facility available through web site for children and parents

Voluntary sector represented on Steering Committee.

Networking with other projects already undertaken.

## **4.3 – Advice & Support**

Currently working with Gwent Health Authority on the early identification of children with SEN – the systems for sharing this information across agencies.

Advice given on web site and through other media.

Working closely across partner agencies and with colleagues in the voluntary sector to ensure consistency in advice given.

Establish closer links with the Special Needs Advisory Project to identify gaps in advice and support.

## **4.4 & 4.5 – Audit of Need and Provision/ Development of database**

One of the fundamental aims of the project is the development of a Regional SEN database. To facilitate this partner agencies have agreed to share data and information

on current levels of need and provision within each county borough. In order to do this effectively and to meet the requirements of current legislation in relation to data protection, it has been agreed that pupil level data would be transferred to the central database via one source, i.e. education departments. Due to the variation in the systems and current practices across the agencies this will entail the reconciliation of data at source. Therefore, data held by education will need to be reconciled with schools, social services directorates and the health authority prior to transfer (see appendix 5). Initial data transfer is scheduled for November 2000.

This will ensure that robust systems are in place to enable data to be shared in each authority and that internal agencies are working from the same data set. Hence when the data is transferred to the central database it is as accurate and reliable as possible. Following the collection of data it will be possible to return area specific data back to the relevant agencies for further reconciliation, together with an analysis of the data held on the whole region.

Data will need to be transferred on a regular basis and at least every three months to ensure the Regional Database is kept up to date.

Information will also need to be collected on a wide spectrum of SEN based activities including provision availability, training, funding, transport and SEN vacancies (appendix 6).

It is envisaged that the co-ordinator for the project will collect this data and disseminate through the various media as and when appropriate.

#### **4.6 - Children First**

Task group as yet to be established.

Information centrally held will be compatible with that of children first requirements for those with special educational needs only. This does not encompass all children who are looked after and in need.

#### **4.7 - Continuous Professional Development**

No developments to date – task group to be established as part of phase 2

#### **4.8 - Post 16 Transition**

No developments to date – task group to be established as part of phase 2

## **4.9 - Best Value**

Working within the remit of Best Value

Targets set and performance measurement regularly monitored

All Wales benchmarking data to be collected on a regional basis and compared with all Wales

## **4.10 - Exit Strategy**

To be considered in due course

## **5. Conclusion**

The Steering Committee are committed to the success of this project. The benefits of Regional Planning for Special Educational Needs is already becoming evident in terms of sharing ideas and practices on a multi agency basis.

We are also aware of the inconsistencies in service delivery across the region.

We await the results of the audit of need and provision across the area, to enable us to identify gaps in services and provision thus enabling us to make the necessary recommendations to our partner agencies in addressing any shortcomings and identifying best practice.

