

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 12 March 2018

Time: 5.30 pm

Present: Councillors M Rahman (Chair), Y Forsey, R Hayat, S Marshall and T Suller

In Attendance: H Davies-Edwards (Principle Challenge Advisor), S Morgan (Chief Education Officer) and E Mulligan (Democracy and Communications Manager)

Apologies: Councillors D Davies, M Linton, R Mogford and K Whitehead

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Educational Achievement Service - Business Plan 2018-2021

Attendees;

- Sarah Morgan – Chief Education Officer
- Hayley Davies-Edwards – EAS Principal Challenge Advisor

The Chief Education Officer and the Principal Challenge Advisor for EAS presented the report to the Committee and gave highlights of the current successes and actions going forward. It was advised that even though the plan was regional, aspects were specifically focused upon Newport, as outlined in the authority-specific annex provided.

The Committee asked the following:

- In relation to progress against actions identified by Estyn, Members asked whether the aims of the plan were aspirational enough. In relation to the terms used by Estyn to evaluate progress, 'Strong Progress' was aimed for in every term. EAS would be satisfied with a 'Satisfactory' half way through the year but aspiration towards end of the year would be to make strong progress. The Advisor would provide the Committee with further information regarding the progress evaluation if requested.
- In response to a question, it was explained that EAS did not hold any statutory powers, however the Chief Education Officer had powers to issue warning notices and legal documents to school, which set out targets of improvements and timescales of expected movement. The Chief Education Officer could also add additional School Governors to the board, or as a last resort could apply to the Local Authority's Cabinet to take powers away from governing bodies.

Members asked what support was available for staff within schools from EAS. Members were advised that the wellbeing of teachers was the overall responsibility of governing bodies. Governor Support was high on EAS's agenda, and there was also a wellbeing program for teachers and head teachers. The EAS Challenge Advisor should monitor this with the Head teacher, and be part of discussions with the Head

on staff well-being and development. Training activities had been designed to help teachers be more effective in their roles. It was also advised that there was now a regional workload forum with Headteachers from the whole region.

- In response to a question about the consistency of setting targets, it was explained that the work of the Challenger Advisors was quality assured, both through paperwork and joint visits. This was also monitored through regular meetings between EAS and the Chief Education Officer, to consider accountability to the local authority and any instances where there were variances with the challenges provided through EAS.
- It was asked if the number of days a Head Teacher is out of school is monitored. It was advised that there is no statutory guidance, however out of respect and common courtesy Heads should let the local authority know when they are out of the school. Work was being undertaken on a protocol to how this can be recorded.
- In response to a question about Head Teachers providing support to schools outside Newport / the EAS area, it was explained that the governing body would be responsible for authorising this, and it was often necessary, and beneficial, for Head Teachers to share expertise further afield, and vice versa, especially as Newport is a relatively small area where the Heads all know each other well.
- In response to a question about target monitoring, Members were advised that a self-evaluation plan was included in the business plan, and there was also a calendar of events and key points of the business plan delivery, which could be sent to the Committee,. Challenge Advisors met once a term to make judgements of how close the Council were to achieving targets. FADE (Focus, Activity, Do, Evaluate) reports were sent to the Leadership team every 2 weeks.
- In response to a question about in-year changes to the plan, the Committee were advised that if the change was small and did not affect school funding, EAS would authorise the change. If it was felt a process needed to be fundamentally changed e.g target setting, it would go to the regional Director's Group, with the Chief Education Officer representing the Council. Members were also advised that the self-evaluation included in the business plan showed how the EAS scrutinised itself.
- The Committee raised concerns over the potential reductions to funding for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and how the loss of the EAL grant would be covered. It was advised that negotiations are still taking place although 30% reduction in the Multi-Ethnic Achievement grant was anticipated. The impact of this on Newport was unknown at this stage. Pending the final decision on this funding, the committee recommended a Report be requested by the relevant scrutiny committee to monitor the impact of any changes to funding levels in this area.
- The Challenger Advisor told the Committee of a project being run in Newport which was focused within Pill and Maesglas. The Heads worked together to discuss the best way to greet children who have potentially been moved from different countries and who do not necessarily speak English. The result was the New Arrivals project, which was a collection of resources such as sound cards for different languages. The Advisor advised this was available to the Committee on request.
- In response to a question about charges made to schools, it was advised that details were not in the report, but could be made available to the Committee on request. The charges were very limited, and charging only occurred when there were no grants to cover the costs. The majority of courses were nil charge. The EAS had not been told of any confusion within costing and charging for training within schools.

- While the level of training provided through the Challenge Advisor team had increased, the Advisor would need to check on the level of training provided by the Governors Support team. It was advised that all statutory governor training would be E-learning. Welsh Government had highlighted the importance for blended learning, as this was best practice.
- Members spoke of the need to ensure that there was an equal balance to hold training courses in Newport, as comments had been made in Governors Forum that some people found it difficult to travel to other authorities. The Officer advised that training courses in Newport were held in Newport High and Llanwern High. The aspiration was to move to more E-learning.
- The length of time a Chair of Governors could be in office was queried. It was advised that there was no fixed period under legislation, but this would be a matter for discussion with the school and the Challenge Advisor.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending and they were excused from the meeting. The Committee considered the evidence gathered through questioning the officers on the strategy and agreed to make the following comments to the Cabinet for consideration:

Conclusions

Following its consideration of the EAS Business Plan and local authority annex, the Committee had no specific concerns to raise about the content of the planned activity and targets, and was satisfied that the appropriate processes were in place to monitor progress. The committee were pleased to see the ongoing positive partnership between the EAS and the Local Authority, both locally and regionally. The committee were also pleased to note the numerous examples of best practice from Newport being shared across Wales and further afield.

The committee supported the protocol being developed to monitor the number of days dedicated by senior teaching staff to sharing best practice, to ensure balance between this and maintaining performance within their own schools.

The committee raised concerns over the potential reductions to funding for English as an Additional Language. Pending the final decision on this funding, the committee recommended a paper be requested by the relevant scrutiny committee to monitor the impact of any changes to funding levels in this area.

In following up on the discussion, the committee requested a copy of the self-evaluation timetable referenced in the report. The committee were also interested to receive further details of the new arrivals project cited as best practice.

The meeting terminated at 7.30 pm