

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 2 February 2022

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors M Linton, S Marshall, R Mogford, T Suller and K Whitehead

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate Centre), William Beer (NHS Public Health Team Consultant), Craig Lane (Citizens Advice), Steve Morgan (Natural Resources Wales), Harriet Bleach (Natural Resources Wales), Steve Tiley (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO)), Tracy McKim (Partnership Policy & Involvement Manager), Nicola Dance (Senior Policy & Partnership Officer), Geraint Willington (Director - EAS), Ed Pryce (Assistant Director - EAS), Sarah Davies (Principal Challenge Advisor - EAS), Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer), Andrew Powles (Deputy Chief Education Officer), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Felicity Collins

Apologies: Councillor Jane Mudd – (Leader of Newport City Council - Chair of One Newport), Councillors J Clarke, F Hussain and M Spencer

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 One Newport Wellbeing Plan 2021-22 Q2 Performance

Invitees:

- Councillor Jane Mudd - Leader of Newport City Council - Chair of One Newport Public Service Board (PSB) and Intervention Lead for the Newport Offer
- Bev Owen - Chief Executive of Newport City Council
- Rhys Cornwall – Strategic Director
- Nicola Dance – Senior Partnership Officer
- Tracy McKim – Policy, Partnership and Involvement Manager
- Will Beer - Intervention Lead for Strong Resilient Communities (NHS Public Health Team Consultant)
- Craig Lane Intervention Lead for Sustainable Travel (Newport Third Sector)
- Steve Morgan Intervention Lead for Green and Safe Spaces (Natural Resources Wales)
- Stephen Tiley Intervention Lead for Right Skills (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO))

Apologies were given for the Leader of the Council. The Intervention Lead for Strong and Resilient Communities informed the Committee that they will update them on the progress made against the key steps of the five objectives set out in the well-being plan as agreed by the partners. It reflects the work they are currently doing in the partnership rather than in their own constituencies; and the focus is all about the collaborative work

The Committee was advised that the Leader of the Council was unable to attend for the update and had asked that her apologies were offered at the Meeting. Members were advised that the Senior Partnership Officer and Strategic Director will cover the Newport Offer section.

Newport Offer

The Senior Partnership Officer gave a brief overview of the Newport Offer Intervention and how Newport Now has brought a local business perspective into the board and the Leads are keen to involve the Newport Youth Council as it has a long term focus for young people to also make the decisions. She referred to its aspiration to change perceptions and raise the profile of the city.

She pointed out the key re-generation projects such as shared ownership homes and green infrastructure works and the work for the city centre that has brought the Council together with Coleg Gwent and Newport Live. Also noted the collaboration with the Police and Newport Now on the application to retain the Purple Flag Status as it could provide stimulus for long term investment potential. Partners have been working hard to build it back up to how it was before with the tourism economy which has been hit very hard by the pandemic. Lots of investment via Transporter Bridge and partners putting on events such as the marathon and the Mercure hotel development in the City Centre. Survey work will also be done to establish performance measures in helping improve people's perceptions about the City.

Members asked the following:

- Members noted the need for Newport to have a diverse economy and asked if businesses have approached the PSB wanting to come into Newport.

The Senior Partnership Officer clarified that there are enquiries which come into the council for investment and work through the Newport Offer, Newport Now and Newport Economic Network. But in terms of direct enquiries, they do not get them through to the board itself but they are responded to by the team at the council.

- A Member commented that there seems to be two polarised perceptions of the City Centre. Looking at social media, some well-known traders will state the bad rather than the good through their experiences. Although there is activity for development within the city; there lies the issue that Newport has the most empty retail units in Great Britain. Despite there is ongoing work for development, it has to be acknowledged that people have a dark view of the City Centre and queried how the partners are managing that and bringing people into that conversation.

The Senior Partnership Officer responded that the main aim of the Newport Offer is about changing the perceptions of the City Centre and to promote the good news stories about Newport, and that these come from the works of individual partners, partnerships and the communities.

- Members asked if the partners work smoothly without much risk of overlapping in the work. If an overlap would occur, is it a challenge for the partners and are they dealt with well?

The Senior Partnership Officer confirmed it has not been a particular challenge but recognised as one as there are so many organisations working in the city centre. The Offer has an action to look at the different groups working which is a benefit.

- Members acknowledged the impact of online shopping on the City Centre and queried if partners have looked at other activities to encourage people into Newport,

such as through a mix of the arts and culture as they note they have the bowling alley there but have lost the cinema in the city centre.

The Senior Partnership Officer stated that the board has considered that with the initiatives that are tourism focused through the Newport Offer; the officer offered to pass on more information on that after the meeting.

- Members noted recognition of the work going on such as the bridge and market arcade developments as well as the green areas in town which helps with people's perceptions. Building on perceptions, the Member asked if anything was linked from the City Centre PSPO and from the Newport Offer stage.

Members were advised that it was more part of Safer Newport work, which has been part of the Newport Offer Board to inform partners. Members then asked if there has been any changes or amendments to the Board as a result of that. The Senior Partnership Officer confirmed not through the Newport Offer Board but potentially through other partnership boards.

The Strategic Director added that the PSPO work goes through the partnership structures around Safer Newport which is a safety partnership, which is separate but is linked in through the statutory partnership, part of Crime and Disorder Act Legislation. It is primarily led by the police and local authorities. Does not necessarily go through the Newport Offer but assured Members they are cognisant of what happens with the PSPO work.

Strong Resilient Communities

The Intervention Lead for Strong Resilient Communities gave a brief overview of the collaborative work and funding streams. £415,000.00 has been granted for community based projects to improve people's well-being and to help those in the community who have been hit hardest during the pandemic as they move into the recovery phase. They want to ensure they have the information they need to support them to improve their mental well-being and to build up resilient and cohesive communities. The Participatory Budgeting has been a way to empower residents in making decisions to stimulate community projects.

Steering group oversees these projects, such as Newport Access Group, Ethnic Minorities Youth Support team, these programmes have been successful so far. They speak to a local need and the Partner noted the Partnership Officer from Newport City Council, Huw Williams has been instrumental in driving the work.

The play based approaches were discussed in bringing agencies together with two well-being collaborative, one in Ringland and one in Pill. The Lead referred to the future plans for the next quarter which are set out in the highlight report provided and that they are looking at the representation and fairness commission to measure the impact that the programme has had.

Members asked the following:

- Are any other initiatives in other areas in Newport?

The Lead highlighted that the Well-being plan was never going to capture the full locality of the work happening, Ringland and Pill were to test out proof of concept on a small scale to bring partners together to give them a blueprint to extend to other areas. The next step for them would be to see how much they have achieved in those areas, then bring it to Bettws and other areas to see if they can make sure it has the right impact on other areas of Newport.

- Members commended the Early Years Work in Bettws. Normally the hubs are the main drivers with the work, and asked if normal members of the public come forward

to have an input on the work going on, just like how Communities First started off originally.

The Intervention Lead stated they need the bottom to top approach which is critical to the Well-being Plan. Trying to test out these methods to engage with the communities, such as the participatory budgeting which is allowing the communities to have their say and lead over the statutory services.

- The Member went on to ask if the team have had a good response from the communities involved.

The Lead confirmed they have had community conversations with different approaches in other areas, such as one project in Caerphilly which is postcards for the future. The residents would send in what they want to see for their future and the team responds by asking what they think they need to do to achieve that which has had a good response from to help and found it made people feel empowered to take action.

- Discussion ensued about the wider community and how sport plays a major role in children and young adult's lives as it would change attitudes so stated that everyone should encourage people to participate in sports.

The Lead recognised that anti-social behaviour can be linked to youths because they have been bored without anywhere to go. It is important as it encourages discipline and comradery. The midnight basketball idea was referred to which was based in New York. They introduced installing basketball courts in the area of anti-social behaviour reports. This example showed how community voices are important to be included in the decision making process.

- Members praised how the partners work together and that Newport is very multi-cultural. They fully appreciate that all people from walks of life are involved and asked if the partners are bringing everyone together and making sure they are able to take part.

The Intervention Lead confirmed that arts and cultural activities are a way to bring people together, important in creating more cohesive communities for the future. Those values are at the heart of the plan and they agree with the Member that it's important to include as many people in the community.

- Members noted the issue mentioned with working from home isolation, many lack social interaction and asked if the partners have worked together in relation to that.

The Lead confirmed they have struggled throughout the waves of the pandemic in looking across the board on how to open the community hubs back again safely, still quite a challenge with the current surge of omicron cases. There are issues for example such as volunteers who may be unable to go as they are shielding/anxious to venture back out however when they move toward Spring/Summer things may be better. They are looking at ways on how to address this social anxiety and to get people out again. It was recognised that interactions are less due to working from home and the partners are looking at what they need to do in the recovery phase.

- The Member went on to explain how some colleagues from his workplace meet weekly to go for a walk and a chat which has been hugely beneficial. Grassroots ideas like that should be encouraged and asked if partners are trying to reach to organisations to promote things like that further.

The Lead stated that there is a strong overlap between strong communities with safe and green spaces which will be clear later on in the meeting. The Lead referred to previous work on a community centre which was placed but not open too much, so they are looking to open safe and accessible spaces where the community can have more ownership over those.

There will be discussion on sustainable travel to help get people out of their cars such as a safe route to schools etc. to help others connect in ways they may not have done beforehand.

- Have the partners linked in and engaged with young people on strategies?

The Lead confirmed the steering group, with young people are the people they wish to meet and want the young people on the steering group. It was acknowledged that it is difficult to identify people who represent the whole of the young people as it is a very diverse community but the partners are trying to do it and know that they can do better. The Lead noted they are working with the well-being of the future generations act in mind so assured the Committee they are trying to be representative of the people in Newport.

- The Member went on to ask the Lead to confirm the lead partners in their area.

Craig Lane works for Citizens Advice Bureau and chairs the Newport Third Sector Partnership – a range of voluntary organisations represented by that partnership and they also work quite closely with GAVO, Newport City Homes. They work quite close with NCH with their masterplans and built in environments and with developers of Ringland hubs alongside officers within the council in a range of service areas such as Chris Humphreys, Sally Ann Jenkins and then the other area in Regeneration with Bev Owen. Some of those partners it is about stimulating grass roots activities, some to change the environment for communities, improving infrastructure/hubs. All partners have an important role to play.

- How the partners communicate with elderly residents who are not easy to contact/on social media technology?

The Lead confirmed he has spoken with Senior Citizens Forum in Newport who are active and noted there has been disadvantages of the digital transformation as well as the advantages. The network of Well-being Champions work, there has been to get word of mouth out to residents. When community hubs are open again, they will look to put up information on noticeboards and speak with the hub managers. It was recognised that there are elderly people who are digitally excluded so their approach will be nuanced with that as they cannot fully rely on technology for everything.

- Discussion ensued on how the pandemic has exposed how isolated the elderly can be from day to day social interactions and leaflet campaigns could work to help combat that. Members then asked how often partners refer to the councillors/community councillors and how the organisations out-reach to the members.

It was noted that members are involved in the participatory budgeting programme and the team has met with them occasionally in asset mapping. It is something they could strengthen to have a two way conversation with the Members to collectively know together. This could be facilitated through Democratic Services.

- Members expressed concern on the lack of changing facilities for sporting teams, such as for the Ringland area. Members then wished to commend the results with NCH and future developments going on for the area.

The Lead was involved in the development of the masterplan with NCH and they spent a lot of time looking at the hub and the mention was the changing facilities. It was used as a flexible space to encourage more in the community than the idea developed for the playing fields plus the well-being centre. If and when that goes ahead, they will be using that space flexibly as well. It was advised that could be a discussion with the hub manager. As it will be a well-being area, not sure it would be appropriate for the area but will look into it if area can be moved around a bit.

- The Committee thanked the Lead, acknowledged that the teams may not afford it starting up with expenses of the ongoing funds and asked if the Lead could consider the above suggestion for the Partners to consider that for the whole of Newport including Ringland for facilities usage. And asked if the Leader could come back to the Committee on the next meeting on that.

The Lead agreed he would take that to the partners to consider and discuss.

Right Skills

The Right Skills Intervention Lead introduced the Intervention to the Committee and gave a brief overview of the well-being dashboard and advised the Committee that similarly to comments made in the earlier Progress Updates by other Leads, assured Members that positive strides were being made but highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the work, which has brought challenges. Members were informed of the key achievements and successes from the quarter in steps, mentioning the development on the Virtual Careers Week for students in Year 9 and above in Newport schools focused on the health, social care and childcare sectors and also workshops to address longer term skill needs. Adult Learner Week is to be promoted by the team developing online content and the Lead noted that the One Newport Board has agreed to establish a group to support the promotion of Welsh language skills in the workplace.

The Lead noted that £800,000 grant funding has been secured from the Community Renewal Fund for “Foot in the Door” project to be delivered by Ffilm Cymru. The Newport project will develop skills required by the screen sector, create training and employment opportunities for young people in the city, and support strong working links between the screen sector and education providers locally.

The Lead explained the key measure performance indicators with the committee and covered the plans for the next quarter and for the future, such as delivering an online careers event for schools focused on the health and social sector which is scheduled for November 2022.

Members asked the following:

- Members recognised that online engagement is a challenge and acknowledged that the area comes with a number of challenges and asked if the numbers spiked of younger adults in NEAT (Not in Education And Training) as a result of the pandemic.

The Lead advised he would need to look at the numbers as the pandemic will skew those numbers as WG gives them a percentage that would go into that but they need more information on that, will be by June but cannot comment as it's difficult to comment on whether it's the right amount. It could be a case going back a few years ago who might have ended up going into helping those not wanting to go into educational employment. The Lead explained that by addressing it and looking at it how they are now as a board, and trying to ensure there are pathways in support for people going down that route; it might help the situation moving forward. Would like to

see how pandemic has affected that and will analyse the data to see how to mitigate that.

- Members asked if numbers get better or stay the same. – Can bring something back to you from Report in June to send more information across when it's in.

The Strategic Director added that in his experience 12 years ago, they had 10% of school leavers not becoming in NEAT. It has been brought right down since then and it would be interesting to see the impact of the pandemic on that. As it is too early to know from that but all partners involved, voluntary sector and careers wales, training providers have worked hard to ensure these individuals have opportunities. Each person not in education or training is a lost opportunity.

- Is the grant a long term agreement?

The Lead confirmed unfortunately it is only until June but they will monitor that to give more opportunities for people to get involved in different sectors from the legacy of it. Tight timescale but a lot of work has gone into putting into the bids, so the team is focused on how the money is going to be spent; as the ball is rolling on how to use the grant efficiently.

- In regards to apprenticeships; if firms are willing to take on people who do not serve a five year term and commented that the terms seem to be shortening.

The Intervention Lead agreed with the comment as the apprenticeships are getting fewer and far between unfortunately but there are lots of organisations open with opportunities for the team to work with. The public sector partners try to support that and promote those as well. The Members were informed that they work with University South Wales and the colleagues are tied into those so are trying to link the individuals within the education area.

- Is there any linking in with other partners to work together to hold apprenticeships with the new partnerships on board?

The Intervention Lead confirmed that apprenticeships has been discussed but is something on their radar. It is something they would need to re-visit and partners would have apprenticeships they would bring on. There are a few trying to advertise the opportunities via local authorities which are linked into the right skills. As they progress forward it is something they can look into.

- Members mentioned with regard to Covid recovery; empowerment of volunteers that stepped up during the pandemic. The Member asked if there has been consideration for them to be accredited through the work they have done with qualifications to allow them to prove the skills they have.

The Lead confirmed that volunteering is one of their key aims and they have a volunteering centre. There has been huge support from the partners for the volunteers and commended the work from the volunteers. Volunteering can be treated as a stepping stone to a career and builds on people's ability to work with people as qualifications can be a grey area as with qualifications sometimes they require actual work experience but ways of volunteering could link to that. The ideal is for volunteers to be recognised in the schemes for the work they have done.

Green and Safe Spaces

The Intervention Lead provided the Committee with a brief overview of the intervention dashboard to the Committee to show how the team is delivering against the well-being objectives. The Lead noted a key achievement so far as the Network Workshop (September 2021) created further partnership work with opportunities to collaborate and saw the network membership expand from that. He also referred to the new Community Green Flag Award achieved for the Laundry at Tredegar House and 5 other Green Flags retained for another year.

Members were informed that they have successfully secured funding for a City Centre Green Infrastructure (GI) feasibility study by March 2022 to identify opportunities for GI, engage with partners and businesses with the intention that the GI is part of the future plans. The Newport City Council Climate Change Plan draft incorporates the aspects of this intervention with a tree planting target and advised the Members that the draft will go out for comment.

The Lead also went into detail with the future plans for the quarter such as applying support the woodland wellbeing sessions in Bettws and continue to strengthen links and opportunities with Housing Associations and will look to promote volunteering opportunities via Newsletter.

Members asked the following:

- A Committee Member confirmed with the partners that the 'road to nowhere' area would be turned into a nature reserve and asked if they will be liaising with the Welsh Government to get the nearby Lake turned into a part of the reserve.

The Intervention Lead was not aware of that engagement but agreed to take that on board as a great idea. The partner fully understood the issue as it was an eye sore with the issue of fly-tipping and the result is well overdue. The Lead agreed to take on board that idea suggested.

- A Member asked if ash trees are being felled in the woods by Morgraig Avenue in Duffryn.

The Lead clarified that unfortunately the rate of felling is high at the moment as there are a lot of tree diseases and also new tree diseases in Wales. The trees mentioned are being felled for ash die back disease, there is a lot of larch disease. There is a lot of health issues with ash. Despite this, there are a lot of initiatives for tree planting. The Welsh Government have a national forest objective and working with a number of partners to see what they can do. Also it was explained that the partners are discussing initiatives with the private/public sectors on how to maximise lands for the future with tree planting.

- Members commented on the small green spaces in England that he has seen when driving past with wildflowers and asked if the team has considered for the same to go into the areas of Newport. Members also went on to raise the issue that is with every local authority of antisocial behaviour in the form of off-road bikers and quad bikes in green spaces and therefore asked if there is an opportunity for the partners to engage with those and find an area of land to help mitigate the behaviour.

In response, the intervention lead noted that they are planning on planting specific colourful species around the City as it was noted that they need to use particular species in certain areas. The Lead referred to the November's e-Newsletter which listed specific examples of plants and wildflowers they have used in Newport and will focus on those in the next update for the q3. It was stated that Members could see some of the work done so far along the riverfront from interventions and partnerships but agreed it is good to see and replicate ideas around the area.

On the second point, the Lead was mindful that this was not relevant to the partnership but it is something they do consider as they partner with other organisations outside of the interventions, such as with the police.

The partner recognised that anti-social behaviour such as wild-fires and quad biking for example can be issues and have found from initiatives such as the idea of providing a space for quad-bikers to go to; found that they do not want to be contained within a space and wish to explore and develop their own tracks. Members were informed that the partners are considering it a lot for safer green spaces to tackle the issue but ensure that people can enjoy their time outdoors but also not damage the environment.

Sustainable Travel

The Intervention Lead introduced the Sustainable Travel Intervention to the Committee and referred to the aim of reducing carbon emissions through encouraging active transport and public transport to mitigate climate change and to promote the health benefits from that. Initiatives were mentioned, three primary schools are involved at the moment to discourage the use of vehicles to create safer sustainable spaces around schools. Active Travel Network Map will be used to plan active travel development plans for the future. It was noted the partners are keen to take advantage of the behaviour change encouraged by pandemic in reduced private car use and encourage active travel, a stakeholder workshop has been done to see how to make that permanent.

Committee were informed of the public awareness campaign with a video shared on social media, and provided an update on the Devon Bridge project progression, and implemented lighting on shared routes with low level lighting in order to not cause light pollution. The Lead stressed that the partners are mindful that some people are unable to take part in active travel so are being realistic with their work. The partners are in the process of getting funding for bike hire within Newport, as Newport is hilly, it was noted they need electrical bikes included so further funding has been applied for.

Members asked the following:

- Members raised the issue of the Fflecsi service not being able to reach all areas of Newport so stressed that it is difficult for residents to partake in active travel initiatives.

The Policy, Partnership and Involvement Manager added that the Intervention Lead is a partner where they are reviewing the partnership progress for the well-being plan. Partners recognise that within the wellbeing plan this is a challenge and noted that it is important that this has been recognised as a challenge and there are a number of partners working together to resolve the issue of active travel.

- A Committee Member referred to the mention of the electric car charging points and wished to suggest other local areas away from main roads and within wards. The Member asked how they would go about requesting the points to go within the wards.

The Intervention Lead responded, stating that as it is early days, they recognise that accessibility and affordability of the vehicles is an issue and not everyone has off street parking for the points. The charging points will be key to ensure low emission vehicles are being used sustainably and advised they are at the mapping stage to sort this. It was agreed that they need to be creative in place them for communities to use accessibly and the Lead noted that they would take this back to the partners to look into.

The Committee thanked all of the officers and partners for their comprehensive presentations and for their time in answering the questions. They praised the teams on the work they have done so far.

Conclusions:

1. The Committee **noted** the performance within the One Newport Well-being Plan 2021-22 Quarter 2 Performance Appendices 1 to 5.
2. The Committee **made** the following comments to the Public Services Board:

The Committee Members thanked the Intervention Leads for attending and praised the commitment and work of the partners, the Members recognised that there is a strong working partnership taking place. Members also noted some parts of the interventions cross over as they fit in naturally without duplication, much like the Green Safe Spaces and Newport Offer.

The Newport Offer

Members requested if further details could be given on tourism related initiatives currently running, and planned within Newport.

Strong, Resilient Communities

The Committee asked for the Strong and Resilient Communities Intervention Lead to look into the start-up fees for clubs, new developments on hubs within Ringland and if other areas of Newport have similar plans of work to use our facilities and buildings for different purposes to engage more people in the community.

Right Skills

The Committee wished to note their support for the hard working team of volunteers behind the projects and would like their work would be recognised.

Green and Safe Spaces

The Committee asked if partners could liaise with the Welsh Government to turn the 'Road to Nowhere' into a nature reserve.

Sustainable Travel

The Committee spoke of the importance of having more charging points throughout the city for electric vehicles, and understand that they would need to be creatively and evenly placed in communities where they can be used excessively.

3 Education Achievement Services (EAS) Business Plan 2022-25

Invitees:

- Sarah Morgan - Chief Education Officer/Head of Education (NCC)
- Geraint Willington – Director – EAS
- Ed Pryce – Assistant Director – EAS
- Sarah Davies – Principal Challenge Advisor (EAS)

The Chief Education Officer introduced the EAS team and their report and introduced the Assistant Director of EAS to cover the key lines of the business plan. The Assistant Director provided the Committee with a brief overview of how the EAS team and partners have reviewed how they wrote the business plan and stressed that the fundamentals such as Local Authority Strategic plans would not change and that the initial feedback from other stakeholders and what the EAS will change in the final version.

Members were informed of the 5 key priorities for the group after the feedback from the Directors and School Improvement Lead session and referred to these within the report. The Assistant Director explained the EAS Vision for 2025 and covered what the EAS will do to

achieve the vision, such as ensuring that all schools are able to access a universal offer and professional teaching, a set number of days to work with a school improvement partner. It was noted that bespoke support would be developed for schools who require more intensive work. Members were informed that the EAS will report on the progress it is making towards the impact statements within the business plan.

Members asked the following:

- The Committee thanked the officers for their comprehensive presentation and praised them on the work they have been doing.
- Members referred to page 31 with regard to encouraging youth/learner voices and asked if any changes have been made to how the partnership works because of that learner voice being included.

The EAS Assistant Director confirmed that a colleague of his, Cath Bevan; Assistant Director, looks after their well-being strategies, has liaised with numerous school councils offering the vision for feedback and has undertaken an exercise. Members were advised that the partner has not seen the feedback as of yet but assured the Committee that it will be incorporated into the final version and published as one of the appendices, as EAS do for standard procedure.

- Members asked in relation to the challenge of staffing numbers mentioned; how the EAS team have experienced putting the plan into motion during a reduction of staff, or if they have adapted it with the new way of working.

It was clarified that the EAS had a minor restructure last year and that they take advantage of opportunities where they help with staffing. The Member was directed to 3.4 of the report where it also states they have always passed on efficiency savings to the local authority. It was explained that they may be at a point where any further efficiency savings at the core would become more challenging in future years.

The Committee was assured that they are committed to the model of the partnership with the school improvement partners who are the best of the professionals and leading network schools. The EAS monitor that and broker their support to them in line with the objectives set. It is similar in the governance team as they have a much smaller team managing the centre and have a flexible pool of casual clerks.

The EAS felt that model is effective as it offers efficiency savings into the system as well, both for schools and local authorities.

- Members highlighted the challenges of the situation from the pandemic with free school meals and asked the partners what they have been looking at to work with that challenge with other local authorities.

It was advised the Members would expect it to be heavily embedded in the well-being area with free school meals, but it is embedded in all areas but with particular groups of learners with free school meals might have socio-economic disadvantage. They will be the priority of the plan and in the reporting metrics. It was acknowledged that the pandemic has had the greatest impact on the most socio-economically disadvantaged therefore all of their strategies have elements ensuring that the teachers focus on those

learners. They have found that as by-product, other learners have benefited from that too.

- Members mentioned the recent education law changes in Wales relating to those with disabilities/additional learning needs and asked the if that has had any bearing on the way the partners have worked in the partnership and if so, how.

The Chief Education Officer confirmed that it is a partnership approach so the local authorities lead on the transportation and there has been a team that would lead schools. However the EAS partners dovetail into that strategy. For instance, they look at the good quality teachers included for the quality, and what they should do is look at the differentiation and setting appropriate challenges for pupils. So the partners support the council with that aspect as an example.

- Members asked if there had been any challenges in the last 12 months while coming into the recovery phase from the pandemic whilst going into the business plan. And asked if the partners foresaw the challenges.

The EAS Partner confirmed that one of their greatest challenges was last autumn where with some of the waves of COVID, they had assumptions that they were ready to drive forward with the school improvement agenda. But it was advised that they did that at a stage where schools were not ready at those stages as they were facing challenges of staffing in schools. From that, they have gained a stronger insight with stronger avenues to be able to listen to the head teachers in virtual meetings too and stated they felt that the partnership became much stronger.

The Chief Education Officer added that during the pandemic, the EAS and Local Authority maximised the work with schools where possible. An example was mentioned where the EAS put on professional learning led by the speaker who was approved specifically for leadership changes and adapting in challenging circumstances. They will retain and build on the successes and asses what they will leave behind some things they did before the pandemic. Therefore it was stated that in itself it has provided a good springboard for the partners to take those successes with them and helped them provide good self-evaluation and for the co-operation from the schools.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions:

3. The Committee **noted** the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2022-2025
4. The Committee **made** the following comments to the EAS and Cabinet:
 - The Committee thanked the officers for attending and complimented the Business Plan as very clear in their goals with a good understanding. Members were pleased to see that the partnership is still healthy. Members were also happy with the information contained within the report, and wished to feedback that the Business Plan read a lot better to previous reports.

- The Committee wished to request for the partners to keep them apprised of any key changes.
- Members were pleased to hear that the partnership have been liaising with school councils offering the vision feedback for learner voices and that it will be incorporated into the final report.

4 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Invitee:

Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

a) Actions Plan (Appendix 1)

The Scrutiny Adviser advised the Members that the comments and recommendations were sent over for the Gwent Well-being Assessment and the Regional Population Needs from the meeting on 20 January.

Members were informed that the officer is waiting on confirmation from the Leader on the Dementia Awareness online training session taking place in February. Once the adviser knows further, it was agreed he would send this out to the Members so they can take part.

The meeting terminated at 20:12