



# Agenda

## Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: Wednesday, 3 November 2021

Time: 5.00 pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting

To: Councillors J Clarke (Chair), F Hussain, M Linton, S Marshall, R Mogford, M Spencer, T Suller and K Whitehead

Item	Wards Affected
1	<u>Apologies</u>
2	<u>Declarations of Interest</u>
3	<u>Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 October 2021</u> (Pages 3 - 14)
4	<u>Norse Joint Venture Partnership</u> (Pages 15 - 30)
5	<u>Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money 2020-21</u> (Pages 31 - 64)
6	<u>Conclusions of Committee Reports</u> Following the completion of the Committee reports, the Committee will be asked to formalise its conclusions, recommendations and comments on previous items for actioning.
7	<u>Scrutiny Adviser Reports</u> (Pages 65 - 74) a) Forward Work Programme Update ( <b>Appendix 1</b> )  b) Actions Plan ( <b>Appendix 2</b> )  c) Information Reports ( <b>Appendix 3</b> )

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Date of Issue: Wednesday, 27 October 2021

d) Scrutiny Letters (**Appendix 4**)

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Live event

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# Draft Minutes

## Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

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Date: 6 October 2021

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Clarke (Chair), Hussain, S Marshall, R Mogford and M Spencer

In Attendance: Councillor Jane Mudd (Leader of Newport City Council & Chair of One Newport Public Services Board, Beverly Owen (Chief Executive), Huw Jakeway (Chief Fire Officer, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service), Nicola Prygodzicz (Executive Director of Planning, Digital and IT, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board), Guy Lacey (Principal, Coleg Gwent), Harriet Bleach (Natural Resource Wales), Will Beer (Public Health Wales), Tracy McKim (Partnership Policy & Involvement Manager), Nicola Dance (Senior Policy & Partnership Officer), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser) and Felicity Collins (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors M Linton, T Suller, K Whitehead, Craig Lane

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### 1 Declarations of Interest

None.

### 2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 July 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 July 2021 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

### 3 Public Services Board Well-being Plan Annual Report 2020-21

Invitee;

Councillor Jane Mudd – Leader of Newport City Council and Chair of One Newport Public Service Board (PSB)

The Chair of One Newport Public Service Board (PSB) introduced the four well-being objectives to the committee and advised that the partnership have delivered a range of projects despite the difficult circumstances. There is ongoing close collaboration and a focus on long term improvements for the local communities. The report emphasises the partnership work in action and that the partners are very proud of the achievements from it. There are examples of the work to demonstrate their understanding that wellbeing is multi-dimensional and depends on teamwork for involvement of the communities of Newport.

The pandemic has shown that One Newport PSB's partners have a massive capacity and strong community resilience. This has been showcased through a number of examples of individuals coming together to support one another; the partnership wish to sustain and support this. This year, the partnership reviewed their objectives in light of the impact of COVID-19 and as part of the change; the partnership adopted a new vision for plan. All of the partnership activity seeks to deliver a proud and friendly City where both people and places thrive. The partners wanted to recognise that it is still a troubling time for the local

communities and that the PSB is committed to support these businesses. The partnership listens to the local individuals and appreciate that the action they take must bring about the best outcome for the years ahead. The new formation of the PSB for Gwent could create new opportunities and for stream lined governance. Members were assured that the representatives for Newport City Council will ensure that Newport gets the focus and unique consideration that it warrants and sought to deliver against the well-being objectives.

**First Well-being Objective:**

Invitee;

Beverly Owen – Newport City Council Chief Executive

The Chief Executive advised that the annual report is a testament to how everyone has worked together. Reference was made to the Purple Flag Status and referred Members to the report for the team's commitment to Place Making Wales Charter as an important backdrop on how the council delivers. In terms of achievements and interventions, there are numerous projects with a lot of progress made since the well-being plan has been developed. Members were reminded that this has been delivered in the face of a global pandemic but despite this the partners are maintain progress as best as they can. A few interventions were noted, which included The Chartist Tower Development which continues to progress despite being curtailed by the pandemic. Market Arcade which is due for completion in Winter 2021 to early Spring 2022, will be a real achievement to the Council and partners especially Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Welsh Government.

The Chief Executive also advised the Committee of numerous ambitious projects underway, such as the Newport Knowledge Quarter, work on the Transporter Bridge and the city the City to continuing to develop its strategic events programme for a broader cultural offer; for instance the Newport Wales Marathon becoming a regular event in the calendar. It was then advised that it was from the work of the PSB; this could not have been done without the partners. But not just about the PSB, also it is from the work from the Business Improvement District, Newport Now, Newport Economic Network, Safer Newport and other strong relationships that the Council has forged with partners who work hard to keep city moving forward.

**Second Well-being Objective:**

Invitees:

Guy Lacey - Principal, Coleg Gwent

Will Beer – Consultant, Aneurin Bevan Health Board

The Lead Partner gave a brief overview of the progress of the interventions that have been developed to see if people have the skills to develop thriving cities. The officer highlighted the Digital Fair Event and Youth Engagement Profession Work. School Learning Coaches – providing alternative learning at the end of compulsory education – this has successfully reduced the number of needs. Other interventions noted by the officers included Film Cymru has been set up to promote careers in television and shows. A bid has been made to the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund, and is hopeful they will be able to extend this to run a six month programme.

The Consultant for Aneurin Bevan Health Board stressed the importance of Early Years Development. The foundations for human development are laid down in the early years. Therefore this explains why the partner wants to ensure that every child has the best start in life as adverse child experiences can massively affect their long term outcomes. Therefore this is a crucial area they would like to focus on for future generations. The officer went into detail of two case studies in Bettws; the Early Years Path Finder, which would be a better means of communication and integrating the services for each stage from antenatal services up until the age of five years old. Also, The Early Learning Community, which is

complementary to the first programme). This is funded by Save the Children but is a community approach – to see what conditions affect people's wellbeing in the community i.e such as digital exclusion, what affects their physical and social development. The team hope this will be a blueprint for the rest of Newport.

### **Third Well-being Objective:**

Invitees:

Nicola Prydodzicz – Director of Planning in Digital IT, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board – Joint Chair of Strong Resilient Communities Intervention Group with South Wales Police  
Huw Jakeway - South Wales Fire and Rescue Service – Joint Chair of Strong Communities  
Harriet Bleach -

The Partner from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) provided an overview of the Participatory Budgeting Project – a project where the Health Board works with the Newport City Council in partnership with a company called Mutual Gain which are external consultants who are experienced in community engagement. They used £100,000 of Health Board funding for prevention, to engage with communities and asked them to put a bid in for grass root community projects to see how they could have an impact on Covid recovery and reduce inequalities.

There was a huge interest in this, as 83 projects were put forward by the communities where 400 residents took part in the online voting programme. Out of 83 projects, 24 of which were successful with funding ranging from £1000 to £10,000. Team are looking at projects which were not successful in case they might meet some of the criteria. The successful projects range from youth projects, digital inclusion and family based groups. The broad ranging community projects saw a build-up of enthusiasm from the communities. Previous work has been done on a smaller scale in Pill and Ringland, so the team applied their learnings from this.

Work has been recently undertaken by way of surveys with communities around well-being and levels of mental distress in the context of the pandemic. Key factors from this correlating to mental distress, where there is a good level of social interaction and personal resilience, there are lower incidents reported of mental distress. This shows how the Participatory Budget could bring about opportunities with these factors. They will follow this up in terms of impact and the team will look into how to roll this out further as they understand more about its success.

The partner representative for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service informed the Committee from a brevity perspective; the partner stated that they have learnt that from pandemic that they value their green spaces more and pointed out that there are examples in the report. The Partner highlighted the work with the Newport veterans' hub in creating an allotment facility to help the mental well-being of the veterans and building on the existing volunteer work that they have so there are discussions ongoing with G.A.V.O on this. The partner stressed that their ambition is to utilise the green spaces and that they are observing the pilot being done currently in Caerphilly to learn from that. The Partner personally thanked a fellow partner, Harriet Bleach and the team from Natural Resource Wales that continue to fund the project. Harriet has grown the green network up to 130 participants. Members were informed that this network is very active but has been impacted by the pandemic but the team are working hard with updates and looking to get a digital platform while restricted.

### **Fourth Objective:**

Invitees:

Huw Jakeway - Chief Fire Officer, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service  
Harriet Bleach – Natural Resources Wales

The Partner informed the Committee that he would like to tie the fourth objective in with the third and picked up on the maximising of green spaces which were mentioned in the reports.

It was stressed to the Members that if the green spaces are utilised then residents will feel safer and secure. There is currently a data-mapping exercise between Newport City Council, Gwent Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the fly tipping team to get an overview of disturbances, anti-social behaviour, deliberate fire setting etc., in green spaces so they can target resources to where appropriate. Through the Joint Emergency Services Group where the Chief Constable of Gwent Police who has been leading on a campaign against violence against emergency workers which has been data-mapped. There will be an opportunity where they can overlay information from emergency services workers in the local communities into this piece of work as well.

The Committee asked the following:

- A Member of the Committee mentioned the challenge of sustainable transport within the report and expressed concern that the new flecsi bus initiative does not cover the whole of Newport as it cuts off in some wards. The flecsi bus has been observed to not have many passengers. Could the board partners if they could comment on if this is effective enough?

The Leader clarified that to Committee that the partners present are there to report on the plan and partners are present to comment on the plan specifically; not any Newport City Council plan initiatives.

The Leader pointed out that the partners are looking at a range of interventions around sustainability, active travel and clean air that will enhance the lives of citizens of Newport. It was mentioned they participated in Clean Air Day and are currently looking at active travel routes. This work in the plan showcases how the partners collectively work across the public sector to look into how to improve the lives of the residents. It was mentioned there are transport interventions across Cardiff Capital region for example electric taxi vehicles, electric buses. With this partner organisation they were able to share and promote where they were converting part of their electric vehicles. There is quite a significant investment in sustainability across the partnership as they recognise it is very important. In the long term, the partners are looking to introduce partnership cycle hire and are developing the green infrastructure map which will demonstrate to people on how they can access sustainable green space.

The Leader stressed that sustainability is part of an integral part of the future generations' aims, which the achievements from the interventions undertaken will be a golden thread that the public service board and partners have tried very hard to integrate since the plan was set up.

- Members commented that it was good to learn about the work that the Newport Armed Forces Forum and Newport City Council have been doing with the Veterans' hub. However, there is still work that needs to be done with veterans but also for emergency services workers as well. Members further congratulated the partners as they would like them to keep up the good work for the veterans.
- Members referred to the third paragraph on page 86 of the plan; where it states the partnership is performing well against most of its indicators. They asked the partners to expand on the terminology of 'well' and how the partners see themselves to be working well? If they could mark themselves, for instance, out of a scale of ten.

The Leader noted in terms of progress, they rate their progress in a ranking, by rating the partnerships' progress against the rate of their interventions in a rating system. Overall, they have consolidated the partnership as they have just started to make improvements to the lives of citizens as the examples demonstrate in the report. The Leader welcomed input from the partners on this.

The Early Years Consultant for ABUHB commented that they feel they are doing well but could do better. One of the things they are trying to be of the partnership, is complacent. They want to be constantly improving in terms of more objective measures. The partner has got the 'Thriving Places Index' which allows them to rank Newport compared to other Local Authorities across the UK. This allows the partnership to have a specific focus on areas that affect people's well-being within the city.

Two further points were mentioned; firstly that it is important that they are not the place in which where they improve and do better and ensure that those four objectives are working at the heart of everything they do. And secondly, if looking at more objective measures, they have got the Thriving Places Index which allows the partner to focus on those different domains of well-being within the City which allows then to rank their position.

- The Partners were asked if they felt if evaluating themselves every two years is sufficient enough to make sure things are progressively changing and also in challenging each other not just their ideas.

The partner from Coleg Gwent offered reassurance to the Committee that officers interact on performance. Members were provided with an example of a subgroup called 'Write Skills Group' where they routinely look at the work plan and ask partners to contribute updates on progress. The challenge was acknowledged but they ask people to contribute their time for a joint purpose.

Members were advised they challenge and debate whether the partners can do things better. The partner mentioned that he is a chair of a meeting which brings in numerous representatives from different organisations which entails a lot of encouragement, cajoling and underlying challenge on reflection on an ongoing basis.

The Early Years Consultant for ABUHB also commented that over the last 18 months, it has been mostly challenging due to the Covid response. It has left the partners with an opportunity on where to go in terms of pandemic recovery, as it showed the partners what matters and that is people's well-being. It was argued that a huge amount has been achieved by the PSB and now have the opportunity to re-group as they move to the recovery phase.

The Chair of Strong Resilient Communities Network mentioned that they have been a part of the PSB since its inception and have been personally involved in a number of discussions on how they adapted their business on the back of evaluations. The partner explained they will be due on soon as unable to during the pandemic. It was stressed that strong links have been made and relations that they did not have before that. The strong links were a foundation for this and are fully thankful now than they were before.

The Leader concluded that the partnership has developed a broad development action plan to challenge the partnership sessions; which helps them know how they are being effective and learn from that as well as self-evaluation. They have taken this forward and one decision was to invite the Chair of Scrutiny Committee to attend the meetings to observe that the PSB has got that 'golden thread' for connectivity. Further, the Leader mentioned how this highlights the partnership's willingness to be scrutinised and to get feedback.

It was noted that the Chair has agreed to first of the sessions and that will be with the Newport Youth Council. They are proud to be engaging as not only does this help the partnership development; but it also helps them to evaluate their progress and recognising that they are reaching groups of people.

- Members noted the mention of Covid recovery and advised that they would be interested to hear what the panel says on; whether they feel the difference in working from home has made them efficient in delivery or has it challenged the projects with partners not being able to meet face to face?

The Early Years Development (ABUHB) partner mentioned that they were deployed to the COVID-19 incident co-ordinating centre since February 2020; with the Track, Trace and Protect programme across Gwent and the mass vaccination programme. This shows what can be achieved with cross party support with a unified objective with a fully engaged public and programme that is fully resourced, and they have been able to use advances in digital technology to support the response. There is a huge amount of learning from the pandemic, if the communities have got those conditions right then they can achieve significant outcomes in short period of time. Moving forward it would be good to take this perspective and look at other very important issues such as child poverty and climate change.

- Members asked the partners where they see themselves moving forward closer together in the future as a partnership. As the City has great interventions with hotels and markets to sell the city; is the City doing enough for tourism to sell itself? Members further queried how could the panel can test themselves and collectively do more for benefit of citizens in local area?

The Chief Executive referred the Committee to their brief run through of the plethora of projects that are ongoing in Newport for the first objective. The PSB is aware that it cannot just be a programme for project delivery as it is about the offer. There are two aspects of that which were discussed at length with Newport One and Newport Now Business Improvement District around; how they can develop an indigenous narrative about Newport, and how can they make sure the residents become proud. As pride is about the market tool. The second aspect has been talking to a range of local businesses, SMEs and largest employers on how the partners can market themselves to the wider world.

The City has a rich cultural offer and mentioned its aspiration around the City of Culture. It is certainly on the One Newport PSB's radar but however considering the last 18 months has been difficult to further the momentum. For example they are developing the events programme, and the website as they move through the pandemic and looking to see how they can pick that

momentum back up. Members were assured that this is something on the One Newport's radar for future plans.

The Partner for the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service echoed the sense of pride as something that the PSB has had to drive through Newport City Council's brand. It was acknowledged that it could be difficult for the PSB to be able to do that, as its being able to work through the brand that people connect with. On the topic of pride in Newport; there are 130 volunteers in the Green Network to encourage biodiversity spaces in Newport. Members were advised that this emphasises that people want to embrace the biodiversity and everything that Newport is. The partner also mentioned how important it is for the partnership to work on the connection outside of the PSB with resident schools to improve biodiversity in the green spaces within Newport.

- Members commented on the green spaces within their ward such as St. Mary's, the community gardens, Eveswell, and Food for Life which all have brilliant initiatives where a lot of volunteers are getting involved in the greening in Maindee. Members congratulated the partnership on that as it is a positive to their diverse ward who all got involved on the issue. For example they are working on the mural in Maindee; that is a project they look forward to seeing finished.

The Partner representative from Natural Resources Wales confirmed that Maindee Unlimited are great projects which ran ten projects at once. This is a brilliant example of communities working together and volunteering – by creating the community gardens; the partner noted that they work with that particular group quite often. The partner stressed that the community is key in terms of sustainability and would like to keep it going as they make a difference.

- Members noted the regeneration of the city centre with the bringing in of the living quarters with grants as great to see that work going ahead. Are there projects with electric charging parking points to bring people in, to live in the City?

The Chief Executive highlighted are lot of achievements, but also a lot more in progress which are not included in the report; such as the leisure project and the quarter. As part of their wider future planning and what they endeavour to do will be as sustainable as possible. For instance, public sector building electric charging points. Despite some in very early stages, regeneration work infra-structure time does take a while to come to fruition. Conversations on this are ongoing and within the next few years they are hoping they will be involved in future developments.

- Are any fears on deadlines as a partnership?

The Chief Executive advised that in terms of key initiatives that were highlighted there will always be project risks but they are on track for delivery. As sustainable interventions, in terms of risk; these are monitored regularly and reported back to the PSB from a risk management perspective therefore are on track to deliver within the timescales. All partnerships are signed up to the sustainable travel charter which was launched, the lead officer linked this

back to Clean Air Day as all partners realise what needs to be done. This is a challenge but it everyone involved are working very well together.

The Early Years Consultant commented on the point about development; one is of the achievements with supplementary planning guidance for sustainable travel. This is the Council's responsibility however it is open to the partners to input; this is a great opportunity from the public health point of view on how this can help the partnership achieve public health outcomes. This chance to contribute is a good example of collaboration.

- Comment was made regarding greening and regeneration with the interest in becoming more carbon neutral. Is there information on each of the properties of the City Centre, even if not under the remit of the Council's properties. The Member summarised if they can ask partners if they can grant grants funding for these private buildings to get them to do it also.

The Chief Executive advised that in terms of energy data collation; that is ongoing work as part of the Local Area Energy Plan where Newport has been the pilot with Welsh Government over the last six months. This will be rolled out to the rest of Wales. It is not completely perfect but were assured that Newport is potentially ahead in terms of collecting data on buildings across Newport.

- In terms of greening – as mentioned last year with local houses, there was an idea for local residents to be provided with seeds and tips to grow plants themselves. Are any updates on this?

The Partner representative for Nature Resources Wales gave an overview of the home grown vegetable scheme And confirmed that the home grown packets were done in Ringland and they look to do it again next spring but hopefully across all four hubs. In terms of encouraging people to grow food at home and in their gardens/balconies, the partner has been finding the resources and tips for that and getting the findings on the social media page. The partner advised that there is more to be done on promoting that and that they are looking into that.

The Leader highlighted that Wastesavers has opened their centre in Maindee. A re-use centre will be also opening in the city centre; this is really important as it will be a library of things where people can drop in to borrow items to help and support them in activities.

- Have the partners been able to link in role models with education, for the curriculum and if skills have been identified for green jobs? Could apprentices be linked in and what skills have been identified prior to Covid and now post Covid?

Coleg Gwent partner explained that they look closely at the way in which residents in Newport work; as work in Newport is quite mobile with people coming in for work and a number of residents leave the city for work. The growth sector has a potential to offer long term growth for jobs with good jobs developing the city in areas such as manufacturing and engineering with success stories from that. They have a need of skills, such as in the health and care sector. Colleagues from the health sector have noted that and we

look at the needs of the Aneurin Bevan Health Board and note that they have a high number of vacancies with a difficult job to recruit. They are looking on how they can steer young people by flagging up careers and promoting in STEM career areas. This is going to follow in the next virtual careers event in order to help younger people look into the areas of care work and help drive young adults who are returning to work or choosing to upskill to support these sectors.

Apprenticeships will form key support for that and has helped the way in which partners are working around these skills issues.

- What type of partnership networking has been done to coordinate more effective and prosperous work for the outdoor world to encourage green citizens?

The lead partner for Nature Resources Wales responded stating that with the Greener Safe Network, a strong partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust which links them with children in community groups such as Pill. Keep Wales Tidy also run a number of similar activities as well. The Council's Biodiversity Officer, works with local schools and assists with plans for carbon literacy training which entails learning more about the carbon footprint and actions you can take. This type of learning is currently in discussion.

- The Committee recognised the works being undertaken on the economic side of things and noted how the City wants to bring in people to the centre, as they will be attracting more students with the new campus and flats. Has there been any change to economic power that the centre has due to the post pandemic situation?

The lead partner for Coleg Gwent responded that they are considering how education can train developers in the recovery phase. There has been a great show of young people wanting to get back to face to face education as remote learning experiences can be variable as it does not suit all learners.

The Committee was advised that there is a big demand of education as a social activity. The partner mentioned that the Knowledge Quarter to draw people in to the centre is a huge potential.

It was recognised that prospects have been impacted by covid, through many means such as furlough and loss of employment which will be a big challenge for the partner to tackle. There are key sectors that the partners will have to support in terms of their recovery and integration of their training is a vital part of that. Therefore the partner is hopeful that the Knowledge Quarter project will be a major step in helping them sustain the city centre.

- How is the partnership looking to draw that back to the local communities and city centre so the money can stay locally to help the residents?

The Chief Executive clarified that Newport is no different from other cities and unfortunately there is not a 'silver bullet' for its partners. Through the One Newport PSB, partners have discussed what Newport's unique selling point is and what the different offer that Newport has. This comes from the smaller independents and comes back to one of the first questions of this is through marketing. This can be through firstly sustaining the market and the footfall of Newport to make people want to come in to the centre and secondly is how to

market that to others to come visit. When the vaccination programme reaches its final conclusion; the City will be likely to see a return of people.

The lead officer also reinforced the lead partner from Coleg Gwent's point with their very productive conversation with the College and University of South Wales. This conversation covered how the education system and eco-system help boost the economy in different levels. The Committee was informed there with the strong working relationships between the partners, the partnership can build on this from where they are.

- Comment was made that the partnership may need to give more experiences for people coming into the city centre that could be something different, not from online. As a chance to be bold, Newport has great art for instance. Members hope that the partners could come up with creative ways and local knowledge to move that idea forward.

The Chair thanked the partners and officers for their time and for answering every single question within the meeting. It was mentioned that everyone has gone through a lot through the pandemic but noted the enthusiasm on behalf of the partners and thanked them on behalf of the Committee for the work that they are doing.

#### **Conclusions:**

1. The Committee **noted** the Public Services Board Well-being Plan Annual Report 2020-2021
2. The Committee **agreed** to forward the Minutes to the Public Services Board as a summary of the issues raised and in particular wished to make the following comments to the Public Services Board:
  - The report was very positively received by the Committee. The report shows that the partners are working hard as a team and in terms of the Covid-19 recovery phase; the fact their partnership has strengthened through a most difficult 18 months sounds positive. The Committee also appreciated that the partners were able to answer each other's' questions and work well together, and also made comment that they are clearly not afraid of challenges and trying new things.
  - Members were pleased that individual interventions appear to be working well and that the partners are checking in and evaluating on a regular basis.
  - Whilst talking about the city centre regeneration, Members were interested and hopeful to move forward for the city to becoming green and carbon neutral. Members asked if we have information about each of the properties or old buildings in the city centre, such as energy ratings, that we may be working in partnership with.
  - Whilst Members praised the positivity of the report as encouraging, they voiced the importance of openness from the partners where they can admit of any issues that need to be worked on. Comment was made that if the partners are looking at the public perspective to ensure the goal of everyone being happy; they have to recognise that not every single person will be. The committee then enquired if there could be additional information at the end of the report to advise people of what things the partnership are looking to do in the future, what areas that may be struggling and what needs to be done to overcome them.

- Members were pleased to see more mention of the Armed Forces Covenant and the work to support the Newport Veterans Hub. Members praised the good work with the veterans and hope to see a continuation of this in future reports.
- The Committee recommended that the partners should be bolder and advertise more highlight the strong partnership work that they are doing for the residents by being proud and honest with the public about their collaborations. For example, the flower and greenery work done in the Victoria ward looks brilliant and people in the area know it is there, however they might not know where it came from and who put it there.

#### **4 Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Invitees:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the forward work programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next two meetings:

##### **3 November 2021**

- Norse Joint Venture Partnership – Strategy and Performance Review
- Education Achievement Service – Value for Money 2020-21

##### **17 November 2021**

- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Members asked the following:

- Would the committee be able to have an informal briefing with officers for the Norse agenda item?

The Scrutiny Adviser told the Committee that this would be discussed with the officers to check if this can be arranged.

The meeting terminated at 6.46 pm

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# Scrutiny Report

## PSC – Partnerships

### Part 1

Date: 3 November 2021

### Subject **Norse Joint Venture Partnership**

**Author** Scrutiny Advisor

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Invitee:	Area / Role / Subject
Tracey Brooks	<b>Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing</b>
Lyndon Watkins	<b>Managing Director of Newport Norse</b>
Mark McSweeney	<b>Director – Professional and Contract Services</b>

### Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

#### 1 Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider the briefing paper and presentation on the Newport Norse Joint Venture partnership
2. Assess the contents of the report and decide if there has been satisfactory progress against the initial aims of the partnership.
3. Establish whether there is any additional information needed.
4. Decide if the Committee wishes to make any comments or recommendations in relation to the joint venture partnership

#### 2 Context

##### Background

- 2.1 This will be the Committees first consideration of the Newport City Councils joint venture partnership with Newport Norse. The aim of the partnership was to improve the way that NCC managed their assets and to provide each service area with more stable and suitable working environments across the city.

### **3 Information Submitted to the Committee**

- 3.1 The submission for the committee is comprised of two sections. The initial report (section one) is included in the agenda pack. The second section of the submission is a presentation for the committee meeting. This presentation will go through the highlights of the report, respond to any requests for additional information and answer any initial lines of questioning Members requested.
- 3.2 The Newport Norse Partnership report contains the following sections:
  - Introduction
  - Background
    - When and why was the joint venture started
    - What has been achieved to date
  - The present day
    - What does Newport Norse do for the Council
    - Lessons learned
    - Compliments and complaints 2020/2021
    - Performance Management
  - The Future
    - Goals for next year
    - Planning for the end of the contract

### **4. Suggested Areas of Focus**

#### **Role of the Committee**

**The role of the Committee in considering the report is to:**

Review and analyse the contents of the report and additional information contained in the presentation. Establish what progress has been made from the partnership's inception and what that means for the Council and its service users.

- Take a look at the achievements of Newport Norse to date and whether this constitutes as positive progress;
- Assess and make comment on the impact Newport Norse has had on:
  - The local economy, skills and employment, the environment and schools and local communities;
  - The extent to which and opportunities to learn and change practices are being addressed and associated risks are being mitigated;
  - The management of assets and the council estate as a whole;
- Conclusions:
  - What was the overall conclusion on the information contained within the reports?
  - Is the Committee satisfied that it has had all of the relevant information to base a conclusion on the performance of the JV partnership?
  - Do any areas require a more in-depth review by the Committee?
  - Do the Committee wish to make any Comments / Recommendations to the Cabinet?

**Suggested Lines of Enquiry**

4.1 The Committee might wish to think about the following when devising questioning strategies;

- What are the main challenges that face both Newport Norse and NCC in the Partnership?
- Are there any fundamental changes to the relationship that would allow for greater success?
- What were the most important lessons learned in part 3.2? Have all the actions listed in this section been implemented?
- What is planned over the final three years of the partnership to ensure service areas and service users continue to benefit?
- What is being planned to continue the growth of the profit share in the final three years?

## **Section B – Supporting Information**

### **5 Supporting Information**

5.1 The following have been provided to the Committee for additional / background reading to support the scrutiny of the joint venture partnership:

- A Guide to Newport Norse
- A Schools Guide to Newport Norse
- Newport Norse Communication Plan
- Trusted Partner Newport Norse



## 6 Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The Newport Norse JV partnership is an integral part of all of the Wellbeing Objectives, Corporate Plan Commitments and supporting function. The NCC assets provide a foundation to provide all of our services from:

<b>Well-being Objectives</b>	Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment	Improve skills, educational outcomes & employment opportunities	Enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient	Build cohesive & sustainable communities
<b>Corporate Plan Commitments</b>	Thriving City	Aspirational People		Resilient Communities
<b>Supporting Function</b>	Modernised Council			

## 7 Impact Assessment:

### 7.1 Summary of impact – Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

Newport Norse has strong working partnerships with around 50 schools in the local area, supporting a combined roll of over 23,000 pupils.

### 7.2 Summary of impact – Equality Act 2010

The Norse Group have their own equalities plan in place, which states that The Norse Group opposes all forms of discrimination, harassment or victimisation whether because of age, disability, sex, gender-reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, or because someone is married or in a civil partnership ('Protected Characteristics') or otherwise.

### 7.3 Summary of impact – Socio-economic Duty

Newport Norse directly employs 320 people, around 73% of which live in Newport. Newport Norse have also increased job security and local employment, contributing to a thriving economy.

## 8. Background Papers

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan](#)
- [Socio-economic Duty Guidance](#)
- [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)
- [Welsh Language Measure 2015](#)



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## **SCRUTINY REPORT**

### **NEWPORT NORSE PARTNERSHIP**

Tracey Brooks

Acting Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing

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DRAFT



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## **1.0 Introduction**

The purpose of the report is to inform Scrutiny Committee of the performance of the Council partnership company Newport Norse Limited.

## **2.0 Background**

### **2.1 When and why was the joint venture started?**

In July 2014 Newport City Council (NCC) and Norse Commercial Services Group (a public services company wholly owned by Norfolk County Council) entered into a 10 year Joint Venture (JV) Agreement, creating "Newport Norse" (NN) to help transform service delivery and provide an improved property and facilities service for the Council.

The decision to move to this partnership was not taken lightly. Prior to 2014 the Council operated an in house Property and Asset Management service. This included both front line maintenance and repair services, as well as estates, cleaning and property professional services. NN offer a total facilities management service, which provides for a range of services including delivering capital construction projects, reactive maintenance, building cleaning, asset management, surveying, valuation, and catering.

The partnership was the first public wholly owned Local Authority Property Services Joint Venture in Wales. It was designed as an innovative, public sector designed, and public sector run service delivery model. It utilises the Teckal exemption under EU Procurement rules to build a new approach to local authority service delivery. It is a solution that allows public bodies to formally collaborate, and provides an alternative to a traditionally outsourced, private sector delivered, market offering.

All property services have been transferred to the JV and the Council retain a Property Manager within Regeneration, Investment and Housing to oversee the contract.

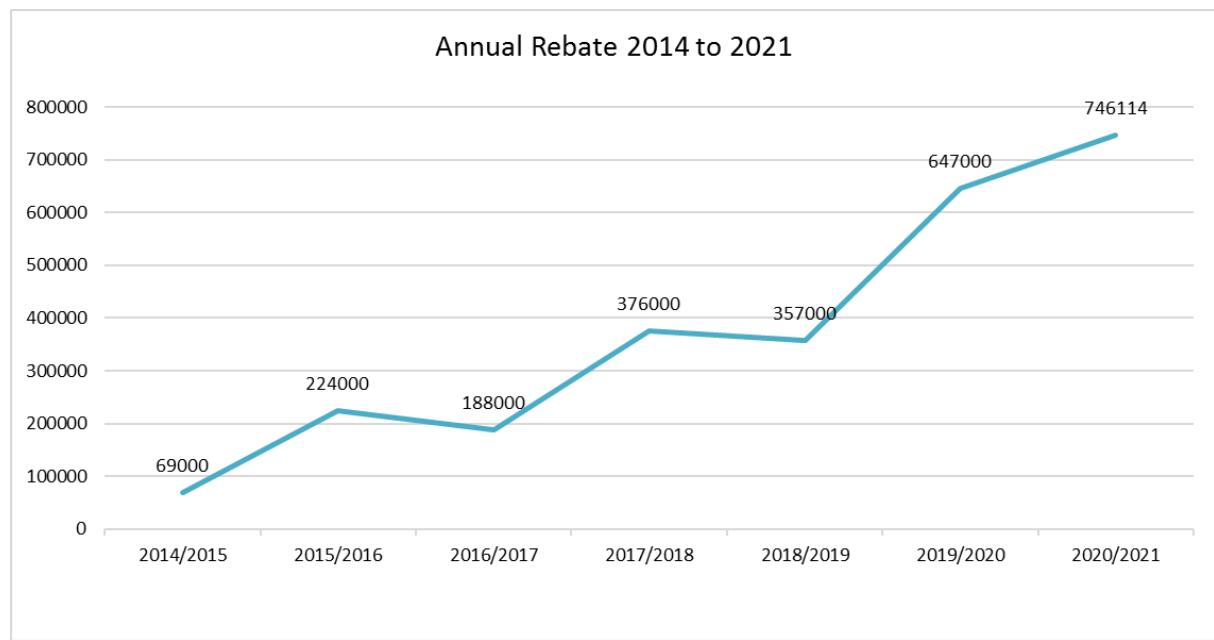
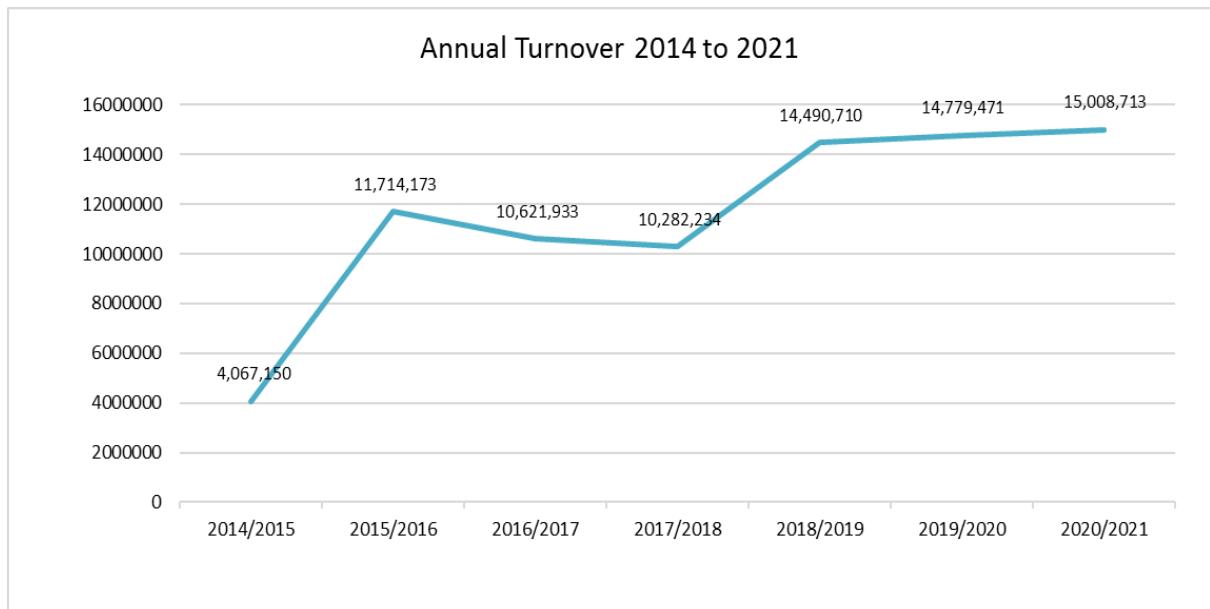
All profits are recycled back into the public sector, 50% of which are fed back into NCC.

### **2.2 What has been achieved to date?**

Whilst the Joint Venture may feel like NCC has outsourced its services, the fact is that it's been a very successful 'in-sourcing' mechanism. The company's turnover at its inception in 2014/2015 was £4,067,150, with turnover rising from 2020 to 2021 to £15,008,713.

The turnover in 2020/21 was comprised of the following;

- Circa 49% in NCC contract payments
- Circa 46% in tendered / discretionary business
- Circa 5% in external non NCC business



Over the same period profit share (or rebate) paid back to the Council has increased from £69,000 (2015), to £746,114 (2021). Total rebate (profit share) over the period to date has been £2,607,114. There is often the comment that this money is only the Council's money being paid back to it, which is true to an extent, however prior to the JV, this share of profits didn't occur and effectively went to private sector companies.

Corporate social responsibility, community benefits and social value is very important to Norse Group and NN. It is also aligned to the Council's aspirations to embed Social Value and Community Benefit into what we do. In terms of social / economic benefits of the partnership these include the following;

## **For the economy**

- Newport Norse directly employs 320 people, around 73% of which live in Newport.
- For every £1 of expenditure on suppliers, £0.70 is spent in the South East Wales region, including £0.42 with businesses in Newport
- The supply chain expenditure supports 44 jobs in Newport and 76 jobs in South East Wales as a whole\*.
- Newport Norse spends a total of £10.2 million on wages, salaries and local sub-contractors. For every £1 of wages paid, £0.87 is spent in South East Wales and £0.51 in Newport.
- It is estimated that spending from staff wages supports a further 35 jobs in Newport (62 in South East Wales as a whole).
- Cumulatively this means that Newport Norse supports a total of 457 jobs in Newport (and 518 across South East Wales, including Newport).
- The business contributes Gross Value Added (GVA) of £8.5 million in Newport and £10.5 million in South East Wales.

## **For skills and employment**

- Newport Norse supports the continuing professional development of its staff by delivering internal and external training sessions throughout the year.
- In 2020/21, the business devoted around 520 ‘training days’ and over £45,000 to developing the skills of its workforce.
- Newport Norse employs five apprentices at present, with plans to increase this number in the future.
- Newport Norse pays staff working on Newport City Council contracts a sum equivalent to the National Living Wage as a minimum.

## **For the environment**

- Newport Norse adhere to Norse Group’s Environmental Management System, aiming to minimise their adverse impact on the environment by adopting “greener” processes.

- This is supported by the Norse Group Sustainable Procurement Policy and Supplier Code of Conduct.

### **For schools and the local community**

- Newport Norse has strong working partnerships with around 50 schools in the local area, supporting a combined roll of over 23,000 pupils
- The business has made a number of contributions to the local economy over the duration of the JV as part of their community activities.
- Newport Norse has organised various events throughout its time to support a number of charities, for instance raising over £600 for charities such as Age UK and Macmillian.
- The business has also spent over £3,000 on sponsoring events such as the inaugural Pride of Gwent Awards.
- Newport Norse has also donated around £10,000 from wider Norse Group's Community Fund to local voluntary associations and clubs nominated by Newport Norse employees. It has helped purchase new training kit for local sports clubs, supplied a local scout unit with a new mess tent, provided pantomime tickets for residents of a local women's refuge at Christmas, and sports equipment for local young rugby players.
- Newport Norse also operates a Volunteer Programme, which allows each member of staff to take one day off with pay each year for volunteering purposes. Staff have helped transform a rundown garden for local women's refuge, supported Dementia Awareness events, assisted the first ASD School in Newport with its preparations for opening, and landscaped a children's home.

### **Other benefits brought to NCC include;**

- Commitment to maintaining high quality services whilst achieving targets.
- Undertaking new external contracts generating profits subsequently shared with the Council.
- Building of strong, local communities with support for local charities, arts, civic projects and community initiatives
- Increased job security and local employment, contributing to a thriving economy.

- The introduction of the c365 Compliance System, which is being rolled out across all Schools and the wider estate. This is a cloud-based system which allows Head Teachers and Council Premises Managers to access in ‘real-time’ information about asbestos, boiler servicing, electrical testing, etc. for the buildings they occupy.
- Much has been achieved to date, most notably the transformation of what was Newport Property Services Department. This has been done in collaboration with the Council, and much hard work by staff to build a service which now in-sources £10.9m more than it did in 2014/2015.
- This means that profits associated with this work now return to the Council instead of the private sector. By April 2021 this has amounted to £2.6m, and has been achieved by the partnership, whilst maintaining good quality jobs, offering the local government pension, and paying as a minimum the Newport Living Wage equivalent.
- There have been huge successes in bids for external funding. Schemes such St Andrews School, Windmill Tree Farm, Oaklands Home, Rosedale Home and many others have all been successful.

### **3.0 The Present Day**

#### **3.1 What does NN do for the Council**

Working from their base in Cleppa Park, Newport Norse currently manages approximately 330 built assets for the City Council with a total asset value of some £320m. Newport Norse provides a ‘one stop shop’ for all Property services, which include:

- building maintenance, including direct labour
- statutory testing and inspection
- cleaning and catering
- estates and valuation
- design and construction procurement
- project management
- corporate premises manager.

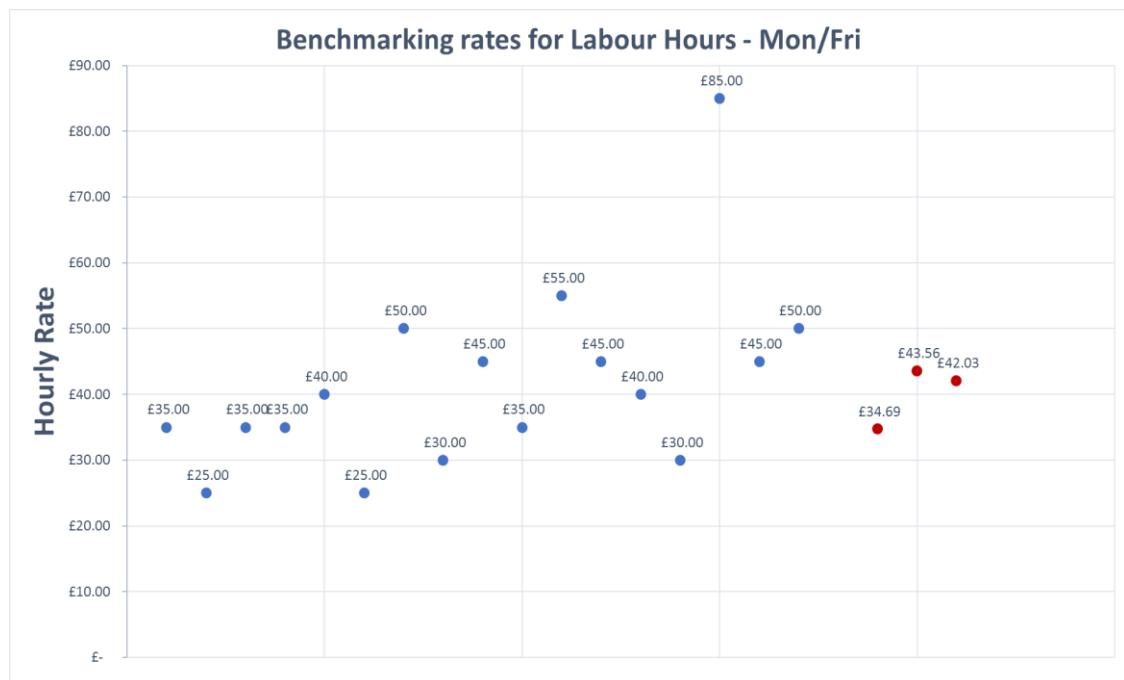
NN acts as the Council’s Corporate Landlord Agent, ensuring Council policy is followed by delegated budgets holders, and that the Council fully optimises the use of its property assets.

NN works with the Council to ensure the people who occupy Council properties are able to do so safely. The Council has not transferred ownership of any of its property to Newport Norse, and has retained full ownership of all assets.

### 3.2 Continual Review

The performance of the JV is continually being reviewed by partners through the formal governance arrangements which comprise working groups and formal boards. Feedback is received from a variety of sources and is evaluated as a lessons learned opportunity. Any actions identified are taken forward by the relevant group or Board and reviewed as appropriate. The partnership are always looking for opportunities to improve what we do and how we do it.

The area where most questions are raised is around value for money and this is one area that is kept under review. Some very recent benchmarking of local suppliers and contractors hourly rates and overhead/profit levels show the following;





NN Rates highlighted in 'red'

In nearly all cases where NN have been challenged as being too expensive, it has been shown that the variance has not been in unit costs, but what has actually been priced. The review has identified the importance of specification/drawings or clear pricing documents from the 'client' otherwise contractors make their own assessments as to what is required for a commission or contract. NN will always include for what is required by the Council to maintain its assets and costs will include for items such as;

- Asbestos refurbishment and demolition surveys;
- Remove any asbestos containing materials in accordance with regulations
- Provide DBS checked operatives on site to ensure safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.
- Compliance with the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015;
- Use high quality, durable and appropriate products.
- Provide £10m Public Liability Insurance
- Provide £10m Employers Liability Insurance
- Provide £10m Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Pay staff legal wages
- Liaise with the HSE for notifiable works

NN pride themselves in not cutting corners and ensuring that the options and solutions provided for the Council are resilient and sustainable, rather than sometimes opting for what could be considered a 'quick fix'.

### **3.5 Compliments and Complaints 2020/2021**

Newport Norse has systems in place to obtain customer feedback. They meet regularly with various client groups such as; the Client Team, Head Teachers and Education Liaison Group, various other schools estates forum, service management teams as well as individual clients. Project related surveys and an annual tele-survey are also undertaken.

Over the 2020/2021 period NN had received;

- Compliments – 54
- Complaints – 11

This financial year NN have had 11 complaints and 25 compliments.

Of the 11 complaints in 2020/21

- 8 were related to customer dissatisfaction with service/standard
- 1 driving incident
- 1 Customer dissatisfied with product
- 1 Norse staff behaviour

All complaints are dealt with via an agreed action plan with Council officers to ensure that they satisfied with the end result and that lessons are learned for Norse Staff. At present NN are investing in updated “Customer Care” training to help improve the service and also learn the lessons from where standards have fallen short.

The following are some of the compliments made over the past year;

- *March 2021 – (Chief Education Officer) “Thanks for working with us. Covid has presented us with some difficult circumstances but I have to say that Norse colleagues have been incredibly supportive in going the extra mile to support our schools. It is genuinely appreciated.”*
- *March 2021 – (Head Teacher) “Thank you to everyone for such a great - and memorable - project! I am so very pleased with the end result and really appreciate the hard work and perseverance of everyone involved in this project. The end result will give us so much more than just a dining hall and we intend to make full use of it to benefit our children and families.”*
- *Feb 2021 – (Head Teacher) “I just wanted to send you a quick e-mail to express my thanks to your team who have been supporting us with the issues arising... Warren has been excellent in terms of communication with us, keeping us informed at every step! Thanks also to Chris Gosling, Joe O’Connell and Nick Poretti. Responses have been immediate and everyone seems to be working together to secure the best possible outcome.”*

- Nov 2020 – (Head Teacher) “Can myself and Kelly just take this opportunity to say we cannot thank you enough for our new bathroom! The workmanship that you set in place is so outstanding and we are absolutely over the moon with it. We would especially like to mention Vince and Gary as they were absolutely fantastic, professional so polite and well-mannered that made the process so comfortable (no toilet sometime lol) we really cannot thank you enough and again for your commitment, hard work and the time spent to complete it.”
- Nov 2020 – (Site Manager) “Just wanted to pass on my thanks and praise to the team (Keith, Dave & Matt) for their work in tracking and curing the underground water leak. They worked professionally and diligently under miserable weather conditions. Furthermore, I was grateful for the progress updates provided from initial investigation until completion.”
- April 2020 – (Accommodation Support Manager) “I just wanted to say that since we have entered into lockdown, and all began working in a very strange, weird and wonderful way, from home and in the community, Norse have provided a great service. Without the use of your service; operatives, administrators, finance officers, inspectors, surveyors; conveyancers etc, we would not be able to deliver much needed accommodation to those in need. From conveyancing to cleaners all staff are vastly important and we cannot do this without you. We are very grateful for all the hard work and efforts of the teams, thank you from all of us.”

#### ○ Performance Management

The performance of the partnership is monitored at a number of levels using various monitoring tools, such as Quarterly report to the Board and Internal/External Audits. This also has a number of layers from strategic monitoring to day to day monitoring;

1. Contract Management, via;
  - Joint Venture Management Team (Monthly)
2. Council wide via;
  - CSAMG (Quarterly)
  - Joint Venture Client Group (Quarterly)
  - People Services Capital Board (Quarterly)
  - Head Teachers Liaison Group (Quarterly)
  - School Governors Group (Quarterly)
  - People Services Capital Board Steering Group (Monthly)
  - Major Projects Group (Place) (Monthly)
  - Capital Maintenance Finance Monitoring (Monthly)

- Capital Finance Budget Monitoring (Monthly)
  - Cabinet Member Briefings (Monthly)
3. Service Specific  
At a service level there are a significant number of weekly and ad hoc meetings to discuss and manage performance on a day to day basis.

## 4.0 The Future

### 4.1 Goals for the next year

Each year NN produce what they refer to as their 'Plan on Page'. This is presented to the Company Board and the Steering Group, which includes Senior Council Officers and elected member. This annual plan outlines the companies;

- Objectives
- Key targets
- Balanced Scorecard measures
- Key Themes and Activities.

The Objectives are separated into;

- Financial
- Customer
- Process
- People

In summary the Key Objectives for 2021/2022 are to;

- Achieve profitable and sustainable growth
- Expand the customer base and meet the client's needs while making a positive impact on the communities we serve
- Continue to deliver high quality services effectively
- Ensure that NN becomes an employer of choice within the property industry in South Wales

### 4.2 Planning for the end of the Contract

The current contract is due to end on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The intention is that the Council will start to explore and consider options in 2022. There are several options available to the Council and any decision we make will need to ensure that the services we deliver are not compromised and that there is alignment with the Corporate Plan and Well-being Plan.



# Scrutiny Report

## Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

### Part 1

Date: 3 November 2021

### Subject Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money 2020-21

Author Scrutiny Adviser

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Invitee:	Area / Role / Subject
Geraint Willington	Education Achievement Service (EAS) Director: Resources, Business and Governance
Ed Pryce	Education Achievement Service (EAS) Assistant Director : Policy and Strategy
Sarah Morgan	Head of Education
Andrew Powles	Deputy Chief Education Officer

## Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

### 1 Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked

1. Consider the information provided within the submission of evidence in **Appendix A** together with the externally commissioned Education Achievement Service (EAS) Regional Value for Money (VfM) report 2020-21 in **Appendix 1** and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Regional Value for Money (VfM) report 2020-21 PowerPoint presentation in **Appendix 2**.
2. Determine if it wishes to make any comments to the Cabinet Member and / or the EAS.

### 2 Context

#### Background

- 2.1 The EAS is the school improvement service for the five Local Authorities in the region (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen). The role of the EAS is to support, monitor and challenge schools with the purpose of raising education standards in South East Wales.

- 2.2 Newport City Council makes an annual contribution to the commissioning of the EAS. The EAS has provided Value for Money reports to each of the local authorities across the Region for the last three years. In Newport, the 2018-19 EAS Value for Money Report was considered by this Committee at its meeting on 10 July 2019 and were previously reported at its meeting on 20 June 2018. (***Links to the Report and Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships Meeting held on 10 July 2019 are provided in the Background Papers in Section 7 of this report.***)
- 2.3 The VFM report for 2020-2021 (Appendix A) focusses on the delivery of the regional service and the regional impact set against a number of criteria. Members will note that the report does not break down individual LA detail. The report has been written by an external consultant, Rod Alcott following a competitive tender process. This is the fourth year that this consultant has reviewed the VfM of the EAS. In the context of operating in the unique circumstances of a global pandemic and in the absence of the usual measures of effectiveness then considerations of effectiveness have had to be re-thought. The most valid measure now becomes a consideration of the extent to which EAS achieved what it set out to do in response to the unique set of circumstances under which it was operating.

### **Previous Consideration of this item**

- 2.4 The timing and frequency of the previously annual VfM reporting has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The following is an extract from the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 10 July 2019, when the Committee received the EAS Value for Money Financial Year 2018-19 report:

*"The EAS Director presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted they key areas for consideration. The report to the Committee assessing the performance of the EAS concluded that the EAS is providing good value for money in terms of those aspects that are within its control, notably: economy; efficiency; equity and; sustainability. However, collective action involving EAS, its constituent local authorities and school leaders was required to address concerns over educational outcomes across the region and those schools that are underperforming.*

*Members asked the following:*

- A Member welcomed the report and with regard to Learning Networks asked whether the EAS were confident that when a school is asked to support another school, it does not have an adverse impact on learning at the school assisting.*

*Members were advised that the Local Authority was asked for a view, which takes account of previous performance, sickness, etc., and sometimes the view was that it should not go ahead. The EAS views applications and is able to scrutinise whether schools have considered the offer of their own support. There had been times where offers have been mutually agreed and looked good on paper but it was thought that the offer should not go ahead. The EAS Assistant Director advised Members that the EAS also had the flexibility to invite other schools to become involved.*

*The Principal Challenge Advisor advised Members that the EAS had more schools wanting to be learning schools than needed, so they had been placed on a waiting list.*

- Members enquired whether the Value for Money report could be undertaken in-house by EAS officers rather than externally, and if so how much money could be saved.*

*Members were advised that the Consortium worked across 5 Local Authority areas with the different authorities working independently, it was felt it was important that this was done externally otherwise the EAS would be scrutinising themselves. It was explained that the*

*EAS had learnt a lot from the report author from his previous experience in Wales Audit Office and his skills evaluating value for money.*

- *A Member referred to the tools that schools could use on page 33, and asked what the working relationship between the EAS and the Local Authority was like.*

*Members were advised that the partnership work between Newport and the EAS was held in high regard and that statutory powers were taken seriously and acted upon swiftly. It was clarified that as the EAS works regionally, the Local Authority would need to take the lead sometimes and it was important for the EAS not to lead every protocol. The benefits of shared intelligence were explained and examples given of schools in different areas that were similar. The EAS were confident that Newport had been a lead voice as a local authority in the school concerns strategy.*

- *A Member enquired if schools had any issues regarding children with additional learning needs, whether schools in other regions would be able to help.*

*Members were advised that Additional Learning Need specialist work could be provided on a regional basis. Schools can also be matched up to schools, which had been identified as having children with additional learning needs. Members were advised that gaps exist where there are only 35 secondary schools and the match was not effective. The EAS were moving to work more with partners from other regions and advised that a number of partners took visits to other regions to secure support.*

*The Challenge Advisor advised the Committee that Newport had higher achieving secondary schools, which had performed well in the region. This provided opportunities to work with similar schools in other areas, which raised the bar further for these schools, e.g. providing formal partnerships with Cardiff and beyond.*

- *A Member asked about the challenges for Key Stage 4 at Secondary school level.*

*Members were advised that EAS needed to focus on cluster and transitional work, and mentioned the strong clusters in Newport. As the curriculum changes, Year 4 students would be the first to do the new GCSEs, so they need to make sure that transitional support was in place for learners. The whole system was changing, as the business plan reflected.*

- *A Member referred to Page 37 of the report that 29 of 35 of school clusters were engaging and asked was there a struggle to get leaders in partnerships involved.*

*Members were advised that engagement with Head teachers was reasonably high. Some initiatives may not be right for them at the time. Information of non-engagement within Newport was sent to the Deputy Chief Education Officer on a termly basis, however there was some non-engagement with perfectly good rationale. Members were also advised that there had been a change of leadership in two clusters, but would be in place in September.*

- *A Member asked with funding being reduced by 30% how were resources being fully utilised through partnership working.*

*The Challenge Advisor explained that the ways that EAS support schools have changed, since 2014 there had been 5 years of evolving practice and the Challenge Advisor was expected to have a depth of knowledge for schools, but may only broker support.*

- *A Member asked what other partnerships the EAS had in relation to Looked after Children.*

*Officers advised that an Equality and Wellbeing Lead had recently been appointed who liaised very closely in the region, following the recognition that wellbeing is a critical component in learning. It was also advised that for the first time, this year a pilot school*

*review / complete partnership review had been run.*

- *It was clarified that Head teachers have responsibility for the schools budget in as part of their overall responsibilities.*
- *A Member asked why the number of red secondary schools had almost doubled.*

*Officers advised that that each secondary school was treated in a bespoke way. The EAS was able to offer support, leadership coaching and subject specific work. Members were also advised that there were a huge range of complex factors in Secondary Schools, more complex to change than Primary Schools, but that schools were improving, including those being monitored. Some schools could have six recommendations, which might seem that the school is lacking but they are in fact improving. As an external partner the EAS was empowering schools.*

*The Challenge Adviser advised that school categorisations changed for lots of reasons e.g. standards could be good but if a Headteacher and Deputy left then the school would need additional support.*

- *Members discussed upcoming changes to the categorisation systems and asked if it would be Welsh Government led.*

*Members were advised that it would be nationally reimagined, though the process will have an appeal process for schools not happy with the category.*

- *A Member referred to page 23 of the report, which mentioned reduced spending and asked in the long term how would staffing numbers be addressed and managed.*

*Members were advised that there was a big pressure for the next year, and already there were not many core services left. The Joint Education Group and business managers would discuss this further and Learning network schools would be able to help for other subjects.*

- *A Member referred to page 21 of the report and asked what was the uptake of services for governing.*

*Members were advised that there was one school that had not signed up to a Service Level Agreement. The way the service has altered is to make sure an income was generated by schools, so as well as a core team there was some flexibility to support demand. The core responsibility for the local authority was to promote training programmes.*

- *A Member enquired about the challenges faced despite the healthy partnership relationship.*

*Members were advised that for schools causing concern, the local authorities challenge each other through work being undertaken in schools. There is a monthly quality assurance meeting with Deputy Chief Education Officer every month and he sends the EAS issues he wished to discuss. Case conferences would also take place ensuring the necessary people attend.*

*The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.*

### **Conclusions**

*The Committee noted the Education Achievement Service Value for Money Financial Year 2018-19 report and agreed to forward the Minute to the Education Achievement Service and the Cabinet Member as a summary of the issues raised and in particular, the following comments:*

- *The Committee were satisfied with the report concluding overall value for money and commended the evidence of constructive relationships between the EAS and the Local Authority; the programme of robust support (tools) available, and; the mutual professional respect to challenge and develop the support provided. However, the report could include more information upon risk and mitigation.*
- *The Committee expressed concern at the unknown Welsh Government funding position for the Education Achievement Service for next year.*
- *The Committee was disappointed that following the recommendation of the 2017-18 report to work with other consortia to develop a national framework for assessing Value for Money at a regional level, this comparison had been unable to proceed as not all of the regions had submitted / verified their data.*
- *The Committee welcomed the increase in the percentage of “Green” Primary schools across the Region, but expressed concern at the percentage of “Red” Secondary Schools across the Region, in relation to the Wales Average, however following the Officers’ verbal explanations it was acknowledged that within the “Red” Category Schools there had been improvements.*
- *The Committee expressed concern at the potential impact of the new Curriculum upon Categorisation in the future.*

**Comments to the Performance Scrutiny Committee – People:**

- *The Committee expressed concern regarding the high percentage of Secondary Schools in the Red Category for 2018-19 across the EAS Region and requested that the Performance Scrutiny Committee - People be advised of their concern to keep it in mind when considering reports upon School Performance in Newport.”*

### **3 Information Submitted to the Committee**

- 3.1 The following information has been submitted to the Committee for consideration:
- **Appendix A - Submission of Evidence – Education Achievement Services, Value for Money, Financial Year 2020-21**
  - **Appendix 1 - Regional Value for Money Evaluation 2020-21 by External Consultant**
  - **Appendix 2 - Submission of Evidence – Education Achievement Services, Value for Money PowerPoint presentation**

### **4. Suggested Areas of Focus**

- 4.1 **Role of the Committee**

**The role of the Committee in considering the report is to consider:**

- Whether the information presented provides the Committee with evidence of the impact of the EAS providing measurable value for money?
- How should scrutiny be involved in monitoring of the value for money of the EAS collaboration?
- Assess and make comment on:
  - Whether the consortium is providing value for money?
  - The progress being made since the previous year's Value for Money report?
  - How well the consortium is working together to deliver Value for Money?
- Conclusions:
  - What was the overall conclusion on the information contained within the reports?
  - Is the Committee satisfied that it has had all of the relevant information to base a conclusion?
  - Do any areas require a more in-depth review by the Committee?
  - Do the Committee wish to make any Comments / Recommendations to the Cabinet?

**Suggested Lines of Enquiry**

4.2 In evaluating whether the EAS is providing Value for Money in the 2020-21 Report attached as **Appendix A**, the Committee may wish to consider:

- How does EAS performance compare with that of neighbouring regional education improvement services?
- Whether the report contains sufficient information to demonstrate that the EAS Consortium is providing Value for Money.
- Has the EAS Consortium fully considered the impacts of Covid-19 in the delivery of their objectives?
- Is the EAS Consortium taking demonstrating sufficient steps to innovate or change the way they deliver services to meet the long term needs of its users?
- Are there any emerging risks / issues and lessons learned as result of Covid-19 on the EAS Consortium both short term and long term?

**Section B – Supporting Information**

**5 Links to Council Policies and Priorities**

Summarise how this report aligns with Council priorities – in particular the Corporate Plan and wellbeing objectives:

<b>Well-being Objectives</b>	Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment	Improve skills, educational outcomes & employment opportunities	Enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient	Build cohesive & sustainable communities
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<b>Corporate Plan Commitments</b>	Thriving City	Aspirational People	Resilient Communities
<b>Supporting Function</b>	Modernised Council		

## 6 Impact Assessment:

### 6.1 Summary of impact – Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

The Committee's consideration of the Education Achievement Service's Value for Money Report 2020-21 should consider how the Consortium is maximising its contribution to the five ways of working. The following are examples of the types of questions to consider:

5 Ways of Working	Types of Questions to consider:
<b>Long-term</b> The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.	What long term trends will impact upon the service delivery? How will changes in long term needs impact upon the service delivery in the future?
<b>Prevention</b> Prevent problems occurring or getting worse.	What issues are facing the Consortium's service users at the moment? How is the Consortium addressing these issues to prevent a future problem?
<b>Integration</b> Considering how public bodies' wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.	Are there any other organisations providing similar / complementary services? How does the Consortium's performance upon service delivery impact upon the services of other public bodies and their objectives?
<b>Collaboration</b> Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the organisation itself).	Who has the Consortium been working with to deliver the service? How is the Consortium using knowledge / information / good practice of others to inform / influence delivery?
<b>Involvement</b> The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.	How has the Consortium sought the views of those who are impacted by its service delivery? How has the Consortium taken into account diverse communities in decision making?

### 6.2 Summary of impact – Equality Act 2010

The EAS have their own Equalities plan in place.

### 6.3 Summary of impact – Welsh language

The EAS have their own Welsh Language plan in place.

## 7. Background Papers

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan](#)

- [Socio-economic Duty Guidance](#)
- [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)
- [Welsh Language Measure 2015](#)
- [Agenda and Minutes of Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships 10 July 2019](#)
- [Agenda and Minutes of Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships 20 June 2018](#)
- [EAS Website](#)

Report Completed: November 2021

# Report

## Scrutiny Meeting

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### Part 1

Date: 3 November 2021

Item No:

**Subject** **Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money 2020-21**

**Purpose** Newport City Council are a partner local authority of the EAS Regional School Improvement Service. This paper describes the outcomes of an external report on the Value for Money (VfM) of the Regional Service in 2020/21.

**Author** Geraint Willington (Director - Resources, Business and Governance, EAS)

**Ward** All

**Summary** The VFM report for 2020-2021 (Appendix A) focusses on the delivery of the regional service and the regional impact set against a number of criteria. Members will note that the report does not break down individual LA detail. The report has been written by an external consultant, Rod Alcott following a competitive tender process. This is the fourth year that this consultant has reviewed the VfM of the EAS. In the context of operating in the unique circumstances of a global pandemic and in the absence of the usual measures of effectiveness then considerations of effectiveness have had to be re-thought. The most valid measure now becomes a consideration of the extent to which EAS achieved what it set out to do in response to the unique set of circumstances under which it was operating

**Proposal** Members are requested to:

- Receive the report for information

**Action by** The Education Achievement Service in partnership with the LA

**Timetable** This is an annual report reflecting on the previous Business Plan year.

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer)

**Signed**

## **Background and Report**

- 1.1. The VFM report for 2020-2021 (Appendix A) focusses on the delivery of the regional service and the regional impact set against a number of criteria. Members will note that the report does not break down individual LA detail.
- 1.2. On the request of the EAS Company Board an external tender was advertised to attract alternate consultants to complete this work. Despite this tender process only one consultant applied to undertake the work. This was Rod Alcott, the tender was awarded to him to complete the review.
- 1.3. The report has been written by an external consultant, Rod Alcott. The report has been sectioned into the following aspects:
  - Executive Summary
  - Recommendations
  - Economy and Efficiency– Spending less and spending well
  - Equity – Spending fairly
  - Effectiveness – Spending wisely
  - Sustainability – Spending for the long term
  - Conclusion
- 1.4. The full content of the regional school improvement VfM 2020/2021 report can be found in Appendix A.
- 1.5. The report notes that: In the context of operating in the unique circumstances of a global pandemic and in the absence of the usual measures of effectiveness then considerations of effectiveness have to be re-thought. The most valid measure now becomes a consideration of the extent to which EAS achieved what it set out to do in response to the unique set of circumstances under which it was operating.
- 1.6. The exceptional circumstances within which the EAS operated throughout 2020-2021 means that an evaluation of VfM must be re-thought. This re-thinking means that:
  - considerations of economy and efficiency are best conflated into a single judgement;
  - sustainability centres around the extent to which revised ways of working can be continued in the future;
  - equity becomes an even more significant consideration given the well documented disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils; and
  - effectiveness places a greater focus on well-being and becomes essentially a judgement on the extent to which schools and staff felt well-supported.
- 1.7. While the current context provides a particular set of challenges it does not deflect from an approach centred around answering the basic VfM questions of:
  - Are you doing the right things?

- How well are you doing them? (economy and efficiency)
- Are you promoting fairness? (equity)
- What impact are you having? (effectiveness)
- Is your approach sustainable? (sustainability)

- 1.8. It must be recognised that the above questions are inextricably linked. There is a need to recognise that interventions that are being implemented economically and efficiently are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for demonstrating VfM. Interventions may be being implemented very well but if they are not the right interventions then impact will not be maximised and effectiveness – the cornerstone of VfM - will not be achieved.
- 1.9. One of the advantages of couching the questions in the above format is that they provide a possible framework for, or approach to, VfM that staff can integrate into their on-going or summative evaluation of their work. Arguably these are questions that sit more readily with reflection on performance than more formal and less widely used terms such as economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.10. The value from a VfM review lies in part in the assurance that it can provide to both providers and recipients of services. However, it can be argued that a greater added value comes from the extent to which it acts as a catalyst for improvement, based on an evaluation of a body of evidence that demonstrates what is working well and what is working less well. This in turn can lead to well informed judgements about what needs to change.
- 1.11. If one accepts the approach and underlying assumptions outlined above, then the next consideration was how to gather the necessary evidence to make a valid evaluation of VfM. However, it must be recognised that evidence gathering and analysis for this report took place in the wholly exceptional circumstances of the lockdown imposed to combat the Coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, it was an exercise undertaken entirely remotely. While this caused some inevitable logistical challenges and delays in reporting, it did not affect the quality of evidence gathered or impair the validity of subsequent findings and conclusions.
- 1.12. This VfM review drew upon information and data supplied by EAS in response to requests, evidence from external experts who have undertaken work for EAS during the year 2019-20. The unique circumstances of operating during a global pandemic meant that the question that this VfM review had to answer in order to come to an overall judgement was:

*How successful was the EAS in responding to the pandemic to mitigate the impact on schools, learners and its own workforce?*

### **Conclusion**

- 1.13. Consideration of the body of evidence provided to this review enabled a judgement to be made regarding VfM and the judgement is that:

*EAS continues to provide good VfM in terms of the services it provides, as evidenced by its successful mitigation of the impact of the pandemic on schools, learners and its own workforce*

1.14. This conclusion was arrived at because:

- **Economy and Efficiency – spending less and spending well.** The EAS has increased the capacity and credibility of the school improvement offer while reducing the cost of delivering it and maintaining one of the highest delegation rates to schools of any consortium in Wales.
- **Equity – spending fairly.** The EAS has mitigated the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged and vulnerable learners through the provision of a range of services designed to promote wellbeing and minimise the, often disproportionate, impact on these young people.
- **Effectiveness– spending wisely.** The EAS has provided flexible and responsive support that has contributed positively to the wellbeing of staff both within schools and its own workforce.
- **Sustainability – spending for the long term.** In response to the pandemic the EAS has devised an alternative approach to service provision that is sustainable from both a financial and human resource perspective.

1.15. The full report in Appendix A details the evidence that underpins these judgements.

## **Recommendations**

1.16. The profound impact of the pandemic on working practices means that there was little or no opportunity for the EAS to implement the recommendation that was made last year. In anticipation of the year 2021-2022 seeing something of a return to more ‘normal’ working it would appear sensible to re-iterate the recommendation as follows:

- The EAS needs to build upon its evolving approach to considering VfM through:
  - on-going refinement of its internal reporting mechanisms;
  - further developing its mid-year review of VfM; and
  - extending engagement with recipients of its services to triangulate evidence and further validate findings and conclusions.
- The pandemic has shown that positive change is and has been possible. Schools, settings and the EAS have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working and delivering meaningful learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach.
  - The EAS needs to reflect and build upon on the lessons learned from the positive approach that has been developed during this time.
- The EAS needs to ensure that:
  - recommendations from the IIP report are implemented and their effectiveness evaluated through a staff survey;
  - responses are compared to those from the survey undertaken as part of the accreditation process; and
  - future people management processes are refined to reflect the survey outcomes.

## **2. Resource Implications**

2.1 There are no specific resource implications, but resource decisions already taken are considered within the report.

## **3. Consultation**

3.1. The Consultees are noted below:

- Directors of Education (within South East Wales)
- Regional Joint Executive Group (JEG)
- Individual local authority education scrutiny committees

## **4. Background Papers**

4.1 The South-East Wales Regional Value for Money Report (2020-2021) attached as Appendix A.

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# **Value for Money (VFM) Review and Report for 2020/21 for the South East Wales Education Achievement Service**

**Report Author: Rod Alcott (External Consultant)**

**Date of report: June 2021**

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## **Executive Summary**

Value for Money (VfM), or cost effectiveness, is a measure of how well resources are being used to achieve intended outcomes. Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes. VfM is usually measured by considering:

- **Economy:** minimising the cost of resources used while having regard to quality (inputs)
  - spending less;
- **Efficiency:** the relationship between outputs and the resources used to produce them
  - spending well; and
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which objectives are achieved (outcomes) – spending wisely.

While the above represent the traditional method of measuring VfM it is also possible to include two further dimensions:

- **Equity:** the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to – spending fairly.
- **Sustainability:** an increasingly standard consideration within the context of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (WBFG) – spending for the long term.

While addressing the above is essential within any VfM review it is also important to consider them within the specific context of the organisation being reviewed, and the external environment within which the organisation has been operating during the period under review. For the period 2020-2021 the dominant external consideration is that of an organisation operating under the challenges posed in adapting service delivery to respond to a global pandemic.

This means that a key feature of the review will be an evaluation of the effectiveness of the organisation's response both in terms of its deployment of resources and the impact of its amended service provision. Evaluating impact will also provide a unique challenge given that the usual measures of educational outcomes such as examination results, school categorisation and Estyn inspection reports will either not be available or, where available, will not provide a valid measure of progress.

In the context of operating in the unique circumstances of a global pandemic and in the absence of the usual measures of effectiveness then considerations of effectiveness have to be re-thought. The most valid measure now becomes a consideration of the extent to which EAS achieved what it set out to do in response to the unique set of circumstances under which it was operating.

The exceptional circumstances within which the EAS operated throughout 2020-2021 means that an evaluation of VfM must be re-thought. This re-thinking means that:

- considerations of economy and efficiency are best conflated into a single judgement;
- sustainability centres around the extent to which revised ways of working can be continued in the future;
- equity becomes an even more significant consideration given the well documented disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils; and
- effectiveness places a greater focus on well-being and becomes essentially a judgement on the extent to which schools and staff felt well-supported.

While the current context provides a particular set of challenges it does not deflect from an approach centred around answering the basic VfM questions of:

- Are you doing the right things?
- How well are you doing them? (economy and efficiency)
- Are you promoting fairness? (equity)
- What impact are you having? (effectiveness)
- Is your approach sustainable? (sustainability)

It must be recognised that the above questions are inextricably linked. There is a need to recognise that interventions that are being implemented economically and efficiently are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for demonstrating VfM. Interventions may be being implemented very well but if they are not the right interventions then impact will not be maximised and effectiveness – the cornerstone of VfM - will not be achieved.

One of the advantages of couching the questions in the above format is that they provide a possible framework for, or approach to, VfM that staff can integrate into their on-going or summative evaluation of their work. Arguably these are questions that sit more readily with reflection on performance than more formal and less widely used terms such as economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The value from a VfM review lies in part in the assurance that it can provide to both providers and recipients of services. However, it can be argued that a greater added value comes from the extent to which it acts as a catalyst for improvement, based on an evaluation of a body of evidence that demonstrates what is working well and what is working less well. This in turn can lead to well informed judgements about what needs to change.

If one accepts the approach and underlying assumptions outlined above, then the next consideration was how to gather the necessary evidence to make a valid evaluation of VfM. However, it must be recognised that evidence gathering and analysis for this report took place in the wholly exceptional circumstances of the working practices employed to combat the Coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, it was an exercise undertaken entirely remotely. While this caused some inevitable logistical challenges and delays in reporting, it did not affect the quality of evidence gathered or impair the validity of subsequent findings and conclusions.

This VfM review drew upon information and data supplied by EAS in response to requests and evidence from external experts who have undertaken work for EAS during the year 2020-21. The unique circumstances of operating during a global pandemic meant that the question that this VfM review had to answer to arrive at an overall judgement was:

*How successful was the EAS in responding to the pandemic to mitigate the impact on schools, learners and its own workforce?*

Consideration of the body of evidence provided to this review enabled a judgement to be made regarding VfM and the judgement is that:

**EAS continues to provide good VfM in terms of the services it provides, as evidenced by its successful mitigation of the impact of the pandemic on schools, learners and its own workforce**

This conclusion was arrived at because:

- **Economy and Efficiency – spending less and spending well.** The EAS has increased the capacity and credibility of the school improvement offer while reducing the cost of delivering it and maintaining one of the highest delegation rates to schools of any consortium in Wales.
- **Equity – spending fairly.** The EAS has mitigated the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged and vulnerable learners through the provision of a range of services designed to promote wellbeing and minimise the, often disproportionate, impact on these young people.

- **Effectiveness– spending wisely.** The EAS has provided flexible and responsive support that has contributed positively to the wellbeing of staff both within schools and its own workforce.
- **Sustainability – spending for the long term.** In response to the pandemic the EAS has devised an alternative approach to service provision that is sustainable from both a financial and human resource perspective.

The main body of this report will detail the evidence that underpins these judgements.

## **Recommendations:**

1. The profound impact of the pandemic on working practices means that there was little or no opportunity for the EAS to implement the recommendation that was made last year. In anticipation of the year 2021-22 seeing something of a return to more ‘normal’ working it would appear sensible to re-iterate the recommendation as follows:
  - The EAS needs to build upon its evolving approach to considering VfM through:
    - on-going refinement of its internal reporting mechanisms;
    - further developing its mid-year review of VfM; and
    - extending engagement with recipients of its services to triangulate evidence and further validate findings and conclusions.
2. The pandemic has shown that positive change is, and has been, possible. Schools, settings and the EAS have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working and delivering meaningful learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach.
  - The EAS needs to reflect and build upon the lessons learned from the positive approach that has been developed during this time.
3. The EAS needs to ensure that:
  - recommendations from the IIP report are implemented and their effectiveness evaluated through a staff survey;
  - responses are compared to those from the survey undertaken as part of the accreditation process; and
  - future people management processes are refined to reflect the survey outcomes.

**Economy and Efficiency – spending less and spending well. The EAS has increased the capacity and credibility of the school improvement offer while reducing the cost of delivering it and maintaining one of the highest delegation rates to schools of any consortium in Wales.**

One part of arriving at an overall judgement is to look at the organisation holistically in terms of the overall resources -essentially people and money - at its disposal.

The picture is one of ever diminishing resources both in terms of income and staff numbers. The extent of the reduction in core funding, grant funding and trading income is shown below. There has been an agreed 8.24% reduction in LA funding over the past 5 years which, along with the elimination of trading income, has resulted in a reduction in total core funding of some £880k or 22.12% in absolute terms between 2016-17 and 2020-21; although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into account, the reduction has been in excess of 30%. Over the same time period the reduction in the amount of grant money received from the Welsh Government has resulted in EAS having £4.96m or 7.3% less, in grant money available in absolute terms. When reductions in LA funding, elimination of trading income and reductions in grant money received are added together the reduction in total funding is £4.96m which represents an 8.3% reduction in absolute terms; although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into account, the reduction has been in the region of 10%.

The overall financial position is summarised in the table below.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
LA Funding	£3,376,653	£3,275,353	£3,209,847	£3,145,651	£3,098,465
Trading Income	£601,974	£447,460	£0	£0	£0
Total Core Funding	£3,978,627	£3,722,813	£3,209,847	£3,145,651	£3,098,465
Grants	£56,082,261	£52,033,572	£51,991,066	£49,022,408	£51,996,479
<b>Total</b>	<b>£60,060,888</b>	<b>£55,756,385</b>	<b>£55,200,913</b>	<b>£52,168,059</b>	<b>£55,094,944</b>
Delegated To Schools	£50,384,126	£46,481,315	£48,886,304	£46,142,076	£48,754,009
Delegation Rate	90%	89%	94%	94%	94%
Residual Income	£7,668,633	£7,278,655	£6,314,609	£6,025,983	£6,340,935

However, if increases in the rate of delegation to schools are taken into account then residual income spent on running the organisation, including staffing costs, fell by some £1.33m or 17.3% from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The evidence clearly demonstrates that EAS is spending less than in previous years and that the rate of reduction is accelerating, while the overall number of schools being supported has remained largely static.

Reduced spending has inevitably resulted in a considerable reduction in staffing numbers, with the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff reducing from 111 in 2016-17 to 69 in 2020-21, taking the total reduction in FTE staff reduction to 42 over the period 2016-17 to 2020-21, representing a reduction of over one third in staffing levels. This staffing reduction is starkly illustrated by the dramatic reduction in the number of Challenge Advisors employed by the EAS. Prior to the

inauguration of the EAS in 2012 the Challenge Adviser ‘to be’ model was based on 31.7 FTE employees. At the end March 2021, the Challenge Adviser delivery model was based on 4.20 FTE Challenge Advisers and 74 current serving Headteachers.

Such a reduction in staffing numbers inevitably leads to the question *‘how does an organisation maintain the level and quality of service delivery with significantly fewer people to undertake the work?’* The answer one suspects is through a different model of delivery which then begs the question *‘does the revised delivery model provide value for money?’*

The answer to the first of these questions can be found in the evolution of a different model of service delivery, as reflected in the work undertaken by Steve Munby in his Review of Progress carried out in October 2020<sup>1</sup>. In his report of the findings from the review he concluded that:

*‘EAS is ensuring that it avoids being insular and maximises the expertise available to it by identifying highly effective schools from outside the region and pairing them with schools in the region. This is bringing in much needed additional capacity at secondary school level and is enhancing the credibility of the offer to schools.*

*EAS has continued to move towards a school-led system by ensuring that almost all challenge advisers are serving school leaders. This has significantly enhanced the credibility of those providing support and challenge to schools and has been very well-received by headteachers. In addition, wherever possible, EAS has combined the role of Challenge Adviser and Headteacher of the Lead Network School. This has provided more joined-up support and has increased the capacity of the school improvement offer, as the Lead Network School is able to bring the expertise from within their own school to provide support. 20 primary schools and 3 secondary schools are part of a new “earned autonomy” approach where they receive the resource but can choose how they use it.’*

While the above provides evidence of the enhancement of the quality of service being offered, a VfM study must also consider the cost of provision before coming to any conclusion regarding economy and efficiency. The evidence points to the service now costing considerably less than it would if the original number of CAs, that were envisaged to be necessary, were still being retained. This cost saving can be summarised as:

- £1,910,939 estimated current cost of employing 31.7 FTE Challenge Advisors
- £253,184 current cost of employing 4.2 FTE Challenge Advisers
- £953,500 anticipated partner Challenge Adviser costs
- **£704,255** reduction in costs

The evidence, relating to this significant area of service delivery clearly leads to the conclusion that both economy and efficiency in the use of resources are being achieved. The EAS is not only spending less but is also spending well by delivering an enhanced service at a reduced cost.

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<sup>1</sup> A previous review was conducted in 2019 and reported on in October 2019

**Equity – spending fairly. The EAS has mitigated the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged and vulnerable learners through the provision of a range of services designed to promote wellbeing and minimise the, often disproportionate, impact on these young people.**

Before considering the issue of equity it is important to be clear what is meant by equity in the context of education. In education, equity addresses the issue of fairness and the removal of barriers to achievement. The Welsh Government's Education in Wales: Our National Mission states that, “*each learner must be respected and challenged to achieve the best they are capable of ... while being supported to overcome barriers that inhibit their learning*” (Welsh Government, 2017, p.31).

“*Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion)*” (OECD, 2012, p.9).

‘*Equity does not mean that all students obtain equal education outcomes, but rather that differences in students’ outcomes are unrelated to their background or to economic and social circumstances over which students have no control*’. (OECD, 2018, p.13)

For the purposes of this report the concentration will be on the impact of the pandemic. It is appropriate to acknowledge that the pandemic has not necessarily been a positive time as many have experienced loss and had difficult lockdown experiences, including isolation, physical and mental health challenges, and anxiety. Home learning experiences will have been varied. We know that some learners have struggled and, due to a range of factors including digital exclusion, many have not engaged adequately. It is important to note that some children and families have struggled and been concerned that they are not making progress.

In response to this the EAAs has continued to place wellbeing at the forefront of a supportive regional approach. This approach reflected a recognition that schools and their communities have had their own unique set of circumstances that required a bespoke and flexible approach to learning together..

There is ample evidence of the impact of the pandemic on pupil wellbeing and in particular the wellbeing of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners. Research suggests a strong association between wellbeing and educational outcomes. There is widespread acknowledgement that wellbeing is multifaceted including the following four dimensions of:

- emotional (including fears, anxiety and mood);
- behavioural (including attention problems);
- social (including victimisation); and
- school wellbeing (including enjoyment and engagement) (Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012:3).

In recognition of this the EAS provided a range of services designed to equip the educational workforce to mitigate the threat to wellbeing and minimise this disproportionate impact. This approach encompassed a recognition that promoting the well-being of school leaders and their workforce was integral to supporting the well-being of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. The support provided to promote well-being among school leaders and their workforce is detailed later in this report, while this section of the report concentrates on the support that was provided to better equip the educational workforce to support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

One aspect of this support was participation in a National Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Focus Week as part of a national programme of work designed to support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of learners. An overview of the programme is provided below.

	Theme	Keynote Speakers	Breakout Sessions
Monday 22 <sup>nd</sup> March	Whole School Approach	Kirsty Williams – Education Minister Alasdair MacDonald – Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Overview Sally Holland - C.C Officer Becky Frances - Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)	Trauma Informed and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Practices – Dr Coral Harper
Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> March	Teaching and Learning	Mike Guerson	A Tiered Approach to Teaching and Learning – Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)  Understanding the impact of poverty – Ellie Harwood (Children in Wales)  Engaging the digitally excluded – Kate Thomas.  Early Language Development – Head sprout
Wednesday 24 <sup>th</sup> March	Re-igniting Learning	Nina Jackson - Engaging with Families Professor Barry Carpenter - A Recovery Curriculum	
Thursday 25 <sup>th</sup> March	Accelerating and Intervention Programmes	Lousie Blackburn - Raising the Achievement of Disadvantaged Youngsters	Engagement in Communities – University of Florida  Family and Community Engagement Modules – Regional Presentation  Literacy and Oracy – Voice 21 Role of the Engagement Officer – Regional Presentation  Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) – Regional Presentation  Super Ambassador Programme and Pupil Voice – Kath Mattingly
Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> March	Effective Approaches and Planning	Professor Mick Waters	

The programme was well received as the following comments from participating Headteachers illustrate:

*'I wanted to thank you for helping arrange this week's training. It's been thought-provoking and inspiring. I understand that all the sessions have been recorded. Is that right? I'd really like to use some of them with my staff. Where can I find them please?'*

*'This has really given me food for thought. Definitely something I want to follow up.'*

In addition to participation in the national programme of work the EAS also provided support at a regional level. This support entailed the EAS providing schools across the region with professional learning opportunities with a focus on teaching, learning and developing learner's engagement in learning. These opportunities included the provision of a Primary and Secondary Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Learner Lead Programme. This programme comprised a number of sessions that covered:

- *Professional Learning Programme: Settling in* – teaching learning behaviours and high expectations; including the development of resources, for use when appropriate, for school professional learning.
- *Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners* - focusing on ‘hearts and minds’ encouraging staff to reflect on their own beliefs and how these impact on their work and the work of their colleagues.
- *Understanding impact of COVID–19 on Vulnerable Learners* – building greater knowledge and understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on disadvantaged learners based on international research.
- *Understanding ‘Learned Helplessness’* - developing a clear understanding of how to help learners become more resilient.
- *Assessing the poorest child* – including consideration of how planning impacts on the poorest learners.
- *Developing ‘Universal Provision’ for Teaching and Learning of Vulnerable Learners* – focusing on developing schools’ tiered approach to supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable learners.
- *Supporting Young Carers in school* – providing schools with resources to raise the awareness of Young Carers.
- *What being poor does to young people’s brains and what schools can do about it* - focusing on the impact of poverty on learners and which instructional strategies will help make miracles happen!
- *Supporting Adopted Learners* - providing professional learning opportunities and resources to support those learners who are either identified as Adopted Learners or those currently in Care.
- *Hard to reach schools* - looking at the school as part of the community including the challenges of attendance and engagement from the hardest to reach families.
- *Developing five steps to instructional coaching to benefit disadvantaged and vulnerable learners* - focusing on behaviour and relationships, curriculum planning, explaining, and modelling, questioning and feedback.
- *Supporting learners who are ‘New to English’* - providing guidance and resources to support the learners who are either BAME or New Arrivals and new to the English language.
- *Moving on and Moving Up* - Download resources (to use when appropriate) for school development and professional learning, focusing on careers related learning and transition.
- *Taking the REINS – Reflection, Evaluation, Impact, Next Steps* - download resources (to use when appropriate) for school development and professional learning.

In addition to the programme outlined above the EAS has:

- Provided *Positively Mad Professional Learning* - sessions for staff focusing on habits of learning.
- Purchased *‘Thinking Differently for Disadvantaged Learners’* – a Professional Learning Offer for teachers to support vulnerable learners and raise aspirations. The programme provides new ideas and approaches to support accelerating learning approaches for all schools and settings.
- Supported the *Accelerating Learning Programme grant*. - this included the creation of a playlist of research-based interventions to support all learners return to school but a targeted approach for vulnerable learners.
- Expanded the existing *Raising the Achievement of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) Programme across clusters* - to get a consistent approach regarding support and provision for vulnerable learners.
- Developed a *Blended Learning Website* - in partnership with schools with a section aligned to supporting Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Groups of Learners.
- Captured *Case studies* - to share practice across the region.

- Developed a guidance document '*Engaging the Digitally Disengaged Learners.*'
- Provided a range of professional learning opportunities to include:
  - *Family and Community Engagement Programme.*
  - *Designated Looked After Children Lead*
  - *Sexuality and Relationship Curriculum Toolkit.*
  - *Reading and Reflection Intervention Programme for Teaching Assistants*
  - *Developing your Anti-Poverty Strategy.*
  - *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (train the Trainer – Unit 2)*
  - *Rights of the Child and Curriculum for Wales*

The extensive range of Professional Learning support that was offered was complemented by targeted financial support for disadvantaged and vulnerable learners via the Pupil Development Grant and financial support for secondary schools to continue to engage in the Vulnerable Learner Lead Programme.

At the start of the pandemic, no one could have foreseen or anticipated the disruption to the lives of learners, staff and school communities that would happen during the course of the year. In recognition of this the EAS continues to place wellbeing at the forefront of the regional approach and this is reflected in the Business Plan for 2021-2022 which identifies the following priority:

*'Continue to provide support to leaders on the identification and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.'*

The approach adopted by the EAS was endorsed by Dr Steve Munby in the findings from his follow-up review in October 2020 where he commented that:

*'Good progress has been made by EAS, in partnership with Local Authorities and schools, in developing support for student well-being and for staff well-being. A well-being review is now being conducted jointly with local authorities. Since my last review, a regional approach to supporting vulnerable learners has been developed. The Raising the Achievement of Disadvantaged Learners (RADY) initiative is an important development, with 26 clusters requesting to be involved. Networks are very well-attended and a new offer for professional learning for Teaching Assistants has been well-received.'*

### **Effectiveness– spending wisely. The EAS has provided flexible and responsive support that has contributed positively to the wellbeing of staff both within schools and its own workforce.**

As stated earlier, arriving at a judgement on effectiveness, in the context of a school improvement service operating in the unprecedented circumstances of a global pandemic, requires a greater focus on well-being and becomes essentially a judgement on the extent to which schools and staff felt well-supported. It is important to recognize that the term staff, as used here, refers to the Wellbeing support provided for all levels of educational practitioners, learners and the EAS in-house workforce.

The impact of the pandemic was such that the original priorities and actions set out in the 2020-21 Business Plan were not able to be delivered. A revised plan was developed (October 2020) that reflected the adaptation required to meet the needs of the changed situation. It is important to note that wellbeing featured as an objective in the initial Business Plan and this was reflected in the revised plan. It was recognised that it was critically important that the EAS remained sensitive and responsive to the needs of the school workforce. Schools and settings were facing many challenges and new approaches, the EAS needed to be a highly supportive, reflective and

responsive organisation that provided resources and guidance materials for schools that addressed the 5Rs<sup>2</sup>.

The approach outlined above in the revised 2020-21 Business Plan has been continued in the 2021-22 iteration, to reflect the on-going nature of the pandemic and its wellbeing legacy. This is illustrated by the inclusion, as Priority A, within the 2021-22 Plan of the following:

*'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.'*

This revised approach adopted for the latter half of 2020-21, and its continuation into 2021-22, is entirely consistent with expert external advice provided to the EAS:

*"Especially in times of uncertainty, it is important for the organisation to be agile and to be able to respond quickly to changing needs. In these times of challenge, continue to focus on staying close to schools, listening to the voice of school leaders and working closely with local authorities. Relationships and trust are crucial in times of uncertainty so in spite of the other pressures this needs to continue to be prioritised very strongly and time proactively put aside in diaries to do it."*  
*(Steve Munby: Review of the EAS - October 2020)*

One aspect of the support provided was participation in a National Development Programme entitled '*Well-being Partnership Programme*'. Participation in the core elements of the programme involved the EAS in:

- raising awareness and enabling access to mental health and well-being support;
- the development and delivery of mental health support for educational staff and leaders;
- creating capacity to provide every headteacher with a coach;
- promoting and hosting National Well-being webinars;
- the development of national Well-being programme for leaders plus review and revision of current well-being module of all leadership pathway programmes;
- the development of Compassionate Principles for Leaders (Leadership Academy leading); and
- a programme of recognition for educational staff at all levels;

Alongside participation in the National Programme the EAS also provided additional support on a regional basis. One component of this regional support was the EAS offer of emergency Wellbeing Coaching sessions to support leaders. Other examples included:

- development of a Wellbeing Team Space for schools to remain connected and informed during the pandemic;
- shared links to Wellbeing webinars in all EAS networks;
- Professional Learning in using Emotional Coaching Techniques with learners;
- the purchase of a license for all schools and setting to access the resources via the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) website;
- the delivery of four PL programme focussed on engaging the disengaged learner;
- drop in coffee mornings to support Foster Carers by providing resources and techniques to help manage the emotions of their foster children;

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<sup>2</sup> Regrouping, reflection, renewal, relationships, relaxation

- two pupil voice activities focussed on their wellbeing. One pupil voice questionnaire was particularly targeted at Children in Care; and
- a planned curriculum entitled ‘Altogether Now’ was shared with all schools to assist them with their curriculum offer in June 2020. This was supported with another planned curriculum called ‘Altogether Again’, shared with schools to support their return to school in September 2020.

Given that a very significant factor in judging effectiveness is the extent to which schools felt well supported, then the most valid form of evidence available to this review is the views of headteachers on that support. This evidence is available in the form of responses to a survey carried out by the EAS in April 2021. For summer 2021 the survey was significantly adapted to share with a broader range of stakeholders, including headteachers, other leaders, governors, teachers, learners and teaching assistants. At the time of writing, responses from the broader group were not available so the following analysis is based on headteacher responses.

The survey was distributed in a series of Headteacher Briefings, with time being given to complete and the introduction, for the first time, of an option to complete anonymously. Approximately 70% of those who attended chose to complete the survey. All questions were revised, from previous surveys, to focus upon the role of the EAS during the main period of the pandemic from Summer 2020 to Spring 2021.

It is worth noting that the validity of the evidence generated from the survey is enhanced by:

- its recent timing; and
- its amended focus.

In analysing survey results two universal considerations apply in relation to historical trends. The first is response rates and the second is the level of positivity in those responses. In relation to response rates it is significant that the overall response rate rose from 38% in 2019 to 53% in 2021.

In terms of positivity levels, it must be recognised that previous iterations of the survey used different question sets that were focused on support and challenge as it was delivered at that time. While this rules out direct comparison question by question it is still possible to compare overall levels of positivity. Approximately 70% positive approval rates were achieved in 2018 and 2019, compared with an approximate positive rating of 80% and above in 2021. It is also worth noting that negative response rates were significantly lower in 2021 than in 2018 and 2019.

In looking at survey findings on a question by question basis it needs to be recognised that all main questions had 6 response options:

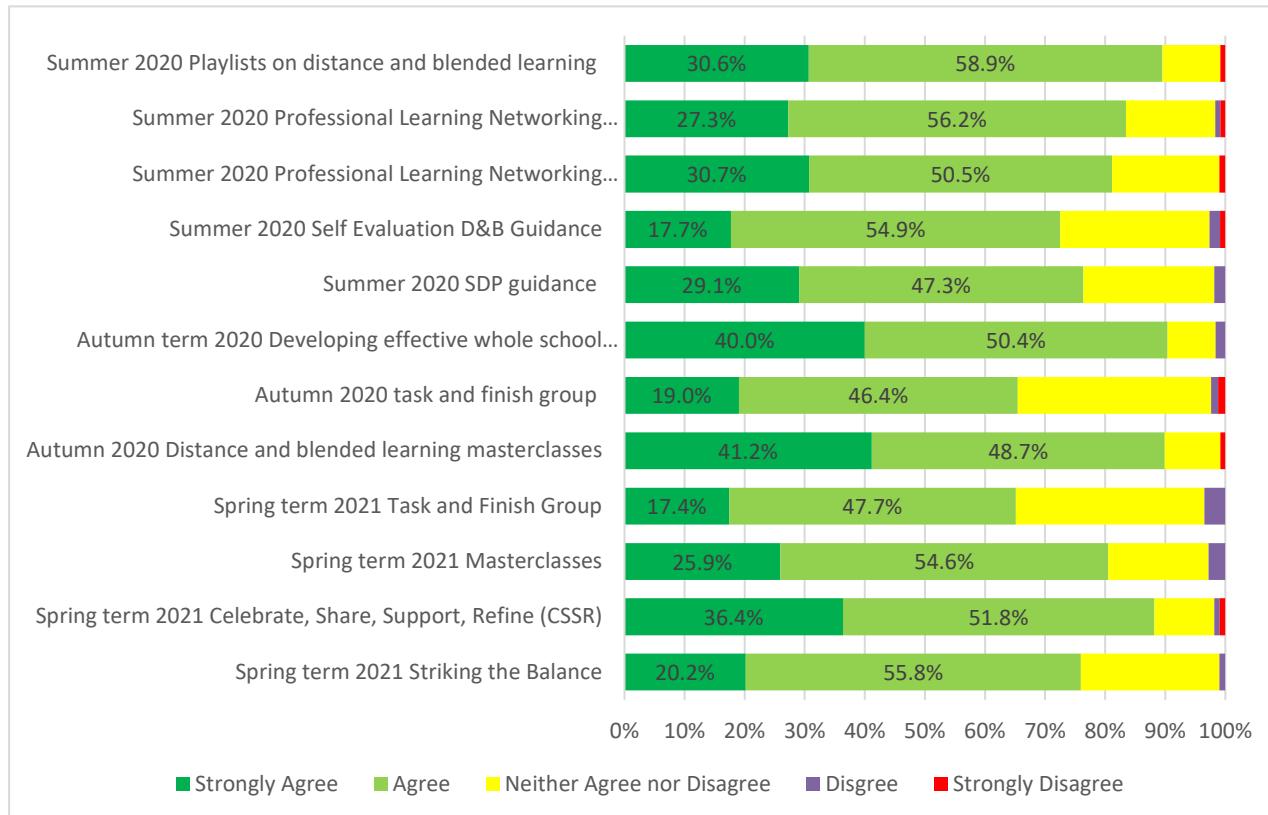
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not applicable

All ‘Not applicable’ responses have been removed and only the 5 applicable responses are included in the following illustrations of results.

## **Advice and guidance**

This section of the survey listed a number of support measures provided by the EAS and asked respondents whether or not they agreed that the EAS had provided timely and effective advice and guidance on, and approaches to, distance and blended learning. The results are presented in the

table below:

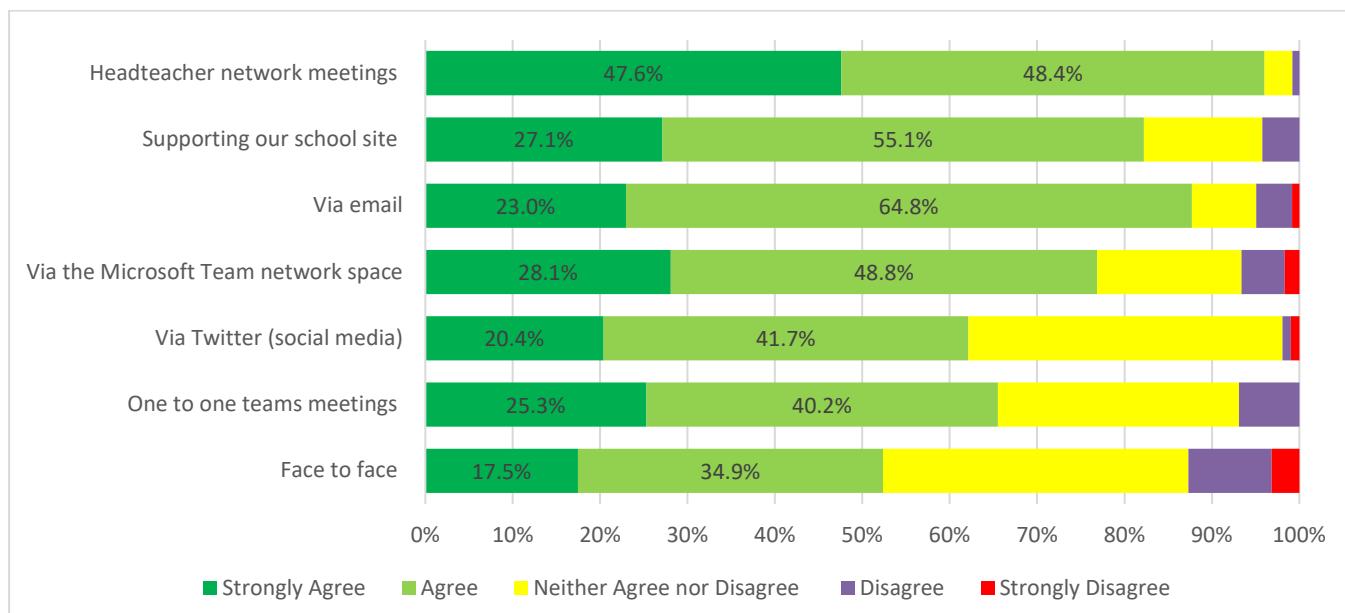


The positive response rates (Strongly Agree / Agree) for each of the support measures ranges from between 65%-90%. Negative response rates (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree) were never higher than 5%, representing between 1-4 respondents of the 128.

The single response of “Strongly Disagree” on each of the 7 questions was from the same respondent.

## Communication

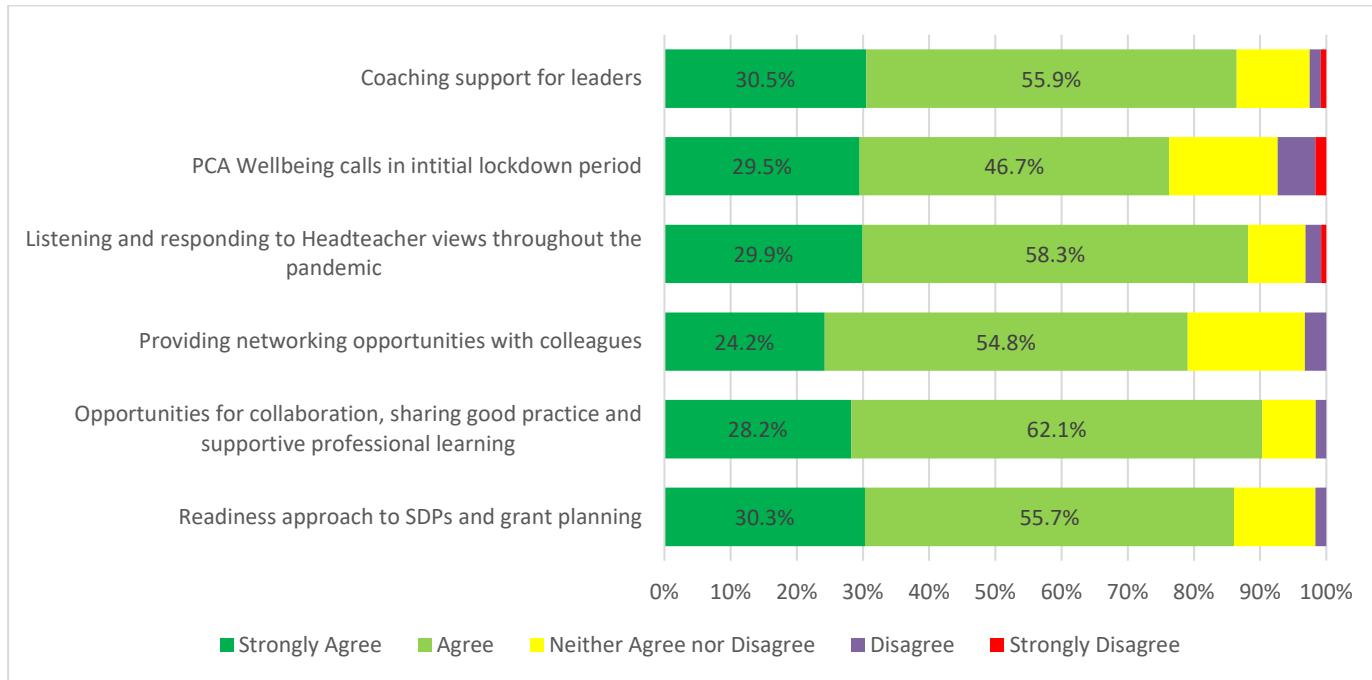
This section asked school leaders to reflect on whether or not they agreed that the range of communication methods the EAS has utilised and evolved during the period of the pandemic were effective. The results are presented in the table below:



The positive response rates (Strongly Agree / Agree) for each of the questions range from 50%-95%. Negative response rates (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree were never higher than 7%, except for the question on face-to-face, where 13% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

## **Wellbeing.**

This section asked school leaders to reflect on whether or not they agreed that the EAS appropriately prioritised the wellbeing of all through the period of the pandemic. The results are presented in the table below:



The positive response rates (Strongly Agree / Agree) for each of the questions ranges from between 75%-90%. Negative response rates (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree were never higher than 8%.

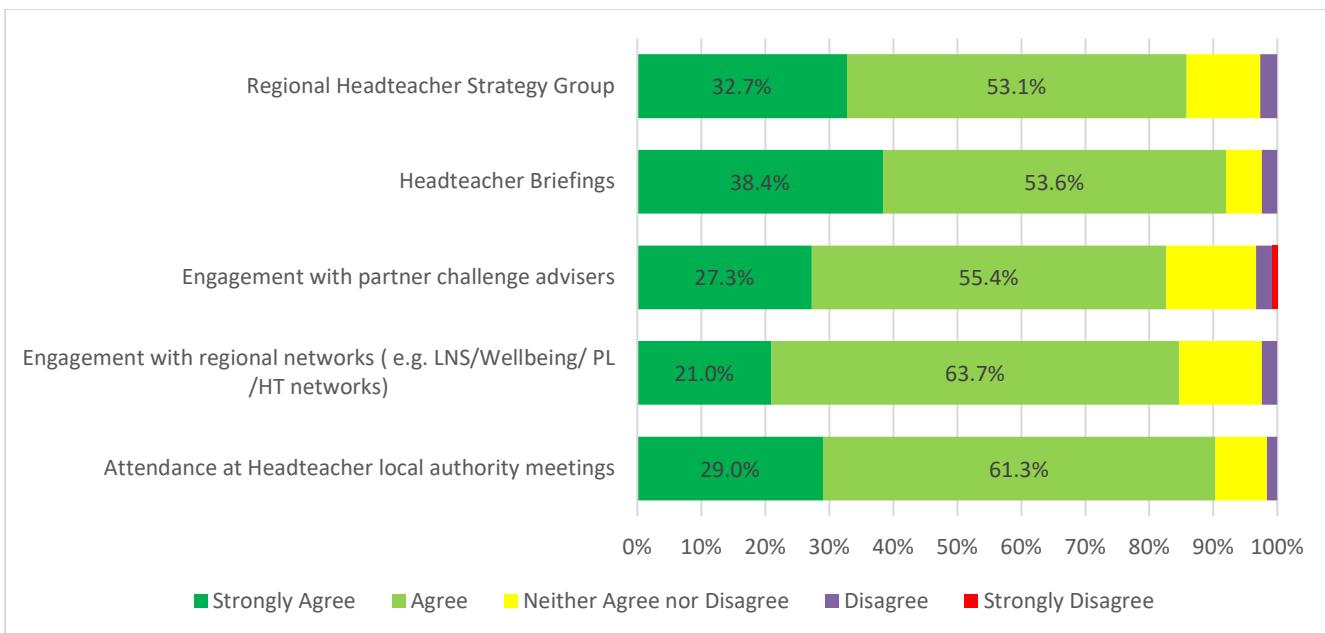
In addition to the quantitative evidence of positive and negative response rates illustrated above, there is also qualitative evidence in the form of the following comments received from individual headteachers:

*'During a time when we have all had to make significant adaptations, the EAS has adapted exceptionally well to support schools. There is a genuine feeling of well-being and balance that underpins the strategic direction. Thank you.'*

*'EAS certainly listened following the first return to school and responded well to ensuring the wellbeing of schools and school leaders became a priority.'*

## **Involvement**

This section asked school leaders to reflect on whether or not they agreed that the EAS had involved headteachers in discussions about regional support via a range of mechanisms/groups. The results are presented in the table below:



The positive response rates (Strongly Agree / Agree) for each of the questions ranges from between 80%-90%. Negative response rates (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree were never higher than 4%.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence paints a picture of school leaders who feel that they have been well advised, listened to, supported and involved by the EAS through the period of the pandemic. This is also reflected in the findings of Dr Steve Munby in his follow-up report of October 2020. The report ends with the following conclusion:

*'I was greatly encouraged by my return visit. When I reviewed the work of EAS last year, it was already making strong progress on its agreed direction of travel. But since then, in spite of the massive change that covid-19 has caused in how schools and the EAS need to work, the progress has either been significantly accelerated or has, at the very least, continued steadily. Some of the practices that are now in place or are being developed are as good as I have seen anywhere else in the world. Now is not the time to lose your nerve but to renew your efforts'.*

In the opening paragraph of this section of the report reference was also made to the the wellbeing support provided the EAS to its in-house workforce. This support was provided in recognition of the additional support that was required to ensure that the potential adverse impact of the pandemic on the workforce was mitigated. In outline the support comprised:

- developing a Team Space for EAS staff to connect;
- creating a Staff Wellbeing Focus Group (consisting of representatives from each EAS Team);
- sharing 'Five Ways to Wellbeing<sup>3</sup>' for staff;
- introducing monthly staff briefings to remain connected to all staff;
- conducting staff surveys;
- continuing to work towards Investors in People accreditation; and
- holding staff virtual social events.

<sup>3</sup>Seen to be of fundamental significance in ensuring culture change within an organisation and comprising:

- Routines
- Reactions
- Roles
- Relationships
- Reflections

One source of objective external evidence of the quality of people management within the EAS comes from the Investors in People (IiP) accreditation process referred to above. The decision to undertake the IIP accreditation process was agreed following a request by the Company Board on 19 December 2019 to explore accreditation options following on from the results of the November 2019 staff survey. The process commenced in October 2020 and a feedback report on the outcome of the assessment was received on 4 January 2021. As a result of the assessment process the EAS has been awarded the Gold level of the 'We invest in people' accreditation.

The assessor commented in his report that "*the achievement of Gold level accreditation is based on extensive evidence collection despite restrictions imposed by government in reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic*" and highlighted the following as standout strengths:

- excellent communications;
- a distinctive leadership style;
- teamworking at all levels;
- intersectional working typified by several task and finish groups;
- strong core values; and
- a strong commitment to learning and continuous professional development.

The IIP feedback report highlights the following as areas the EAS should be proud of:

- The seamless switch from office to home-based provision of services without any perceptible impact on the quality and levels of service provided to clients.
- Emphasis on staff wellbeing (using a structured five-point model) during the current lockdown including a Covid-19 related staff survey (undertaken in July 2020) and the activities and proposals of the Wellbeing Focus Group.
- The involvement of all staff and other stakeholders in the development of the business plan and overall strategy of the organisation.
- An effective PDR system that provides all staff with meaningful performance objectives that can be linked directly to requirements contained within the business plan.
- Despite the restrictions on flexible rewards and remuneration, senior staff are at pains to recognise staff individually and collectively for their contribution to organisation.
- Good channels of communications, especially during home-working, with regular team briefings to keep staff informed of activities and developments within the organisation.
- Frequent canvassing of the opinions of the workforce. Recent surveys have focused on assessing the impact of Covid-19 on wellbeing and operations and current levels of ICT literacy in view of the change in working practices.
- The EAS places great store on 'reflection' as precursor to organisational improvement through the adoption of a 'no blame' culture and the viewing of error as a learning opportunity.
- A strong emphasis on learning and development by various means including work shadowing, access to coaching, in-house knowledge sharing, as well as traditional training course attendance and qualification attainment.
- Use of task and finish groups drawn from across the organisation to consider pressing matters and present solutions. Such groups also draw their representation from across the organisation as a whole.
- Despite the limitations in terms of flexible remuneration, the EAS has compensated for this by recognising and valuing staff both as individuals and teams.

In addition to recognising organisational strengths the report also highlighted the following as areas for development.

- Consider the development of a structured leadership programme throughout the organisation.
- As intended, review current organisational values and in so doing, take the opportunity to develop an associated competency framework of linked behaviours.
- Introduce 360° feedback as an extension to the current PDR system and to facilitate the adoption of revised values and behaviours.
- Further develop the inter-relationship between teams by establishing customer-supplier arrangements and key performance indicators.
- Develop a project management methodology to achieve consistency in the way task and finish groups and other cross-sectional teams manage assignments.
- Consider means of encouraging staff to challenge decisions and organisational objectives to facilitate ownership and involvement in strategic and operational decision-making.
- Re-examine the concept of ‘the learning organisation’ by undertaking a proximity audit to its basic tenets and introducing improvements accordingly.
- Consider forming a working party to examine how bilingualism could be strengthened further within the organisation.

While the evidence provided by the IIP accreditation process has been included within this section of the report that is focused upon effectiveness, with an emphasis on staff wellbeing, it also feeds into other judgements within this report. The evidence of effective people management demonstrated through the accreditation process provides important, objective, external and valid evidence to support the earlier judgement of efficiency in the use of resources. It also provides evidence that impacts on any judgement relating to sustainability particularly in relation to the retention of staff which is seen to be a key factor in determining sustainability.

**Sustainability – spending for the long term. In response to the pandemic the EAS has devised an alternative approach to service provision that is sustainable from both a financial and human resource perspective.**

Sustainability in the current context of adapted service provision can be seen to comprise both financial and human resource sustainability. Resource sustainability can, in turn, be seen to comprise both delivery resource sustainability and recipient resource sustainability. Essentially, sustainability requires an approach that continues to be affordable, remains deliverable from the available human resources and capable of continued absorption by the recipients of the services embodied in that approach.

The first two dimensions are not mutually exclusive in that resources attract a financial cost and their efficient deployment makes a significant contribution to financial sustainability. The opening section of this report concludes that the EAS is achieving both economy and efficiency in the use of resources. This conclusion, allied to prudent financial management, provide evidence that the established model of service delivery, and its more recent adaptation to meet the demands of the pandemic, are financially sustainable. The adaptation referred to above meant that changes to the original agreed budget were inevitable and that a revised budget had to be prepared. The eventual budget outturn was one of an overspend of some £29k which was offset against the company reserves of £245,607.

Resource sustainability is typically viewed through the lens of recruitment and retention but in the current circumstances retention, through the provision of wellbeing support, has taken precedence over recruitment. As detailed earlier in this report the EAS has provided an extensive programme of support to its in-house workforce and this has been instrumental in ensuring staff wellbeing and hence facilitating retention and sustainable provision of services. The positive

findings, and outcomes, from the IIP accreditation process provide further evidence of effective people management which encourages a sense of being valued and promotes retention.

Recipient sustainability is a concept that has been constructed specifically for the purposes of this review. Essentially it refers to the extent to which service provision was designed and delivered in a way that maximised support, while not exacerbating the pressures that schools were already experiencing. In recognition of the need to achieve this somewhat delicate balance, support was made available to all schools and settings on the understanding that schools and settings were facing different challenges at different times. It was left to school leaders to determine the most appropriate type and timing of attendance at any or all of the support on offer in line with their priorities.

The EAS was aware of the need to over communicate with clarity to provide reassurance regarding advice, guidance, support and expectations. As a result, existing delivery models were re-purposed to support schools and settings in a time sensitive manner. The EAS also worked with Local Authorities to minimise any unnecessary bureaucracy for schools and settings to ensure they were able to focus on their most important priorities. The timing, delivery and focus of support was carefully considered, taking into account the challenges that the pandemic presented to schools and settings. It was recognised that many schools would be facing periods of time when both staff and pupils would be required to isolate.

With this in mind, there was recognition of the absolute necessity to continue to support schools in developing effective strategies for teaching and learning, in the context of distance and blended learning. This included the blend of some class-based learning (synchronous) and some online (synchronous and asynchronous) learning. The EAS also provided a range of guidance and professional learning for schools on what effective pedagogies could support the approach to 'blended' learning.

The balance that was struck was appreciated by schools as the following quote from a headteacher in the survey response indicates:

*'I certainly feel that EAS has listened and responded to feedback from heads - no additional pressure at times of enormous challenges for schools and heads.'*

Findings from the headteacher survey and outcomes from the IIP accreditation process provide valid evidence from both a service delivery and recipient perspective, which allied to prudent financial management, paint a picture of overall sustainability.

## **Conclusion:**

As stated in the introduction to this report, the context within which the EAS was operating in 2020-21 was unique. This unique context presented the organisation with unprecedented challenges and any VfM judgement must recognise this. Essentially when looking at 2020-21 the key question is:

*How successful was the EAS in responding to the pandemic to mitigate the impact on schools, learners and its own workforce?*

Impact mitigation required an amended approach, with wellbeing taking an even greater role than the already prominent role afforded to it. It should be recognised that promoting wellbeing is both an end in itself and a means to an end. In the short term the judgement is about the impact on wellbeing as a means to help people cope with the impact of the pandemic. In the longer term it is about the extent to which preserving wellbeing has a positive impact on educational outcomes. It is to be hoped that the successful approaches adopted will benefit learners in the future.

While the context and consequent challenges were unique, the underpinning considerations for a VfM judgement remain unaltered. To demonstrate that it is providing good value for money the EAS has to demonstrate that it was providing a service that was:

- doing the right things;
- doing them well;
- having an impact; and
- sustainable .

The evidence available to this review demonstrates that the EAS, through the adoption of a responsive, flexible and supportive approach chose the right things to do, did them well, had the desired impact and achieved sustainability.

All of which support the overall conclusion that EAS continues to provide good VfM in terms of the services it provides.



# Scrutiny Report

## Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships

### Part 1

Date: 3 November 2021

### Subject Scrutiny Adviser Report

**Author** Scrutiny Adviser

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Invitee:	Role
Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)	Present the Committee with the Scrutiny Adviser Report for discussion and update the Committee on any changes.

## Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

### Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked to:

**1. Committee's Work Programme:**

Consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme Update (**Appendix 1**):

- Are there any amendments to the topics scheduled to be considered at the next Committee meeting?
- Are there any additional invitees that the Committee requires to fully consider the topics?
- Is there any additional information that the Committee would like to request?

**2. Action Plan**

Consider the Actions from previous meetings (**Appendix 2**):

- Note the responses for the actions;
- Determine if any further information / action is required;
- Agree to receive an update on outstanding issues at the next meeting.

**3. Information Reports**

Note that no Information Reports have been circulated to the Committee

## 2 Context

### Background

- 2.1 The purpose of a forward work programme is to help ensure Councillors achieve organisation and focus in the undertaking of enquiries through the Overview and Scrutiny function. Effective work programming is essential to ensure that the work of Overview and Scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
- 2.2 Further information about the work programming process, including the procedures for referring new business to the programme, can be found in our Scrutiny Handbook on the Council's Scrutiny webpages ([www.newport.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.newport.gov.uk/scrutiny)).
- 2.3 The Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Guide recognises the importance of the forward work programme. In order to 'lead and own the process', it states that Councillors should have ownership of their Committee's work programme, and be involved in developing, monitoring and evaluating it. The Good Scrutiny Guide also states that, in order to make an impact, the scrutiny workload should be co-ordinated and integrated into corporate processes, to ensure that it contributes to the delivery of corporate objectives, and that work can be undertaken in a timely and well-planned manner.

### **Forward Work Programme Update**

- 2.4 The Committee's work programme was set in October 2020, including estimated timescales for when the reports will be considered by the Committee. This programme is then managed and implemented by the designated Scrutiny Adviser for this Committee under the direction of the Committee Chairperson.
- 2.5 Attached as **Appendix 1** is the Committee's Forward Work Programme Update. The Committee is asked to consider:
  - *Any amendments to the topics scheduled to be considered at the next Committee meeting?*
  - *Are there any additional invitees that the Committee requires to fully consider the topics?*
  - *Is there any additional information that the Committee would like to request?*

The Committee agreed to keep a degree of flexibility within its work programme to enable the Committee to respond to urgent / emerging issues. This item is an opportunity for the Committee members to raise any suggested amendments to the Work Programme.

### **Action Sheet from Previous Meetings**

- 2.6 Attached at **Appendix 2** is the Action Sheet from the Committee meetings. The updated completed actions are included in the table.
- 2.7 Any actions that do not have a response will be included on the Action Sheet at the next meeting to ensure that the Committee can keep track of outstanding actions.

### **Information Reports**

- 2.8 There were no Information Reports circulated to the Committee.

## **3 Information Submitted to the Committee**

- 3.1 The following information is attached:

**Appendix 1:** The Committee's Forward Work Programme Update;  
**Appendix 2:** Action Sheet from Previous Meetings.

## **4. Suggested Areas of Focus**

### **Role of the Committee**

**The role of the Committee in considering the report is to:**

- **Forward Work Programme Update - Appendix 1**  
Consider:
  - Are there any amendments to the topics scheduled to be considered at the next Committee meeting?
  - Are there any additional invitees that the Committee requires to fully consider the topics?
  - Is there any additional information that the Committee would like to request?
- **Action Sheet from Previous Meetings - Appendix 2**
  - Consider the responses to the actions from the meeting;
  - Are you satisfied that you have received the necessary information?
  - Are there any further issues arising from the responses that you would like to raise?
  - For the actions that do not have responses – these actions will be rolled over to the next meeting and reported back to the Committee.
- **Information Reports**  
Note that no Information Reports were circulated to the Committee.

## **Section B – Supporting Information**

### **5 Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The Corporate Assessment, and the subsequent [follow up assessment](#) provide background information on the importance of good work programming. Specific reference is made to the need to align the Cabinet and Scrutiny work programmes to ensure the value of the Scrutiny Function is maximised.
- 5.2 The latest Cabinet work programme was approved by the Cabinet on a monthly basis for the next 12 months and includes the list of reports scheduled for consideration. Effective forward planning by both Cabinet and Scrutiny needs to be coordinated and integrated in relation to certain reports to ensure proper consultation takes place before a decision is taken. A link to the Cabinet work programme is provided [here](#) to the Committee as part of this report, to enable the Committee to ensure that the work programmes continue to reflect key decisions being made by the Cabinet.

### **6. Links to Council Policies and Priorities**

- 6.1 Having proper work programming procedures in place ensures that the work of Overview and Scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services, contributes to the delivery of corporate objectives, and ensures that work can be undertaken in a timely and well-planned manner.
- 6.2 This report relates to the Committee's Work Programme, Actions from Committee's and Information Reports that support the achievement of the Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with the Law and Regulation Service Plan, Objectives, Actions and Measures and the Wellbeing objectives:

<b>Well-being Objectives</b>	Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment	Improve skills, educational outcomes & employment opportunities	Enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient	Build cohesive & sustainable communities
<b>Corporate Plan Commitments</b>	Thriving City	Aspirational People		Resilient Communities
<b>Supporting Function</b>	Modernised Council			

## 7 Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

- 7.1 The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 which came into force in April 2016 sets the context for the move towards long term planning of services.
- 7.2 **General questions**
- How is this area / policy affected by the new legislation?
  - How will this decision / policy / proposal impact upon future generations? What is the long term impact?
  - What evidence is provided to demonstrate WFGA has been / is being considered?
  - Evidence from Community Profiles / other data?
  - Evidence of links to Wellbeing Assessment / Objectives / Plan?
- 7.3 **Wellbeing Goals**
- How are the Wellbeing goals reflected in the policy / proposal / action?
    - *A prosperous Wales*
    - *A resilient Wales*
    - *A healthier Wales*
    - *A more equal Wales*
    - *A Wales of cohesive communities*
    - *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*
    - *A globally responsible Wales*
- 7.4 **Sustainable Development Principles**
- Does the report / proposal demonstrate how as an authority we are working in accordance with the sustainable development principles from the act when planning services?
    - **Long Term**  
*The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs*
    - **Prevention**  
*How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives*
    - **Integration**  
*Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies*
    - **Collaboration**  
*Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives*
    - **Involvement**

*The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.*

## **8 Background Papers**

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan 2017 - 2022](#)
- The Corporate Assessment and [follow up assessment](#).

Report Completed: 3 November 2021

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships – Forward Work Programme Update**

<b>Wednesday, 17 November 2021 at 5pm</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Information Required / Committee's Role</b>	<b>Invitees</b>
<b>Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children</b>	To consider the developments being undertaken in partnership with Cardiff City Council on behalf of Welsh Government to proactively offer support to children who are awaiting placement in the South of England	<b>Head of Children and Young People Services;</b> <b>Service Manager</b>

<b>Wednesday, 1 December 2021 at 5pm</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Information Required / Committee's Role</b>	<b>Invitees</b>
<b>Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)</b>	Examine proposals for the next steps in the developments of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence regional team.	<b>Head of Children and Young People Services</b> <b>Corporate Safeguarding Manager</b>
<b>Shared Resource Services (SRS) Update</b>	<b>Performance Scrutiny – Effectiveness of Partnership Arrangements</b>  The Committee received a performance update in April 2019 and requested an updated Action Plan to monitor progress in 6 months.	<b>SRS Chief Officer</b> <b>Head of People and Business Change</b> <b>Digital Services Manager</b> <b>Digital Information Project Officer</b>

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**Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships****ACTION SHEET – 6 October 2021**

	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1	<b>Public Services Board Well-being Plan Annual Report 2020-21</b>	The Committee <b>noted</b> the recommendations in the report, <b>agreed</b> to forward the Minutes to the Public Services Board as a summary of the issues and made a number of comments to the Partnership.	<b>Scrutiny / Partnerships Team</b>	<b>ACTIONED – Comments from the Committee forwarded to the Public Services Board on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021.</b>
2	<b>Scrutiny Adviser Report</b>	<u>Forward Work Programme Update:</u> The Committee requested that: a) An informal briefing could be arranged prior to the next meeting to be held on 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2021 to discuss the Norse Join Venture;	<b>Scrutiny Team and Appropriate Lead Officers</b>	<b>ACTIONED –</b> <b>a)</b> Request sent to relevant Head of Service and officers on 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2021. Officer advised that due to unavailability of Norse Director, an informal briefing cannot be arranged, however the report and additional information can be forwarded to the Committee prior to the meeting.

**APPENDIX 2**

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