

Scrutiny Report



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Part 1

Date: 10 July 2019

Subject Education Achievement Service, Value for Money, Financial Year 2018-19

Author Scrutiny Adviser

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

Invitee:	Area / Role / Subject
James Harries	Strategic Director - People
Sarah Morgan	Chief Education Officer
Andrew Powles	Deputy Chief Education Officer
Geraint Willington	Education Achievement Service (EAS) Director – Resources, Business and Governance
Hayley Davies-Edwards	Education Achievement Service (EAS) Principal Challenge Adviser for Newport

Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

1 Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked to:

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 2018-2019 in **Appendix 1**.
2. Consider how Scrutiny should be involved in the future monitoring of value for money outcomes, and;
3. 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 last year's EAS Value for Money Report was considered by this Committee at its meeting on 20 June 2018 and were previously reported to the Learning Caring and Leisure Scrutiny Committee. ***(Links to the Report and Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships Meeting held on 20 June 2018 are provided in the Background Papers in Section 7 of this report.)***
- 2.3 The EAS is reporting Value for Money on a regional level set against the previous year's Business Plan and consequently, the external report upon Regional Value for Money Evaluation for 2018-19 is being submitted to the Committee together with an explanatory submission of Evidence from the EAS.
- 2.4 For Members' information, EAS Reports upon Newport's performance are reported to the Performance Scrutiny Committee – People for scrutiny, including reports upon: Education and Pupil Performance; School Attendance; Special Educational Needs and Performance; Exclusions Monitoring; Key Stage 4/5 Pupil Performance Data, and National Categorisation of Schools. The EAS Principal Challenge Adviser for Newport attends to answer the Committee's questions on these reports.

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 2018-19**
 - **Appendix 1 - Regional Value for Money Evaluation 2018-19 by External Consultant**

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?

4.2 Suggested Lines of Enquiry

In evaluating whether the EAS is providing Value for Money in the 2018-19 Report attached as **Appendix A**, the Committee may wish to consider:

- What accounts for the percentage of "Green" Primary schools increasing from 45% in 2018 to 54% in 2019, and the percentage of "Red" Primary schools decreasing from 5% in 2018 to 2% in 2019 across the EAS area?
- What accounts for the percentage of "Green" Secondary Schools increasing from 8% in 2018 to 17% in 2019, and the percentage of "Red" Secondary Schools decreasing from 28% in 2018 to 20% in 2019 across the EAS?
- While there has been improvement, why is the percentage of "Red" Secondary Schools at 20% for 2019 across the EAS still almost double the Wales Average figure of 11% for the same year and how is this being addressed?
- Why is there such a difference in the performance of primary schools and secondary schools across the region and how is this being addressed?
- Whether there is a correlation between the amount of funding / grants and performance?
- How are resources targeted to improve schools, in particular, those in "Red" and Special Measures?
- Whether National Categorisation for 2019 varies much across the 5 Local Authority Areas: for primary schools, and; for secondary schools.
- 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.

4.3 Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act

The Committee's consideration of the Education Achievement Service's Value for Money Report 2018-19 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:
Long-term 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?
Prevention 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?
Integration 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?
Collaboration 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?
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.	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?

Section B – Supporting Information

5 Additional Data and Analysis

5.1 The following is an extract from the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 20 June 2018, when the Committee received the EAS Value for Money Financial Year 2017-18 report:

"The EAS Company Secretary presented an overview of the report to the Committee. The Education Achievement Service (EAS) provides a Regional Business Plan on an annual basis. Alongside this the EAS provides a mid-year review on progress towards the plan and the Annex for NCC. In addition, a number of reports were provided to Members throughout the year to enable scrutiny in a number of key areas. The EAS had provided Value for Money (VfM) reports to all local authorities across the region for the last 2 years. The EAS would be reporting VfM on a regional level set against the previous year Business Plan.

Members asked the following:

- With regard to Value for Money, a Member was concerned at the number of Red Schools in the categorisation table on page 40. Members were advised that 25 days are allocated in Challenge Advisor time to schools, which might be partially driven by categorisation, partially by inspection. A bespoke detailed support plan was delivered in partnership with*

the Local Authority. Advisers could also come to the school to coach a Head teacher or spend time with middle leaders. A fund had also been created to bring in Head teachers from another local authority.

The Chief Education Officer advised that to ensure EAS was delivering, trends and Challenge Advisor reports were examined by the Local Authority to get a feel if they were written accurately and appropriate for the school. She advised she was looking for pace, progress and impact, and if progress was not happening quickly enough she would question EAS and ask them to change what they were doing. She would also consider whether the school was accessing the appropriate training and consider warning notices.

The Principle Challenge Advisor advised the Committee that schools causing concern were held on a statutory register and have intervention plan monitoring to provide a forensic view of the impact, which adds value and things improved with the frequency of checking.

- Members referred to the regional report received with no breakdown of how many schools in Newport are in the red category and asked why there had been a move towards regional value for money rather than value for money in individual authorities. Members were advised that previously there had been a breakdown for local authorities, however an external consultant recommended a regional value for money report as resources are shared and balanced out and so it was more meaningful to look regionally.*
- A Member enquired whether there was an area of most concern which was a Cluster of Red schools. Members were advised that there was not a cluster of red schools and advised there were a number of reasons why schools are in red measures. The common factor is usually that leadership needs to be improved.*

The Chief Education Officer advised that she is focussed on making sure that Newport schools were receiving the support needed and it is consistently being tracked.

- Members asked whether best practice was being shared. It was advised that there was a matrix of learning network schools that lead in particular areas. Schools volunteer to take the lead in an area they have strength in. Challenge Advisors use intelligence to share across the region. Everyone has the opportunity to share expertise and that way each local authority area gets something in return.*
- Comment was made about the public perception of schools in red measures and whether it had a negative effect on children entering those schools. It was advised that the EAS are aware of the consequences of colours of categorisations, however if a school needed the highest level of support then 25 days need to be allocated. It was also advised that this year the EAS were trying to change the culture. 120 learning network schools across the region were far more than what the EAS was set up to do. This had not just been limited to green and yellow schools, but was open to red measure schools as well. The Chief Education Officer made the final decision whether a school could cope with extra demands, as they don't want to burden schools.*
- It was queried whether Newport schools were getting value for money when there were different challenges in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen schools. It was advised that Newport have the best outcomes in primary schools in the region. Newport schools have also been given as examples of good practice in schools in the Gloucester and Bristol area. Gaer Primary school is improving and the partnership work which helped had been praised. Value for Money report examines all outcomes as well as systems leadership. Since 2014 there had been massive changes.*
- Members asked if there was any update on GEMS. It was advised that funding for GEMS had recently been confirmed by Welsh Government however other Local Authorities had*

not been as fortunate so as a result less money may be going into the budget. If the total funding was reduced then a redesign of the service may be considered.

- *Members referred to the decrease in funding on pages 37-38 which indicated that the EAS was delivering its services to all schools across the region whilst spending less and asked whether there was any correlation between the reduction in funding to the spikes in regional level performance. It was advised that there was a funding jump between 2016-17 from the Welsh Government, however it ended in 2017-18 and there had been a further 10% reduction in the last 2 years from the EIG, however, it would be difficult to prove a direct link academically. The Chief Education Officer advised that the biggest impact on performance was teaching in the classroom and leadership, which needed to be tackled and addressed.*

The EAS Company Secretary advised that they had aimed to protect delegation to schools without a reduction in service. He advised that if grants continued to decrease then it could start to impact a year or two down the line.

- *Members referred to increase in the number of green schools in the categorisation figures on page 40 and asked to what extent the increase was down to support from EAS rather than a national trend and whether the EAS anticipated this to level off. Members were advised that it was unsure whether this was due to a national trend, but there was a good correlation between schools in green measures and outcomes in inspections. There were schools that were currently yellow that were likely to become green in the next round, however a few green schools could become yellow due a change in their circumstances.*
- *A Member asked whether EAS had undertaken any comparison with neighbouring improvement services and if not whether this was likely to change. It was advised that information was currently not available to share, while outcomes can be compared but some neighbouring services were not ready to share finance comparisons as each was in a slightly different position. The EAS Company Secretary advised that Welsh government were interested in considering national Value for Money, which would be likely to move towards comparison of consortia. The Chief Education Officer advised that on a termly basis Challenge Review meetings for each consortium were held. There were also meetings with the Managing Directors and Local Authority representatives together. It was thought that 94% delegation was the highest in Wales but the figure could not be proved yet without the sharing of financial data.*
- *Members referred to the grant figures in the report and asked for a breakdown of grants, where they came from and what the biggest wins had been for the EAS in the past year. The EAS Company Secretary advised that all grant funding came from Welsh Government although through 36 different grant lines with various conditions attached. The grant was paid to Torfaen as the regional banker and then notionally to the local authorities but passported to the EAS. The Challenge Adviser added that the partnership between Newport and the EAS was excellent and that statutory powers were used well, with good communication between them before exercising powers. There was variation in all regions for how statutory powers were used.*
- *Members raised concern over the impact of funding decreasing year on year on the future service provision. The Challenge Adviser clarified that if the EAS got to the point where the capacity of the team was reduced as well as the expertise then that would be a genuine red risk, but that was not currently the position. It was advised that this issue is high on the EAS agenda and reports were shared.*
- *A Member commented that the consultant had not looked at the risk register however in Newport's inspection the risk had a good result and this was key information that should be looked at.*

- *There was discussion about Head Teachers managing their schools budget. It was clarified that as with many senior roles it was a requirement of the Head Teacher's Job Description and that they were accountable for everything including finance although they had close links with the Finance Team and their Governing Body received budget proposals and had a key role in determining how the budget was allocated.*
- *A Member asked what support was provided to Governing Body Finance Sub-Committees. It was explained that training offered is included in the Cluster Training Menu options.*
- *It was asked what would be the general priorities for the EAS moving forward if things became difficult. Members were advised that the core business plan need to be delivered as the national agenda for Wales and the EAS business plan. The Joint Education Group (JEG) Committee commissioners signed off the business plan, so the EAS would work with JEG members to decide upon would get signed off.*

The Chair thanked the invitees for attending.

Conclusions:

The Committee made the following comments:

- *Following the responses provided to its questions, the Committee accepted that the performance / categorisation of schools was one element of the Value for Money report upon the EAS Service, and that the biggest impact on performance was teaching in the classroom and leadership. However, it expressed concern that for the EAS Region the number of Secondary and Primary schools in the Red category was above the Wales Average.*
- *While they were concerned about the negatives associated with being categorised as a Red school, the Committee was satisfied that appropriate resources and extra support were being provided accordingly.*
- *The Committee welcomed the recognition of the importance of and the involvement of pupils to ensure pupil voice in Schools.*
- *Whilst the Committee was satisfied with the Value for Money of the EAS at this time despite the reduced funding, it expressed concern the future reductions in funding may have an impact on value for money and service delivery.*
- *The Committee welcomed the evidence of a good partnership between the EAS and the Local Authority and were assured by the presentation upon the collaborative approach.*
- *The Committee requested that a report upon Value for Money be included in the Annual Forward Work Programme for consideration in 12 months' time as a separate report, but at the same Committee as the EAS Governor Support Report would be scheduled.*
- *The Committee would welcome the inclusion of comparative information upon other regional improvement services in future reports, when shared.*
- *The EAS should promote to Green Schools that it is open to them to request a Challenge Advisor attends to present the report to the Governing Body."*

6 Links to Council Policies and Priorities

- Newport City Council's Corporate Plan and Wellbeing Objectives:

Well-being Objectives	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
Corporate Plan Commitments	Thriving City	Aspirational People		Resilient Communities
Supporting Function	Modernised Council			

7. Background Papers

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan](#)
- [EAS Website](#)
- [Agenda and Minutes](#) of Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships 20 June 2018
- [Agenda and Minutes](#) of Learning, Caring and Leisure Scrutiny Committee 22 March 2017

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