

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 10 July 2019

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors M Rahman (Chair), D Davies, S Marshall, M Spencer, T Suller and K Whitehead

James Harris (Strategic Director - People), Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer), Andrew Powles (Assistant Head of Education - Engagement and Learning), Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser) and Neil Barnett (Governance Officer)

In Attendance: G Willington, H Davies-Edwards, E Price and Diamond

Apologies: Councillors Y Forsey and J Hughes

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Education Achievement Service - Value for Money Financial Year 2018-19

Attendees:

- James Harris (Strategic Director – Place)
- Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer)
- Andrew Powles (Deputy Chief Education Officer)
- Geraint Willington (Director – Resources, Business and Governance, EAS)
- Hayley Davies-Edwards (Education Achievement Service)
- Ed Price (Assistant Director Policy and Strategy, EAS)

The EAS Director presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the 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 Regional Partnership Board - Annual Report 2018-19

Attendees:

- James Harris (Strategic Director - People)
- Phil Diamond (Regional Partnership Board Regional Team)

The Regional Partnership Board Team Representative presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted their key areas for consideration.

Members asked the following:

- A Member referred to the Core Themes listed on page 42 of the report, which were similar issues faced across the region and asked did the Partners engage and is there balance found between each Authority.

Members were advised that for the partners to succeed they needed to see value in working together and engage. The priorities highlighted on page 43 were nationwide and were key areas for partners. The Strategic Director advised that it was surprising how common these issues were in Gwent. The activities identified for the most part were all common issues. If a map was provided for those in need, such as Young Carers and Dementia, there would be hot spots across the region, but Newport is getting a fair share, and had the same profile broadly speaking.

- A Member praised the service provided and acknowledged it was a challenging providing support in 28 days, but asked could the time be improved upon.

Members were advised that the 28 days was a timescale set by Welsh Government, however, this region is above the Welsh average for responding. Members then asked if there was scope in the service should someone's issues get worse then the team could react faster. It was advised that there is a Mental Health practitioner in the Police Centre so if there was a serious case then they could take the necessary steps.

- A Member asked what lessons had been learned from various panels over the year.

The Regional Officer advised that there is a regional citizens' panel which feeds back and scrutinises the Regional Partnership Board at each meeting. There were also meetings in the 50+ and Youth Forums. In terms of every report highlighting progress, the board needed to make sure that the citizens' voice is there from each forum.

- A Member referred to the positive outcomes listed in the progress section, but felt there was a lack of objectiveness and asked how the Partnership was evaluating progress.

Members were advised that in terms of progress, the Partnership Board had set out equal challenges and there was a reporting mechanism to the Regional Partnership Board, with action plans evaluated at each meeting. There would be progress against each priority but also challenges highlighted in each report.

The Strategic Director advised that priorities were largely funded through the Integrated Care Fund projects, which required there to be detailed evaluation, rigorously evaluated from the Strategic Partnership Group. This took up an enormous amount of time. Each year there was an evaluation whether the project proceeds or not. Some had fallen by the wayside.

The Scrutiny Adviser reminded the Committee that this would be the subject of a future report included on the Committee's Forward Work Programme in October.

- A Member asked what were the main challenges faced by the collective.

The Strategic Director advised that at times partnership work could be really challenging. For a number of years the Partnership had been at a storming stage, with the large number of representatives sitting on the partnership board, but was now at the point where they could be very open and appropriately challenge the partners. However, it had not always been easy and there had been difficult meetings.

The Regional Officer advised that another challenge had been learning how to work with partners and the Health Board, as the landscape changed. Local Authorities had shared the Regional funding to help them all get to the same standard. Gwent is a more diverse regional area than others due to having five Local Authorities within the Health Board Region to form the Regional Partnership.

- A Member enquired about turnover / retention of staff and asked whether the partnership worked with ex-servicemen.

The Strategic Director advised that the turnover varied in different areas, and in the staff working specifically to support the Regional Partnership Board turnover was low. The turnover within social care in Newport was slowing down, as was turnover of staff in Children's Social Services. Adult Social Services were experiencing slower turnover than it had been, so it was not causing Newport any difficulties. Beyond Council services, turnover of staff in Domestic Care across the region was faster, but it was difficult to recruit in the first place.

The Regional Officer then advised the Committee that the partners had developed a storybook for schools with the ethos to help people get into employment in social care. Coleg Gwent had advised that 70% of pupils did not pursue a career. The book suggests that carers and nurses are superheroes and is part of planning how recruitment to health and social care careers needs to look in the future and ex-servicemen is very much linked into this.

The Strategic Director advised that he attended a mental health board meeting, which held a presentation about armed forces, the support they need and how services across the region should work together to support. While there was a lot to be done, there was a focus on this.

- A Member asked whether the My Mate initiative could be included in the regional partnership work.

The Regional Officer advised that this would be fed back to the Mental Health Partnership and advised that the presentation shown was very powerful and promoted self-worth and employment, as its number one priority.

- A Member asked given the partnership relationship had matured and improved, what were are the challenges going forward.

The Regional Officer advised there were a number of challenges, which included the mental health of younger people and an ageing and increasing population. The Regional Partnership would highlight what can be done to look after people.

The Strategic Director advised that the partnership had been delivering services and functions with Integrated Care Fund funding to areas identified nationally or by the Partnership. There was Potential for impact and change by joint working opportunities e.g. Ringland Hub. People would become more aware and want services faster in the future. The need for prioritisation would become more important and would be challenging in the coming years.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

Conclusions

The Committee noted the Regional Partnership Board Annual Report 2018-19 and **agreed** to forward the Minute to the Regional Partnership Board and the Cabinet Member as a summary of the issues raised and in particular, the following comments:

- The Committee acknowledged that Welsh government had not required an Action Plan to be included in the statutory report provided, however concluded that without the data and information referred to by Officers from Action Plans and Dashboards used in their reports to the Partnership Board in their verbal responses to Members questions, it would have been difficult to establish the level of overall progress being made.
- The Committee recognised the challenge and the priorities across the region and welcomed the professional and mature relationship developing between partners and the balancing of best interest and benefits of joint working being embraced and taken forward e.g. the Hub. There appeared to be a maturity of collectiveness moving forward with an expectation of mutual trust and respect among partners, which the Committee welcomed.

4 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

Attendee:

- Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser)

a) Forward Work Programme Update

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and advised the Committee of the topics scheduled for the next two Committee meetings, as follows:

Wednesday 9 October 2019:

- Regional Transformation Grant
- Integrated Care Fund Capital and Revenue Projects
- Shared Resource Services Updated Action Plan

Wednesday 4 December 2019:

- National and Regional Adoption Service
- Update upon Developing Regional Fostering Arrangements

She also advised upon the list of Briefings the Committee had requested, including Overviews of partnership arrangements of Newport LIVE, Norse and Wastesavers, including a site visit to Wastesavers.

The Committee requested that a potential date be explored during the weeks beginning 16th and 23rd September at Wastesavers.

b) Action Sheet

The Scrutiny Adviser advised the Committee that as the previous Committee meeting was only held on 26 June 2019, the Minutes and Action Sheet would be reported to the next Committee Meeting.

c) Information Reports

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the Committee that there were no Information reports to bring to the Committee's attention.

d) Scrutiny Letters

The Scrutiny Adviser informed the Committee that there were no Scrutiny letters to report to the Committee.

The meeting terminated at 7.20 pm