

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 reimaged, 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:

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
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Corporate Plan Commitments	Thriving City	Aspirational People	Resilient Communities
Supporting Function	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:
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?

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