

Scrutiny Report



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Part 1

Date: 9 November 2022

Subject Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money 2021-22

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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
Marc Belli	Education Achievement Service (EAS) Principal School Improvement Partner
Sarah Morgan	Head of Education

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 2021-22 in **Appendix 1** and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Regional Value for Money (VfM) report 2021-22 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 four years. In Newport, the 2020-21 EAS Value for Money Report was considered by this Committee at its meeting on 3 November 2021 and were previously reported at its meeting on 10 July 2019. **(Links to the Report and Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships Meeting held on 3 November 2021 are provided in the Background Papers in Section 7 of this report.)**
- 2.3 The VfM report for 2021-2022 (Appendix A) focuses 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. A key requirement of the South-East Wales Education Achievement Service ('the EAS') is to demonstrate annually that it offers value for money to the five local authorities within its geographical remit and their constituent schools. This report details the findings from a Value for Money (VfM) review that was undertake 'an independent report on value for money functions of the EAS paying particular attention to how the organisation has refined its delivery model from a fully staffed central model to a model where schools are funded to provide support and challenge to peer schools within the region'.

Previous Consideration of this item

- 2.4 The following is an extract from the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 3 November 2021, when the Committee received the EAS Value for Money Financial Year 2020-21 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 against the backdrop of a global pandemic; the approach has been rethought in vulnerable and disadvantaged wellbeing. The Director went through the report in detail for the Committee and highlighted that the focus is spending less and spending well, the external contender introduced equity of spending fairly and for the long term. They found effectiveness affects wellbeing and therefore assessed how the EAS mitigated the impact on those from poor backgrounds.

The officers covered the sustainability area of the report and went through the data on how to get a greater range of accountability about what was going on in schools rather than exam performance. As they did not have the exam grades due to the pandemic the team had to improvise their approach and also discussed the feedback from the schools on this. The officer noted it is about ensuring that the recommendations from the report have been implemented as part of the value for money and they continue to compare the outcomes outlined from the surveys.

The Committee asked the following:

- *A Committee Member noted the a third of the staff numbers being reduced. With that, will they still see a resilient service and what the differences will be? For instance would that be putting more on the head-teachers on providing a service more so than before?*

The Assistant Director covered the headteacher element by stating that the majority of heads are improvement schools that they backfill and ensure that their funding they receive are able to other leaders to buy and supply and. Their partner school advisors report gained huge amount of support in another school; can learn a lot by providing the support back into the school.

The Director for Resources confirmed with the resilient point, they had to make major savings but the issue with grants has hit them hard as they had to reduce what was needed to be taken again and have had to re-structure. They assured Members they are mindful with the improvement service area, that it cannot go any lower. They are mindful of the support going to the staff; for instance they received the gold award while going through a re-structure.

- *The Member asked if the reduction in funding from Welsh Government was foreseen or unforeseen and in terms of risk balance; would there be a risk if there is further reduction; and if there is clarity between the Welsh Government and Council of this difficulty.*

The EAS Director confirmed that the Joint Executive Group (JEG) is under a lot of pressure and that they are 50 percent funded via grants and due to the pandemic; funding was late coming through. They were unaware they had this until late January, but was already in communication with the Welsh Government. They were under the impression they had to make savings whilst being in touch with unions; as they did not know what the funding was going to be. Members were informed they had a meeting today to see what it is like as they are mindful they want to avoid a re-structure for stability.

- *A Member queried how EAS compares to other regional bodies.*

In response, the Assistant Director stated they work collaboratively with other regions and are well established within the Cardiff/Bridgend area. The Director for EAS added that the pandemic has brought the bodies closer together because of the virtual environment which has helped with collaboration in leadership.

- *The Committee Member then queried in relation to the Welsh Government funding; would they have been able to foresee that the Government is funding less in order to encourage the bodies to merge.*

The Assistant Director confirmed that they would not as they only know what each region is getting in terms of money and use that collaboratively.

- *A Committee Member queried whether head teachers will be prepared for more cuts and if they are in the know of these so they can work within the set budgets.*

The Head of Education confirmed that with school individual budgets; the Committee are discussing a different topic but explained the EAS provide money to schools for school support. A fraction of the grants they have are their budgets; as public servants the Council has limited resources so potentially there could be reductions at any point but they do their very best with supporting the schools with financial training. The Council have to watch and wait in terms of Welsh Government settlements with grants but are prepared to manage money appropriately.

- *The Member then asked the officers to confirm what would be the lowest amount they can manage on, grants wise.*

The EAS Director of Resources replied stating that the grants go to the local authorities and through the Head of Education, they commission the work. For instance they have £52 million coming in, and 44 grants within that total all trying to do something different. They try to simplify that for schools to give them more autonomy and use one grant to do one function.

- A Committee Member referred to the recovery situation from covid-19 and queried the team on how they feel they have challenged themselves and how the Local Authority challenged them.

The Assistant Director stated that schools have adapted and where schools have not responded for strategies; this has been addressed collaboratively with schools to get the right provisions in place for pupils to be supported appropriately. They have been listening to school leadership. From the EAS perspective; for quality assurances there has been good attendance between Local Authority officers and Principal Officers with a lot of dialogue on individual schools on a monthly basis.

The Head of Education concluded that they have regular dialogue in terms of experience through quality assurances. Over the pandemic, the JEG group monitored the performance of the EAS; nothing stopped during the pandemic but noted they found school partners have been receptive to change with professional learning to keep teachers teaching through blended learning. The officer was pleased with the performance of EAS for what they have done for the school improvement partners is valued.

- The Member asked if the officers foresee any future challenges or can comment on the past challenges, and if any Local Authorities ventured off from what Newport are trying to achieve.

The Assistant Director confirmed they work very close with Managing Director Debbie Hartevelde and look at priorities with similar in terms of equity. The Head of Education highlighted an example of the Local Authority request would be the ESTYN recommendations from the services within their Local Authority annex of the action plan; within that are specific actions bespoke to Newport.

- How does the partnership try to maintain innovation and new ways of working?

The Assistant Director confirmed in terms of innovation this is ongoing but is slow as the engagement with teachers because the schools struggle with staffing in terms of Covid. There has been a range of work with workshops working with school leaders, selective groups and governors for reflection. With curriculum reform, they are constantly challenging thoughts and have had external advisers who are highly experienced, joining them on virtual engagement activities to challenge the leaders.

- The Committee mentioned that with failures; usually leadership comes down to being one of them. Is there work being done to ensure leadership?

The Head of Education asserted that categorisation is not part of it anymore, so there would be no 'Red' areas. There is a professional learning menu that goes on all different levels including middle leadership with those considering going into deputy headship with professional courses available. In addition to new leadership courses; they have been responsive to the pandemic by focusing on agile leadership.

The Assistant Director complimented this by explaining that now categorisation has gone; there has been dialogue with local authorities with schools on their concerns. Funding is linked to that model and up to 25 days of support; this offers far more flexibility to support the mentioned programmes.

- Members referred to the tables with coloured feedback and queried what type of work and actions are being discussed. It was observed there were a lot within the 'agreed' section. How would officers get those to be move to the 'strongly agreed' section?

The Assistant Director confirmed that it is a small part of a large bit of qualitative feedback. That was not shared in the report from Rod Alcott; it is a 'you said, we did' style of table. The columns form the approach for the business plan for their data which will include quantitative and qualitative feedback.

- *The Chair recognised that the pandemic has been tough but through the report and presentation, it seems to have developed stronger relationships; the chair asked the officers if this is something they agree with.*

The Head of Education agreed and that is important to feedback they talk directly to the school and the authority is direct with EAS. They have all had to think quickly on their feet to be innovative through the pandemic. They have developed helpful relationships to ensure they are listening and responding. The Assistant Director also agreed that the accessibility has been important for colleagues in schools and LEA interfacing.

The Chair and Committee thanked the Officers for their time and asked them to express their thanks to their colleagues as they recognise that they have moved forward over the past 18 months.

Conclusions:

*The Committee **noted** the Education Achievement Service Value for Money Financial Year 2020-21 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, especially during the pandemic. The Committee also wished to thank the partners and all their staff for all of their hard throughout the pandemic, and continued high quality of service.*
- *The Committee expressed concern at the unknown Welsh Government funding position for the Education Achievement Service for next year. Concerns were also expressed at the reduction of third of the workforce over a period of five years. Even though EAS are doing well currently with the number of staff and resources available, Members raised the concern of future staffing problems.*
- *The Committee felt that the partnership had conducted themselves well, which was evident in the report. It was also felt that they risk assessed each other well, were not afraid of innovation and could sense the strong, positive relationship between the consortium. It was hoped that this will continue."*

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 2021-22**
- **Appendix 1 - Regional Value for Money Evaluation 2021-22 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, within the scope of the definitions provided in the report?
- 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 2021-22 Report attached as **Appendix A**, the Committee may wish to consider:

- How does EAS performance compare with that of neighbouring regional education improvement services, where there is comparable information?
- Whether the report contains sufficient information to demonstrate that the EAS Consortium is providing Value for Money, within the context of the definitions of value for money provided in the report.
- Has the EAS Consortium fully considered the previous impacts of Covid-19 in the delivery of their objectives?
- Is the EAS Consortium 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
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 2021-22 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](#)

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