

# Report

## Scrutiny Meeting

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### Part 1

Date: 9 November 2022

Item No:

**Subject** Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money 2021-2022

**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 2021-2022.

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**Ward** All

**Summary** 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'.

**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 (2021-2022)

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer)

**Signed**

## **Background and Report**

- 1.1. The Educational Achievement Service (EAS) is the school improvement service of the five local authorities in South East Wales: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. The EAS is owned by the five Councils and operates within a robust governance structure which is populated by representative Elected Members from each Council.
- 1.2. The EAS has been in operation since September 2012 and has undergone many changes during this period. Through the commissioning of a Business Plan the EAS delivers key school improvement support to all schools and educational settings across the South East Wales region.
- 1.3. The EAS endeavours to work in partnership local authorities, schools and settings and wider stakeholders, ensuring that service delivery remains of a consistently high standard and meets the needs of the system. The service welcomes external expertise and challenge to support continued improvement and will remain agile and responsive to regional need.
- 1.4. The VfM report for 2021-2022 (Appendix A) was commissioned to review the delivery of the regional EAS Business Plan 2021-22. It 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.
- 1.5. 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, and the tender was awarded to him to complete the review. The report has been shared and agreed through EAS Governance structures (Company Board and Joint Executive Group (JEG)) in Summer 2022
- 1.6. The report has been sectioned into the following aspects:
  - Executive Summary
  - Review Framework
  - Financial Overview of the EAS
  - School to School Delivery Model
  - Illustrative Case Studies
  - Conclusion
- 1.7. The full content of the regional school improvement VfM 2021-2022 report can be found in Appendix A.
- 1.8. The report notes that: Value for Money, 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.

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

- **Equity:** the extent to which service provision is needs based to remove barriers and facilitate equal opportunity – spending fairly.
- **Sustainability:** an increasingly standard consideration within the context of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (WBFNG) – spending for the long term.

1.10. It was recognised from the outset that time and financial constraints did not allow for a detailed consideration of the above criteria across the full range of activities undertaken, and services provided, by the EAS in the period under review. The review is not therefore of school improvement in its broadest sense, but a review of a particular approach to school improvement.

1.11. To ensure the validity of any subsequent judgements it was essential to identify an area of activity that was broad enough to provide a representative view of the EAS, but specific enough to lend itself to detailed analysis and subsequent evaluation. The requirement was therefore to provide *'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'*.

1.12. The review was an evaluation of how successful the EAS approach to school to school learning has been in terms of the quantity, quality and deployment of resources designed to secure improvement. This necessitated:

- comparing the costs associated with a decentralised school to school approach with the previous more centralised approach;
- gathering information from the EAS including, where available, from relevant reports and surveys;
- gathering, where possible, feedback from participating schools; and
- bringing the above together.

1.13. While there are more nuanced interpretations available; for the purposes of this review VfM would be demonstrated if the approach ensures that:

- effectiveness remains unimpaired or improves while costs have been reduced; or
- effectiveness improves while costs remain constant; or
- increased spending is offset by improved effectiveness
- equity is preserved; and

- sustainability can be demonstrated.

- 1.14. Having determined the focus for the review, the approach to evidence gathering and the necessary evaluative criteria, it was also important to consider the specific context of the external environment within which the EAS has been operating during the period under review. For the period 2021-2022 the dominant external consideration is that of operating under the challenges posed in continuing to adapt service delivery to respond to a global pandemic.
- 1.15. A key feature of the review was 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.
- 1.16. Evaluating impact also provided a unique challenge given that measures of educational outcomes such as examination results (not to be used for accountability purposes), school categorisation (suspended by Welsh Government and subsequently now ceased) and Estyn inspection reports (not available during the pandemic).
- 1.17. Welsh Government have suspended the calculation and publication of Key Stage 4 and legacy sixth form performance measures for 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022 academic years. They have stated that qualification awards data will not be used to report on attainment outcomes at a school, local authority or regional consortium level and must not be used to hold schools to account for their learners' outcomes.
- 1.18. The table in Section 3 of the full report gives a detailed breakdown of overall EAS financial position. From 2016/17 the reduction in core funding has been continuous over the six-year period. There has been an agreed 10.07% reduction in LA funding, which, along with the elimination of trading income, has resulted in a reduction in total core funding of some £942k or 23.7% in absolute terms; although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into consideration, the reduction has been in excess of 30%.
- 1.19. Over the same time period the amount of grant money received from the Welsh Government reduced year on year up to 2019-20 but has increased over the last two years with a very significant increase of £8.83m or some 17% between 2020-21 and 2021-22.
- 1.20. From a regional school improvement prospective when reductions in LA funding, elimination of trading income and increases in grant money received are added together the increase in total funding is £3.81m which represents a 6.3% increase in absolute terms over a six year period.
- 1.21. When increases in the rate of delegation to schools (95.5%) are taken into account then residual income spent on running the organisation, including staffing costs, fell by some £2.04m or 26.6% from 2016-17 to 2021-22. Reduced spending has resulted in reduction in staffing numbers, with the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff reducing from 111 in 2016-17 to 63.3 in 2021-22, taking the total reduction in FTE staff reduction to 47.7 over the period 2016-17 to 2020-21, representing a reduction of almost 43% in staffing levels.

- 1.22. This staffing reduction is a direct consequence of the decision by the EAS to refine its delivery model from a fully staffed central model to a self-improving School to School (S2S) model where schools are funded to provide support and challenge to peer schools within the region. It is this delivery modification that provided the focus for the VfM review for 2021-22.
- 1.23. The review gathered evidence that allowed the following questions to be answered:
- What does the delivery model comprise?
  - How has it been refined?
  - What are the cost implications?
  - How effective is it?
  - Is it demonstrably equitable and sustainable?
  - What lessons have been learned that will inform future refinement and improvement?
- 1.24. The School to School (S2S) delivery model is broken down into 4 areas of support
- School Improvement Partner (SIP)
  - Learning Network Schools (LNS)
  - Professional Learning Networks (PLN)
  - Curriculum for Wales Professional Learning Schools (CfW PL)
- 1.25. The evidence that was gathered is presented in the table below to reflect the three component areas of expenditure:
- School Improvement – Challenge Advisers or School Improvement Partners as they have been re-titled and S2S (delegation to headteachers to support allocated headteachers)
  - Curriculum and Wellbeing – Mainly subject specific advisers and LNS (departments in schools providing support to departments in other schools)
  - Leadership and Teaching – Mainly former headteachers undertaking professional learning for schools (building future leaders at all levels) and delegation to schools within clusters to embed and continue practice.
- 1.26. The table on Page 10 of the report highlighted the funding to support these 3 areas, comparing 2020-21 (where funding was already used heavily to support S2S delivery) with 2021-22 where this model has been expanded. Spending has increased by 5%, but the amount distributed to school to support the model has increased by 43%, whilst the core decreased by 17%

## **Conclusion**

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

*The refined School to School (S2S) delivery model represents good value for money. This judgement has been arrived at from the following evaluative judgements:*

- *The model is efficient:* - Evidence gathered from case studies demonstrates that the small 5% increase in spending to fund investment in the model can result in significantly accelerated progress in schools requiring support; with a consequent reduction in the amount of time that additional support needs to be provided.
- *The model is equitable:* The distribution of funding ensures that those schools most in need of support receive the most support.
- *The model is sustainable:* The concentration on capacity building, based on leadership development in supported schools, ensures that progress is sustainable and increases the pool of potential support providers in the future.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The EAS must ensure that approaches to school improvement represent continuation and refinement to this model rather than any shorter-term fixes.
- The EAS must ensure that it has systems and mechanisms in place to gather valid data and wider intelligence on school performance to verify the effectiveness of the model and inform future improvements.

## **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)
- EAS Company Board
- Regional Joint Executive Group (JEG)
- Individual local authority scrutiny committees (each local authority determines the most appropriate committee and whether to add the report to the work programme)

## **4. Background Papers**

4.1 The South-East Wales Regional Value for Money Report (2021-2022) attached as Appendix A.