

# Scrutiny Report



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

### Part 1

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024

## Subject Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money (Phase 1 - December 2023)

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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 (Phase 1 - December 2023) in **Appendix 1** and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Regional Value for Money (VfM) report 2022-23 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 2021-22 EAS Value for Money Report was considered by this Committee at its meeting on 9 November 2022 and were previously reported at its meeting on 3 November 2021. **(Links to the Report and Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships Meeting held on 9 November 2022 are provided in the Background Papers in Section 7 of this report.)**
- 2.3 The VfM report for 2022-2023 (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 external consultants, Rod Alcott and Betsan O'Connor, 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 continued to refine 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 9 November 2022, when the Committee received the EAS Value for Money Financial Year 2021-22 report:

*"The Chief Education Officer introduced the Committee to the Partners and introduced the report. The Education Achievement Service (EAS) Director for Resources presented an overview and presentation of the Value for Money Report 2021-2022 and drew the Committee's attention to the main points and invited the Committee to ask any questions they felt were relevant. It was highlighted that 5 authorities own the company and that the report is focused on the S2S (School 2 School) approach.*

*Members asked the following:*

- *A Member referred to the economy and efficiency part mentioning the 96% going to schools and asked if there is any obligation on schools to use it for improvement.*

*The EAS Director for Resources responded that two grants come in – the Regional School Improvement of DPP Grants and lots of sub-grants within those grants, then there is an expectation within those to be fulfilled.*

*EAS have been more flexible with schools, given them the money to decide what to do, the school would show us what they wish to use it and demonstrate how, which is then signed off by the panel following review. The Chief Education Officer mentioned that EAS also have a Head teacher Strategy Group which worked well for the minimum requirements and advised that the model is sensible.*

- *A Member highlighted the finance side, mentioned the strain from staffing levels and the cost of living crisis; despite they may have efficient funding at the moment, the Member asked if the partners could see that changing.*

*The Director for Resources recognised that it will be challenging moving forward with the funding from the grants and Welsh Government.*

*The Chief Education Officer explained that the model works on 50% grants and that is dependent on what the Welsh Government. The other 50% is from Newport City Council. It depends if they can afford EAS on annual value but assured the Committee it is excellent value for money. It was mentioned that other regional services have gone up in price but with EAS that has not*

*happened. The contributions with Local Authorities have decreased but EAS has allowed them to retain a good service to see efficiency.*

*- A Member noted he found the report quite hard to read as a newly elected Councillor with the range of unfamiliar terms and phrases. The Member asked for the Partners to confirm what they would like from the discussion and asked what the local schools receive from EAS on a monthly basis.*

*The Principal School Improvement Partner gave an example of where a local Newport school partnered up with a school in Cardiff, both schools had similar socio-economic challenges. The children in the schools come from the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. The Head-teachers of the schools have been working together with a serving practitioner, as an improvement partner alongside Estyn report measures due to a disappointing inspection*

*It had a significant impact through the process at all levels, which was effective in working to evaluate the standard of pupils work and also established informal relationships in both schools to share effective practice. From this, the schools saw rapid improvements. In December 2021, they saw the Newport school being removed from the notifications from Estyn which is a great improvement for review. The partners will continue to work hard as no school is perfect, as they would like to further build on the confidence of the schools. The Cabinet Member also commended the local high school after having visited it.*

*- A Member wished to know what has been the significant challenge over the past year for the partnership and if the partners could foresee the next year's challenges.*

*The School Improvement Principal explained that the new curriculum for Wales and the ALN transformation are two key legislative changes in Wales coming in at a time of the post-pandemic era, will be a challenge for all schools.*

*- A Member felt it was good that the schools partner up with others in other areas. It was mentioned that some schools may have a larger population of pupils from BAME communities and therefore the Member wanted to know if those schools would have access to extra funding for that, as there must be more costs for the interpreters.*

*The Assistant Director for Policy advised that would be specific for GEMS, who are separate from EAS but that service is provided through them. Their colleague Sally Bevan is running a team in ensuring the right provision is in place for teachers. Many of EAS programmes go through their provision.*

*- A Member appreciated how the report writer mentioned that he did not have access to the pupil attainment data due to the change in reporting style. The Member noted there are three case studies within the report and asked if there were more and how extensive the evidence is.*

*The Assistant Director – Policy (EAS) confirmed that there is a breadth of evidence not included in the report. The way the report was written is in a way that it is not the whole of EAS' work. In relation to a Member's prior point about the jargon, it was written for people with more contextual information. That is why the partners tried to fill in the gaps on that in the meeting and stressed that they would be more than happy to return to do that but assured Members there is a range of evidence available but was not included in the report.*

*- A Member asked the partners to clarify when they identify a school experiencing issues before partnering up; when the partners would go visit and evaluate the issues; if there is a budget on solving the problem as well as the partnership itself.*

*The Chief Education Officer explained that on occasion the budget comes in and if there is a host of problems; the partners work together as professionals and recognise the issue that the school*

*improvement partners cannot improve everything. Such as poor financial management, poor exclusion issues. They do offer support in a targeted approach for those schools.*

*The Deputy Chief Education Officer added that the EAS work closely with the council with the School Development Plan. Where in the region, local Headteachers would meet to evaluate the progress from the previous plan and evaluate. Then EAS would go to the school, ensure the evaluation is robust and discuss key priorities with the partnerships to identify the key needs. Could be through local authority, EAS or a mixture of both. It was emphasised that every school has a universal offer of eight days of support and in addition to that the learning school network such as the two schools earlier mentioned working together.*

*It is an opportunity for professional learning in targeted groups in schools, for instance support for the middle leadership in schools who are the engine for learning. The tiered approach evolves every year as they are able to better match their improvement partners in the regions to meet the needs of the schools in a more refined approach. Discussion ensued amongst the Members and EAS partners regarding the budget and the Deputy Chief Officer highlighted the cultural shift of supporting schools without pressure to build it in to partnerships.*

*- A Member made the observation that pupils were hardly mentioned in the report and that the report almost admits to that as it states that it came to conclusions in the recommendations to make sure that the mechanisms are in place to gather data if the pupils are making progress.*

*The Assistant Director – Policy (EAS) appreciated the Councillor’s comment and explained that in terms of the data, it is not that it does not exist; as it exists in schools. He went on to note that they cannot aggregate up to Local Authorities to compare league tables as referred to in the report. The Director also stated that getting the improvement partners into the school is key and having personalised assessments; which is more qualitative than quantitative.*

*It was highlighted that the report was written on the year where the systems were based in pandemic era where they were not able to access schools in lockdown. The partners have returned since April to schools much more and explained that physical work is taking place. The Committee Members thanked the officers for the work that they do and for their time and commended them on their partnership work.*

### **Conclusions**

*- The Committee considered the information provided within the submission of evidence, together with the externally commissioned Education Achievement Service (EAS) Regional Value for Money (VfM) report 2021-22 and PowerPoint presentation. Members. The Committee praised the partnership for their hard work and appreciated that the job is difficult. They were pleased with the figures contained within the report and wished to comment that this feels like a real partnership.*

*- The Committee were pleased to note that good practice is being shared within the partnership and schools from the examples that were given by the Officers and are hopeful that this continues in future.*

*- The Committee raised a comment related specifically to the impact of the school support measures on school improvement. The progress made in moving to a new model of school support was acknowledged, however the lack of pupil based data did not yet make it possible to state that the model resulted “in significantly accelerated progress in schools.” Members appreciate that much of the pupil progress data used previously to make judgements on school effectiveness is now not available - the Alcott report acknowledged this. The report recommended, however, that EAS find to systems to gather such data. Members would like to see this data as part of future reports. It is appreciated that it may be necessary to summarise the data if there is a large amount of it. Conclusions drawn from the data could be in the main report, with the supporting data as an appendix- maybe as summary tables.*

- *The Committee wished to make the comment that it would be nice to see the benchmark figure of 96% being maintained but were mindful of pressures such as the decreased staff levels, the cost of living, and the pay rise, could affect that.*
- *The Committee queried whether EAS had any direct communications with Norse or previous partnership work with regards to the schools they both represent. Members commented that given both services work directly with the schools in Newport, it may be beneficial if there was partnership work between EAS and Norse to see how they can make the necessary improvements the schools think they would benefit from.”*

### **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, Phase 1 – December 2023**
- **Appendix 1 - Regional Value for Money Evaluation, Phase 1 – December 2023 - External Consultants**
- **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 2022-23 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.
  - How does the EAS plan to maintain or improve its Value for Money (VfM) in the future
  - What impact has the shift to the School to School (S2S) model had on the EAS's Value for Money (VfM)?
  - Are there any areas where the EAS could improve its Value for Money (VfM)?
  - What specific metrics were used to determine the Value for Money (VfM)?

## Section B – Supporting Information

### 5 Links to Council Policies and Priorities

- 5.1 The report links with the Wellbeing-being Objectives and Aims of the Council's Corporate Plan 2022 – 2027;

Well-being Objective	1 – Economy, Education and Skills	2 – Newport's Environment and Infrastructure	3 – Preventative and Equitable Community and Social Care	4 – An Inclusive, Fair and Sustainable Council
<b>Aims:</b>	<b>Newport is a thriving and growing city that offers excellent education and aspires to provide opportunities for all.</b>	A city that seeks to protect and enhance our environment whilst reducing our carbon footprint and preparing for a sustainable and digital future.	Newport is a supportive city where communities and care are at the heart of what we do.	Newport City Council is an inclusive organisation that places social value, fairness and sustainability at its core.

The EAS Value for Money report has strong links to Well-being Objective 1.

### 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:
<b>Long-term</b> 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?
<b>Prevention</b> 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?
<b>Integration</b> 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?
<b>Collaboration</b> 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?
<b>Involvement</b> 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 9 November 2022](#)
- [Agenda and Minutes of Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships 3 November 2021](#)
- [EAS Website](#)