

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **18th December 2019**

Report Subject: **Education Achievement Services (EAS), Value for Money Report, Financial Year 2018/19**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins Executive Member for Education**

Report Submitted by: **Lynette Jones, Corporate Director of Education
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Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	15.10.19	02.12.19			06.11.19	18.12.19		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are a partner local authority of the EAS Regional School Improvement Service. This report describes the outcomes of an external report on the value for money (VfM) of the Regional Service in 2018/2019.

2 Scope and Background

- 2.1 The VFM report for 2018-2019 (Appendix 1) focusses on the delivery of the regional service and the regional impact set against a number of criteria.
- 2.2 Members will note that the report does not break down individual Local Authority (LA) detail. The VFM report focuses entirely on the impact of the regional service on a number of measurable outcomes that are contained within the commissioned regional Business Plan. The Council will have received a number of detailed reports in previous meetings and through LA scrutiny committees such as: LA Outcomes, Categorisation, Estyn Inspection outcomes which has specific LA detail.
- 2.3 The report has been written by an external consultant, Rod Alcott. This is the second year that this consultant has reviewed the VfM of the EAS. The report has been sectioned to include the following elements:
- Executive Summary
 - Recommendations
 - Economy: Spending less
 - Efficiency: Spending well
 - Effectiveness: Spending wisely
 - Equity: Spending fairly
 - Sustainability: Spending for the long term
 - Conclusion
 - Appendix: Pen Portrait

2.4 The full content of the regional school improvement VfM 2018/2019 report can be found in Appendix 1.

2.5 What is Value for Money?

VfM 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.

2.6 Whilst the above represent the traditional method of measuring VfM it is also possible to include two further dimensions:

- **Equity:** the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to – spending fairly. Equity is sometimes included within considerations of effectiveness but is treated separately here to highlight its importance to the work of EAS; and
- **Sustainability:** an increasingly standard consideration within the context of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (WBFNG) – spending for the long term.

2.7 External Judgement of the EAS

Assessing the performance of EAS against the criteria outlined above the conclusion is that:

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 is required to address concerns over educational outcomes across the region and those schools that are underperforming.

This conclusion has been arrived at because:

- *Economy:* EAS is delivering its services to all schools across the region while continuing to spend less.
- *Efficiency:* The regional approach to deployment of resources allows economies of scale to be achieved; and the impact on service delivery of reduced EAS resources is being mitigated by a concerted effort to build compensatory capacity within schools to allow the quality of support to schools to be maintained.
- *Effectiveness:* Overall, educational outcomes are not improving at the desired rate in all schools, particularly within identified schools within the

secondary phase, and this needs to be addressed through acceptance of collective responsibility and accountability to improve performance.

- *Equity*: A comprehensive programme designed to better equip schools to support vulnerable learners has been established across the region, based upon cluster working and reinforced by the distribution of wellbeing grants to every cluster.
- *Sustainability*: EAS has an agreed Medium Term Financial Plan that sets out a sustainable approach to financial management in the future and is concentrating upon preparing schools to meet the challenges of curriculum reform, based upon a robust regional delivery network for professional learning that is intended to ensure that pupils needs will be met in the future and the workforce are well prepared and informed on all aspects of the reform agenda.

- 2.8 The report notes that; “While maintaining the quality of support to schools is essential, effectiveness depends upon what this support achieves. The overriding purpose of EAS, as set out in its mission statement, is to *‘transform the educational outcomes and life chances for all learners across South East Wales’*.”
- 2.9 Consequently, assessment of effectiveness must relate to its contribution in bringing about this desired transformation. One approach to this assessment is to look at educational outcomes as measured by categorisation outcomes, Estyn inspection outcomes and pupil outcomes. However, it must be recognised from the outset that these outcomes cannot be achieved by any one organisation or programme of support. They require collaboration and a collective effort for which there is a collective responsibility and accountability. In relation to this report this collective responsibility and accountability extends to Welsh Government, EAS, Local Authorities and schools.
- 2.10 The report concludes that; “While the report is written in discrete sections, to mirror the constituent parts of a VfM evaluation, it is important to recognise that discrete does not mean unconnected. On the contrary, achieving value for money requires delivery strands to complement and reinforce one another to create a coherent and consistent overall approach that makes the best use of resources.
- 2.11 For EAS this coherence and consistency comes from its ever-evolving approach to supporting the emergence of a self-improving system based on cluster working. This approach runs as a consistent theme throughout the report as illustrated by the following examples:
- Financial underpinning through maximisation of delegation rates and remodeled approaches to cluster funding.
 - The development of a Wellbeing and Equity Strategy centred around a cluster-based approach.
 - The creation of Learning Schools Networks and enhanced peer working arrangements.
 - A professional Leadership offer that emphasises collaboration and shared development in a cluster-based context

- 2.12 The above demonstrates that the approach adopted by EAS is consistently centred around attempting to create additional capacity in schools, utilise external support and research to shape service delivery, focus sharply on interventions that provide support and challenge to underperforming schools and to ensure that the demands of curriculum reform can be met in a sustainable way that does not compromise current provision. In financially constrained times, with impending major curriculum reform, this would appear to represent a very sensible use of resources.
- 2.13 The report notes two recommendations for consideration:
1. Further develop and refine the current approach to VfM evaluation in FADE reporting.
 2. Consider whether there are cost-effective ways to secure the involvement of Head Teachers in further developing the annual VfM report for 2019-20.
- 2.14 These recommendations will be accepted in full and will be implemented within the current business planning cycle.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** members consider the report and provide feedback thereby engaging in self-evaluation processes prior to approving the report

3.2 **Option 2:** approve the report.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 **Statutory Responsibility**

4.1.1 The EAS through its planning cycle is required to submit an annual value for the money report on the regional school improvement service.

4.1.2 **Corporate Plan**

- **Education Aims**

- “To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing, particularly for our more able and most vulnerable learners
- To improve the quality of our education services and our school building to help learners achieve great outcomes
- To continue to support our school leaders to help out pupils achieve their ambitions.”

4.1.3 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The content of the EAS business plan is clearly aligned to the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan which aims for everyone to have the best start in life. Through this plan it seeks to ensure that the education provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people so that their progress is as good as it ought to be.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council made a financial contribution of £364,452 this financial year to the regionally commissioned Education Achievement Service (EAS) for the delivery of the statutory school improvement functions; namely, support, challenge, monitoring and intervention.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Risk lies in weak or late identification of significant school improvement concerns. Mitigating actions involve both the local Authority and EAS having effective monitoring processes in place, which cover the impact, effectiveness, quality and appropriateness of school leadership, school provision and pupil outcomes. Effective partnership working is therefore essential in order to maximise the impact of both the local Authority and EAS on pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Collective and Management Agreement (CAMA) sets out the terms and conditions of the partnership between Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and the EAS.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The regional HR officers in the EAS work closely with OD officers in the Council.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The value for money performance of regional consortia is contained in 2.7 above.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

High Quality education is a fundamental pre-requisite of ensuring future local and national prosperity through the provision of an informed and well-educated workforce and society. The Local Authority's statutory role to monitor and evaluate school performance and the quality of provision, coupled with its statutory powers of intervention in schools causing concern is fundamental to ensuring that all schools provide high quality education provision.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Involvement of partners is fundamental to securing and sustaining school improvement. The statutory framework advocates this and the work of the Local authority, its commissioned school improvement service (EAS) and schools evidences the positive impact of working in this way.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The SEWC regional framework seeks to ensure that schools deliver high quality provision and standards in the long term.

The value for money report is clearly aligned with this approach.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

A key element of the Council's work is to monitor settings and ensure appropriate support to secure continuing high standards. Estyn Inspection reports reflect the extent to which settings and Local Authorities has been effective in achieving this.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Educational improvement in Blaenau Gwent is delivered on a regional basis through the South East Wales Consortium in collaboration with Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen Councils.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The Estyn Inspection Framework is aimed at promoting high standards and high quality education provision. This aim is fundamental to the Council's well-being objectives and is fundamental to the joint work between Education and Social Services Directorates.

6.8 ***EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

Not required for this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The South East Wales Consortium is required to submit to the Council a value for money report. Alongside this report the Council will have received a number of detailed monitoring reports in previous meetings and through LA scrutiny committees such as: LA Outcomes, Categorisation, Estyn Inspection outcomes which has specific LA detail.

8. **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

1. The South-East Wales Regional Value for Money Report (2018-2019)