

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Partnerships

Date: 20 March 2024

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors E Stowell-Corten (Chair), B Davies, P Drewett, F Hussain, J Jones, M Pimm, A Screen and K Whitehead

In Attendance: Sarah Morgan (Head of Education), Geraint Willington (Education Achievement Service (EAS) Director: Resources, Business and Governance), Marc Belli (Education Achievement Service (EAS) Principa School Improvement Partner), Ed Pryce (Education Achievement Service (EAS) Assistant Director: Policy and Strategy), Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate), Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager), Helen Gordan (Senior Policy and Partnership Officer), Sam Slater (Head of Strategy, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser), Katharine Majer (Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Taylor Strange (Governance Officer) and Emily Mayger (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors C Baker-Westhead and A Morris

1 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Pimm declared an interest due to connections involved in agenda item 5 and 6.

The Committee members declared interests on item 4 as it relates to governorship on school boards within Newport.

2 **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th December 2023**

The Minutes of the previous meeting were held as a true and proper record.

3 **Education Achievement Service (EAS) - Value for Money (Phase 1 - December 2023)**

Invitees:

- Sarah Morgan (Head of Education)
- Geraint Willington (Education Achievement Service (EAS) Director: Resources, Business and Governance)
- Marc Belli (Education Achievement Service (EAS) Principal School Improvement Partner)
- Ed Pryce (Education Achievement Service (EAS) Assistant Director: Policy and Strategy)

The Head of Education introduced the report. The Education Achievement Service (EAS) Director: Resources, Business and Governance and Education Achievement Service (EAS) Assistant Director: Policy and Strategy gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee queried the importance of baselines for measuring school improvement. The EAS Assistant Director advised against ranking schools but saw baselines as necessary. He emphasised caution when setting baselines, focusing on working with schools over older methods of ranking schools. The Committee asked why few schools had set baselines. It was clarified that EAS, not schools, were setting baselines for themselves to highlight schools that required support.
- The Committee enquired about EAS's role. They were advised EAS was working with a 40-school regional sample but did not know which schools were involved in the sample. The Committee sought to understand EAS's input on choosing the sample schools and sample size. The EAS Director explained an independent advisor determined 30 was the minimum sample size, with 40 being above minimum based on constraints. The EAS Assistant Director further explained restricting the sample helped maintain better continuity in EAS's work. The Committee asked why the EAS were not aware of the sampled schools' identities. The EAS Assistant Director stated this reduces bias towards those schools.
- The Committee queried if EAS impacted School Development Plans. The EAS Principal School Improvement Partner noted schools set their own plans, with EAS supporting their needs. The EAS Assistant Director stated this was based on the 40-school sample, not all schools. The Head of Education explained schools evaluate themselves, with Officers helping to analyse development plans' focus on aims and objectives.
- The Committee noted the increased funding gap for EAS and asked if students would get priority with additional funds. The EAS Director: Resources, Business and Governance explained EAS strived to work within provided funding, ensuring funds went to the right place.
- The Committee asked if EAS would use technology like Artificial Intelligence (AI). The EAS Assistant Director noted they do not directly implement technology changes in schools, as this responsibility lies with the local authority, but they do encourage schools to facilitate its use. The EAS's internal team uses technology and training is being created to address schools' fears around AI. The EAS Principal School Improvement Partner stated AI should be incorporated, not used as a replacement.
- The Committee questioned if Wales struggled academically compared to other countries due to cost constraints and spending cuts. The Head of Education stated accurate comments could not be made on 'Wales' academic achievement, which was a complex issue, but literacy and numeracy were high EAS priorities.
- The Committee raised concerns over bias from self-evaluation. The EAS Assistant Director: Policy and Strategy stated supported self-evaluation allows more collaborative and accurate evaluation rather than in isolation.
- The Committee asked how schools viewed EAS's involvement in schools. The EAS Assistant Director noted annual surveys and headteacher feedback groups

highlighted the staff found EAS involvement was helpful, with a critical but supportive approach. The Committee queried if school staff could give anonymous feedback. The EAS Assistant Director confirmed options for anonymity existed.

- The Committee asked officers if there were areas for EAS improvement. The EAS Assistant Director noted key priorities are highlighted in the report such as focussing on outcomes in school plans.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee praised the EAS partnership for its excellent work in providing financial support for schools, noting this was encouraging for Members to hear and emphasised the importance of maintaining this practice.
- The Committee expressed that the report seemed very layered and required repeated reading to fully grasp the content. Suggestions were made to make future reports less drawn out, avoid copy and paste content, and aim for more concise and understandable presentation.
- The Committee commended the involvement of EAS School Improvement Partners in analysing School Development Plans during meetings with schools to discuss priorities, emphasising the importance of tailored plans.

4 Safer Newport Strategic Needs Assessment 2024-2029

- Rhys Cornwall Strategic Director- Transformation and Corporate)
- Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager)
- Helen Gordon (Senior Policy and Partnership Officer)
- Sam Slater (Head of Strategy, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent)

The Strategic Director introduced the report to the Committee. The Policy and Partnership Manager and the Senior Policy and Partnership Officer then gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee praised the report being created in various languages and questioned how they approached community groups for responses, as uptake of responses was low in areas with diverse communities. The Senior Policy and Partnership Officer noted they consulted Community Connectors and similar groups but were unsure why consultation uptake was low. They stated a face-to-face consultation was set up at the Gap Centre. The report reflected more qualitative data, with the majority feeling safe in Newport. The Policy and Partnership Manager noted people likely felt safe due to secure housing and feeling safe in one's community leads to taking pride in it.
- The Committee queried using other methods to gain wider participation from Newport's diverse population. The Strategic Director stated best practices from other consultations were being examined to garner more responses. The Policy and Partnership Manager noted they could learn from partner organisations' participation

with community groups, such as Gwent Police. They also noted the issue of consultation fatigue and the need to be smarter when consulting with community groups.

The Committee praised the report's quality but was surprised by Newport's population distribution. They questioned how rural areas with sparse populations felt about safety and sought assurances that rural populations were not forgotten. The Strategic Director noted the varied population spreads faced different challenges in terms of crime but the Council worked with Gwent Police on these challenges. The Committee requested a breakdown of responses by location, which the Senior Policy and Partnership Officer agreed to provide.

- The Committee asked if housing associations were contacted for feedback. The Senior Policy and Partnership Officer explained partnership work occurred with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) but needed building upon, though no specific issues were raised.
- The Committee questioned how housing associations disciplined anti-social behaviour. The Strategic Director noted partners are used tactically for specific RSL issues, but that information was not collected for this report.
- The Committee asked how report information feeds into community wellbeing profiles. The Policy and Partnerships Manager stated the Intelligence Hub would share information with partners.

The Committee thanked officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee praised the report's presentation and accessibility. Additionally, they commended the effort to distribute the report in multiple languages, recognising the importance of reaching a diverse audience and ensuring inclusivity in communication.
- The Committee emphasised the importance of recognising the safety and security of individuals living in rural areas as being equally significant as in urban areas. It was suggested that safety concerns in rural areas should not be overlooked or forgotten, indicating a need for specific attention and measures to address safety issues in these communities.
- The Committee requested to receive a data pack of the information about areas of residence which was collected during the public engagement but was not contained within the report to enhance their understanding of the geographical distribution and associated safety concerns within Newport.
- The Committee expressed concern about the low engagement rate from diverse communities. Despite the report being translated into multiple languages and efforts to reach out to community groups, participation remained low. The Committee recommended exploring ways to improve engagement with these communities to ensure their perspectives and concerns are adequately represented.

5 Serious Violence Duty: Gwent Strategic Needs Assessment and Strategy

Invitees:

- Rhys Cornwall Strategic Director- Transformation and Corporate)
- Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager)
- Helen Gordon (Senior Policy and Partnership Officer)
- Sam Slater (Head of Strategy, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent)

The Strategic Director introduced the report to the Committee. The Policy and Partnership Manager, Senior Policy and Partnership Officer and the Head of Strategy, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent then gave an overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee noted a discrepancy on page 179 of the report regarding “Weapon-related crime” and “Rape and Sexual offences” statistics, which appeared to show the same figures for both Newport and Gwent as a whole. The Policy and Partnership Manager advised this would be corrected.
- The Committee highlighted the importance of county lines drug dealing and the use of alternative bladed weapons in crime. They asked if these were included in the knife and gun crime data. The Head of Strategy at the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner's Office noted all weapons were included in the knife and gun crime statistics.
- The Committee noted a reduction in criminals attending hospitals due to criminal injuries. The Head of Strategy at the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner's Office highlighted that while the data shows a drop, it doesn't identify the cause, which would be explored further.
- The Committee asked if the report stood alone or was linked to community profiles. The Head of Strategy at the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner's Office noted it fulfils Home Office requirements, but the report fed into localised planning.
- The Committee asked for ward-by-ward data to be provided and for the challenges faced with consultation, such as anonymity, to be highlighted. The Strategic Director noted that since the report is in its infancy, there is room for growth. The Committee was informed that the report would be brought back to them. The Strategic Director further highlighted that some of the data's real-world impacts are relatively small compared to their percentages. The Head of Strategy, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, explained that local engagement is a key priority.
- Concern was raised by the Committee over the reality of increasing crime rates. The Committee also expressed concern regarding the increase in sexual crimes against women. The Policy and Partnership Manager highlighted that the issue of crimes against women needed to be explored in more detail.
- The Committee highlighted the positive impact of more women coming forward about crimes they had experienced. The Policy and Partnership Manager agreed with the Committee's observation.
- The Committee queried if hate crime was increasing and whether specific ethnic groups were being targeted both by perpetrators but also by law enforcement. The Strategic Director noted this is an important point, highlighting its importance within the counter-terrorism and community reports.

- The Committee asked for clarification on the term "community safety domain." The Strategic Director noted it is covered under the Welsh Government index but would clarify the term in all future reports.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- The Committee commended the report stating that it was very accessible and informative.
- The Committee noted a discrepancy on page 179 of the report regarding "Weapon-related crime" and "Rape and Sexual offences" statistics, which appeared to show the same figures for both Newport and Gwent as a whole. They recommended a clarification or correction of this data.
- The Committee suggested including a detailed breakdown of the ethnicity of targeted groups in hate crimes within the Safer Newport Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA). This analysis will help contextualise the link between hate crimes and serious criminal activities, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the assessment in addressing these specific issues.
- The Committee observed that presenting data as percentage increases (e.g. a 300% increase in homicides) could be misleading due to the small numbers involved. They suggested that presenting the actual figures might provide a clearer and less alarming picture.

6 Scrutiny Adviser Reports

- Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser)

a) Forward Work Programme Update (Appendix 1)

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next committee meeting:

Wednesday 24th April 2024, the agenda item;

- Wastesavers Partnership
- Fostering and Adoption Services Update

b) Actions Plan (Appendix 2)

The Scrutiny Advisor updated the Committee on the actions sheet and advised all actions are up to date.

The meeting terminated at 7.02 pm