

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE: 24 JANUARY 2023

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING, CONTROL ENVIRONMENT UPDATE

AGENDA ITEM: 4

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Reason for this Report

1. This report has been produced in response to the Governance and Audit Committee's request for an update on the Education and Lifelong Learning control environment.
2. The Governance Audit Committee has requested this update in respect of its role to:
 - Monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the committee.
 - Consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
 - Consider the Council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risk and priorities of the Council.
 - Consider the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
 - Review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the council from fraud and corruption.
 - Review the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or Collaborations.
 - Review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively and make any associated reports and recommendations.
3. The Committee has requested specific updates on:
 - The management of school balances;
 - Systems to review the affordability of the 21st Century Schools Programme; and
 - Complaints handling in schools.

Background

4. Cardiff Council's Education Directorate has responsibility for the duties, functions, and services in relation to statutory education in the city, including the youth service. This excludes post-16 provision in relation to Further and Higher Education Institutions. The work of the Directorate is split into four main service areas – Achievement, Inclusion, Services to Schools and School Organisation Access and Planning (SOP). The Director of Education is

supported by an Assistant Director and Programme Director for SOP. The central education service has 594.5 FTE. For schools this is 6171.85.

5. Cardiff has 127 schools. There are 98 primary schools, including 15 that provide Welsh-medium education, two dual language and three maintained nursery schools. There are 18 secondary schools including three Welsh-medium schools. In addition, there are seven special schools and one pupil referral unit.
6. The local authority's school improvement service is provided by the Central South Consortium. The Consortium provides a school improvement services and acts on behalf of five local authorities being Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff, and the Vale of Glamorgan.
7. Education is a clear priority within 'Stronger Fairer Greener' - the Administration's policy statement for the city, which strongly articulates the view that a *"good education provides the best start in life and remains the surest route out of poverty."* Cardiff 2030 – 'A ten-year vision for a capital city of learning and opportunity' set out the vision and goals for education in Cardiff in November 2019. This vision – *'All children and young people in Cardiff experience high quality education and develop the knowledge skills and attributes that enable them to become personally successful, economically productive, and globally engaged citizens'* remains relevant; however, post pandemic it is clear that we need to refresh the strategic goals and commitments to action, to respond to the educational and societal context now faced. A refreshed vision and strategy will be published before the commencement of the academic year 2023/24.
8. The key priorities and demands within the education system in Cardiff at present are:
 - Raising pupil attendance levels post pandemic and tackling persistent absence where this is prevalent. Attendance levels remain below pre-pandemic rates.
 - Meeting the increasing of Additional Learning Needs (ALN), including ensuring children and young people facing emotional, mental health and well-being (EMHWP) challenges have access to school places that meet their individual needs. And, providing the optimum level of EMHWP support for children and young people, especially the most vulnerable.
 - Aligning services to support schools to support learners, including the development of a 'Team Around the School' approach.
 - Continuing to progress the national education reforms: Curriculum for Wales, Accountability and Assessment changes, and ALN reform.
 - Delivering the 21st Century School programme and managing the condition of the existing school estate.
 - Managing reducing budgets and escalating costs.
9. The Directorate Delivery Plan sets out the specific priorities, and how the responsibilities to deliver these are distributed across teams. This plan forms the cornerstone of the performance and risk management cycles within the directorate.

A. Overall Structure of Governance and Control

Education Management Team

10. The Education Management Team (EMT) provides the overarching governance for Directorate business at an operational and strategic level. The operational group, EMT

Assurance, meets weekly and the strategic group meets monthly. Both groups are chaired by the Director of Education.

11. EMT Assurance maintains oversight of all services across the education department including the monitoring of delivery and performance, ensuring robust processes are followed and adherence to all statutory requirements. This includes:
 - Supervision of directorate and corporate performance cycles, ensuring the management of progress against stated priorities in the Corporate Plan and Directorate Delivery Plan.
 - Oversight of the commissioned school improvement service via the Central South Consortium, to ensure adequate challenge and support is provided to Cardiff schools.
 - Leadership and control of the annual Self Evaluation and resulting planning process.
 - Ownership of the Risk Registers, including risk and issue identification and review.
 - Regular updates from Operational Managers across the directorate on key service priorities to assess progress, issues and risks and support ongoing action.
 - Financial, Human Resources and Information management.
 - Compliance with mandatory training requirements.
 - Complaints and correspondence management and analysis.
 - Oversight and progress of internal audit recommendations including coordination of updates from lead officers allocated to monitoring and reviewing the Directorate response to ongoing audits.

School Improvement Framework

12. The new Welsh Government (WG) guidance on school improvement, published in 2022, sets out a framework for evaluation, improvement, and accountability to deliver sustainable school improvement and drive behaviours and practices that are required by the Curriculum for Wales and the new assessment arrangements. The guidance sets out what schools and others 'must' and 'should' do under the new framework. The Director of Education, in partnership with the Central South Consortium, WG, Estyn and School Leaders (including Governing bodies) will oversee the implementation of these new arrangements in Cardiff. Embedding these arrangements is a critical priority for the EMT in 2023.
13. The new framework for school improvement is comprised of several aspects:
 - Information and evidence;
 - Evaluation and improvement;
 - Democratic accountability and governance at all levels of the school system:
 - o Governing bodies within schools;
 - o Councils and Scrutiny committees in the local authority; and
 - o Joint Committees at Regional Consortia; and
 - Inspection – whereby schools will be inspected more regularly by Estyn.
14. Robust self-evaluation by schools will be fundamental to the new arrangements, to enable schools to produce and publish a single 'School Development Plan' to set out their priorities. This intelligence will need to flow to the local authority to enable scrutiny of the effectiveness of local authority services in supporting schools to achieve positive outcomes for learners. School Development Plan content will be collated, tracked, and monitored via Improvement Partners at the Central South Consortium.

15. The new accountability system sets out the processes required to confirm that evaluation and improvement is functioning effectively and is the safety net for when it is not. It should ensure that problems are identified and addressed promptly.

Schools Causing Concern

16. Local authorities will continue to have the statutory responsibility to monitor and intervene where there are concerns about school standards. The local authority and the Central South Consortium, working in partnership with schools, have put in place effective mechanisms to regularly monitor the performance of schools and to identify any issues at an early stage which need to be addressed to secure improvement. Such schools are referred to the Schools Causing Concern (SCC) meeting.
17. The SSC meeting is held six times per academic year, chaired by the Principal Improvement Partners. Membership includes the Assistant Director of Education, Lead Officers for Inclusion, Key/Targeted Groups, Education Welfare Services, Safeguarding, Admissions, HR, Finance, Governor Services, SOP, Audit and Health & Safety.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Share information, or intelligence, about the issues or challenges facing the school.
- Determine any additional actions that may need to be taken by the school, the local authority or by Central South Consortium.
- Determine any issues that may need to be escalated to senior officers in the local authority for further consideration or action.
- Agree an overall judgement of the progress of the school.

A termly report is submitted to EMT, the Lead Cabinet Member for Education and Chief Executive summarising the progress being made by individual schools causing concern and provides an updated position on actions being taken to address these concerns.

18. In addition to the regular school improvement mechanisms operated between the local authority and consortium, the Education department has also introduced termly All Schools Risk meetings. These meetings bring together officers from a range of local authority teams with the School Improvement Partners, from the Central South Consortium, to share valuable intelligence about every school, similarly to the SCC processes. The local authority collates the intelligence gathered in a systematic report and enables tracking and monitoring of any agreed interventions, to provide a rounded picture of improvement and to ensure escalation of risks as appropriate to schools causing concern.

Major Project Governance – Schools Organisational Programme

19. Following the Cabinet paper in 2017 the School Organisation Programme (SOP) structure was strengthened by aligning project and programme governance and includes relevant service areas and teams across the Council. The revised programme governance structure accommodates typical project management lifecycle and decision-making processes with appropriate risks considered at project and programme level. In summary, the programme governance structure includes:
 - SOP Cabinet Review Group – advisory group that consists of directors and Cabinet members.

- SOP Board – responsible for taking all high-level decisions about the Programme. These decisions will be escalated from the SOP Project Boards, Programme Director (SOP), or School Asset Performance Group.
 - Project Boards – the forum whereby the project is managed at the operational level. The Project Board will have decision making responsibility for decisions within the scope of the project or up to agreed tolerances.
 - School Asset Performance Group – responsible for assessing and managing the performance of the asset renewal. The group receives reports on the overall performance metrics, programming, commissioning themes, stakeholder feedback and Health & Safety (H&S).
20. The SOP Board is the key decision-making function and has directed the programme appropriately since the outset. The board is held every month, works effectively, and seeks to handle all business on a consistent basis including agreement of scope of projects. The board receives a risk register at every meeting and has recently escalated inflationary pressures on the capital programme as a corporate risk.
21. For any projects that require a school organisation change the 5-case business model, which is HM Treasury standard, (including 3 Cabinet reports) is applied. It is also recommended that there are 8 gateway reviews throughout a project lifecycle which are scheduled from the outset of the programme. For projects that do not require statutory consultations and that are usually smaller, it is proposed that there will be a streamlined 6 gateways reviews. It is expected that the SOP board approves the project at each stage. This is in line with the principles of the 5-case business model that tests value for money at each stage of the business case cycle. These cases are submitted to WG for approval.
22. The benefit of project gateways is that key decision makers will have sight of the project at each key stage. It provides a consistent and structured approach to monitoring and managing scope change and project costs. It also provides teams with clarity about when to escalate issues.

Risk Management

23. The Directorate Risk Register is kept as a live document and reviewed monthly at EMT. Risks identified are managed on an ongoing basis alongside the Directorate Delivery Plan and reported on a quarterly basis via the Directorate and Corporate Risk Registers. Escalated Directorate and Corporate Risks for which the Directorate holds responsibility are reviewed by the Council's Senior Management Team and subsequently reported to Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee.

Corporate Risks

24. Corporate Risks that are owned by the Education Directorate relate to the SOP Programme, Schools delegated budgets and School Improvement and Attainment. As reported to Governance and Audit Committee via the quarterly Corporate Risk Management reporting process, all the above risks are mitigated through a variety of controls, actions, and policies to ensure the current (residual) rating is reduced from the inherent rating and is acceptable in respect of the Council's risk appetite. The most recently escalated Education risk to the Corporate Risk Register, relates to 'Ensuring Access' to education for all learners. This has been escalated to secure challenge and support to manage the risk of learners not accessing full time education due to the increased demand for places for pupils with

additional learning needs, emotional health and well-being needs, and delays in admitting pupils when parental choice cannot be met in certain parts of the city. The risk is being managed by the EMT.

Directorate Risks

25. At the most recent review of the Directorate Risk Register the highest risk ratings applied to the following risks:

- Attendance, Persistent Absenteeism and Exclusions
 - Sufficiency of school places.
 - Sufficiency of places for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
 - Increasing numbers of learners not in appropriate full-time education.

Risk Description	Residual Risk	Current Controls	Future Planned Actions
Increasing fixed term and permanent exclusions in the secondary phase linked to increasing challenging behaviour and anxiety levels compounded by the pandemic. This is similar across Wales. This can lead to Children and Young People are in environments where they are not being safeguarded.	A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusions are closely monitored, and support is provided as necessary by E & LL. • Working with Central South Consortium via the All-Schools Risk, Schools Causing Concern processes. • Fresh Start and fair Access Panel meetings are regularly attended by Education Officers. • Policies are in place to Safeguard these Children and Young People and monitor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Welfare continue to monitor and action concerns. • E & LL continually monitor school exclusions and school attendance, investigating alternatives to exclusions on a case-by-case basis.
Inability to provide sufficient secondary school places (year 7 and in-year) for pupils to meet the local requirements of parents, ahead of the delivery of additional places through Band B schemes and section 106 schools. Cardiff will experience peak intakes to secondary schools in 2022/23 and 2023/24. In some areas of the city, catchments will have demand that exceeds supply and whilst there are places in other parts of the city, there is a risk that parents will refuse to accept these.	A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction has begun on building new schools. • Admissions work with Families re accessing placements, annually and in year placements. • There are ongoing communications regarding guardians selecting multiple schools and for those applications to be submitted within the set timeframe. • 151 extra places added for September 2022 (30 Eastern, 30 Radyr, 30 Corpus Christi, 31 Mary Immaculate High School, 30 St.Teilo's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Schools to open in 2023 • Improve the condition of School Buildings • Catchment areas residents in the catchment area have access to the school generally, clear policy in place.
Failure to provide ALN places and not delivering statutory provision. Plans are in place to address this over the next 3-5 years. However, the deficit will continue to impact the out of county spend in the short to medium term.	A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to progress schemes for additional ALN places • Additional special school accommodation at Woodlands, Riverbank, the Court, and Greenhill is on track for delivery. • Ahead of the inception of Band B, several ALN developments have been delivered, extensions of Ty Gwyn, and the expansion of places in other Specialist Resource Bases. 	Proposals to Cabinet in October 2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 136 additional Secondary and post-16 EWHB places • 139 additional Secondary Complex Learning and Autism Spectrum Condition places • 42 additional Age 3-19 Complex Learning and Autism Spectrum Condition places • 150 additional Primary Complex Learning and Autism Spectrum Condition places.
Failure to provide full-time education that meets individual needs. Children and Young People	A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong referral processes exist for EOTAS and quality assurance and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve joint working with YJS/LACE and EOTAS.

<p>often spending prolonged periods in EOTAS provision on a reduced timetable, or 'out of education'. There is a risk that young people out of full-time education are not in an environment where they can be safeguarded, and that we are not meeting our statutory responsibilities to provide an Education.</p>		<p>monitoring of learners has improved and is now strong.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination tracking of young people is clear and works across services. • The fresh start panel works well with good contributions from most high schools. • Knowledge of EOTAS needs and support by youth mentors is strong. • Mentors in place for post 16, ALN, EOTAS and LACE but a gap exists in support for sixth form learners. • Additional capacity secured with EOTAS lead officer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALN identification and support/training requirements, proposed ALN lead working across Directorates will strengthen knowledge of and therefore support for Young People. • Too many learners with ALN are placed in EOTAS in lieu of special school places but this is acknowledged in the EOTAS plan and included in Band B proposals. VAP enhancement and EPC functions need enhancement • Community Teaching structure needs to be considered, in light of review and ALN reform.
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Internal Audit Engagement and Response

26. The weekly EMT Assurance meeting has a standing item for Audit Reports. New audit reports are received and considered at EMT, including the audit report recommendations and responsible officers are identified. The weekly meetings provide an opportunity for officers to identify issues and review timelines for implementation of recommendations.

27. For school audits this also provides an opportunity for individual school issues to be highlighted and feed into the SCC and All Schools risk process. The Director, Assistant Director of Education and Head of Services to Schools meet with a Senior member of Internal Audit on a half termly basis to review the audit plan, any recent audits and identify issues and concerns. The Director and Assistant Director follow up systematically with individual schools and chairs of governors on outstanding audit recommendations.

28. Thematic audits of health and safety and asset management are underway in a sample of audit schools at the time of reporting.

See Appendix A EII Table of Recommendations

School Control Risk Self-Assessment (CRSA) Exercise

29. All schools were engaged in a CRSA exercise, whereby they completed a comprehensive self-assessment of their internal control environment and submitted this with supporting evidence to colleagues in Internal Audit. A large number of schools were sampled for a desktop audit review, and from this exercise a summary of the assurance ratings and the position against the recommendations raised is included in the table below.

The Wider Control Environment

Senior Management Assurance

30. In completing the annual Senior Management Assurance Statement (SMAS), the Director of Education receives individual assessments from each member of the EMT to cover their areas of responsibility. The collated SMAS is then discussed and agreed at EMT before final sign off by the Director and submission to the corporate centre.

31. Whilst governance systems are improving, there are a number of areas that will be developed over the next year. These actions are included within the Senior Management Assurance Statement which is reported half yearly. The key areas for improvement are:

Risk Management

- The application of integrated risk assessments across the Directorate, including partners, stakeholders, boards, and staff at all levels.
- Review of risks associated with Business Continuity.

Compliance

- The central assurance process for compliance and accountability including for commissioning and procurement.
- Mapping of corporate policies to improve knowledge of requirements.
- Mandatory training compliance.

Control

- Ensure safeguards are in place for physical and information assets.
- Improve knowledge of procurement policies for all staff.
- Continue to progress reviews of traded services.
- Ensure more consistent and regular budget monitoring at manager level.
- Ensuring accuracy of the Establishment data held by Human Resources on Digigov and alignment of this with accountancy routines to manage salary budgets.

See appendix B SMAS

Budget Management

32. In 2022-2023, the Council's net education budget is £310,518,000. The delegated school budget per pupil in 2022-23 is £5,208, the 5th highest of all local authorities in Wales. The local authority spends above the indicator-based assessment for education services and has increased and protected schools' budgets against a backdrop of financial pressures across the council.
33. The local authority delegates a high proportion of its education budget to schools and has a comprehensive range of service level agreements in place with a large uptake of the services provided by schools. The percentage delegation is 87.5%.
34. Schools' balances overall significantly increased over the 2021-2022 financial year, due to additional funding being received from Welsh Government.
35. Six schools (five primaries and one secondary) set a deficit in 2022-23 and two schools brought forward a deficit balance. The local authority has arrangements in place to work with the schools in deficit and has intervened appropriately.
36. The local authority has a significant capital programme in relation to schools both in terms of new school builds and investment in its existing schools' estate.
37. Band B of the school buildings investment programme is delivering against the planned profile and the financial position continues to operate within the programme envelope of £284m. WG has committed to additional Net Zero Carbon funding for all Band B projects, which will be profiled as projects develop. Additional funding has been awarded for site purchase and remediation at the Ty Glas site as part of the wider Band B scheme.

38. The asset renewal programme of works is increasing in scale and the most recent outturn summary can be seen below:

Category	Budget £'000	Projected Outturn £'000	Variance £'000
Asset Condition	2,302	2,302	0
Suitability	1,040	1,040	0
Asset - Invest to Save	8,677	16,000	7,323
Total	12,019	19,342	7,323

39. A review is taking place to assess the preparedness of the model for the delivery of specialist additional learning needs services and educational psychology services aligned with the WG reforms of Additional Learning Needs support. Additionally, early in the Spring Term the Directorate will consult with schools on proposals to amend the formula for distributing funding to schools for Additional Learning Needs.

40. The Education Directorate continues to work through major changes to two of its trading services brought about by the introduction by WG of Universal Free School Meals for Primary aged pupils and the National Plan for Music Services.

School Balances

41. At the end of the 2021/22 financial year school balances stood at £32.512m. This represented an increase of £11.412m or 54% on the previous year's balance of £21.099m. An analysis of each school's balance for the financial years 2016/17 through to 2021/22 can be found as Appendix C.

42. Officers have continued to work with schools to monitor the level and use of school balances and this work has been supported by a thematic audit of school balances by the Council's Audit Team. There are sufficient oversight and control arrangements in place to ensure appropriate governance of school balances.

43. At month 7 of the 2022/23 financial year the Council's LFMS team undertook an exercise to project the estimated balance for each school for the end of the 2022/23 financial year. Based on each school's spending plans the overall level of school balances was estimated to drop to £4.399m a decrease of £28.112m or 86.47%.

44. These projections suggested that at that point 35 schools would end the 2022/23 financial year in a deficit position.

45. However similar exercises undertaken in previous financial years have indicated similar levels of balance reductions, which have not materialised as a result of changes to spending plans, additional external grant income being received and changes to timings of building projects. Officers will continue to monitor the situation at an individual school level and consider intervention if any school continues to hold a surplus balance in excess of the recommended thresholds for more than one financial year.

See appendix C School Balances

External Assurance – Local Authority & School Inspection

Local Authority Link Inspector Visits

46. The Local Authority Estyn Link Inspectors visit the authority termly. At these visits, updates on school improvement and other key topics of interest as agreed between Estyn and the Authority are provided. A key area of discussion at present is the new school improvement guidance, to determine the most efficient and effective means of gathering intelligence on learner progress as education reforms proceed.

Local Authority Inspection

47. Estyn inspected Cardiff Education Services in November 2021 and four recommendations for improvement were made in the published February 2022 report. These recommendations have been assigned clear status and responsibility within the Directorate Delivery Plan to enable EMT to track and monitor progress.

Estyn Recommendations 2021
R1 Improve counselling services for children and young people
R2 Improve the quality of self-evaluation across the directorate
R3 Ensure that the work of the regional consortium is focused appropriately on Cardiff's strategic priorities
R4 Ensure clear strategic leadership and oversight of the development of Welsh-medium education

See appendix D Estyn Recommendations Action table

School Inspection

48. As the regulations around COVID were lifted towards the end of 2021, HMI Estyn were able to begin inspecting schools once again in 2022, in the table below is a breakdown of schools inspected and outcome, actions or progress made.

Inspection Area	Provider	Report Date	Link to School Estyn Report	Number of Actions
Herbert Thompson Primary School	Estyn	29/12/22	Inspection report Herbert Thompson Primary 2022 (gov.wales)	3 Recommendations
Greenway Primary School	Estyn	29/12/22	Inspection report Greenway Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	3 Recommendations
Trowbridge Primary School	Estyn	29/12/22	Inspection report Trowbridge Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	4 Recommendations
Thornhill Primary	Estyn	3/10/22	Inspection report Thornhill Primary	4 Recommendations

Inspection Area	Provider	Report Date	Link to School Estyn Report	Number of Actions
			School 2022 (gov.wales)	
Llanedeyrn Primary	Estyn	5/7/22	Inspection report Llanedeyrn Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	Placed in Significant Improvement with 4 Recommendations
Glyncoed Primary	Estyn	4/7/22	Inspection Report Template (gov.wales)	4 Recommendations
St Francis Primary	Estyn	27/6/22	Inspection report St Francis R.C. Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	Placed in Estyn Review with 4 Recommendations
St Patricks Primary	Estyn	27/6/22	Inspection report St Patrick's R.C. Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	Excellent Practice with 2 Recommendations
Holy Family Primary	Estyn	13/6/22	Inspection report Holy Family R.C. Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	Excellent Practice with 2 Recommendations
Bryn Celyn Primary	Estyn	16/5/22	Inspection report Bryn Celyn Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	Excellent Practice with 2 Recommendations
Pen y Groes	Estyn	16/5/22	Inspection report Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Pen-y-Groes 2022 (gov.wales)	Excellent Practice with 2 Recommendations
Cathays High School	Estyn	9/5/22	Inspection report Cathays High School 2022 (gov.wales)	Excellent Practice with 1 Recommendation
Bryn Y Deryn PRU	Estyn	9/5/22	Inspection report Bryn Y Deryn 2022 (gov.wales)	3 Recommendations
Albany Primary School	Estyn	28/3/22	Inspection report Albany Primary School 2022 (gov.wales)	4 Recommendations
St Teilo's CIW High School	Estyn	14/3/22	Inspection report St Teilo's CIW High School 2022 (gov.wales)	Excellent Practice with 2 Recommendations
Cardiff West Community High School	Estyn	8/2/22	Outcome Document (gov.wales)	School removed from Estyn Review

Below is a breakdown of the upcoming reports for Schools Inspections that are awaiting publication.

Inspection Area	Provider	Date of inspection	Date of Report Publication
Gladstone Primary School	Estyn	21/11/22	02/02/23
Riverbank Special School	Estyn	21/11/22	02/02/23
Ty Gwyn	Estyn	21/11/22	02/02/23
Woodlands High School	Estyn	21/11/22	02/02/23

Value for Money

49. Estyn noted in the February 2022 report that in recent years, Cardiff Council has demonstrated a sustained and incremental improvement in the quality and effectiveness of its education services. Also, that Senior leaders share a bold and ambitious vision for all learners, which they communicate clearly in the council's 'Capital Ambition' document. The leader of the council, cabinet member and chief executive set out high expectations for officers, schools and other providers and the strong commitment of elected members and officers at all levels to supporting young people and their families is highly evident.
50. The report states that the Director of Education supports fully the 'Cardiff 2030' vision and strategic priorities and the drive towards the Child Friendly City strategy. The Assistant Director for Education and the Assistant Director, County Estates aligned their work effectively throughout the pandemic. This support is well regarded by school and setting leaders.
51. In general, the report notes that the school inspection outcomes continue to be strong across all three sectors.
52. Officers across the Education Directorate were noted for their collective work and that it productively considers a range of issues in schools. This joined-up approach enables the local authority to gain a secure understanding of the individual contexts of its schools. The local authority has established strong working relationships with the regional consortium and there are robust processes for the support and challenge to SCC.
53. The SOP continues to deliver targeted value for money investment through Band B and investment in the existing estate. Through the SOP Board and Asset Commissioning Group, governance processes are robust to ensure that projects deliver against value for money business cases, underpinned by well-established sufficiency, condition and planning projection data.

21st Century Schools – Affordability of the Scheme

54. As noted earlier in the report there are strong governance arrangements in place for the significant capital expenditure incurred through the 21st Century Schools Programme and all decisions; financial and other are managed through these arrangements including assessment of value for money through the HM Treasury 5 Case Business model that comprises an option appraisal process. It is the intent of the Directorate to apply the standards of the model and option appraisals to any future review of service and significant investment.

The affordability of the programme is continuously monitored by the Director of Education, EMT and through the governance arrangements of the SOP Board and SOP Review Board. The delivery of the Band B large-scale capital projects is undertaken on a project-by-project basis to ensure delivery cost remains within the capital grant envelope awarded by WG and

affordability of the local authority's contribution. It should be noted that the award of WG grant is made without an inflationary increase as the expectation is that there is a cost over-run towards an end of a Band envelope grant will be provided by additional grant. Project delivery and costs are also monitored at Project level. The asset maintenance programme is managed on a yearly budget basis to ensure affordability with the overall budget allocated to this programme.

The first annual report on Investment in Education was published this month. This report provided an update on the progress of the programme and any considerations that will impact on the strategic planning of future investment including considerations for the next 12 months. As an annual report it primarily updates against agreed programme priorities and will be brought forward before the end of each financial year. It also identifies any potential notable changes, including increasing costs, which could impact on the planning and sequencing of any forward investment in the education estate in light of the recent WG announcement regarding the next round of funding.

Complaints Handling

Internal complaints procedure

55. The Central Education Service is committed to dealing effectively with any complaints about our services. Complaints are reviewed regularly and in line with corporate requirements and an annual report is produced documenting the number and type of complaints we have received. This information is used to improve practice and processes within the directorate.

56. If we receive a complaint, we ensure that complaints are sent to the relevant department/s for a response and:

- Acknowledged within 5 working days of the date that it is received.
- Aim to resolve the complaint within 20 working days - if a complaint is more complex, they may need more time.
- Inform the complainant within the 20-working day period if it may take longer to investigate the complaint and advise new timeframe, providing regular updates.
- Respond in Welsh if requested.

57. Education Complaints is managed Corporately though quarterly reporting, as well as any particularly prevalent issues being raised in weekly Education Management Team meetings. In the near future, the management and therefore regulation of Education Complaints is looking to be further improved through the use of the Halo system. This is a programme in which rigid timeframes can be uniformly set, and reporting can be generated directly.

Education Correspondence

58. Education Correspondence concerns enquires and/or complaints directly from Councillors, Cabinet Members, or the like received from members of the public. These are received in two formats: a direct email inbox, and the Halo system (a programme in which rigid timeframes can be uniformly set, and reporting can be generated directly).

Each enquiry/complaint is:

- Responded to in 15 working days or 10 working days if the enquiry was made to a Cabinet Member by a Councillor – whilst keeping all parties updated on the current position of the response.

- Tracked through excel: allocated a reference, current position, deadline for response, officer responding.

59. These enquiries/complaints are managed weekly in EMT meetings.

60. Governing Bodies are required by Education Act 2002 to establish procedures for dealing with complaints. Procedures have been confirmed to be in place in all 127 maintained schools in Cardiff. Of the 127 schools there are 119 of them who currently publicise their procedures on their school websites. In addition, the following activities are undertaken:

- Education Governor Services Team periodically undertakes checks to ensure that schools have complaints procedures in place and that they are being followed in specific cases
- Governor Services Team also provides practical advice, support, and training on school complaints procedures.
- Legal Services also provides advice on more complex complaints and support for schools in dealing with difficult or persistent complainants.
- Education Officers will carry out assurance exercises to ensure that schools have complaints procedures and have acted in accordance with them. This may involve a review of the procedures followed. It does not include a rehearing of the complaint.
- The Ombudsman may consider complaints about the Council's assurance role (detailed above) in relation to the operation of an individual school's complaints procedure, however it does not consider the issues originally raised in the complaint.

See Appendix E Sources of Assurance for the Cardiff Council Governance and Audit Committee on handling complaints

Legal Implications

1. The statutory functions of the Audit Committee include the duty to review, scrutinise and issue reports and recommendations on the appropriateness of the authority's risk management, internal control, and corporate governance arrangements (pursuant to Part 6 Chapter 2 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011). In discharging its functions, the Audit Committee must have regard to all relevant guidance, in particular the CIPFA guidance for Audit Committees.

Financial Implications

2. The financial implications (if any) arising from this report have been contained within the body of the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. That the Governance and Audit Committee considers and notes the content of the report.

Melanie Godfrey
Director, Education and Lifelong Learning

The following is attached:

- Appendix A: ELL Table of Recommendations
- Appendix B: SMAS Report
- Appendix C: School Budgets
- Appendix D: Estyn Recommendations Table of Progress
- Appendix E: Sources of Assurance Cardiff Council Complaints