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[The Children, Young People and Education
Committee](#)

16/09/2015

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn
ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in
the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation
is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Angela Burns | Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives |
| Keith Davies | Llafur Labour |
| Suzy Davies | Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives |
| Bethan Jenkins | Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales |
| Ann Jones | Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Chair of the Committee) |
| Lynne Neagle | Llafur Labour |
| Aled Roberts | Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats |
| Simon Thomas | Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales |

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Steve Davies | Rheolwr-gyfarwyddwr, Gwasanaeth Cyflawni Addysg De-ddwyrain Cymru Managing Director, Education Achievement Service for South East Wales |
| Chris Elmore | Cadeirydd y Cyd-bwyllgor, Consortiwm Canol De Cymru Chair of Joint Committee, Central South Consortium |
| Deborah McMillan | Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol, Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr a Phrif Gyfarwyddwr Consortiwm Canol De Cymru Corporate Director, Bridgend and Lead Director of the Central South Consortium |
| Hannah Woodhouse | Rheolwr-gyfarwyddwr, Consortiwm Canol De Cymru Managing Director, Central South Consortium |

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Sarah Bartlett | Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk |
| Marc Wyn Jones | Clerc Clerk |
| Siân Thomas | Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service |

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:35.
The meeting began at 09:35.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the first meeting of this new term of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. Welcome back after your summer recess. Can I just say before we start that, during the recess, our clerk got married to Sarah Beasley? So, congratulations to you both. We wait to see the photographs. There we go.

[2] We've got a number of apologies. We've an apology from John Griffiths, who is substituting on another committee this morning, and apologies from David Rees. We're going to move on to a new piece of work and a discussion around regional education consortia. As it's a new one, can I ask whether anybody needs to declare any interests that they haven't formally declared?

[3] **Aled Roberts:** Jest o dan y **Aled Roberts:** Just under the new rheolau newydd, rwyf eisiau datgan rules, I want to declare my interest as fy niddordeb fel cadeirydd a chair of governors. llywodraethwyr.

[4] **Keith Davies:** Rwy'n **Keith Davies:** And I'm also a school lywodraethwr ysgol hefyd. governor.

[5] **Ann Jones:** Okay.

[6] **Bethan Jenkins:** Mae fy mam i **Bethan Jenkins:** My mother is a yn dysgu mewn ysgol gynradd ym teacher in a primary school in Mhontypridd. Pontypridd.

[7] **Ann Jones:** Right; okay. Thanks very much.

09:36

**Trafodaeth gyda'r Consortia Addysg Rhanbarthol—Gwasanaeth
Cyflawni Addysg De-ddwyrain Cymru (EAS)
Discussion with Regional Education Consortia—Education Achievement
Service for South East Wales (EAS)**

[8] **Ann Jones:** So, we're looking at regional education consortia. You'll remember, if you cast your minds back to the last fortnight of the last term, that we had a briefing from Estyn and from the Wales Audit Office on the findings of their respective reports relating to regional education consortia, and so we decided to enter into some discussion and some thoughts with the consortia. We put out for written evidence, which you've all seen copies of. We're now delighted to have with us Steve Davies, who is the managing director from EAS, which is the Education Achievement Service for South East Wales. So, thanks very much for agreeing to come in.

[9] We've got a number of areas that we want to start with on the development, but, basically, we're looking at three and we're looking at the effectiveness of regional consortia in delivering school improvement services. Then, we want to look at the governance arrangements of consortia and then the national model for regional working. So, those are the three main themes, although the debate may just move all over. But, certainly, those are the three that we'll be looking at. So, we've got sets of questions. If I take Angela first and then we'll see how we go.

[10] **Angela Burns:** Thank you very much, Chair. Good morning, Steve.

[11] **Mr Davies:** Good morning.

[12] **Angela Burns:** As you will be aware, there are a great many initiatives currently going on to improve services and to improve educational attainment within schools, and these initiatives come from a number of sources, from the Communities First-style programme that starts at the very early years, all the way through to work that the local education authorities are putting in place to try to improve the outcomes for our children. I wondered if you could explain to me how you can be confident as to the value add that the consortia bring to this entire process. How will you be able to measure the outcomes and how will you be able to say with a degree of certainty, 'Right, well that amount of improvement in those types of schools

was down to this particular initiative that was thought up by and implemented by the consortia'?

[13] **Mr Davies:** Okay. I've worked in education for about 40 years and to get a direct correlation between an initiative and outcomes is difficult, but, that said, one starts with a baseline in terms of where standards are. When we formed the EAS, or the councils formed the EAS, it was recognised that in south-east Wales, in the five local authorities, there was significant underachievement, both in raw data, but also in terms of the progress of children as they were measured when they entered school through to finishing school. So, fundamentally, our backbone to our measures of our impact is the standards that children achieve, not just at 16, but as they progress through schools. So, keeping a regular check on that and making sure we are aware of the overall progress, then deciding on what initiatives you put in place, or how you implement national initiatives in a local context, is critical. So, in terms of defining exactly what strategy we're going to use, the debate is very much through the local education authority.

[14] Localising national policies in terms of implementation is worked through the governance structure and we make decisions through business planning as to how we are going to implement the decisions over a three-year period: what is the expected impact of those; how do they relate to initiatives that are the responsibilities of local education authorities; how do we link to Communities First; and how do we link to senior officers in the authority who have responsibilities in other areas? So, if you look at the structure of our business plan—the business plan identifies our set intentions over a period—and how it links to local government initiatives, that is then broken down across the service. So, every service area, whether it be literacy, numeracy or challenge adviser work, have specific initiatives that identify their expected impact on standards. The business plan is established in April. As we go through the year, we then take deep slices. Some of those slices are specific to education performance—August is a critical period—when we may need to change tack in that business plan. Then, we measure impact as far as teacher and school perception are concerned. But, critically, we have to report back to council members through either the board—. We have a board made up of cabinet members, non-education cabinet members, and we have a separate body called a JEG, joint executive group, which are the five cabinet members for education.

[15] So, in short, we have to implement national policy. We look to give it that local flavour by agreeing with the five councils, through the various

governance mechanisms, the clear statement of intention through the business plan, which is three years overall but one year in detail. That business plan has the key indicators of success overall, but also for the service areas, and we are measured against that. So, fundamentally, not only do we measure ourselves by outcomes, we measure ourselves by perceptions, and our masters, as such, within the local education authority, whether it be the political masters or the chief education officers, hold us to account on a regular basis as well as at significant periods when examination or test results come out.

[16] **Angela Burns:** Sorry, this has spawned a couple of additional questions, if I may. First of all, can I be really clear? Are you saying to me that the consortia's role is to implement national initiatives only or do the consortia also look at the areas that they represent and think, 'Actually, we could do this or this' to tailor it to a specific group of schools?

[17] **Mr Davies:** Yes. We have to not only tailor it to our area, but tailor it to local education authorities. So, the appendices within the business plan, which I defined, have particular areas of focus for those local education authorities. Fundamentally, we are measured by Estyn by the extent to which we are implementing certain national policies—so, for example, the pupil deprivation grant—but the very nature of the authorities is that they are different even within the five local authorities in terms of levels of deprivation. So, we don't make the decisions; we make proposals, but that goes through a democratic process. In making those proposals, they emerge through detailed discussions. So, there will be a local flavour. It isn't just doing what Government says in this particular way. The impact from that comes, in a formal sense, from cabinet members and the chief education officers, but also we engage schools and governors in discussions as to what their aspirations are. So, there will be a local flavour and, as you listen to the other regions, there are different ways in which we do it but there are also different emphases in how we implement policy.

[18] **Angela Burns:** I just want to be really clear that I have understood this. So, basically, a national policy will come down, you will take that policy and you will look at the best ways, in conjunction with the local authorities, as to how that national policy could be implemented throughout your region.

[19] **Mr Davies:** Yes.

[20] **Angela Burns:** You are unlikely, as a consortium, to come up with

something that national Government hasn't thought of and say, 'Actually, this would work in this area'. That's not particularly your role to create new—

[21] **Mr Davies:** We don't create new policy—

[22] **Angela Burns:** No.

[23] **Mr Davies:** —but we do challenge Government. If we believe we have something that is not being reflected in the ideas on implementation of policy, then we will test that locally. If there is an ambition from local authorities then we will, not just on our own but with them, put a constructive challenge to the senior officers within Welsh Government to propose and sometimes gain their support. Sometimes there are resource implications. So, we do push back and say, 'We believe there are other ways'.

09:45

[24] **Angela Burns:** Okay. So, this is my last question on this set, and it's going to be a tough question. I don't wish to aggravate you, but, to me, we had the building blocks, so nothing much has changed, in that we've got national policy, we've had national policy before; we've got local authorities, we've had local authorities before; and we've got the schools. You know, everything is about the same, only now we have regional consortia in that mix.

[25] So, what I'm trying to understand is, given that the decisions that you make about how something might be implemented would still have to go back to the local authorities, would still have to be looked at by their elected councillors, would still have to be looked at by their officers, and they will then decide how they will implement them within their schools, what do you think was the problem prior to the creation of regional consortia? Because, actually, that's what those guys should've been doing anyway, so all I can see is that what the Government's done is put in place four task masters, and I guess your job is to hit their heads together and make them do it. But, surely—. Is that really your role? I can see that the added value of the consortia might be to get all these disparate people to get on with doing the job, but the reality of the situation is these highly well-paid people in local authorities and these elected officers should've been doing that anyway. I'm just wanting to understand what else you bring to that party. It seems to me that all the building blocks are still there, they've just been slightly differently rearranged.

[26] **Mr Davies:** Okay. If I gave the impression that we just bring the national policy and work with the councils and do what they say, that is not how it works. We propose, across a region, with consistency and rigour, approaches to things like implementation of the national model for categorisation, so we can deliver that consistently and to a high quality. The economies of scale across five authorities enable us to. We've got three authorities with four secondary schools and one with seven, and to actually have a fully skilled, full range of provision, it was one of the major weaknesses. So, for example, there were people whom I inherited through TUPE, because all of the staff from the councils came into the one service, who were doing two or three jobs—they were the equivalent of a challenge adviser, they were doing some maths over here and then they had another curriculum area over here. So, having that high-quality service.

[27] But, in terms of making decisions as to what good school improvement looks like, this service, the EAS, puts the proposals to the councils and then doesn't say, 'Well, you choose how you want to do it'. The great majority of our work is applied consistently across the five authorities, so there is not the range of provision for school improvement that was so marked when we first arrived. But I inherited, almost immediately, three authorities in special measures and two authorities that were demonstrating a good degree of success. Now, even in those authorities, we've moved standards on.

[28] So, it's about a common agenda in terms of implementation, but there is that local flavour: we don't look to dictate to local authorities. So, there is a consistent approach, for example, to challenge adviser work, but there are particular challenges, say, in Blaenau Gwent, that require a slight adaption to that and it may be that the actual volume of resource—. So, we're able, across regions, to address, within authorities, and then across authorities and groups of schools, significant weaknesses. So, I would say that the quality of school improvement thinking as well as implementation has been raised significantly and that's been evidenced by improved results, but we're not complacent; there's still much to do.

[29] **Angela Burns:** Thank you.

[30] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Aled.

[31] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf eisiau **Aled Roberts:** I want to address your

mynd at eich tystiolaeth chi rŵan. Mae'ch tystiolaeth chi'n dweud eich bod wedi gweld gostyngiad o fewn yr arian rydych chi'n ei gael gan lywodraeth leol o ryw 22 y cant o 2011—o £4.4 miliwn i £3.5 miliwn. Ond, mae yna gostau sylweddol ynglŷn â diswyddo staff. Rydych chi wedi sôn am rai o'r staff a gafodd eu trosglwyddo i fewn i'ch gwasanaeth chi. A ydy'r arian rydych chi wedi'i wario ar ddiswyddiadau'n ychwanegol i'r ffigwr yna, neu a ydy'n gynwysedig yn y ffigwr?

evidence now. Your evidence does say that you have seen a reduction in the funding that you receive from local government by some 22 per cent from 2011—from £4.4 million to £3.5 million. But, there are significant costs attached to actually making staff redundant. You've talked about some of the staff that were transferred within your service. Is the money spent on actually getting rid of staff additional to that figure, or is it included within the figure?

[32] **Mr Davies:** It's actually included within the figure. We have not gone back to the local authorities to request any additional money for redundancy. I reduced the staffing from approximately 130 to 101 in three years. That's been through natural wastage, in terms of when people have moved out of the job. I've looked at either bringing secondments on within schools, or looking to deliver that service differently. Of those staff who have left, only two have been made redundant, and that was through voluntary redundancy. As a service, we bore those costs. The councils do not expect us to go to them for any additional resource in relation to redundancy, and that's been from the outset, so from day 1. We started before the national model in 2012. I inherited those staff and we have looked at different ways of delivery, so those staff have in part been replaced by secondments, but we've also used that money to give to schools that are highly effective so they, in some cases, can put additional staff within their school that support others. I recognise that there has been a different approach in some other regions in terms of how redundancies have been managed, but we haven't done that within our region.

[33] **Aled Roberts:** Ocê. Ac o fewn y 101 o swyddi rŷch chi'n dweud eich bod yn cynnal rŵan, a yw rheini'n hynny'n swyddogion sydd ar waith ar hyn o bryd, neu a oes rhai swyddi sydd dal angen eu llenwi, achos mae adroddiadau Estyn a'r archwilydd yn

Aled Roberts: Okay. And within the 101 posts that you say you maintain at present, are those officers who are currently working, or are there some posts that remain to be filled, because Estyn's reports, and those of the auditor, say that there have been

dweud bod yna broblemau wedi bod yn recriwtio staff mewn rhai consortia?
problems in recruiting staff in certain consortia?

[34] **Mr Davies:** I have to be careful here, and without trying to put our region on a pedestal, but we haven't had those problems of recruitment. One of the key factors is where we're placed geographically. We're in the south-east, and we're close to large areas like Bristol, and it's not a natural inclination in my mind to go and look into England, or to see English colleagues as being better than Welsh, but it's a wider area from which to recruit. So, we haven't had those problems. Some of the other regions struggled to make the first appointment of the managing director; I was appointed in that first round. We've had restructuring, where we've had to make new appointments internally and externally, but to date we haven't had to go twice to an advert to make an appointment.

[35] **Aled Roberts:** Faint o'r 101 o swyddi sy'n secondiadau ar hyn o bryd yn hytrach nag yn swyddi parhaol, llawn amser?
Aled Roberts: How many of the 101 posts are secondments at the moment rather than permanent, full-time posts?

[36] **Mr Davies:** Of the 101 posts, there would be, I would say, something in the region of about 5 per cent that are secondments.

[37] **Aled Roberts:** Ocê. Rwyf eisiau aros efo adnoddau dynol. Mae nifer o undebau yn eu tystiolaeth wedi barnu'r cymorth sydd ar gael i ysgolion o ran cyngor adnoddau dynol, ac rŷm ni wedi clywed hynny hefyd mewn ymchwiliadau eraill, yn cynnwys y rheini ar gyflenwi a phethau felly. Mae eich tystiolaeth chi yn dweud eich bod wedi gweithredu holl feysydd Robert Hill ers 2012, eto mi roedd yr adolygiad yn 2013 yn dweud bod angen i'r consortia hefyd weithredu cyngor adnoddau dynol achos nad yw'r arbenigedd yna o fewn y cynghorau lleol. Nid wyf yn gweld llawer yn eich tystiolaeth chi
Aled Roberts: Okay. I want to stay on the issue of human resources. A number of unions in their evidence have criticised the support available to schools in terms of HR advice, and we've also heard that in other inquiries, including those on supply teaching and such things. Now your evidence states that you have implemented all of the Robert Hill recommendations since 2012, yet the review in 2013 stated that the consortia also needed to implement HR advice because the expertise wasn't there within the local councils. I don't see much in your evidence on how you make arrangements across

ynglŷn â sut yr ŷch chi'n trefnu ar your councils. Are you responsible draws eich cynghorau chi. Ai chi sy'n for providing HR advice to schools gyfrifol am gyngor adnoddau dynol i where there are issues of ysgolion lle mae yna gwestiynau o underperformance and such things? danberfformio a phethau felly?

[38] **Mr Davies:** The statutory responsibility for HR for employees lies with councils, and we recognise that. When the EAS was set up, we set aside two posts that we tried to recruit to externally, but in the end we seconded two people from the local authorities who work in a co-ordinating role across the five authorities. So, they pull the heads of HR together, and look to co-ordinate a consistent approach to external policies in terms of pay, disciplinary and capability matters. That has made good progress and while I think some of the unions would rather deal with five separate local authorities, I think the local authorities themselves have found that that has worked well.

[39] What those two people do as well is look at the non-statutory elements that are to do with training and development for schools, particularly headteachers and governors in terms of fulfilling those responsibilities. But, it's a careful line you walk between the statutory responsibility and giving advice and support. When it comes to the more complex areas of disciplinary matters within schools, we provide the advice consistently across the five authorities, but ultimately, when you get into the detail of the decisions that are made, quite rightly, it's the local authority that provides that detailed support. Inevitably, across five local authorities, or 22 local authorities, there would be variance in the amount of staff and the way in which they deliver that. But, as for our responsibility for training, development and support, we look to co-ordinate it, but ultimately the statutory responsibility lies with the local authority and we don't look to step over that mark.

[40] **Aled Roberts:** Jest dau **Aled Roberts:** Just two brief questions gwestiwn cyflym i orffen. to finish.

[41] **Suzy Davies:** I've a question on that point, if that's all right.

[42] **Aled Roberts:** Ocê. **Aled Roberts:** Okay.

[43] **Suzy Davies:** You mentioned that there are two posts set aside for this co-ordinating role, which is a significant number in a small organisation.

How do those two roles contribute directly to school improvement and attainment? Is it this training element, or is it something—? I don't want you to take a long time, but—.

[44] **Mr Davies:** It does two things, really: it does relate to school effectiveness, because the quality of your staff and the way in which they're managed—whether dealing with disciplinary or capability matters—has a direct impact on quality and the progress of children. So, we treat it very seriously. The feedback from our schools is that they welcome and use the advice that we give them and we believe, because they train also our challenge advisers, so our staff know the best mechanisms that are available to support headteachers in dealing with some of these complex issues. So, they do have a direct impact.

[45] When the organisation was set up, before I arrived, there was a resource in the region of £90,000 that was put aside to deliver this work from the outset. That resource has been used fundamentally to recruit and deploy those staff, but they are integral; they're not a bolt-on service, they're integral and work particularly with our challenge advisers who are at that interface with heads—sometimes challenging headteachers to take some of those harder decisions. Historically, in some parts, heads were encouraged, sometimes, by human resources people not to take that hard decision because it involves hard work and hard decisions—clearly, never in my region, or our region, within EAS, but it has happened within education.

[46] **Suzy Davies:** Okay; thank you. I don't want to eat into Aled's time, but that was very helpful. Thank you.

[47] **Ann Jones:** Aled.

[48] **Aled Roberts:** Jest ynglŷn â datganiad ddoe ynghylch y fargen newydd a threfniadau hyfforddiant ar gyfer staff neu athrawon newydd eu cymhwyso sy'n gweithio fel staff cyflenwi, fe wnes i ofyn i'r Gweinidog ddoe, ond cefais i ddim ateb, felly gwnaf ofyn i chi: pa gonsortia sy'n gweithredu'r cynllun peilot yna?
Aled Roberts: Just on the statement made yesterday on the new deal and training arrangements for newly qualified staff or teachers who work as supply staff, I asked the Minister yesterday, but I wasn't given a response, so I'll ask you: which consortia are actually implementing that pilot scheme?

[49] **Mr Davies:** We are working on that pilot scheme, and we have a group

of staff that are supported in that way, but we use designated—. We've identified what we call—in effect, they're teaching schools—teaching hubs, and those newly qualified staff have access particularly to those schools, because we find, too often, with newly qualified teachers that, if they're not in a highly effective school, their access to knowing what really good looks like is sometimes missed. We are part of that pilot.

[50] **Aled Roberts:** Mae yna un **Aled Roberts:** There is another consortiwm arall; a ydych chi'n consortium working on this; are you gweithredu'r un cynllun, neu a ydy'r implementing the same scheme, or ddwy raglen yn hollol wahanol? Os are the two programmes entirely ydyn nhw'n wahanol, beth yw eich different? If they are, what's your dealltwriaeth chi ynglŷn ag am ba understanding in terms of the length hyd fydd y cynllun peilot yma'n of this pilot? Will the Welsh gweithredu? A fydd Llywodraeth Government evaluate both Cymru yn gwerthuso'r ddwy raglen i programmes to see which works weld pa un sy'n gweithio orau? best?

[51] **Mr Davies:** I believe there's consistency in the way they're being delivered, but I don't have the fine detail for you. I'd be very happy to come back on that.

[52] **Aled Roberts:** Fine.

[53] Jest un cwestiwn olaf ynglŷn â Just one final question on Schools Her Ysgolion Cymru: rydych wedi sôn Challenge Cymru: you've mentioned am yr arian rydych chi'n ei dderbyn the funding that you receive from the gan gynghorau lleol. Rwy'n meddwl local councils. I think many of us are bod nifer ohonom ni'n synnu bod surprised that more than £4 million mwy na £4 miliwn allan o'r £20 of the £20 million has been retained miliwn wedi cael ei gadw gan y by the consortia in order to improve consortia er mwyn gwella ansawdd o standards within those schools. How fewn yr ysgolion hynny. Faint o arian much money have you as a consortia ydych chi fel consortia wedi ei gadw set aside of the Schools Challenge o arian Her Ysgolion Cymru y Cymru funding last year? llynedd?

10:00

[54] **Mr Davies:** I haven't got the exact figure available in terms of that, but we use that money in a way that builds capacity across the whole authority

and supports those schools. So, for example, we identified—and I mentioned teaching hubs earlier—teaching hubs and leadership hubs where we funded additional time within those schools to support Schools Challenge Cymru, so they were partner schools. So, we don't hold on to that money ourselves—it's deployed entirely in recruiting and deploying effective schools in supporting Schools Challenge Cymru schools. But, also, that resource is available to other schools that are not Schools Challenge Cymru schools, because you will know from the criteria that there will be a number of schools to which if you applied the criteria now would be in Schools Challenge Cymru, and some who wouldn't. So, there are a group of schools that are very close to that category that have no resource, so we've used that resource to build capacity to help Schools Challenge Cymru schools and also help those schools that are in that sort of buffer zone. But, all the research shows, and what we are finding is that those that I call 'donor' schools, the schools that are helping, in the main—there've been one or two areas where I think there is a potential distraction to those schools; we have to be very careful—but in the main, those schools have raised their own standards as well. So, it's how you deploy that £4 million to add value to Schools Challenge Cymru, but also particularly to support those schools that are in that buffer zone. And you do it by putting the money into schools, as opposed to recruiting more specialists who are 'the experts who know best'. More often than not, the experts are in the schools.

[55] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Simon.

[56] **Simon Thomas:** Diolch. Rŷm ni wedi clywed hyd yma yn eich tystiolaeth lafar, a hefyd yn eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig, rwy'n credu, pa mor ddyrys yw'r maes yma a pha mor anodd yw e i ganfod pwy sy'n gyfrifol am wella safonau a phwy ddylai gael y clod am wella safonau, os yw'r safonau'n digwydd gwella. Mae gyda chi'r fframwaith cenedlaethol, mae'r awdurdodau lleol yn dal yn atebol yn gyfreithiol ar gyfer hyn i gyd, ac mae'ch gwaith chi fel consortiwm, ond mae Her Ysgolion Cymru yn rhaglen sy'n rhedeg ar draws hynny. Yn eich barn

Simon Thomas: Thank you. We've heard so far in your oral evidence, and also in your written evidence, I believe, how complex this whole area is and how difficult it is to identify who's responsible for improving standards and who should receive the praise for improving standards, if standards do happen to improve. You have the national framework, the local authorities are still legally accountable for all of this, and there's your work as a consortium, but there's also Schools Challenge Cymru, which is a programme running across that. In your view, is

chi, ydy'r system yma o gynnal this system of maintaining a gwasanaeth gwella ansawdd yn standards improvement service a system gynaliadwy yn y tymor hir? sustainable system in the long term?

[57] **Mr Davies:** In terms of the delivery of the national model, I believe it's sustainable and I think what we've been able to demonstrate—and I think this is reflected in other regions as well—is that we've become more effective with a reduction in costs, and I think there's still scope for that. And the approach of the national categorisation is that it provides a clear mechanism to show how schools are improving, because you go through from the red to the green, and we can be held accountable for that. But, I think some people—clearly, not in this room—fail to see the potential that if, out of all of our schools, there are fewer schools in red and amber year on year and they go into green, that model is used to identify how much money and resource is being put into intervening in schools and improving them. So, year on year as we're getting better—I think Robert Hill said you'd do yourself out of a job, but I don't think we'll ever do that entirely—we are reducing the amount of resource that has to be implemented.

[58] Additional injections of resource like Schools Challenge Cymru are intended, I believe, to add momentum and pace where it's critically needed. And the evidence has shown that in two thirds of the schools that's had an impact; in a third, it hasn't had the impact as yet. So, I do think it's sustainable, and I do think that, clearly, it will hit a particular threshold, but there'll be a transparency here, because we publish—you will see it this year—how many fewer schools are red. We have a three-year strategy and I hold the challenge advisers in our authority, who work directly with those schools. They provide me with a target as to where that school's going to be in one year and three years. Now, sometimes it's difficult to move categories in one year because it is a big shift, but there's no reason why, over three years, any school should remain in a category that is red; we expect to see progress. So, I see it as being sustainable, and I see it that, in the short term, the resource is shifting into schools. But, over time, there should be the challenge to consortia and local authorities, if improvements have taken place, you are releasing resource that you can use in another way.

[59] **Simon Thomas:** Mae'n **Simon Thomas:** It's interesting that ddidrol eich bod yn ei ddisgrifio fel you describe it in those terms yna oherwydd rydym ni wedi cael because we have received evidence tystiolaeth o hyd, er enghraifft, gan from Governors Wales, for example, Llywodraethwyr Cymru fod yna, yn eu that, in their view, there is still

barn nhw, ddal dryswch ynglŷn â phwy sy'n gyfrifol am y gwahanol rannau. Mae hefyd yn wir bod y peth yr ydych chi newydd ei ddweud am gategoreiddio yn wir. Rwy'n derbyn hynny ond, wrth gwrs, nid oedd yn wir am y system bandio a gafwyd ei sefydlu reit ar ddechrau'r holl broses hon. Ond mae'r system sydd yn mynd i, efallai, ddisodli'r hyn yr ydym ni'n ei ddisgrifio heddiw eisoes ar y gorwel, sef y peth y mae'r Gweinidog wedi'i amlinellu fel ysgolion sy'n hunan-arfarnu a system sydd yn hunan-arfarnu. Beth, felly, yw eich ymateb chi i'r casgliad yn adroddiad Estyn am y maes yma bod y consortia, ar hyn o bryd—ac rwy'n derbyn eich bod ond yn gallu ateb ar ran un consortiwm—yn tueddu i hunan-arfarnu'n ddigon cadarn?

confusion about who is responsible for the various different parts of this. It's also true to say that what you've just said about categorisation is actually the case. I accept that, but it wasn't true of the banding system that was established at the very beginning of this process. But the system that may replace what we're hearing about today is already in the pipeline, which is what the Minister has described as a system of schools self-evaluating, and a system that evaluates itself. So what, then, is your response to the conclusion of the Estyn report on this area that the consortia at present—and I accept that you can only answer on behalf of one consortium—tend to overplay the current position and aren't self-evaluating robustly enough?

[60] **Mr Davies:** I think that was a fair judgment at the time and I think that we need to continue to improve our self-evaluation. What I gave you at the back of my report was not a sort of self-congratulatory description of what headteachers and schools think of us, because I've given you some that are more negative. But one of the things that has changed, and you referred to earlier in terms of people's understanding—I think there is one slide in that pack that shows you that, over the past 12 months, because we put the survey out just about the time Estyn was to come out, the percentage of headteachers and governors who now understand better their respective roles has improved markedly. So, the understanding is there. But I would agree with them; I think our best schools are extremely strong on being self-evaluated. On the question earlier about what impact we're having, we're working hard, against that business plan and service plans, to hold ourselves accountable. So, we're declaring the impact we expect to have and then measure it. So, what you'd see in the system now, if you came in, and what Estyn will see, is that the linkage between the business plan and the service area plans, and individuals within it, is very tight. So, if we take an example like the pupil deprivation grant—and our literacy team has these strategies to

support PDG—if you looked at the appraisal review of an individual member of staff, every one of them would have been identified as to what, in their role, that they're doing. So, across the four consortia, we have got together to look at ways in which we can harmonise and improve our business planning, particularly looking at how we build value-for-money measures in there and evidence of impact. So, we're not there but we've looked to strengthen it. And why shouldn't we? Because if we're expecting our best schools to deliver that, we should be delivering it ourselves.

[61] **Simon Thomas:** Diolch am hynny. Roeddwn eisiau gofyn i chi am y PDG nesaf—y grant amddifadedd ysgolion. Rwy'n nodi, yn y dystiolaeth, hefyd eich bod wedi crybwyll, rwy'n credu, y ffaith bod cynllunio busnes yn anodd gan fod y grant yn grant, a chan nad yw'n glir bob tro beth sy'n cael ei adnewyddu a faint a fydd yn y pot, fel petai. Wedi dweud hynny, roedd un o ganfyddiadau Estyn hefyd nad oedd gan un o'r consortia felly—. Maen nhw'n dweud nad oes gan yr un o'r consortia ddull strategol cydlynus o leihau effaith amddifadedd ar gyrhaeddiad. Gan eich bod yn gonsortiw m sydd yn cynrychioli'r ardal lle caiff amddifadedd ar ei amlygrwydd mwyaf, o bosib, mae gennych jobyn mwy anodd. Rwy'n derbyn hynny, ond, yn gyntaf oll, a ydych chi'n derbyn y canfyddiad gan Estyn, ac, yn ogystal â'r peth yr ydych newydd ei ddweud, pa gamau eraill a ydych yn eu cymryd fel consortiw m i wneud yn siŵr nid yn unig bod yr arian yn cael ei wario mewn ffordd dryloyw, ond bod y canfyddiadau, yn sgîl hynny, yn rhai y medrwch chi eu mesur, sy'n gyfrifol am y grant yna?

Simon Thomas: Thank you for that. I did want to move on to the PDG next—the pupil deprivation grant. I do note, in the evidence, that you do mention, I think, the fact that business planning is difficult because the grant is a grant, and it isn't always clear what be renewed and how much is in the pot. Having said that, one of the findings of Estyn also was that none of the consortia—. They say that no consortia has a coherent strategic approach to reduce the impact of deprivation on attainment. As you are a consortium that represents the area where deprivation is perhaps at its most prominent, you have a more difficult job. I accept that, but, first of all, do you agree with Estyn's finding, and, in addition to what you've just said, what other steps are you as a consortium taking to ensure not only that the funding is spent in a transparent manner, but that the outcomes of those are ones that you can evaluate, and actually put down to that grant?

[62] **Mr Davies:** I believe Estyn's judgment at that time was fair, and I think all four regions put their hands up to that. Because it was still very early—I mean, we were implementing in April, and they were visiting us at the end of September, beginning of October, so it was early days. We've made some fundamental changes. First of all, in the strategic responsibilities for that, we now have a—. We didn't have anyone. We tried to embed it across the whole service, and it wasn't working sufficiently, because there was nobody driving it. So, we now have a champion—a person responsible for that—and we've seconded two headteachers part time, one primary, one secondary, to work with that person on the identification of best practice and delivery.

[63] We've run courses, we've run programmes, where headteachers have come in. I think that raises awareness, but, you know, it's sometimes just like injecting them with a few ideas and things—they go back to school and isn't always implemented. So, we've looked at the role of challenge advisers in working with schools, both challenging their planning—. So, if you look now at the—. Every school in south-east Wales uses a system called MySID; it's called My School Improvement Dashboard. It's an electronic programme that, in itself, doesn't deliver improved performance for pupils facing deprivation. But it's an enabling programme, where, against their categorisation, they've put their development plan in place, their improvement plan, and their deployment of the resource—PDG as well as other spend. It requires them to identify what the impact of that resource is going to be, and they have to populate that, and then, as they go through the programme, they've got to demonstrate the impact of that. Now, we're not doing that to police schools or to whip them into do what we want them to do—it's an enabling structure. But that process, alongside the support and the training—it should have an impact, but we can test that impact. So, we can look at every school as we come to January/February as to what they expected the impact of the spend—the plans they put in back in April—how it would work on the cycle.

[64] The last thing that we're doing is we're working with central south, and with Welsh Government, on a project—I think we've got about 20 schools—where schools that have been very effective themselves, in terms of having that impact, share that across other schools. That goes back to self-improving schools: the best schools that are delivering it, getting them to work, and we're enabling that. But we'll be measuring ourselves, within our own business plan, in terms of the impact of that.

[65] **Simon Thomas:** Just finally, what you've just outlined, in terms of a monitoring kind of process, is that something that you are already able to

have an overview of and disseminate amongst schools in your region or is it still too early to say that that is having an effect?

[66] **Mr Davies:** It's too early, because, effectively, they had their money in April. Statutorily, every school has to have the development plan by 1 September, so they all have to have it now. We can measure the fact that everyone is compliant, in terms of having a plan, and identifying where this money is against that plan. We now have to work through the rest of the cycle to make it happen, or to enable us to get to say, 'This is the impact it had on that school, this is the impact it had in schools in Monmouthshire, this is the impact it had on schools in the region'.

[67] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. Diolch.

[68] **Ann Jones:** We'll move on to some governance arrangements then. Keith.

[69] **Keith Davies:** Diolch, **Keith Davies:** Thank you, Chair. I'll Gadeirydd. Fe wnaf i ofyn yn also be asking my questions in Gymraeg hefyd. Welsh.

[70] Yn dilyn lan efallai ar rywbeth roedd Simon yn sôn amdano, mae Estyn a'r *audit office* wedi sôn am, efallai, ddiffyg cydweithio. Dywedwch eich bod chi'n edrych ar yr ysgolion yn un o'ch awdurdodau chi, a bod yr ysgol yn tan-gyflawni. Cyfrifoldeb y cyngor sir—cyfrifoldeb nhw—yw addysg. So, beth sy'n mynd i ddigwydd wedyn, te? Rydych chi'n dweud bod yr ysgol hyn yn tan-gyflawni; a ydych chi'n cydweithio wedyn â'r awdurdod yna? Achos yn adroddiad Estyn, mae'n dweud nifer o weithiau bod yr awdurdodau yn gwrthod gwneud dim. So, pwy sy'n rheoli yn y pen draw?

Following on from something Simon mentioned a little earlier, Estyn and the audit office have mentioned a problem in terms of joint working and collaboration. Now, you mention that you look at schools in one authority, and that the school may be under-achieving. That's the responsibility of the county council. Education is their responsibility. So, what will then happen? You say that one school is under-achieving, do you then collaborate with that authority? Because in the Estyn report, it states that very often the authorities refuse to do anything. So, who is ultimately responsible?

10:15

[71] **Mr Davies:** Local authorities are ultimately responsible. We are their detecting agent—that is probably the best way to describe it—so, we are their antennae when there is an indication that the school is beginning to underperform or is significantly underperforming. So, we fulfil that responsibility with them. The critical time is when we hold the mirror up to the school and the local authority and say, ‘There is clear evidence here of underperformance’. Then the question is: ‘Well, what do you do about it?’ Within our region, we have an agreed, it’s called, ‘school intervention strategy’, which we’ve agreed with all five directors and all five cabinet members. So, it’s consistent across the authority. So, if a school is identified, for example, as an amber, or has slipped into a red, or faces a particular challenge, it will have an intervention plan. That intervention plan requires particular meetings over time. First of all, the intervention plan is signed off, not just by the director of education, but by the cabinet member. It can be resourced. It requires additional resource from us, but it can be additional resource from the local authority.

[72] That plan requires the chair of governors and the headteacher to come together on a regular basis to measure the improvement before it’s taken out of intervention. One of the intervention strategies may involve the implementation of the local authority’s powers. So, we’re currently working with a number of schools where the local authority have put additional governors onto that governing body.

[73] You look at the intervention and the local authority putting that intervention in place and putting the powers in place, and there’s a fine line, I think, between using your powers and overusing your powers. Because if an authority consistently uses warning letters, it’s a bit like the teacher who shouts a lot—the pupils go quiet for a while, but they’ve overused their powers too early. So, in balance, we’ve got a process by which we work with the schools and the authority, saying that there’s serious underperformance that requires intervention and then it’s implemented.

[74] **Ann Jones:** Sorry, Keith, but Aled has a specific question on this point.

[75] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf jest eisiau gofyn ar hynny, rwy’n derbyn mai cyfrifoldeb y cyngor ydy o, ond mae hynny’n ddibynnol ar asesiad consortia cywir yn y lle cyntaf. Mae’r Gymdeithas Genedlaethol yr **Aled Roberts:** I just want to ask on that, I accept that it’s the council’s responsibility, but that is dependent on the consortia’s assessment being correct in the first place. The National Association of

Ysgolfeistri ac Undeb yr Athrawesau Schoolmasters Union of Women
wedi gofyn cwestiynau ynglŷn â pha Teachers have asked questions as to
mor gadarn ydy'r asesiadau yna i'w how robust those assessments are as
cymharu efo barn Estyn yn y pen compared to Estyn's view. Do you
draw. A oes gennych chi unrhyw have any experience of where Estyn
brofiad o le mae Estyn wedi cael has come to a different conclusion to
asesiad gwahanol i chi a lle rydych yourselves and where you've been
chi wedi cael rhyw fath o sioc bod surprised that Estyn has placed a
Estyn wedi rhoi ysgol i mewn i school in special measures, where
fesurau arbennig, lle nad ydych chi you haven't assessed there being any
wedi asesu bod yna broblem? problem?

[76] **Mr Davies:** In all of my career, I've come across situations where I haven't always shared the views of the—whether it be Ofsted or Estyn. That said, I respect them. The report pointed to all regions where there was a variance between the school's and the local authority's view, because, prior to an inspection, the local authority—and we do it on behalf of the local authority—writes a report for Estyn, saying where their strengths and weaknesses lie. There have been, in my view, a very, very small number where we have differed. But, I would say, not by more than one category where it's gone entirely in—. When you have a different view from Estyn to the region, we've tested that and we've gone back and looked at it and sometimes we believe that Estyn has been over-generous, sometimes we believe that they've been harsh and then sometimes we believe that we've been wrong and that we didn't get it right. They're relatively small in number, but we're addressing it, and, in particular, we put heavy monitoring processes in place to make sure that the quality of those reports that are written are the right quality. So, we monitor the people completing those reports for Estyn, but it has happened.

[77] **Keith Davies:** Pwy sydd â'r **Keith Davies:** Who has the
cyfrifoldeb? Y rheolaeth—dyna beth responsibility? Governance—that's
sy'n bwysig i fi. Dywedwch yn awr what's important to me. Let's say
fod ysgol wedi cael Estyn yn rhoi that a school has been inspected by
adroddiad arnyn nhw ac wedyn mae'r Estyn and then that school has to
ysgol yn gorfod paratoi rhyw gynllun prepare some plan to improve the
i wella'r sefyllfa. Ai chi yn y consortia situation. Is it you in the consortium
neu'r awdurdod addysg sy'n mynd i or the local education authority who
fod â'r cyfrifoldeb am edrych ar y will have responsibility for overseeing
cynllun hwnnw a phenderfynu os that plan and deciding whether it is
yw'n ddigon da? robust enough?

[78] **Mr Davies:** Ultimately, it's both of those, and I'll unpick that, but it is the local authority's responsibility. It doesn't have a service that it can use to do what you've described, which is to write the plan and gain the agreement of the governing body, the headteacher and their own officers that this is an appropriate plan. So, in effect, they're commissioning us and, within local responsibilities, they still have a director of education. In most authorities, they still have a head of school improvement, who monitors our work and checks our work, and, ultimately, they will sign it off, but they have to satisfy themselves that the strategies that we are proposing and the resource that we're going to put into it will make a difference. And, as I touched on earlier, through the intervention plan, they have to attend, on a termly basis usually, sometimes half-termly, in the school, meetings where we demonstrate that the school is being held to account, but that the cabinet member and the director's representative are in there, challenging themselves as well. So, they don't hand it over; they agree it and then they monitor the implementation.

[79] **Keith Davies:** Yn yr adroddiad yr ŷm ni wedi ei gael, mae'n sôn efallai nad yw'r capasiti'n ddigonol eto yn y consortia. Dywedwch wrthyf nawr, yn eich consortiwm chi, dywedwch fod adran wyddoniaeth mewn ysgol gyfun yn tangyflawni, a ydy'r arbenigedd gyda chi yn y consortia i fynd i mewn a helpu'r adran a helpu'r pennaeth adran, ynteu na? Roeddwn i yn synnu bod 101 o staff gyda chi. Roeddwn yn meddwl, 'Pwy yw'r 101?', achos pan ŷch chi'n edrych ar ESIS ac asiantaethau fel yna, maen nhw'n sôn am 30. A ydy'r capasiti gyda chi i gefnogi pennaeth ar amser y mae rhyw adran yn wael yn yr ysgol?

Keith Davies: In the report that we received, it mentions that the capacity is perhaps not yet adequate in the consortia. Now, you tell me, in your consortium, let's say that a secondary school's science department is underachieving, do you have the expertise within the consortium to go in there and assist that department and help the head of department or not? I was surprised that you had a staff of 101. I wondered, 'Who are these 101 people?', because when you look at ESIS and similar agencies, they are talking about a staff of 30. Do you have the capacity to support a head in a school where a department is underperforming?

[80] **Mr Davies:** We don't have specialists that could go into all subjects in all schools, and I wouldn't advocate that. This is an area where I do have a difference of opinion with Estyn, in that a region should have the capacity to

have specialists, or they should be ready to deploy specialists, in all subject areas. It stopped happening in England about 20 years ago, when local authorities removed these people. If there's underperformance in science in a school, fundamentally, it's the headteacher's responsibility to put that right, and it's more likely to be related to leadership of that department, as well as aspects of quality of teaching.

[81] We do have specialists who may not be specialists in science, but they are specialists in terms of holding a head of department accountable for what is being taught, how it is being taught, how the monitoring of assessment and how the monitoring of teaching and learning will take place. Our 101 staff are fundamentally split across quite a large—. We have in the region of 12 who deliver foundation phase, which is significantly through grant funding. We have about eight who deliver literacy, and another eight to 10 delivering numeracy. We have about 22 challenge advisers—those who lead with schools. So, the way in which we're looking to respond to Estyn's view that we need to ensure that there is support for schools in all subject areas is that we are identifying the highest-performing schools in those areas and looking to facilitate those schools in giving specialist advice in other schools. But being able to deliver across all of the subjects wasn't in the national model. No school improvement service that I know of, nationally or internationally, deploys specialists in the full range of subject areas to support schools. I don't think it would be a good use of resource. I think we need to identify those specialists in schools, particularly in areas outside of English and maths, because we can then go to geography, we can go to history, and you end up having not 101, but 201 staff, and they are seen as the 'experts'. The experts are in the schools, and we've got to find ways of ensuring that that expertise is moved around without looking to disrupt those schools that are providing the support.

[82] **Keith Davies:** Diolch. **Keith Davies:** Thank you.

[83] **Ann Jones:** Okay? We'll go on to regional working—

[84] **Bethan Jenkins:** Can I just ask a question?

[85] **Ann Jones:** Yes, and then go on to regional working.

[86] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just want to ask for clarification. When you say 'deliver', what do you mean by that, because—

[87] **Mr Davies:** Sorry?

[88] **Bethan Jenkins:** When you say 'deliver'. You said, 'We have a certain amount of staff who deliver in different areas'. Can you just explain to me exactly what that delivery process entails on top of what a school would usually do, so that I can understand what the consortia—. Because obviously from what we've read, we've seen that sometimes there can be an indication that it would be sort of criticising or demanding of schools as opposed to facilitating improvement and development. So, the line between those two conflicting areas, really.

[89] **Mr Davies:** If I take mathematics as an area, I hold our maths and numeracy service responsible for knowing the performance of our schools. So, they do an analysis of data to identify where the relative strengths and weaknesses are. They work with the challenge adviser, whose core responsibility is to know the school very well. They use that knowledge to do two or three things. The first thing they need is the knowledge because they will know where the relative strengths and weaknesses are in aspects of maths across the whole region, and they will put on development programmes. They go into schools, work with individual schools to provide consultancy support there. They would hold a course more centrally that teachers would come to, and look to do work on that. We've done less and less on that, because research shows that, by bringing them in, injecting them with a bit of maths or English, it doesn't automatically make them better teachers when they go out. They do that consultancy. So, the doing would be things that are offered to all schools, services that are offered for schools to come in—. We then have direct intervention programmes. So, if we have identified a school that has seriously underperformed in mathematics for two years, you may go to that school and say, 'It's part of the intervention plan we were talking about, a personal work review over a period of six days, over two months, to work alongside you to help you implement and ensure, working with the head too, that that is implemented'. It's both holding to account and providing support, and it's doing that in a differentiated way, so the best schools—. What they also do, the maths team—for the introduction of the new GCSEs, the maths team identified seven of our best secondary schools and they used those in three waves to support the other schools with the implementation of the new GCSE. They do the analysis, they provide intervention where there's significant underperformance, they provide an opportunity for all schools to access, and they facilitate the school-to-school work, getting expertise—

[90] **Bethan Jenkins:** And you will track if that is effective or not? Because another part of what I've done is looking at financial literacy in schools. For example, the LNF will vary widely in its effectiveness between different areas. So, for example, would you then say, 'Well actually this school is doing superbly well in the LNF, and then this school isn't', and share that best practice with them and monitor the progress through that?

[91] **Mr Davies:** That's their responsibility. One of their key responsibilities is they are the detectives of where effective practice is. It's their responsibility to ensure that that practice is shared and developed. So, they not only do the best school, they have identified some of the best teachers and leaders of subjects and used those. So, their responsibility is to know where it is and enable it to be shared. By local authority that maths team has to write impact reports: 'How has my work impacted on—'. Tomorrow I'm going to Monmouthshire where I'm working with one of their scrutiny wings. We have to show how the maths team's work has impacted on schools in Monmouthshire on a cyclical basis, not just when the examinations come.

[92] **Ann Jones:** Suzy, shall we come to you on the regional model?

[93] **Suzy Davies:** Can you give me some steer on how much time I've got?

[94] **Ann Jones:** About 10 minutes, between you and Bethan.

[95] **Suzy Davies:** Okay, I'll cut it down then.

[96] **Ann Jones:** It's fine, because we were late starting, so about 10 minutes.

[97] **Suzy Davies:** Okay, well I'll cut it down to two central questions. I do have a question about the national model, but I want to start off by referring to the recommendation of the Wales Audit Office, which found that the development of effective regional consortia was hindered by a focus on short-term actions and uncertainty about the future of consortia—obviously because of the Williams commission suggestions, I suppose. Is that a fair observation? Is that the reason why we've got short-termism?

[98] **Mr Davies:** I think it's fair, but I think they were insufficiently—. I use the term 'negative'. I think they could have gone further, because, as an organisation, we shouldn't be using the excuse of lack of knowledge of where the future lies. I know it can be a distraction, but any organisation that

wants to be effective needs to work beyond one year. We were working to a model that was given to us by Welsh Government, and they've recognised and reflected that, probably, that was too restrictive. If you're given a template, you work to it, and then Estyn and the Wales Audit Office come to see it. So, I would probably have been more critical on their point and said, 'Don't use the lack of knowledge of where you're going for three years as an excuse for not having a three-year plan'. That said, there are—

[99] **Suzy Davies:** So, was it being used as an excuse?

[100] **Mr Davies:** I'm not saying that everyone was using it as an excuse. I'm saying that any organisation should have a three-year plan. Organisations and individuals will be distracted by lack of security and difficulty of holding onto staff. So, that removed a barrier to it, but what I'm saying, being self-evaluative, is that we should have had that three-year plan in place anyway. Having the funding agreement over a longer period will be particularly helpful in enabling the effective three-year planning. I can plan where I expect schools to be and where I expect us to be in three years' time, but it's with the assumption that there's going to be this amount of resource to enable me to deliver it. So, certainly from my perspective, I think they could have been more harsh on us and said, 'You should have it whether there is uncertainty or not'. It can affect your confidence of delivering it, but as an effective organisation we should have had three-year plans anyway.

[101] 10:30

[102] **Suzy Davies:** Well, thank you for your very honest answer because, obviously, so much of your work is school to school rather than involving the local authorities at all. I was a little bit sceptical that that was a valid reason for short-term action. So, presumably, you'll be supporting the idea of a three-year planning cycle anyway.

[103] **Mr Davies:** We've gone into that. We now write a three-year plan.

[104] **Suzy Davies:** Excellent. Can I just ask you briefly—. Obviously, you've got this refresh of the national model now. How strongly involved has your consortium been in contributing to the ideas that have fed into that? I'm trying to get a sense of balance about who's driving the change in the refreshed model.

[105] **Mr Davies:** Okay. Well, the refreshing of it is actually beginning this

term—

[106] **Suzy Davies:** Yes, it's just about to come out, isn't it?

[107] **Mr Davies:** Yes, it's just about to come out. We had an early look. Robert Hill came back and the consortia were brought together with Welsh Government to have an early look at the report, to look back at the national model and the key questions about whether there is sufficient flexibility in the national model for the way in which we're delivering. So, we've reviewed that as a foundation for the refreshing—

[108] **Suzy Davies:** Sorry, but when you say 'we', is it you as the consortia or—

[109] **Mr Davies:** Consortia with Welsh Government—

[110] **Suzy Davies:** And anyone else?

[111] **Mr Davies:** With Robert Hill with ADEW, the Association of Directors of Education in Wales—

[112] **Suzy Davies:** Right, okay. Thank you.

[113] **Mr Davies:** In terms of planning and moving forward, at that previous meeting at the end of the summer, we agreed that we would sit down and bring together the people who set up—we co-constructed. So, there were external experts, people from local authorities, people from the region, people from Welsh Government who set up the model. The intention is not to make significant changes. It is to refresh it and potentially tweak it in particular areas, but we don't see it as something that's going to be done to us—we will have a say in it. The approach I expect to be the same as we used last time, where there were good levels of debate and some people had to give a little in terms of their stance, but it was the better for that. So, I don't see this being a significant exercise in terms of very large-scale change, but my understanding is that we will have a key role in it.

[114] **Suzy Davies:** Well, that's good. Just finally, if I could. One more?

[115] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[116] **Suzy Davies:** Another observation that was made, even as recently as

this summer, is that collaboration between school improvement partners is still not well advanced. I don't mean between consortia, but within consortia now. I would identify that as a priority for refreshment work. Are you able to say briefly what you consider to be the main priorities of the refreshing process?

[117] **Mr Davies:** I think the main part of the refreshing process is the collaboration of the regions, and we've begun that. We were locked away for two days with our senior teams last week. We had already been working, but it was a concentrated period of time, and we looked at things like governance; we looked at things like value for money; we looked at things like leadership programmes across our regions. For me, it was probably one of the best meetings I've been to, as far as groups of educationists are concerned, since I've been working Wales in the last five years. There's a tremendous amount of will now to make that happen. So, from that group, each region took responsibilities, and people within regions—sub-groups—have now got together and will be working on the development of things like value for money. That won't be a distraction, but that collaboration is a bit like the school to school—you know, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It is the way in which the four can work together, and there's a real commitment not because we're responding to an Estyn report; there's a real commitment now to make that happen. When we started, we were competitive and it is quite natural that we wanted to be the best of the four. It's an instinct, isn't it?

[118] **Suzy Davies:** Okay. I don't want to stray into Bethan's territory, but have you got target timescales for achievements on those? I don't want details, just 'yes' or 'no'.

[119] **Mr Davies:** Yes.

[120] **Suzy Davies:** Brilliant; thank you.

[121] **Ann Jones:** Bethan, and then I know that Aled wants to come in on those points. So, Bethan.

[122] **Bethan Jenkins:** The first question would be on the Governors Wales's views that not all consortia have established a panel to consult with school governors, as is required by the national model. Have you got that—

[123] **Mr Davies:** Yes, we've got leaders from each of the—. Representatives

from each of the five authorities are heavily involved in the business planning; they're heavily involved in coming together to monitor progress against those. So, we have regular meetings with those. I and my senior staff cyclically go out to the local authorities' governors groups themselves to be held accountable for what we're doing for governor development, but also to be held accountable for what we're doing within their schools.

[124] **Bethan Jenkins:** I suppose I can marry that then to my next question, therefore, with regard to working with other consortia. If you are doing this with regard to working with governors, then in the four-consortia commitment to facilitate a two-day sharing of good practice workshop that's set to happen in September, will you be saying how you are working with governors so that other consortia that are not doing it can do that effectively?

[125] **Mr Davies:** We've had the two days.

[126] **Bethan Jenkins:** You've had the two days.

[127] **Mr Davies:** Yes. We didn't discuss governors.

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** Oh, right. Okay.

[129] **Mr Davies:** It was the amount of time that we had available. Not that governors are not major levers in what we're doing, but it wasn't part of the major recommendations within the report. So, we concentrated on some of those key areas. However, this afternoon I'm meeting with the four managing directors—we have our monthly meeting in Welsh Government—so, I'll raise it with them.

[130] **Bethan Jenkins:** Can you give us an idea as to how those meetings went in terms of how you can work together more collaboratively?

[131] **Mr Davies:** Yes. On the two days, we were locked away for two days and one night, and we worked through that period. I think that it was an eye-opener for everybody there about how much we had learned during those two days. People who are quite isolated, historically, business managers who have a key responsibility in the effectiveness of the organisation, had never met the other three and they shared some of the systems they were using. Also, they collectively can bring more challenge to our colleagues in Welsh Government because we're finding that perhaps there are certain things that

we thought it was only for us that it wasn't working, but they now can collaboratively come and constructively challenge colleagues in Welsh Government.

[132] **Bethan Jenkins:** Why has it taken until now for them to speak, if they obviously would anticipate that they would have similar challenges?

[133] **Mr Davies:** Simply because—well, it's not an excuse; it's a partial reason—we are under a tremendous amount of pressure to deliver, and the natural instinct is to be getting your head down and getting on with it and delivering it against, in the very early days, that natural instinct around competitiveness. So, we should have been doing it beforehand because it's only doing what we advocate for schools: get your head up and look around; but, you know, we were too busy delivering. We should have been lifting our head up and looking at that sharing of practice.

[134] **Bethan Jenkins:** My other question is with regard to the relationship with trade unions. The NASUWT say that you do have regular meetings with them, but that they can be quite acrimonious and suggest that you get involved in HR issues and strike action issues that they deem not appropriate. I know that you speak to them, but have you, in these two-day meetings, spoken with other consortia then as to how you can improve the nature of your relationship with trade unions? Clearly, there are issues yet to be resolved.

[135] **Mr Davies:** We've agreed to come together as four regions to talk with the professional associations about ways of working. On a personal level—and I'm touching wood here—up to now, while we've been challenged by the professional associations, I think the dialogue has been constructive. They complimented us recently, which I got worried about. [*Laughter.*] So, we have engaged them. We do it on two levels though, because we are employers. I meet them regularly to deal with our employees who are represented by them. But also, for me, it's about bringing them in to describe the strategies, so they can understand what we're trying to do that's impacting on their members. To date, the latter meetings have been far better than the meetings where we're talking because we're facing challenges about reducing staff. So, we deal with the unions on two levels: one is—

[136] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, it's improved since the NASUWT gave this evidence, then.

[137] **Mr Davies:** Well, you'd have to discuss with them the different approaches across the different regions.

[138] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay.

[139] **Mr Davies:** I'm not saying we don't have any problems, but I genuinely believe we have a good relationship with our teacher associations.

[140] **Bethan Jenkins:** I think that's okay. The only other question I had was with regard to collaborating on other issues that could potentially distract from the national objectives, which is the securing of the tender to deliver the teacher assessment programme. Do you think that that will conflict with what you currently have to do on behalf of the Welsh Government?

[141] **Mr Davies:** It was an initial distraction, because writing a bid takes time. Prior to coming to this job, I worked in the private sector for eight years, where you had to write bids to gain work and it does take time, but we're finding the fruits of that labour have been incredibly positive. Teacher assessment is one of the most challenging areas that we have to face, because of the confidence levels of people, the accuracy of it, and the extent to which it genuinely is improving teaching and learning. So, it is something—. We're using our best headteachers to do most of that work. It isn't our staff who are doing most of the additional work; it's our headteachers. We use the money to release the headteachers to then go into schools in neighbouring regions to assess how effective the assessments have been and how it has taken place, and then we report on it and then bring back guidance to the schools for the next cycle of verification.

[142] So, it was an initial distraction. It took the whole of a half term to write a bid, but now that we're implementing it, we see it as being integral to what we're doing. The thought of having somebody externally coming in and doing it to us; we'd have lost that opportunity to strengthen our headteachers. The headteachers who are doing that work are becoming even better headteachers in their understanding of assessment. So, it was an initial distraction, but I genuinely think it's part of a better—

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** So, you wouldn't be bidding for anything that wouldn't suit the nature of the current set up; it would be because that fitted in line with what you were doing already.

[144] **Mr Davies:** Absolutely. And we had to get permission from all of our

councils and convince them that it wouldn't be a distraction.

[145] **Ann Jones:** Very briefly, with a 30-second question and a 30-second answer if you've got one, Aled.

[146] **Aled Roberts:** I just want to understand the financial position of consortia within this three-year plan, really. Initially, there was £19 million agreed between the WLGA and the Welsh Government, which was ring-fenced, to all intents and purposes, with the threat that the money would be taken out of the revenue support grant if the WLGA didn't agree. That was a 12-month agreement, initially. What's the position, going forward? Is that now ring-fenced within local authority budgets, or do you have to agree annually what your budget is with each individual authority?

[147] **Mr Davies:** I believe each authority will set its budget on an annual basis. My understanding is that there is a commitment from our councils to continue to deliver against what the requirement was, but I don't believe there is anything in legislation that dictates that they must do that, and we have had some discussions: we're taking the same percentage hit as them in terms of our reduction of budget.

[148] **Aled Roberts:** Your three-year plan agreed with each local authority doesn't actually commit them to continue financing—

[149] **Mr Davies:** They commit to an annual budget. It's a three-year plan and an annual budget signed off by the cabinet member, saying, 'This is how you're going to spend the money we're giving you within your business plan'.

[150] **Ann Jones:** Okay. Thanks very much. Thanks very much for coming in this morning and sharing your thoughts with us. There'll be a transcript sent to you to check for accuracy, so if you could just let us know and then that's published as part of any recommendations that we may want to make. So, thanks very much.

[151] **Mr Davies:** Thank you.

[152] **Ann Jones:** Shall we have five minutes and be back here to start dead on, if we can, because we are running significantly late? Thank you.

Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:45 a 10:53

The meeting adjourned between 10:45 and 10:53

**Trafodaeth gyda'r Consortia Addysg Rhanbarthol—Consortiwm Canol
De Cymru
Discussion with Regional Education Consortia—Central South
Consortium**

[153] **Ann Jones:** Right, thanks very much. We'll reconvene now as the Children, Young People and Education Committee, continuing our discussions around the future for regional education consortia. So, I'm delighted to have with us the Central South Consortium. I wonder, do you want to introduce yourselves for the record? Then we can go straight into questions. Do you want to start, Hannah?

[154] **Ms Woodhouse:** Hannah Woodhouse, managing director of Central South Consortium.

[155] **Ms McMillan:** My name's Deborah McMillan. I'm the director of education at Bridgend and the lead director for the consortium.

[156] **Mr Elmore:** I'm Councillor Chris Elmore, cabinet member for children's services and schools at the Vale of Glamorgan and chair of the joint committee.

[157] **Ann Jones:** Okay, thanks very much. I know that you were listening to the first set of evidence from the first witness, so you'll know the three areas that we're going to look at, which are delivering school improvement services, consortia governance arrangements, and then the national model for regional working. So, those are the three. You'll see that we tend to run a bit over time as well, but we'll see how we get on. So, Angela, do you want to start with the first question?

[158] **Angela Burns:** Certainly, Ann. Thank you all for coming this morning. The question I wanted to ask is to get your view on how you will be measuring the value-add that consortia bring to the school improvement process. The reason why I table this question is because, as you will all know only too well, there is a significant number of different policy initiatives running; there are a lot of organisations currently engaged in trying to deliver improvement in educational attainment to break the education and poverty gap and to ensure that children achieve the best that they possibly

can. So, I am keen to understand the value-add that your organisation can bring to that.

[159] **Ms McMillan:** If I can start, I represent the five chief education officers across the region, and I think it's important to state that we are a partnership. That's important, because it's not a commissioning relationship that we have with the consortium, in that we do not commission the consortium to deliver school improvement services for us. We are a partnership of five local authorities. That's really important, because that's where the added value comes from.

[160] Now, two-and-a-half years ago, when I first came to Wales to work in Bridgend, I think it was clear that we weren't, as a group of five local authorities, totally committed to that partnership and we weren't convinced that it was successful and was going to work. So, as five directors, we took many steps, and I know Hannah can fill in the gaps, really, in terms of setting up the consortium and making sure that it had good governance, that it had good leadership and that it was robust, with a clear strategy. We realised that simply moving staff, advisory teachers, from five local authorities into one, being the consortium, on its own wasn't going to bring about the systemic change that we needed. I think it's important to set that out first. Hannah can pick out the other questions that you asked.

[161] **Ms Woodhouse:** I think, for me, the value added from a model like this falls into three areas. There's one particular area around scale and resilience. So, for example, the recruitment of high-quality challenge advisers. Because of the scale that we have across the five authorities, covering 400 schools, we can recruit, and we have a better chance of recruiting, really good quality staff than perhaps one of the individual authorities might have on its own. So, for example, we've recruited in Merthyr Tydfil in the last two years three new challenge advisers. All three are experienced, highly successful headteachers, and it's a question whether the authority would have been able to do that on its own. So, there's a scale point.

[162] I think there's a strategy point, which is about—. We can come on to, if it's helpful, talking about our strategy, which is about working across schools and bringing schools together—the self-improving school system work. We can do that across 400 schools because they're not used to working together. They don't know each other very well, they're not competing in terms of pupils, and there's a real benefit from bringing schools together across a region as wide as this.

[163] I think the third area comes back to where Deborah started, which is that we can identify where, across the five authorities, services are working and where they're not. So, for example, you talked to Steve, I saw, about HR services, and I think we are looking at how we can make sure that we've got really good, consistent HR services across the region, drawing on the strengths of the region. Similarly, with attendance, the five authorities have developed an attendance strategy, Callio, which has seen significant improvement in attendance across the five by pooling functions and working together. So, those are the three areas that, for me, bring the value added. With your permission, I've put on the table just some headlines in terms of outcomes. I think it is clear that, particularly in the provision of key stage 4 data, we are seeing significant improvement in outcomes across the piece in the region.

[164] **Angela Burns:** But how would you know, or how can you evidence, for example, that that improvement in the key stage 4 data is entirely down to the consortium? So, it's about how we monitor the outcomes, because there are an awful lot of policies floating around, but it's outcomes we're interested in. So, I'd be delighted to have the discussion now about the strategy, but the other question I'd like you to consider whilst you're answering that is about the—. I went away with the impression from our previous witness that the role of the consortia is very much to take existing policies and new policies and to ensure consistency and coherence of delivery throughout a piece, using the savings from the scale of the operation.

11:00

[165] I understand all of that; that's pretty standard—you find that throughout the world in any sort of merger of organisations or collaborative or co-working. But, what I would like to try to flesh out is whether or not, as a consortia, you believe that you have any remit to come up with your own consortia—light ideas for what might work across your 400 schools, and I'd also like to understand in terms of strategy how much notice you take of whether or not you will apply policies throughout, or whether you will accept that one size does not fit all. So, for example, if we're looking at the attainment gap, you might have a child that needs to have work done in order to improve their attainment, but you might have a child from a completely different background who also has a similar issue but you know that for a child from, say, that background, school and school alone won't do

it and therefore you need to work with other organisations to deliver that in order to raise their educational attainment, whereas for this child it might be all about the schooling offering that they have. Therefore, how will you be able to monitor that and be judged on that outcome, because the great wooliness in Government is how we judge these outcomes, because then we know whether or not we're on a successful path?

[166] **Ann Jones:** There seems to be quite a lot rolled up in there, so—

[167] **Ms Woodhouse:** Lots of question there. Just firstly on the 'how do we know it was us?', it wasn't just us. And it's really difficult, in looking at successful school improvement initiatives, to pinpoint what it was, and you can see that in terms of, you know—. The evaluations, for example, of the London Challenge project, showed that every single one came out with something slightly different as to what it was that made the difference. So, I think it is difficult. I think there are a number of factors that led to that improvement, and one is a sharp, tight grip around accountability of underperforming schools by the local authorities. So, this comes back to our point about partnership. Local authorities holding schools to account where the underperformance is clear is one clear factor in that improvement. Another factor is schools increasingly taking accountability for their own outcomes, and that means governing bodies as well as heads. I think there's a factor particularly around schools following on from taking greater accountability for outcomes, opening their doors to work more closely with other schools who are doing things differently. And that's what we're trying to do—we're trying to find ways to encourage schools to do that, learn from each other and engage in professional development together. I think that is a factor. I think that it's a factor where wraparound services around schools are increasingly sharp and working together across local authorities. It's a further factor and, I would hope that, for our own part, we have a more experienced, skilled group of staff who are supporting schools in their self-evaluation and improvement planning most effectively, and that our support follows and is impactful.

[168] So, I think, you know, it's a number of those things working together and, of course, your question to us is: 'Well, how do you know about the impact of any one that's a part of that?', and that is, as you say, the big question. And one of our bits of work that we need to be clear about is how we evaluate the impact of our different initiatives so that we can be clear about the impact that they're having, which is what we're doing.

[169] **Ms McMillan:** If I might just add something to that, Hannah's alluded to the role of the local authority. In this partnership that we have, it's really important that everybody in the partnership understands their role and responsibilities, and that's not only the local authority's role, but it's also the role of schools themselves as part of that partnership. And that's why many of our initiatives are led by strategy groups that are made up of headteachers and, in some cases, governing bodies and other local representatives, and that's really important. The other role of the local authority, apart from using our statutory powers and making sure that there's a group of five directors using those consistently, is about making sure that we're avoiding distractions for schools. And that's very clearly a role of the local authority, to make sure that schools can concentrate on teaching and learning, and to keep distractions away. And another important role of the local authority as part of this jigsaw puzzle of driving improvement are those local authority education services for children and young people—so, making sure that we have excellent quality educational welfare services, educational psychology, additional learning needs services and all of the rest of them. And that's really important because we know that the consortia can deliver very good support for schools, but if those children don't have that wraparound support that helps them to learn and if we're not meeting their other wider needs, then we'll be up against it. So, that's very important as well.

[170] **Mr Elmore:** This adds to the point that you asked right at the end about working on our own initiatives within consortia, which I think is something that, at least from the impression you gave me, you didn't pick up from EAS. We do do that in central south. So, to give two very quick examples: within Merthyr—your point about a very different area to the Vale of Glamorgan, for example—there is a piece of work there now around specific support for a maths challenge adviser, and the person who's been appointed is a very long-serving retired headteacher, who at the time of his leadership, ran a very successful secondary school, and he's now been commissioned for a specific piece of work around improving maths outcomes for learners in Merthyr because their attainment is very low. The other end of the scale then is in the Vale of Glamorgan, specifically in the west of the Vale of Glamorgan, where a piece of work has been developed between central south and the vale specifically looking at learners that are in Cowbridge who might be underperforming. On paper, the school is very high performing, but some of those learners are not being challenged enough. So, you're talking about level 6 primary school pupils perhaps or whatever it might be, and that piece of work is specifically looking at challenging those youngsters who could be progressing even further.

[171] So, it's not just saying it's about attainment at the lowest end; it's about making sure young people in those schools that have got very high achievement levels can achieve even further. So, it's about that balance. So, yes we do—. Deborah said we don't commission—we don't; we work together—but I'll use the word 'commission' just because it's easy. We will work on different projects between different parts of authorities, and even in somewhere like Rhondda Cynon Taf, we've started a piece of work now looking at Valleys poverty within white working-class areas, if you see what I mean. So, again, that's a very specific area where there is underachievement in specific Valleys communities that would affect different parts of the consortia. And it's across three of them, so the top of the Bridgend valley, RCT and Merthyr. So, again, it's a very specific area of improvement that we develop ourselves, and not just using it as a commissioning service.

[172] **Ms Woodhouse:** And in Cardiff we're doing a piece of work around ethnic minority achievement in schools. So, you know, I think you can see that, yes, there's one strategy, there's one direction of travel, there's efficiency, but it's tailored according to the needs of the authority.

[173] **Angela Burns:** That's really interesting to us because, of course, it is about maximising the educational attainment of every child and it will all be different out of different schools. And it was one of the concerns that I had that we would become this one-size-fits-all and that is never really successful. I suppose the reason why I'm driving so far on this route is that I want to have absolute clarity over why—. Because it's the same people; it's the same teachers you're using, but they've been moved around. It's the same staff, but as we heard from the previous evidence session, most of them have been TUPEd across. It's the same directors of education; it's the same schools. Before, they couldn't do it; now they can do it, and so it's a rearrangement of the bricks in the wall, if you like. So, what I'm trying to understand is: is it all about this scale issue and the fact that, because of the scale, you have that ability to offer more dedicated services?

[174] **Mr Elmore:** I think the key thing—sorry, Deborah—from our perspective is that—. You made a comment about it all being the same people; in central south, it isn't. We went through a major restructure, once the national model was implemented by the current Minister, and we realised that there were weaknesses in those people who had moved over from being link advisers and then become—. So, we actually went through that process and carried a substantial reserve for 18 months when we went through a

redundancy procedure with staff who weren't performing. The managing director, with the five directors, has gone through that, and what we haven't done is, where we have vacancies for challenge advisers—. We've not appointed for the sake of it; we've held vacancies over to go back out if need be—and I'm sure you'll ask me now about recruitment—but we have not just said that the same staff can come in from the five authorities and do the work; that's not how it works in central south. It's a very different team to what would've been there in September 2012 when this process was introduced by the previous Minister.

[175] **Angela Burns:** Thank you.

[176] **Ann Jones:** Simon.

[177] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that, can you just say how many staff you employ?

[178] **Ms Woodhouse:** We currently employ 110 full-time equivalent staff. Approximately a third of those are challenge advisers. Approximately a third of those are literacy or numeracy or strategic teams, and then there are support staff.

[179] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. As you say, that's a different staff complement than would have been the case several years ago. Nevertheless, everything you've described so far is something that local authorities could have—you could argue should have—done in the past. I still struggle to understand what you are delivering that is added to what local authorities' statutory responsibilities are. Is there something that you can put your finger on? I know you're collaborating, but you should have done that anyway, so I want to understand what's additional that's happening here.

[180] **Mr Elmore:** I'll take that on the chin—*[Laughter.]* I didn't become a cabinet member until May 2012 so I can't comment on it before then, but I think it's a perfectly fair criticism of local government. When we set up this process—. One of the things I want to make clear is that the consortium does bring a renewed emphasis. Now, I speak as a cabinet member from a very high-performing local authority, but that doesn't mean to say in the last three years—. I think it's 12 per cent we've increased over the last two years. When I entered office, performance was stagnating in my authority. It was hanging around 55.3 per cent. Literally, the year I gained office, it was 55.4 per cent. So, that's stagnation by anyone's measurement. I think what the

consortium has done is actually refocused—redoubled the efforts on the statutory function of the authority.

[181] I have to add—and this goes across the piece of every party in local government that I work with, and there are education cabinet members from every party in Wales—that there is a renewed emphasis from everybody about improving the outcomes of young people. Admittedly, and I agree, it should have been there historically, and I'm sure it was on some level, but certainly, since May 2012, when we've had meetings with the Welsh Local Government Association, with the introduction of consortia, with following the previous and the current Minister's workings of different initiatives and whatever it might be, everything is being directed at improving these outcomes. But I think it is a fair criticism that certainly some authorities were not making the progress they could have when they were holding the offices.

[182] The other issue I would raise is that, not, for example, the Education School Improvement Service, the predecessor to central south, which included Caerphilly but didn't include the Vale of Glamorgan or Cardiff—. They were working as a collaborative. It didn't include Bridgend either, actually. They were working as a collaborative. Were they working as effectively as they could? I simply don't know, but with the new changes, we are seeing those real-terms improvements, which I think is the key thing.

[183] **Ann Jones:** Suzy's got a point before you move on.

[184] **Suzy Davies:** Just a quick one. Listening to what you're saying then, would you consider yourselves to be the enforcers of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013? Because that's what it sort of sounds like.

[185] **Mr Elmore:** No, I don't think I'm saying that. I can't talk about before May 2012. I'm just saying that, since the consortia came in, we're just working more collaboratively, better, making sure we are delivering school improvement. That's not to say that some authorities—. You can go back to previous Estyn inspections from several years ago where some authorities were put into special measures. I think there's a question there, maybe, for committee around what they were or were not doing in terms of delivering and enforcing the Act. But, no, we work with all the authorities because we are—. I call it the Central South Consortium Cardiff branch, the Central South Consortium Merthyr Tydfil branch, because I don't see them as separate entities. We are one unit working for the delivery of improvement. My priority for children in RCT is equally important to the one in my own county,

because I'm accountable for the whole thing. Maybe that's different, perhaps, in how we are pushing things forward, but I don't see it as us enforcing the responsibilities of the Acts. The authorities still have their statutory duties, and, in fact, all the directors take it deadly seriously. I know they do.

[186] **Ann Jones:** Sorry, now we've opened a can of worms because Keith wants to come in. Sorry, I haven't forgotten that you're questioning, Simon.

11:15

[187] **Keith Davies:** I obviously know a lot about ESIS. Let's leave that there. But you talk here about the restructuring—significant restructuring and I'm talking about governance, because the governance of the new structure, I take it, is far different from the governance that existed with ESIS across Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr. So, what was the significant restructuring that you undertook, then?

[188] **Ms Woodhouse:** Technically, legally, there was a whole new legal agreement put in place across the new five authorities. Technically, ESIS operated under a separate legal agreement to the school improvement arm, which is why we are called the JES—joint education service—because we were two organisations. Legally, what we did was to end the links, or ESIS branch, of that organisation completely, so we are only one legal entity now, in governance terms. So, that was the structural bit. I think we also looked at, as Chris said, quality of delivery, both on the links side and on the challenge adviser side, and that's quite a big change. So, there was a literal HR restructure. And the third thing that we did was to adopt an approach that was about putting schools in the lead around school improvement, with the local authorities taking their appropriate place, which is about championing vulnerable children and intervening in cases of underperformance.

[189] **Keith Davies:** Right, on the underperformance, I was interested when you answered Simon and said that of the 101 staff, I think you said, a third would be challenge advisers, and a third would look at literacy and numeracy. So, I take it that, when you look at that third of challenge advisers, you cover the whole curriculum. That's one of the questions I asked at our earlier meeting this morning: if there is a science department in a secondary school that's really underperforming, would the local authority would approach you?

[190] **Ms Woodhouse:** The role of the challenge adviser is really: does the

school know itself well enough, and is it doing the right things to bring about improvement? So, they tend to be headteachers or senior leaders from the schools, and, certainly, the majority of ours are. We do have a science team. So, if a school is struggling with science, then I guess the first thing we'd be asking is: does the school know it's struggling with science; what's the school doing about it; and how is the school accessing other strengths across its local authority or region to support science, and can we broker that? And the role of our science lead is to broker schools to work together, not to go in and deliver, because it's not sustainable and it's not good use of money for my staff to be going in and, sort of, doing two schools. But—

[191] **Ann Jones:** We'll come to your governance arrangements in a minute. I know you've touched on that, but I wanted to just try and let Simon finish off on delivery, and then we'll come back to you, Keith.

[192] **Keith Davies:** Okay.

[193] **Simon Thomas:** The reason for asking these questions is not necessarily to rake over the coals, but the same challenges will now face any local government reorganisation. We need to understand why putting an obligation on a statutory level wasn't working and why there was a need for something else to happen to deliver these. So, to move on to what you are delivering, can you just outline how you interact, between the school categorisation model, your improvement service, and Schools Challenge Cymru—how those are linked, and how they work together within the consortium?

[194] **Ms Woodhouse:** Sure. I wanted to say at the end of your last question, if you don't mind, I think it's probably important to say that all five directors were new in role at that point as well, and I think that's probably quite significant, bringing perhaps a different view around the role of the local authority in school improvement, which I think has allowed us to develop our strategy, which is, as I say, not 'doing to' or command and control. So, the way that we work is we want to support schools to develop a clear view of their strengths and their areas for improvement, and our categorisation is based on the school's view of itself. So, the challenge adviser is asking the school: where do you think you are; what do you think you need to do; broadly where are you against benchmarks and other, similar schools? And the categorisation judgment comes out of that discussion—the role of the challenge adviser is to verify that, rather than label. Then, obviously, schools improvement plans—most schools will have three, four, five main priorities

for improvement, and, as I say, our role is to broker support. So, if it's about leadership, how does the school develop the strengths around leadership using other leaders working together, perhaps, and didactic professional development as well, and then the challenge adviser sort of keeps tabs on whether that's improving. Challenge advisers work much more intensively with red and amber schools and very much less with schools at the top. The Schools Challenge Cymru—

[195] **Simon Thomas:** Does that mean all red and amber schools are included?

[196] **Ms Woodhouse:** Yes, all red and amber schools are included. In terms of Schools Challenge Cymru schools, obviously, most of them—but not all—were in the red and amber categorisation last year. It's the same model, broadly. The Schools Challenge Cymru adviser works with the schools to identify their needs and be clear about the support that they need, and then accesses them either from the region or nationally, or provides them themselves, and then keeps tabs on whether that action's happening. One of the features of the Schools Challenge Cymru programme that we need to learn from is this accelerated improvement board, where, once a month there's a sort of, 'Okay, have you done what you said you were going to do? What's next?' It's a good, pacy system. We've been looking at how we can learn from that more broadly. We started off with probably less contact with the Schools Challenge Cymru team; it's a matter of record. We are now working much more closely with them. Of those working in the region, all but one are working with us, either as normal challenge advisers or doing some specific work around, for example, leadership or practice. So, we know, when we're working with them, they develop as part of our challenge adviser team. They come to our training days and they are very much part of the development of support. I know you're going to talk about how do we fund support in the region and they're very much part of the design of that support.

[197] **Simon Thomas:** Just to stay on this for a second, how do you ensure coherence between your working with the red and amber schools and the fact that Schools Challenge Cymru is also working with red and amber schools, in effect—maybe not all of them, but certainly with a swathe of them in your region? How do you ensure that there is a coherence there and that you're not sending out mixed messages about what should be done and what should be achieved?

[198] **Ms McMillan:** I'll start with that. I have one Schools Challenge Cymru school in Bridgend. It is all about having good, positive relationships with the national challenge adviser. So, I make sure that I meet with her myself on a regular basis, as does my head of service for school improvement. That gives us an opportunity to share intelligence, because there's often, with Schools Challenge Cymru schools, a number of other things that are going on in the life of that school that will affect its performance. It's important to share that and also to make sure that any initiatives are complementing each other and certainly not taking a school in different directions. So, that's one way that we can make sure that we communicate. We also sit on the accelerated improvement board as a partner around the table.

[199] **Simon Thomas:** The other aspect of this is the self-evaluation. That is what the aim is for the whole system. The national model, in time, presumably, will develop even more strongly along those lines. Estyn have stated that self-evaluation was—too generous, I suppose, is a way of putting it—within all consortia. It wasn't singling out any consortium in particular. Is that something that you've been able to bear down upon to ensure that you're confident in what's being done in that regard?

[200] **Ms Woodhouse:** Yes, of course, we can always do that. But, I think, if you look at the language, it says 'most', because Estyn told us that we were very honest in our self-evaluation. I picked them up on it, and it does say 'most'. We were quite honest about our shortcomings in our own self-evaluation and we'll continue to do that. I guess one of the challenges for us is to make sure that self-evaluation doesn't just pick up on the data, but it picks up on the views of all of our stakeholder schools, parents and local authorities as well.

[201] **Simon Thomas:** Where Estyn definitely says 'every' is on the link between deprivation—

[202] **Ms Woodhouse:** Yes, it does.

[203] **Simon Thomas:**—and strategic plans to deal with that. This links into funding as well, because a lot of that is dependent on an ongoing reliance—I think that's a fair word—on the PDG and other funds that were there but have now been tailored and streamlined, with a loss as well, of course. So, accepting that Estyn have said that, what has been your response as a consortium to try and deal with that, which is one of the issues in Welsh education that holds back achievement for the nation as a whole? What are

you able to do in terms of the funding that's put in place to ensure that that is—. We heard from the earlier consortium about some of the ways that they dealt with that, but do you have a different approach or are you very much doing the same thing?

[204] **Ms Woodhouse:** So, £24 million-worth of PDG is spent in our region. It's the most deprived region in Wales, so, yes, it needs to be a major part of our work. We have appointed a lead for closing the gap who is an outstanding practitioner, so very much into quality first teaching as the best evidence-based way of closing the gap. He is developing our approach, and my colleague in the EAS set out some of the elements and Chris has talked about some of the work particularly in the Valleys communities. We've got Ipsos MORI doing some surveying of what works best in the region and learning from that. We're doing some work with universities about how we develop practice-based research around what is working best and, of course, how we use PDG. We've had a number of sessions with schools about effective use of PDG. It's not that dissimilar to the pupil premium model, and I think we can learn both ways.

[205] So, what we do is we require schools to publish their PDG plan, and then the challenge adviser role is to monitor that in terms of whether it's being used effectively, and then we spot-check it across the region, randomly. We do random sampling. Rather than requiring all schools to submit monitoring reports, we sample across the region.

[206] **Simon Thomas:** Right, okay. There's obviously the £24 million, which is the global figure for your region. That goes directly to the schools. It doesn't pass through your hands, as such, but, if you're not confident that that is being used in an appropriate or effective way, then it's going to reflect on your region's attainment. So, there is a significant slug of money there that you have no control over but which you're responsible for—responsible in the kind of wider sense of the word. It links into the evidence you've given to the committee, which I think you just alluded to, which is where you want to see flexibility within the system to allow good practice to be emerging locally and to be used locally and so forth. There is, however, a challenge there, which is the danger of, if you like, reinventing the wheel or the alternative danger of saying, 'Not invented here', and trying to do things your own way when there's a perfectly respectable model that could work, and that lack of control, if you like.

[207] On spot-checking, I take the evidence that you're doing that, but in

what way can you be assured that that money is being spent in an effective way that is actually going directly to the pupils that are in that position? That is the clear will of the Welsh Government—that the money is spent on pupils with free school meals. In the past, there has been evidence, and with previous programmes as well, of a dispersed spend on a whole school, if you like. Therefore, it hasn't addressed that core pupil cohort that needs those resources. Are you confident that that is being done in your consortium?

[208] **Ms Woodhouse:** I think it's an issue, as you say, that's been running in its predecessor in England and in terms of PDG. It comes back to this question of whether we crawl all over schools and spend a lot of time monitoring them or whether we look at both the outcomes and the practice, particularly around teaching and leadership, so that we can learn from what's working. I think we're in that balance between not wanting to overly monitor, but, equally, wanting to make sure that those checks are in place. We have got, obviously, the Welsh national threshold. There are a number of target-setting points—the national threshold around GCSE, outcomes of free school meal pupils. In our region, we have put in a target for primary schools as well—a sort of floor target. We do monitor schools on their target-setting for that group of pupils, as well as the target-setting for the school as a whole, and we ask them to submit four times a year, tracking against that. So, there are a number of measures in place to make sure that's happening. I think the debate is about—yes, the funding needs to be spent on those pupils, but it also needs to bring about sustainable change, and that's difficult. That's why improving teaching and leadership of teaching are the most effective things to do, but you need to do that, as you say, with an eye on the benefits for those pupils particularly, which is a careful balance.

[209] **Ms McMillan:** I think there's also, again, another role here for the local authority, in that all five of us have priorities around closing the gap in our own education or children's directorate business plans. So, the local authority in themselves are carrying out a number of programmes and projects around closing the gap, particularly for vulnerable children. We do have a lead across the consortia for, for example, looked-after children and we have a strategic approach to delivering support for those, including the lack of PDG money. Certainly, in my own local authority we work very, very closely with headteachers and leaders for vulnerable groups across the schools to make sure that we're jointly delivering support for those children. So, again, it's a complementary process. It's not just a local authority delivering support for the most vulnerable. Sorry—the consortia.

11:30

[210] **Ann Jones:** Okay? We've got about 20 minutes. Aled's still got to do his on school improvement. We've got two other sections. So, just to put my little warning out there.

[211] **Aled Roberts:** Okay.

[212] Yr wyf eisiau gofyn yn y Gymraeg. Mae'r strwythur yn wahanol iawn rhwng y consortia. Rydym yn deall y sefyllfa hanesyddol sydd yn arwain at hynny. Jest er mwyn imi ddeall yn iawn, yr oeddech yn sôn am gronfa wrth gefn y gwnaethoch ei defnyddio i ariannu costau diswyddo. A oedd honno yn gronfa a gafodd ei mabwysiadu oddi wrth y cynghorau, neu gronfa y gwnaeth y consortiwm i hun ei chreu ar gyfer y costau diswyddo hynny? Faint ydych wedi ei wario ar gostau diswyddo?

I want to ask this question in Welsh. The structure is very different between the consortia. We understand the historical situation that leads us to that. Just in order to understand properly, you mentioned the reserve that you used to fund redundancy costs. Was that a fund that was inherited from the councils, or a fund that the consortium itself created for those redundancy costs? How much have you spent on redundancy costs?

[213] **Ms Woodhouse:** Thank you. It was so that our—. Our reserves position was, I think, both; partly inherited by the budget that came over from authorities, which we then created and added to in the first year of the consortium operation by making savings. I forget the figures, but we have spent a specific amount out of funding on redundancy for staff. I can provide those figures if it's helpful in evidence.

[214] **Aled Roberts:** Yes, fine.

[215] **Ann Jones:** That would be helpful; just to see them.

[216] **Aled Roberts:** Jyst i gymharu eich sefyllfa chi â sefyllfa'r de-ddwyrain, mae'r niferoedd o ran y swyddi eu hunain yn debyg iawn. Roedden nhw'n dweud mai tua 5 per cent o'r swyddi a oedd yn secondiad i fewn. Beth ydy'r ffigur, allan o'r 110,

Aled Roberts: Just to compare your position with that of the south-east, the numbers in terms of jobs are very similar. They said that only some 5 per cent of those jobs are taken by secondees. How many of those 110 jobs do you have? Are those 110 jobs

sydd gennych chi? A ydy'r 110 yn currently filled, or is that the staffing
swyddi sydd wedi'u llenwi ar hyn o level? If so, how many of your jobs
bryd, neu ai dyna'r staffio? Os felly, are currently vacant?
faint o'ch swyddi chi sydd yn wag ar
hyn o bryd?

[217] **Ms Woodhouse:** So, just to answer that question, yes, they're filled at the moment. Of the challenge adviser group, I would say that over half are seconded or not permanent staff. We've very deliberately gone down that line, partly because one of the issues that we've got is needing to provide a challenge adviser for 400 schools—obviously, quite a big resource. On our salary levels, we struggle to attract experienced headteachers, particularly at secondary level. So, what we are looking at is how we make sure that we get the best challenge advisers within the resource that we have, which is why we have a number of part-time staff. We do have contractors and we have seconded headteachers within the workforce. So, I think it's more than half. Again, I can provide the actual breakdown.

[218] **Aled Roberts:** Okay. And is there any sort of criticism at school level regarding secondments? I'm aware of instances where secondments have taken place at very short notice, where secondments have been extended in some situations, and where that's left a gap, basically, at school level. So, is there any criticism with regard to those arrangements, given that you're reliant—. I accept the point you make regarding, you know, the attractiveness of salaries et cetera.

[219] **Ms Woodhouse:** Not that I'm aware of. You know, it's a governing body's decision to second staff. I am aware of instances where the governing body has said 'no', but, you know, if it's too short notice, the governing body needs to say, 'We're not going to do it'. So, no, I'm not aware of that in our region. I think one of our challenges around our strategy for placing self-improvement with the school is that governing bodies need to understand that it is in the headteachers' and teachers' best interests to work with others. That's how professional development works, and it is the best professional development. So, they do need to let them out of the schools, but make sure that the capacity is in place behind them. So, where we have seconded staff, or where we have seconded staff working across other schools—and I suppose this is one of my messages to the Welsh Government—we've got to plan it properly, because you cannot leave holes in a school structure. That's where standards start to fall. But, no, in terms of our secondments, I'm not aware of concern about that at the moment.

[220] **Aled Roberts:** Ocê. O ran y £4 miliwn sydd wedi cael ei gadw yn ôl, neu wedi cael ei roi i gonsortia, o arian Her Ysgolion Cymru, faint o arian a ydych chi wedi ei dderbyn? Hefyd, a gaf i ofyn i chi—. Mi oedd y tyst blaenorol yn dweud bod cyllideb y consortiwm yna wedi gostwng o ryw 22 y cant. Gan dderbyn eich bod chi mewn sefyllfa wahanol, lle mae'n bartneriaeth rhwng y pum cyngor, beth ydy'r sefyllfa o ran eich cyllideb chi? Ac, wrth edrych ymlaen, rydych chi'n sôn am eich cynllun tair blynedd. Pa fath o sicrwydd a ydych chi'n ei gael gan y cynghorau hynny o ran cysondeb ariannu, wrth ystyried y pwysau ariannol sydd ar y cynghorau yna o ran eu cyllidebau?

Aled Roberts: Okay. In relation to the £4 million that has been retained, or has been given to the consortia, from the Schools Challenge Wales funding, how much of that have you had? Also, can I ask you—. The previous witness mentioned the fact that the budget of that consortium had come down by about 22%. Accepting that you are in a different situation, because it is a partnership between the five councils, what's the situation in relation to your budget? And, looking forward, you've mentioned a three-year plan. What sort of assurances do you have from the councils with regard to consistency in relation to funding, bearing in mind the financial pressures on those councils' budgets?

[221] **Ms Woodhouse:** Shall I just answer the question about Schools Challenge Cymru? We've had £1.6 million from Schools Challenge Cymru's building capacity funds. Of that, we have retained funding for under two posts. One is a seconded assistant head from a very highly successful school to lead our teaching learning programmes, and the other one is a co-ordinator working across the five authorities. So, the remainder of that funding has gone out to schools. A large bit of it has gone to develop our hub schools programme, which is the development of NQT programmes, teaching leadership programmes, across the region. So, it's pump-priming for those schools, really to make sure that what we're not doing is taking the best teachers out of schools so that those schools sink. So, that's where the majority of that £1.6 million has gone, and, again, we can break that down, if it's helpful.

[222] In terms of funding, if you compare our revenue budget, which is £4.4 million, to the national model, we're about £1 million below what the national model says we should be receiving from the five authorities. That's partly because we don't deliver all of the services, but it's also because we are, according to the national model, funded at less than was set out. We're

comfortable with that, because we think it shows efficiency. We also can show an increase in delegation to schools over the last two years. So, if you look at, for example, the education improvement grant, previously known as SEG, and a number of other grants, as you'll know, we delegate much more of that—nearly 90 per cent of that—to schools. Authorities retain tiny amounts, literally only for audit purposes. I think they retain about £100,000, and previously it was up to £1 million. So, there's increased money going out to schools from within the same envelope across both authorities and the consortia.

[223] **Mr Elmore:** On the point around the commitment from the authorities—and, in fact, we had joint committee earlier this week, so we'll try to answer both of your points—the long-term commitment is there from the five authorities, with the five directors. We can increase the funding, if needs be—and I'll come back to the whole efficiency around the whole governance in a second with the budget position—but, if we wanted to have an extra service within the consortium, we have that option because of the legal agreement that we have.

[224] The current budget position within central south is that we have a reserve of £55,000, or 1 per cent, if you want to look at it like that, and in our next joint committee we're having a paper from the directors and from Hannah that is looking at efficiencies moving forward, where and if we can find them, and whether we can look at collaboration. In the previous evidence session, I know that Bethan asked specifically around governors, and that was one of the conversations we had this week. It was around: is there a better option for us with governor support? We have an officer in central south looking at the training of governors, but is it that we should be looking at one of the authorities hosting governor support services, not just central south, but looking at whether one of us could host it, because the Vale of Glamorgan has two and a half governor support officers and Bridgend has one? So, it's about actually reviewing that and looking at where we can make efficiencies within our own local authorities, linking in with consortia.

[225] So, there is a long-term commitment there through the business planning of the current administrations, there is a small reserve, and we then have the option to increase, but, actually, I think it will be that we're reviewing to find efficiencies.

[226] **Aled Roberts:** You've mentioned the services that you provide. The review of the national model was suggesting that, perhaps, there was a

greater need for consortia to assume responsibility for HR guidance in particular—I think, in line with some of the criticisms from the unions regarding the quality of the advice that was available at local authority level. Do you currently provide HR advice? Can I also ask Deborah: could you give us, perhaps, a flavour of the size of the retained school improvement teams within the local authorities, just so that we can compare structures in the different regions?

[227] **Ms McMillan:** I'll pick that bit up first. Two and a half years ago, as I said, we would have been having a very different conversation with you. Because there was a lack of confidence in the ability of the consortia to bring about change, most local authorities have retained advisers back at the local authority level. One of the things we, all five, quickly agreed to do was to commit ourselves to the partnership, and that meant releasing those locally held advisers. So, there are none in Bridgend, for example. What we have—and I think it is described in the paper that you've been given—is a joint role, and that's in four out of five, now; we're just waiting for the last one to be delivered. The senior challenge adviser works half of their time delivering consortium work, but the other half of their time is spent working with the local authority in a school improvement role at a very senior level, at a group manager level. So, in terms of who is left back at the local authority, the structure in Bridgend is pretty much replicated across the five, but there's me, there's one head of service, who is responsible not just for learning, but all of the broader local authority services for children as well, and then this joint role, which is at a group manager level.

[228] **Aled Roberts:** And the HR function.

[229] **Ms Woodhouse:** Sorry, the HR function. No, the HR team doesn't currently provide HR specialist support for schools. There's a big debate nationally, and it needs to sit quite close to the statutory function, obviously. But, the HR directors across the five authorities work really closely together. They have a common HR policy, now, for all schools in place, and they are also at the stage of sharing what works. So, for example, one authority HR team might seek advice from another authority if there's a particular situation in place; one director might seek advice from another HR team from outside their region to get further advice. So, that's happening at the moment and, I think, as I've indicated already, it's an area where I think we may see further coming together to make sure that that's as strong as it can be.

[230] **Ann Jones:** Okay. We've got less than 10 minutes to do both the governance and the regional working, so, there you are, there's my second warning; that's the second yellow card. So, go on.

[231] **Keith Davies:** Mine's going to be short, Chair, so you're all right.

[232] **Ann Jones:** Good.

[233] **Keith Davies:** I was interested in the joint roles, working across the authorities, and you've mentioned now the five posts you're talking about, half in the authority and half within the consortium. Are there other joint roles, for example with additional learning needs? What other joint roles are there, if there are any?

[234] **Ms Woodhouse:** This role is really about bringing together the function of the authority with the support from the consortium, which is why it's important. We have got, obviously, roles shared across the five—so, we have a lead for leadership, for example, and a lead for teaching across the five. In terms of inclusion, we haven't currently got roles in the consortium looking at inclusion, but one of the areas of work that we're working on now is how we make sure social inclusion services do wraparound properly school improvement functions, and we design both collectively. That said, the role of the joint role is to bring those together in Bridgend. So, that person is bringing that together for Deborah.

[235] **Keith Davies:** Fine; thank you.

[236] **Ann Jones:** Okay?

[237] **Keith Davies:** Yes.

[238] **Ann Jones:** The model for regional working: Suzy.

[239] **Suzy Davies:** That was quick; thank you. Perhaps I can start off with the same question that I asked our previous witness, which is about barriers to effective consortium working, particularly this observation by the Wales Audit Office that there's been a characterisation of work as short term, and whether you think that the Williams commission has been used as a bit of an excuse for not actually planning longer term. First of all, do you recognise the observation made by the Wales Audit Office?

11:45

[240] **Ms Woodhouse:** But, they're very different.

[241] **Suzy Davies:** All consortia tend to be characterised by short-term plans rather than a medium-term strategy.

[242] **Ms Woodhouse:** In our business plan, we have a three-year vision, so we set out where we want to be in three years. We published that last year. So, I think we are setting out where we want to be and we're working on year one and we're about to start working on year two of how we get there. So, I think it's perfectly—. We do have a long-term plan. There's the reality of the political climate, there's the reality of the financial climate in terms of what budgets we're likely to be receiving over the next three years, particularly in the context of the scale of the savings that local authorities are having to make, and I think we need to be realistic about that. How firm a three-year plan we can actually make at this stage, I would question.

[243] I think, in terms of the four authorities, they are very different in terms of both context and political make-up. I don't mean that in a party political way; I mean support and how the consortia work with the authorities. We have to work within the context we're in and each consortia has done that, which is why they have different models in place.

[244] **Ms McMillan:** The priorities that are in that consortium business plan you'll also see reflected back in local authorities, in their own forward planning, not just within your medium-term financial plan, but in the local authority forward planning as well. So, you should see a golden thread that runs right through, and in the main a lot of the commitments and actions are mirrored. So, for example, closing the gap will always be a priority for us as a partnership. The fact that we're not sure of how much money we'll have to put into the consortium is really, you know, an aside point. It will always remain a priority as local authorities and as politicians, I guess; you know, we will continue to deliver that with whatever resource that we have.

[245] **Suzy Davies:** That's a very interesting point because, of course, one of the reasons that the national model was introduced in the first place was because of an issue identified by the Hill review that, actually, it was the relationships with local authorities that were preventing consortia doing as well as they could. Now, I'm guessing, because you've all mentioned the five new directors of education, if you like, that there's been no issue with the

signature of the education delivery agreements with any of the councils, and that's not actually made the relationship worse because, obviously, there's a penalty for not signing that agreement. If councils didn't sign up, they were going to lose their money, basically. Because there are five new members, that kind of old-style thinking perhaps doesn't infect the relationship now, does it? Is that a fair observation?

[246] **Ms McMillan:** I think that is a fair observation, and I think you asked right at the beginning of this session 'What's different?' and I think that is the difference: it is a change of not just personalities, but maybe a change of thinking in that the directors have come from different places. Many of us have come from working in England, and that means that we can bring to the table some new ideas around what works, but we can, you know, also find out more easily what will work in Wales. Hannah also talked about the restructure and how we've brought more experience to the table. I think what was different before, certainly in Bridgend, was that the advisers had only ever worked in Bridgend, and therefore they only ever knew what they'd seen delivered within the county borough, and they didn't really look outside the region, let alone outside the country or more broadly worldwide. The breadth that's been able to be brought to the table has helped in that.

[247] **Suzy Davies:** Okay. So, the fact that money has come across from, basically, the RSG into a different body hasn't been a roadblock at this stage.

[248] **Ms McMillan:** Not at all.

[249] **Suzy Davies:** That's good to know. Can I ask you next about the model itself? I mean, it's not been going that long, but it is due a refresh on the basis of some observations that were made in a number of reviews. As a consortium, how much input have you had into this refresh, and how confident are you that the observations you've made about what might need to change have been taken on board so that you will be able to take advantage of the ideas that you think should be included?

[250] **Mr Elmore:** With the senior team within Welsh Government in DfES, we have a challenge and review meeting so we can provide the feedback, but once we had the Estyn and WAO reports, we made changes ourselves. So, we just haven't waited for it to be done to us.

[251] Scrutiny would be a good example. We now have a process where Hannah and I are trying to say that, every March, there will be an update for

all five of the authorities on x; in September, there will be an update for all five authorities on y, so that there is an improved system of scrutiny. And we're bringing, for the first time ever, the five scrutiny chairs together, putting them in a room and saying, 'Look, this is what you should be doing' and making sure they have that discussion with me, Hannah and Deborah, and then we'll leave and let them debate it, because we don't have that at the moment. So, I think Welsh Government do take on board what we're saying, and, in terms of the national model, when it was first introduced two years ago, that was needed. There's no getting around that. Since it's been in place, we follow it robustly, so the joint committee, the advisory board, we follow it, and it works for us in terms of our scrutiny, where I, with Hannah, am improving the work of the joint committee in terms of our robustness in challenge and making sure that we have, you know, papers on time—things that weren't being done under the old committee. So, we're making sure that there's far greater scrutiny from a joint committee perspective and not accepting underperformance. It goes back to Deborah's point about the change in directors. They were changes in cabinet members: only one remained the same after May 2012; everybody else was new. So that meant that there was a fresh face to all of it, and it meant that we're all focusing on the same outcome, which is improvement or better attainment for young people.

[252] **Suzy Davies:** Well, I have to say that an increased focus on scrutiny decisions is something I'm pleased to hear about. I suppose what I want to ask next is: in the refreshment, would you consider that to be a particular priority that should be included in the new look? I mentioned to the previous witness that I personally thought that there was still uncertainty about the nature and operation of consortia, particularly the collaborative relationships inside the consortia rather than between consortia, because I know we'll have a few questions on that. Would you agree that that's something that should be a priority?

[253] **Mr Elmore:** In relation to scrutiny.

[254] **Suzy Davies:** Not just scrutiny, but fact that the nature—. The partnerships within the consortium; how they work together. I'm just trying to get to the bottom of this. You painted a very rosy picture of everybody working together very nicely as a result of you all being new, but it's whether schools work together, whether schools work with the councils, whether schools work with these outside bodies to do with wellbeing. Have those relationships improved in yours, and, if so, how are you going to pass it on

to the other consortia?

[255] **Mr Elmore:** So to not be rosy for a moment, I've been on consortia since the beginning. The first year was not good; it was very difficult. There were a lot of people on the joint committee, but we were coming together for a meeting once every four months and just having a meeting for meeting's sake in my opinion. The national model has seen significant changes in how that works, which I think has led to a more robust scrutiny system through joint committees, through the advisory board and so on, so forth. In terms of schools working together, the school improvement working groups, lots of schools have engaged. We used to have a very pretty diagram that looked like a daisy, and if a daisy was lit, so to speak, in a colour, it meant they were engaging, and, if it was white, they hadn't engaged at all, and, every time we had a meeting, our daisies would be more coloured in. Because schools weren't always engaging in the process. A lot do now; in fact, overwhelmingly, the majority do. But what we found this year is, with our nine green schools, seven of them saw either slight or significant reductions in their level 2-plus outcomes. At least three of those schools have not been engaging in the work of consortia, so the picture is not all rosy.

[256] I think what we're trying to say, though, is that we passionately believe—or I passionately believe; Hannah and Deborah can speak for themselves—that consortia are making a positive difference on outcomes, mainly for the reasons that Hannah lists. But, in terms of moving forward, I think one of the biggest areas—and I know it isn't just that that you wanted to focus on—is around actually getting other members in local authorities, the other politicians in the local authorities, to understand that the consortium is each of the five authorities; it is not a separate organisation. So, Hannah and I visit all the scrutiny committees across the region and a consistent question will be, 'If it doesn't work, can we get our money back?' And I go back and say, 'No, because the consortium is one organisation that you contribute towards as a council.' That's nothing to do with the executive members or scrutiny committee chairs, to be fair; it is members that have not been thrown in the deep end, if you want, in September 2012.

[257] **Suzy Davies:** No, it's not their area.

[258] **Mr Elmore:** Yes, it's because it's not their area, or whatever it might be. So, there is a piece of work to do there; it's almost like succession planning for councillors and probably for some officers as well, not within education, but within other parts of the council to understand that—I would

hope anyway—the consortium isn't going anywhere. It'll grow and improve and possibly take on additional services, as Aled mentioned, and will continue to deliver a school-to-school improving system. Okay, that's a decision for the next Government, but that's what I would hope we'll see, because I would argue that it is working and delivering better outcomes, which has to be the key.

[259] **Suzy Davies:** I don't want to intrude into Bethan's questions—

[260] **Ann Jones:** We haven't got time for those. I'm going to draw it to a close. [*Interruption.*] No, I'm going to draw it to close, actually. I think we'll stay on the positive note there and we'll finish. There are a number of questions that we haven't managed to get to, and, because we're asking you for further information, if we could write to you and then if you put them in with your further information on your redundancies, and how much your redundancies have cost—. But I thank you all very much. I think we found that a very interesting and certainly another perspective on how consortia are working. So, thanks very much all three of you for coming. As you know, we send a copy of the transcript for you to check. So, if you could check that off so that we haven't said anything—. Or if you see something there that—. You cannot alter it. So, if you see something in there and you think, 'Oh, I should never have said that', sorry, you have to live with that. That's probably more for—

[261] **Mr Elmore:** More for me than anybody else.

[262] **Ann Jones:** —Councillor Elmore than anybody else. [*Laughter.*] So, you'll have to live with that. But it's just to check that it's all there. Thanks very much. Thanks for your attendance.

11:56

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[263] **Ann Jones:** Just for committee then, there's a number of papers to note because of the summer recess. If we could note them, then we can return at the next meeting to have a look at them and we'll discuss those and the way forward on those. And just to tell you then that the next meeting we're having in—. Who are we having in? I can't see now. GwE and the other consortia, which is ERW, and then we'll have a private session to discuss our

draft report into WESPs and also the committee's forward work programme.
Thank you very much for staying. Thank you very much.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11:57.
The meeting ended at 11:57.