

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 23 rd May 2024
Report Subject	Changes to School Improvement Delivery Models in Wales
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language and Culture
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to provide an update to elected members following the Welsh Government announcement to change the mechanism of funding for all regional consortia across Wales and the outcome of the Welsh Government commissioned Middle Tier Review which has significant implications for the current arrangements for school improvement services locally and nationally.

The report outlines the change from a regional approach to the delivery of school improvement services to an individual local authority commissioned model for the transitional period of May 2024 to March 2025.

It sets out the basis of that commissioned model and the principles adopted by senior officers in the local authority and in GwE, to ensure the continued delivery of high quality support services for schools to maintain high standards of education for Flintshire learners.

The report also highlights the change that is expected to the longer term delivery of school improvement activity and the development of more localised partnerships. It also highlights a number of challenges currently being managed as a result of this change of Welsh Government policy which require careful consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members confirm that they have received sufficient information about the changes initiated by Welsh Government through the middle tier review, the changes to funding mechanisms to regional consortia and the
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	arrangements to local school improvement services in Flintshire for the financial year 2024-25.
2	Members acknowledge that there is a significant amount of change management to be undertaken to successfully achieve Welsh Government's proposals for a revised school improvement model in the longer term.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE CHANGES TO THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICES IN WALES
1.01	<p>In July 2023 the then Minister for Education and the Welsh Language announced the Welsh Government's decision to undertake a review of the roles of the wide range of education partners in Wales. This is generally referred to as the review of the 'middle tier'.</p> <p>The purpose of the review was to reconsider the future direction of school improvement approaches in Wales, to revisit the roles and responsibilities of partners within the middle tier and to further develop collaborative school improvement arrangements. Its purpose was to enhance the delivery of the Welsh Government's National Mission, which is to achieve high standards and aspirations for all by investing in all young people and by tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment.</p> <p>The purposes of the review were set out as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To clarify the roles and responsibilities of organisations and partners in the education system, how they can work together to support learners and practitioners and foster collaboration within and between clusters. • To set expectations for school improvement arrangements for the Welsh education system which build upon current effective practice, reflect evidence and experiences from within Wales and internationally in this area. • To explore the features of the current system, identifying what works well and less well, and how improvements might be made. • To understand the breadth of views and experiences from across the system, sensitive to the pressures and of day-to-day activities continuing. • To identify how capacity, collaboration and ways of working can be improved for the benefit of learners and all those who support learners across Wales. • To help shape thinking so that there is a clear approach going forward; an approach which we can be confident is fit for the future. <p>The Minister appointed Professor Dylan Jones, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of University of Wales Trinity St David to lead the review.</p>

1.02	<p>The review was undertaken during the autumn term of 2023 and an initial report was presented to the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language in December 2023. The review was based on a range of direct meetings with Headteachers across Wales, with Directors of Education and senior education officers in local authorities, managing directors of current regional school improvement services, Estyn, Education Workforce Council (EWC), National Academy for Educational Leadership in Wales and Trade Unions representing the educational workforce in Wales. There was also an electronic survey for practitioners to complete. A link to that report is included in the accessible document section below.</p>
1.03	<p>In its draft budget report published in December 2023, Welsh Government indicated that the funding arrangements for school improvement regional consortia would change from the beginning of the new financial year. Its rationale was to streamline the funding linked to school improvement activity and provide greater transparency around the very complex funding arrangements to all stakeholders.</p> <p>Funding that had previously been passported to regional school improvement consortia would, from the start of the new financial year, be given to Local Authorities to manage via a revised Local Authority Education Grant.(LAEG)</p> <p>The new LAEG grant comprises of four elements. The total amount of Welsh Government grant is included in brackets.</p> <p>School Standards – Education Improvement Grant, Recruit/Recover/Raise Standards, Foundation Learning (£159.9m) Equity – Pupil Development Grant, Minority Ethnic Gypsy Roman Traveller Grant, Elective Home Education (£154.9m) Reform – Curriculum, ALN, Professional Learning (£54.4m) Cymraeg 2050 – Welsh Language, Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, Siarter Iaith (£9.7m).</p> <p>The level of grant funding being passported directly to schools, rather than via the Consortium or Local Authority to support professional development and cluster working has also been increased by Welsh Government, reducing the amount of funding to Local Authorities.</p>
1.04	<p>Recognising that this decision reflected a major change of funding arrangements and that it needed to be effected within a short period of time, the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language requested that local authorities continued to work closely with regional educational consortia and partnerships to deliver curriculum reform, professional learning and improvement services to schools for the financial year 24-25, while planning the transition to new school improvement arrangements from 2025 and beyond.</p>
1.05	<p>It needs to be acknowledged that this change of direction by Welsh Government in terms of its funding arrangements, linked to the early findings of the middle tier review, will ultimately result in the cessation of GwE as the regional school improvement service for North Wales. This has understandably created a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty for</p>

	colleagues employed by GwE which all partners are endeavouring to manage sensitively and transparently.
1.06	<p>Officers of the Education Portfolio have worked closely with senior officers of GwE to manage this change for the period 2024-25. Flintshire County Council has passed back the requisite level of funding to GwE, under the appropriate grant headings, to provide a continuity of service to Flintshire schools for the period 2024-25. The allocations under each of the grant headings to GwE are as follows:</p> <p>School Improvement - £236,910 Reform – Professional Learning - £428,312 Reform – Curriculum Support - £231,571 Cymraeg - £61,004 Total grant funding returned to GwE for financial year 24-25 - £957,397</p>
1.07	<p>The core allocation to the regional school improvement service for 2024-25 from the six North Wales Local Authorities remains the same as it is stipulated by the Inter-Authority Agreement. The formula allocation is based on pupil numbers in each local authority. Flintshire, as the authority with the highest proportion of pupil numbers, makes the highest financial contribution. For this financial year, the total core funding contribution by the Council to GwE is £801,988 and is 10% lower than previous years, in line with Council policy on making financial efficiencies to balance its budget.</p>
1.08	<p>The national changes to the LAEG, and different decisions made by individual councils about the levels of grant funding being passed back to GwE, means that there can no longer be a single regional approach to business planning by GwE that is delivered across all six North Wales authorities. For the period 2024-2025 this will be delivered by an individually commissioned plan between GwE and each Council.</p>
1.09	<p>Chief Officers across the region identified a number of GwE led activities which they felt were fundamental to the school improvement function. These have been protected in all North Wales councils via the core funding provided under the Inter-Authority Agreement. This included the protection of the Core Lead role for each authority which provides the vital link between GwE and LA officers regarding school improvement activity, the current performance of schools and the evidence to support the need for intervention and further support. The Core Lead role includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality assuring the work of the Supporting Improvement Adviser team • preparation and support for Local Authority Quality Assurance processes including fortnightly meetings with the Senior Manager for School Improvement, attendance at School Performance Monitoring Group meetings and attendance at the half termly Local Authority Quality Board meetings • preparation for and support from Core Leads for Local Authority termly meetings with Estyn • contributing to core inspections of Local Authorities • preparation and support for Council scrutiny meetings • attendance at local headteacher forums

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributing to the appointment of headteachers and deputy headteachers as per the current protocol • contributing to the professional learning offer for school governors • responding to specific commissioning requests from the Chief Officer for Education <p>This work equates to 43.5 days of support for Flintshire from the Core Leads for the year.</p>
1.10	<p>Another protected element which is supported by the core funding to GwE is the level of support for schools causing concern. Flintshire has a very successful graduated support model for schools which begins with early identification and the development of a 360° support plan to address need. If more support is required then schools are brought under the scope of the School Performance Monitoring Group which is a more focused support and challenge mechanism with an enhanced improvement plan and regular scrutiny from senior portfolio officers and elected members. Schools with the highest level of need, designated as 'schools causing concern', who may also be in a statutory follow up category with Estyn, get an even higher level of support.</p> <p>As a result of its percentage contribution through the core funding, Flintshire will receive the highest level of GwE time to support its schools that need additional intervention. Flintshire will receive the equivalent of 124 days of GwE officer time to provide additional monitoring and support for schools on this continuum. The funding will be used on a graduated basis in line with the existing model as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to a maximum of 4 days per primary schools on an early identification 360° plan (but not SPMG) • Up to a maximum of 7 days per secondary school on an early identification 360° plan but not SPMG) • Up to a maximum of 6 days per SPMG primary school • Up to a maximum of 10 days per SPMG secondary school
1.11	<p>Funding from the core contributions also provides GwE officer time for school support, monitoring and challenge and is the equivalent of 4.43 days per school in Flintshire. This is dedicated time for each school's Improvement Adviser to deliver the equivalent of three full days of support over the year to enhance self-evaluation, school improvement planning and the monitoring of progress against improvement priorities. It also provides an additional day to work with the school senior leadership team to undertake a detailed annual evaluation of progress to inform future improvement plans and a half day to support the governing body with the annual Performance Management of the Headteacher.</p>
1.12	<p>Based on the differing levels of contributions from each local authority under the other grant headings – Standards, Reform (Professional Learning), Reform (Curriculum Support) and Cymraeg 2050 – each LA has a further amount of GwE officer time for school support, monitoring and challenge. This will be planned and used at the discretion of the senior Portfolio Management Team in consultation with schools. As Flintshire has passported the greatest proportion of funding to GwE under these headings,</p>

	<p>it can draw down the highest level of support of the 6 North Wales local authorities from GwE. This equates to the equivalent of an additional 4.3 days per school and there is a menu of activities from GwE which can be delivered. Local authorities, in conjunction with its schools, will need to identify the improvement activities they wish to prioritise and how much time to allocate to it. This support can be delivered at an individual school level, within school clusters or for the whole local authority.</p>
1.13	<p>Primary school support could include aspects of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving standards in specific AoLEs or areas identified by schools through self-evaluation processes. • supporting schools to be ready for the new School Improvement Framework which focuses on self-evaluation and improvement planning • curriculum provision and development – further building on the regional professional learning offer • teaching, learning and assessment – concentrating on specific aspects e.g. developing independence, More Able & Talented (MAT), differentiation, level of challenge. • leadership development [senior & middle leaders • AoLE planning - further building on the regional professional learning offer • facilitation of Foundation Learning networks • Specific aspects of the AOLEs to include areas such as pupil voice, role of the AOLE co-ordinator, effective learning environment
1.14	<p>Secondary support could include most of the same aspects as outlined for primary schools above, but also have more specific areas for this phase e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing whole school literacy skills - further building on the regional professional learning offer and the six step GwE skill strategy approach • developing whole school numeracy skills - further building on the regional professional learning offer and the six step GwE skill strategy approach • developing whole school digital competency skills - further building on the regional professional learning offer and the six step GwE skill strategy approach • AoLE planning - further building on the regional professional learning offer • Welsh medium developments • English Language/Literacy – subject specific support • Mathematics – subject specific support • Science – subject specific support • facilitation of secondary subject based LA networks in each core subject • facilitation of Teaching and Learning LA networks for senior leaders with this responsibility
1.15	<p>Support for Specialist Schools and the Portfolio Pupil Referral Unit, Ysgol Plas Derwen, will be individually commissioned. There will be a strong emphasis on supporting their particular needs locally but also ensuring</p>

	access to the regional networks that have become well-established for this particular sector.
1.16	<p>What has been foremost in the planning for this new approach, which came into effect from 1st May 2024, is that for this summer term, it should be 'business as usual' for our schools to ensure continuity. Every school in Flintshire has a plan of support agreed between GwE and the LA based on their previous self-evaluation and their school improvement priorities for the academic year 2023-24. It is crucial that these plans, and the support activities contained within them, are fully delivered by the end of the summer term. In order to ensure this, the total number of support days already committed for the summer term have been honoured in our calculations. This means that 20.5 days from the universal core offer will be used in primary schools this term and 45 days have been committed for secondary schools. The remaining number of days will then be allocated for the autumn and spring terms.</p>
1.17	<p>Senior portfolio officers have been consulting with headteachers through the primary and secondary federations to discuss this new commissioned approach and how this additional support time, funded through the grant allocations to GwE, should be allocated to schools for the remainder of the financial year 2024-25. The proposal, which has been accepted by the Federations is as follows:</p> <p>For the autumn and spring terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to a maximum of 2.5 days per primary (including special) • Up to a maximum of 4 days per secondary (including special and PRU) • Up to a maximum of 2 days additional for schools with sixth forms • 25 days for facilitation of cluster working (to be allocated across 10 clusters) • 17 contingency days for direction by the Local Authority to meet emerging needs and priorities
1.18	<p>Support plans for Federated Schools will need to reflect shared capacity and the Federation may not require the maximum number of days allocated for individual schools. This will be managed by consultation.</p> <p>There is an agreement with Core Leads that all school support plans for the academic year 24-25 will be completed by October half-term to complete the oversight of support days allocated. This will enable any further discussion on any surplus days and how best to deploy them.</p> <p>The model includes flexibility for schools to share allocated days and work collectively e.g. Foundation Phase working, GCSE specification preparation, subject specific work etc. This would be a discussion between the Headteacher and their Supporting Improvement Adviser, escalated to the Core Lead who will then liaise with LA senior officers.</p>
1.19	Schools have received funding directly from Welsh Government through this grant model. If they wish to purchase additional support time from GwE,

	<p>either as individual schools or in their clusters, they have the capacity to do so.</p>
1.20	<p>Senior officers of the portfolio are confident that this commissioned model of support is equitable for all schools in the first instance. It then provides a graduated model of support based on the level of need in particular schools. The model continues to deliver high quality support for Flintshire schools through the expertise in the regional consortia to continue to raise standards of achievement for all learners and provide for the effective development of their workforce.</p>
1.21	<p>The Middle Tier Review has signalled a change model for the longer term delivery of school improvement services, putting greater responsibility back into the hands of local authorities. It is also seeking to enhance the roles of schools as system leaders, so they are contributing more strategically to the improvement of all schools in the area rather than just their own, and a greater partnership approach with local authorities.</p> <p>This has signposted a move away from wider regional models of support to more local partnerships between authorities, with the Minister's position being that no local authority should be working alone.</p> <p>The review also clearly indicated that local authorities and schools want stronger national leadership from Welsh Government and a smaller number but more clearly defined national priorities.</p>
1.22	<p>Welsh Government officials, members of the Middle Tier Review Team and Education Directors across Wales are now working together to move into the next phase of delivery and how new models of school improvement partnerships will be developed. The timelines for implementation of these new models initially outlined in the Middle Tier Review are proving to be very challenging to meet – it is a major piece of organisational change to be delivered, whilst maintaining the quality of current school improvement delivery functions and within the context of huge financial challenges at local authority and school level.</p> <p>The new Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle, SM, who has only been in post for a number of weeks, has indicated she is listening to concerns about these timescales and capacity to deliver such significant change from across the system. Everyone involved agrees that it is vital that this change is managed carefully to ensure the needs of learners continue to be appropriately met and that this change is owned by all stakeholders to deliver it successfully.</p> <p>It is also acknowledged that colleagues employed in regional consortia will need clarity about their opportunities for future employment in the new school improvement partnership models and this needs to be managed through appropriate Human Resources (HR) processes.</p> <p>Officers of the portfolio will bring an additional report to this committee in due course to provide an update on the proposed school improvement partnership arrangements for Flintshire.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no financial implications arising from this report.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>GwE have revised their risk assessment model to reflect these changes to school improvement functions and funding arrangements and this will be considered for approval through its governance processes at the next Joint Committee in June.</p> <p>The Council's Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment which outlines key risks related to the delivery of education services and method statements which describe how these risks are managed. The risks resulting from this change of approach to school improvement delivery models are currently being assessed. Risks are regularly reported to the Education, Youth and Culture Overview Scrutiny Committee.</p>

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Regular discussions are held between education officers and the regional school improvement service to ensure that schools receive appropriate advice and support for self-evaluation and improvement planning. Local authority officers regularly attend headteacher forums to consult with schools on support needed and this change of model initiated by Welsh Government.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	There are no appendices to this report.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	https://www.gov.wales/review-roles-and-responsibilities-education-partners-wales-and-delivery-school-improvement-html

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Vicky Barlow, Senior Manager for School Improvement Telephone: 01352 704054 Cymraeg/ Welsh 01267 224923 E-mail: vicky.barlow@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Estyn – the office of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training (HMCI) in Wales. Estyn provides an independent inspection and advice service on quality and standards in education and training provided in Wales.</p> <p>GwE – the regional school improvement service for North Wales</p> <p>Education Workforce Council (EWC) – the independent, professional regulator for the education workforce in Wales.</p> <p>National Academy for Educational Leadership – its main purpose is to contribute to the development of the professional capabilities of current and aspiring leaders across the education system by providing coherence and quality assurance for the range of educational leadership development opportunities available in Wales.</p>