

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER 2013**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

SUBJECT: **DEVELOPING THE LOCAL EDUCATION SYSTEM APPROACH TO THE HILL REVIEW OF EDUCATION SERVICES**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To note Flintshire County Council's formal response to the Welsh Government's consultation on the Hill Review and to update on latest developments.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The previous Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews, commissioned a review of education services in Wales by Robert Hill Consulting in 2012.

2.02 The Hill Report was published in June 2013. the Welsh Government subsequently commissioned a period of consultation which ended on 13 September 2013. The report is structured in six chapters. Each chapter focuses on a specific element of the Review, as follows:

- Chapter 1 - an executive summary;
- Chapter 2 - how to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom;
- Chapter 3 - options for development and role of school leaders;
- Chapter 4 - options for increasing autonomy for schools;
- Chapter 5 - options for reforming the school accountability; and,
- Chapter 6 – options for the roles and responsibilities of the local authorities, regional consortia and national government.

2.03 Each Chapter outlines Robert Hill's hypotheses and includes a series of short and medium term options for consideration. (See Appendix 1 for a summary list of all the options identified by Robert Hill.)

2.04 The report reads as a collection of ideas and hypotheses presented as various strands of 'good practice' to be developed within a Welsh education system, rather than the presentation of a unified integrated framework for progressing the education structure within Wales.

- 2.05 There is relatively little to disagree with or challenge regarding the issues and options presented within Chapters 2, 3 and 5. Key concepts within chapter 4 are underdeveloped. There are significant concerns about options presented within chapter 6.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 The Robert Hill Review report is in six chapters. Each chapter focuses on a specific element of the Review, as follows:

Chapter 1 - an executive summary.

- 3.02 **Chapter 2 - how to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.**

Robert Hill states: 'The only way for schools in Wales to raise standards of achievement is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. It is the quality of teaching that is the strongest within-school effect on pupils' achievement'.

- 3.03 **Chapter 3 - options for development and role of school leaders.**

Robert Hill states: 'The quality of leadership in a school is second only to teaching in its impact on student outcomes. Wales has some brilliant school leaders but it is not making as much use of them as it should do – nor are there enough of them'.

- 3.04 **Chapter 4 - options for increasing autonomy for schools.**

Robert Hill states: 'Greater autonomy for schools does not on its own result in school improvement. However, giving schools greater control over managing staff, the curriculum and budgets can help boost performance – provided that school leaders are supported, do not get distracted from improving teaching and learning and are subject to clear accountability for their performance. Federations and other types of formal school partnerships provide a strong platform for both increasing autonomy and raising school attainment'.

- 3.05 **Chapter 5 - options for reforming the school accountability.**

Robert Hill states: 'Accountability regimes that put too much emphasis on high-stake tests and inspections can result in a narrowing of the curriculum, shallow learning and gaming by schools and teachers. But a weak or confused accountability framework means schools end up being secret gardens with parents, the public and policymakers not knowing how effective they are. Schools have no basis for benchmarking and learning from each other and little incentive to improve performance. Accountability systems need to balance these factors'.

- 3.06 **Chapter 6 – options for the roles and responsibilities of the local authorities, regional consortia and national government. Hill notes that any conclusions from his Review will need to inform the Williams review of public services in Wales.**
- 3.07 Robert Hill states: 'There is an economy of scale to the expertise and resources needed to coordinate school improvement support and so it makes sense to organise this function at a regional, city or sub-regional level. The current arrangements in Wales are profoundly unsatisfactory. However, there is a widespread recognition that things cannot continue as they are'.
- 3.08 Suggestions linked specifically to teaching or learning approaches may be delivered through other equally legitimate means. Many of the ideas are already being implemented within Flintshire, the regional consortium and GwE (the regional School Improvement Service) Education Directors have long argued for the establishment of a virtual National Leadership College that could utilise digital technology to host resources, for training and sharing of good practice at local, regional or national events. Systems for benchmarking school performance and holding schools to account have already evolved over recent years. Estyn have already conducted their own consultation about the school inspection framework and the system is prepared for changes that will include a reduction in the timeframe for preparation and planning for inspection visits, basing it instead on current live performance.
- 3.09 Within Chapters 4 and 6 the general strands of the report's approach are:
- [i] group schools into federation / hard clusters;
 - [ii] delegate as much funding [including funding for support services for pupils with Additional Learning Needs, capital funding] for these federations to manage themselves;
 - [iii] delegate HR, business and finance support teams to each of the federations;
 - [iv] agree a national funding formula, with the potential for directly funding schools / federations of schools from WG;
 - [v] expand the current regional school improvement consortia service functions;
 - [vi] top slice local authority Revenue Support Grant funding in order to finance federations of schools and regional services directly; and,
 - [vii] reduce the number, responsibilities and services offered by Local Authorities.
- 3.10 However, the report fails to set these strands within a clear governance and accountability structure. It also fails to explain how all the current statutory functions would be realised within the 'new delivery world'. Consequently, submitted for comment in isolation, the options raise serious questions regarding their viability.

- 3.11 As has become usual with Welsh Government consultation documents, there is a consultation response pro forma that lists each of the options listed in Appendix 1, followed by a request to tick a box to indicate if the respondent agrees or disagrees with the option. The document is extensive and a copy has been placed in the Members' Library.
- 3.12 Discussions have started with Headteacher and Governor representatives about how school level leadership needs to develop to address the challenges posed by the Hill Review. Members will also receive an update on regional and national developments with regard to key recommendations in the review.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That Scrutiny members identify aspects of the Hill Review options and Flintshire response that should be given further consideration as part of the annual work programme.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 There are no financial implications at this stage from this paper.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 None directly from this paper.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 None directly from this paper.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 None directly from this paper.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 None directly from this paper.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 See section 4.01

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.01 See section 4.01

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1: Robert Hill's Options

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

WLGA Briefing – The Future Delivery of Education Services in Wales

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