

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2014**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

SUBJECT: **NATIONAL MODEL FOR REGIONAL WORKING ON
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 The purpose of this report is to update members on developments with school improvement services and to recommend the new national model for regional working on school improvement for adoption.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Hill Review set out a number of options for improving the delivery and structure of education services in Wales. One of the key options was that there needed to be greater consistency in the delivery of school improvement services via the regional education consortia. This view was endorsed by local government through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) response, as the representative body, to the Hill Review in September 2013.

2.02 A subsequent key commitment on the part of local government has been to co-construct a National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement (hereafter referred to as the Model) with the Welsh Government. The aim of the Model is to bring consistency and stability to the local authority regional school improvement services which is in line with the WLGA response to the Hill Review.

2.03 The work to develop the Model took place during November 2013 with representatives of local authority Chief Executives, Directors of Education, Directors of Finance and Directors of Human Resources, closely involved in the process. In order to achieve this deadline a number of working groups were established, involving local government officers, education experts and Welsh Government civil servants. These groups have worked on different aspects of the model including clarity over the definition of school improvement, governance and commissioning, budgets and business planning for regional services.

2.04 The Model was agreed by the Minister and the WLGA Coordinating Committee in late November 2013. There has been a very tight timescale to undertake this work but it has been genuine co-construction. Inevitably there have been concessions on all sides.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The Model outlines a consistent approach to school improvement activities, such as how to undertake school-to-school support, which is a key part of moving towards self-improving schools. The model aims to encourage schools to take more responsibility for their own improvement. The Model also looks to clarify issues such as what activities could usefully be undertaken at a local authority level and what activities are best addressed regionally.

3.02 A key section of the document covers the governance arrangements in relation to regional collaborative school improvement services. The current statutory position is retained and responsibility for school improvement rests within the individual local authorities. The Model suggests that governance is best placed in a Joint Committee and in line with the legal requirements of the Local Government Act 1972 members of the Joint Committee would be appointed by the constituent local authorities. This Committee would be supported by an Executive Board which would oversee operational planning.

3.03 As part of the new arrangements, it was agreed that a common business plan template was required to enable consortia to clearly identify their key priorities for the year and the expected outcomes. The Minister for Education and Skills will use the plans as the basis of an outcome agreement with consortia, and will formally accept (or not) the plans on an annual basis. The process of submitting and signing off a business plan should be completed by the end of March of each year.

3.04 Through regular Review and Challenge events (formerly stock takes), Welsh Government will monitor progress against and hold consortia and local authorities to account for their performance against the priorities and outcomes noted in the business plans. The plans must be:

- focused on strategic outcomes;
- dovetail effectively with the outcomes identified in statutory local authority plans;
- deliver national and local priorities to impact on outcomes for learners;
- used to inform democratic accountability arrangements; and
- informed by effective data analysis and need.

- 3.05 It is expected that consortia will have, within the guidance set out in the Model, arrangements for effective strategic planning, governance and decision making, clear performance management and accountability arrangements internally and to constituent local authorities, self-evaluation, quality assurance, local authority level implementation action plans, managing risks and robust financial planning.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 The National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement be supported;
- 4.02 That a business plan be developed with the intention that the additional services listed in the Model be incorporated into the GwE regional model, in phases, subject to a satisfactory business case for each and a supporting transition plan to ensure service continuity and performance; and
- 4.03 That the Joint Committee be directed to ensure that its supporting Executive Board has a sufficiently broad membership to represent the interests of the sub-regions/counties.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 In October 2013 the Minister for Education and Skills issued a written statement outlining his acceptance of the proposal from local government to protect school improvement funding within the local government budget settlement and to jointly construct a National Model for Regional Working.
- 5.02 The agreement replaces the proposal, in the Hill Review, to fund regional school improvement services through a transfer out of the RSG. It agrees Local Authority contributions to school improvement functions will be protected on the basis of the methodology and funding identified in papers submitted to the Distribution Sub Group and Finance Sub Group.
- 5.03 The amount is based on the minimum amount originally proposed top slice (£19.2m) reduced by the average percentage reduction in core revenue funding for Wales, as announced in the Flint Local Government Settlement for 2014-15. This equates to -3.4%.
- 5.04 The individual authority allocations are based on the 'Mainstream Schools' sector Standards Spending Assessment distribution as contained in the 2014-15 Final Settlement. The Mainstream Schools sector comprises the main service areas relating to primary, secondary and special education provision.

5.05 Additional funding to meet the sums identified in the National Model will only be transferred to GwE as and when the functions transfer. This will be in accordance with the milestones identified in the Business Plan and subject to the full compliance with the recommendation at 4 above.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 The Welsh Government, Local Government, School Improvement Consortia and Schools are committed to anti-poverty working as key national priority for school improvement.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 There are no equalities impact implications arising directly from this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 There are no personnel implications at this point. Additional services listed in the Model may be incorporated into regional delivery models, in phases, subject to a satisfactory business case for each and a supporting transition plan to ensure service continuity and performance. This will involve appropriate consultation with staff and their representatives.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Ongoing consultation with school leaders, governors, school improvement officers, neighbouring authorities and the Welsh Government will be required in developing the regional 2014/15 business plan.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 The Model has been developed through engagement with local government officers, education experts, civil servants, WLGA and the Welsh Government.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix A: National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

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