



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15TH OCTOBER 2024

**SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
MIDDLE TIER REVIEW**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND
CORPORATE SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the outcomes of the recent consultation meetings with Headteachers, governor representatives and trade unions in relation to the Middle Tier Review and to provide Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to offer comment.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 In July 2023, Welsh Government initiated a review of roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and the delivery of school improvement arrangements. This review has subsequently become known as the Middle Tier Review (MTR).
- 2.2 The Middle Tier Review was led, on behalf of Welsh Government, by Professor Dylan Jones with support from the ISOS Partnership. The Review had the following goals:
- 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.

- 2.3 In January 2024, the Review Team wrote to the Minister highlighting the consistency of the messages that had been heard across Wales in both the face-to-face sessions and the responses to the survey. The Review Team acknowledged that the direction of travel that school leaders and a majority of LAs wanted to see was already clear:
- an opportunity to lead on school improvement matters through a greater focus on local collaboration and partnership working between school leaders and their Local Authority
 - partnerships between more than one LA with a move away from a wider regional model of support
 - stronger national leadership with clearer national priorities for schools and a simplification of the national funding mechanisms with as much resource as possible going directly to schools or supporting groups of schools to work together.
- 2.4 The Review Team highlighted that there was a clear majority of LAs in favour of exploring a move away from current arrangements for regional support, or have already moved away from such arrangements to partnerships between LAs which allow more localised approaches.
- 2.5 At this point, and on the basis of the evidence established in Phase 1, the next phase of the Review was initiated, looking specifically at:
1. How can school-to-school working best be supported at a local level?
 2. How can school-to-school collaboration and networking continue to be supported across local authorities and nationally?
 3. How school improvement should best be supported at national level?
- 2.6 Caerphilly took the decision to respond to these questions by working directly with a cohort of 22 Headteachers over a series of meetings across the Spring and Summer of 2024.
- 2.7 At these sessions, Headteachers were invited to respond to the specific questions in 2.5, as well as sharing views on the elements of the existing model they would like to retain and any new arrangements they would like to see developed.
- 2.8 The discussions involved consideration of Governor Support Services, the delivery of the School Improvement Model as well as the arrangements for Professional Learning and collaboration.
- 2.9 In summary, Headteachers indicated their preference to bring Governor Support Services and the Service Improvement Partner roles back 'in house' while continuing to work with one or more Local Authorities around Professional Learning.

- 2.10 Caerphilly, along with all Local Authorities across Wales, are required to submit its headline plans to the Welsh Government National Coherence Group by 31st October 2024.
- 2.11 There remains some work to be done to finalise a model but it is important that the views of Caerphilly's Headteachers are shared. The Gwent LAs have jointly commissioned some consultancy to understand the current position across Gwent, to shape what a future model could look like and to set out the steps that would need to be taken to get there.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider the views of the Headteachers set out within this report and to either ask any questions or make any comments they feel appropriate.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 In order to respond to the recommendations made in the review, Caerphilly has consulted with its Headteachers in regard to the future arrangements for services currently commissioned from the Education Achievement Service and shared across South East Wales Consortium. These views are set out within this report.

5. THE REPORT

Background

- 5.1 In 2012, the Education Achievement Service (EAS) was established as the regional school improvement service for South East Wales Consortium (SEWC).
- 5.2 In July 2023, Welsh Government (WG) commissioned a review of the Middle Tier. This review was led by Professor Dylan Jones, supported by the ISOS Partnership. As part of this review, many Headteachers were interviewed alongside local authority and consortia based staff on the current arrangements.
- 5.3 In January 2024, the initial findings of the review indicated strong support for a move away from consortia based arrangements in favour of a strengthened relationship between schools and LAs. The strength of support for this move was sufficient across Wales that the Minister was minded to ask local authorities to begin developing detailed transition plans.
- 5.4 Caerphilly chose to do this work by directly engaging 22 Headteachers from a range of schools geographies and disciplines and cocreating a potential model for a new arrangement. These meetings focused on three key areas

5.5 The LA met with the Headteacher Group four times and there was excellent engagement from all involved. Headteachers offered individual, group and cluster based responses to all of the issues that had been raised. A draft way forward was agreed with primary Headteachers on 21st May and Secondary Headteachers on 23rd May, 2024.

5.6 The group discussed and shaped their needs based on three distinct areas:

- Governor support
- School improvement partnerships
- Professional learning model

5.7 Whilst there was strong alignment between primary and secondary sectors on the first three issues, a phase specific model was proposed for professional learning. The output from those discussions are set out over the coming paragraphs. These still need to be tested and potentially refined with our existing LA partners over the coming weeks to ensure the greatest impact in terms of outcomes and value for money.

Governor Support Services

5.8 Headteachers were very clear and united in the view that governor support services should be provided by the local authority. Headteachers indicated their desire for consistency in practice and training in the role with opportunities for links with HR, Complaints and Finance to ensure better integration and enable thorough preparation for panels and hearings.

5.9 Headteachers asked that mentoring be available for Chairs of Governors and panels, especially in contentious situations. The need for this service to be bilingual in Welsh medium schools was also stressed. The current quality of administration to governing bodies was acknowledged. These views were echoed through consultations with representatives from governing bodies and trade unions.

School improvement partners

5.10 Headteachers agreed that it was important that the local authority knew schools well so that early intervention could happen. The local authority has a statutory responsibility to monitor, support, challenge and intervene in schools as appropriate.

5.11 Headteachers were united in the view that there should be core local authority advisers (title to be confirmed) to oversee clusters and to have a holistic understanding of the challenges. These 'advisers' would support and monitor progress of schools causing concern, or those requiring short interventions. They would oversee co-ordinated support for new Headteachers and contribute to cluster working where needed. They would ensure that where schools were accessing support, it was effective. They would identify and

collate areas of good practice into a directory of support within a range of aspects. They would also have wider roles eg. Post 16, links to WESP etc

- 5.12 The Headteachers acknowledged that School improvement partnerships must be a good match so that trust can be established and maintained. There should be continuity and the partner must be both skilled and credible. They should have expertise in the particular area, e.g., 3-18, Special schools and should be Welsh speaking to work with Welsh medium schools. School self-evaluation activities should be purposeful and in line with SDP priorities.
- 5.13 Those Headteachers with a proven track record as SIPs should be able to continue to offer support within and beyond this local authority. Some schools in the borough would continue to benefit to work with Headteachers and schools outside the county.
- 5.14 School to school support could continue exactly as it does currently.
- 5.15 There must be a clear understanding of the expectations of all involved in any of these processes. (A school improvement partnership agreement is the working title for this aspect.)
- 5.16 While this is very firmly the view of Headteachers, representatives from governing bodies have yet to be consulted on this aspect.

Professional Learning

5.17 Primary phase

Headteachers recognised the need to share the professional learning programme with other partners.

Continued partnership working would also be beneficial in:

- SENCOM
- GEMS
- Safeguarding Board
- SACRE

The Learning Network School (LNS) model is valued and would be continued.

5.18 Secondary phase

Whilst secondary Headteachers also wanted to continue to share services such as SENCOM, GEMS, SEREN, SACRE and the safeguarding board, they believe very strongly that there should be a focus on subject specialism. This would be characterised by regional networks of leads and teachers where good practice could be shared. This would be further supported by links to the examination boards. Alongside these activities, the role of advisory teachers should be explored where excellent practitioners could be seconded

part-time to coach others. It would be important to balance time away from pupils with expert subject and pedagogical support.

5.19 For secondary Headteachers, it would be vital to be part of extended networks and remain outward looking.

5.20 Further discussions will be required in regard to Professional Learning and will take place during October. Following these meetings, the Chief Education Officer will feedback information to consultation groups for full debate and will further refine the proposed model.

5.21 **Conclusion**

5.22 The Local Authority is committed to the planning and implementation of the recommendations of the Middle Tier Review and welcomes the honest, open and transparent consultation to date.

5.23 It is vital that the successes of the current system are used as a strong foundation for future development and that managing change carefully ensures unswerving focus in regard to continued school improvement.

5.24 More discussion and consultation, together with accurate assessment of risks and benefits will be undertaken before any formal options will be outlined, but the views and potential support of Scrutiny will be most helpful at this stage.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 It is assumed that the transition to any new model can be concluded ahead of the Welsh Government deadline of September 2025.

6.2 It is assumed that the new model will, in time, deliver higher value school improvement services at a lower cost than the historic arrangements and that an extended transition period may prove beneficial.

6.3 It is assumed that any monies available to schools through the existing arrangement will not be adversely impacted.

6.4 It is assumed that a suitable arrangement with a partner or partners can be identified within the available timeframe.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 At this stage, this report is only seeking views and, as such, no IIA is deemed necessary.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The financial modelling is currently being worked through but, as referenced in the assumptions section, it is expected that any new arrangement for

school improvement services that emerges will cost less than the current arrangement does.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this report as it purely provides feedback on the views of Headteachers on the Middle Tier Review.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The views of the consultees set out below are embedded within the main body of this document.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Education (Wales) Act 2014

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Background Papers: