



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **- 22nd APRIL 2025**

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

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To gain final approval on the future model for school improvement and to update members on the exit costs and funding to enable the Council to exit the EAS from September 2025.
- 1.2 This report builds on the previous report to Scrutiny Committee on 15th October 2024 which was approved.

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:
- How can school-to-school working best be supported at a local level?
 - How can school-to-school collaboration and networking continue to be supported across local authorities and nationally?
 - 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 (PL)

- 2.10 Caerphilly, along with all Local Authorities across Wales, was required to submit its headline plans to the Welsh Government National Coherence Group by 31st October 2024. These plans have received positive feedback.
- 2.11 Since the report to Scrutiny in October 2024, there has been extensive dialogue between officers at CCBC and their counterparts in the other four LAs.
- 2.12 A consultant was subsequently appointed by the five LAs to disassemble the company board. He has produced an interim report which outlines the risks and benefits of such action. There is a clear steer from the other four LAs that they wish to continue in partnership within the company model.
- 2.13 Discussions with the headteacher consultation group have continued and have confirmed the view that to serve the best interest of our learners, our schools and the Local Education Authority, the LA should:
- Move Governor Support Services from the EAS back in house and deliver directly
 - Move the School Improvement Programme back in house taking back control of the key component of improving schools
 - Continue to access a professional learning offer from the partnership of the four LAs, albeit with a smaller ask.
 - Complement the new EAS professional learning offer with the emerging national professional learning offer from Welsh Government.
 - Headteachers will also identify further opportunities to support school on school improvement within Caerphilly and to support any other partners who require assistance.
- 2.14 It is proposed, therefore, to serve notice to withdraw from EAS. This notice period would essentially run from August 2025 – August 2027 albeit CCBC has been required by the EAS to commit to a PL offer until August 2028.
- 2.15 There are costs attached to exiting the Company which are set out within the wider body of the report, as well as savings to be realized over future years. The Council is also anticipating further funding from Welsh Government on top of previous transition funding to support the withdrawal.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee are asked to

endorse the following Cabinet Recommendations on a proposed new model for school improvement:

- Delegate responsibility to the relevant officers and the Cabinet Member for Education to serve notice to withdraw from EAS in August 2025 with the notice period being two years
- Migrate Governor Support Services from the EAS back in house and deliver directly
- Migrate the School Improvement Partner functions back in house taking back control of the key component of improving schools
- Continue to access a professional learning offer from the partnership of the four LAs, albeit with a smaller ask.
- Complement the new EAS professional learning offer with the emerging national professional learning offer from Welsh Government.
- Work with Headteachers to identify further opportunities to support school to school improvement within Caerphilly and to support any other partners who require assistance.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Caerphilly has consulted widely with its Headteachers in response to the recommendations made in the Middle Tier Review as well as the future arrangements for services currently commissioned from the Education Achievement Service and shared across South East Wales Consortium. The model set out within this report, subject to Cabinet approval, will become the mechanism for school improvement and governor support services in Caerphilly.

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:

- Governor support
- School improvement partnerships
- Professional learning model

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 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 has directly shaped the model that has subsequently been designed and ensures the greatest impact in terms of outcomes and value for money.

Governor Support Services

5.7 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.

5.8 Headteachers asked that mentoring be available for Chairs of Governors and panels, especially in contentious situations and 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

5.9 Headteachers agreed that it was fundamental that the local authority knew its schools exceptionally well in order that early intervention and appropriate intervention could be made. The local authority has a statutory responsibility to monitor, support, challenge and intervene in schools as appropriate, and should have absolute confidence in the intelligence on our schools to be able to do so without any surprises.

- 5.10 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.
- 5.11 The advisers 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 e.g. 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 from working with Headteachers and schools outside the county.
- 5.14 School to school support will continue exactly as it does currently but within Caerphilly as opposed to part of the four LA partnership. However, this support could extend to other regions.
- 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 Representatives from governing bodies have been consulted on all aspects and have shown support for the proposal.

Professional Learning

- 5.17 A professional learning offer will be accessed from the four LA partnerships and supported by a national centralised offer. There will be school to school work across the Borough and it will be an integral part of the school improvement partnerships. A further report on the detail of this arrangement will follow.
- 5.18 Secondary Headteachers 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 Continued partnership working across our region will continue to collaborate on where appropriate e.g. SENCOM, GEMS, Safeguarding Board, SACRE.

5.20 **Complete Proposal**

Based on the preceding information, the complete proposal is therefore as follows:

- Caerphilly to serve notice to withdraw from EAS in August 2025 (with the notice period being two years)
- Migrate Governor Support Services from the EAS back in house and deliver directly
- Migrate the School Improvement Partner functions back in house taking back control of the key component of improving schools
- Continue to access a professional learning offer from the partnership of the four LAs, albeit with a smaller, most cost effective ask.
- Complement the new EAS professional learning offer with the emerging national professional learning offer from Welsh Government.
- Work with Headteachers to identify further opportunities to support school on school improvement within Caerphilly and to support any other partners who require assistance.

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.

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.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Should the proposal be accepted, the Council will work closely with Headteachers and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to the new model. This model will be evaluated carefully and consistently to monitor the impacts of the actions taken on the needs of learners and staff.
- 7.2 The Council remains committed to pursuing excellence together in all aspects of educational provision, and in securing high quality teaching and learning for every child and young person.

IIA available in appendix 1.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The EAS have informed Caerphilly that the one off exit costs for the Council withdrawing from the company are as follows:

Known Redundancy Costs	£578,960
Potential Further Redundancy costs*	<u>£194,000</u>
	£772,960

**** The EAS have advised that there may be potential for two FTEs that are at risk of compulsory redundancy to transfer across to Caerphilly should the individuals be interested and the roles fit. At this point, however, the EAS Change Management process has not yet concluded. Should either one or both resources transfer the exit total costs would reduce by up to £194k.***

- 8.2 In terms of funding the exit costs, Welsh Government have previously made available to each Local Authority £123k transitional funding for 24/25 and it is possible that a similar amount will be made available to all Local Authorities in 2025/26. Caerphilly remain hopeful that further funding will be made available by Welsh Government to support our specific exit needs but that decision and any associated quantum has not yet been made.
- 8.3 In terms of the provision of in house functions for the Governor Support Services and Service Improvement Partners, there is a part year saving projected for 2025/26 of £266k, £236k for 2026/27 and a further saving of circa £137k for 2027/28.
- 8.4 The 2025/26 Budget approved a permanent budget saving of £100k, savings above this element could be used to help fund the exit costs or

any shortfalls that remain beyond the anticipated WG funding. The MTFP contingency reserve could be utilised as a last resort.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The EAS have advised that there is only 0.6FTE member of staff who meets the requirements for a TUPE transfer to Caerphilly.
- 9.2 They have also stated that there could be an additional 2 members of staff at risk of compulsory redundancy who may be interested in transferring to Caerphilly should there be an appropriate fit or role available. As yet, however, no detail has been provided to the Council.
- 9.3 Should Cabinet be minded to support the recommendations within this report then discussions will need to be held with the EAS to obtain accurate information relating to the referenced staff to begin discussions around a potential transfer.

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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Councillor Sean Morgan, Leader of the Council
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Councillor Carol Andrews, Cabinet Member for Education and
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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment.