

Meeting of:	<b>Cabinet</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Thursday, 20 March 2025</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Future School Improvement Arrangements
Purpose of Report:	To provide Cabinet with a further update in respect of the future direction for school improvement services for Vale of Glamorgan schools (following the report to Cabinet on 28th November, 2024) and seek Cabinet approval to the proposed operating model as detailed in this report with specific financial implications.
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language
Responsible Officer:	Elizabeth Jones, Director of Learning and Skills
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Not required at this time
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns about the delivery of school improvement services and, to a lesser extent, curriculum and professional learning support have been widespread in Wales for some time, with a particular concern being that the current arrangements do not sit well with Local Authority statutory responsibilities for the performance of schools in their area.</li> <li>Welsh Government undertook a national 'Middle Tier Review' of school improvement services which concluded with recommendations and guidance for Local Authorities to strengthen arrangements within and across local, regional and at a national level.</li> <li>Welsh Government required high-level proposals from Local Authorities setting out plans for reconfiguring school improvement services by November 2024, with detailed operating models expected in early 2025. The new way of working will go live from September 2025.</li> <li>Further to the report to Cabinet on 28th November, 2024, which outlined the plans for reconfiguring school improvement services in line with the recommendations from Welsh Government's review it was agreed that further updates would be provided to Cabinet as proposals were developed.</li> </ul>	

- Cabinets in each of the 5 Local Authorities agreed that Professional Learning and Curriculum Support should continue to be organised and delivered across the 5 Local Authorities within the Central South Consortium (CSC) regional footprint. Whilst the school improvement element would be undertaken by individual Local Authorities developing an operating model which empowers and enables schools to take greater collective responsibility for their own improvement and that of other schools within their locality. Therefore, the changes proposed do not simply seek to localise the current regional operating model but develop a new one.
- The Middle Tier Review proposed a stronger national role in relation to some aspects of professional learning and curriculum support and the proposals in the report reflect the current understanding of what this will encompass.
- A Joint Committee (JC) currently is responsible for governance arrangements. The characteristics of the JC arrangement (and underpinning legal agreement) include elected Member representation from each Local Authority (LA) within the agreement, with the Managing Director of CSC accountable to the Members of the JC. In order to support the new way of working, it is proposed that the legal agreement will need to be amended to reflect the change of scope for CSC and this provides an opportunity to re-consider the basis of the partnership between the 5 Local Authorities.

## **Recommendations**

1. That Cabinet endorse that school improvement services will be delivered on a local basis.
2. That Cabinet endorse that the professional learning and curriculum support services will be delivered on a regional basis.
3. That Cabinet endorse the governance arrangements for the proposed regional professional learning and curriculum support service should transfer to a collaboration arrangement between the five constituent Local Authorities across Central South Consortium (CSC).
4. That Cabinet note the financial implications.
5. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Education and Inclusion Service to implement any revised school improvement service models following approval of this report.

## **Reason for Recommendations**

- 1-5 To ensure that Cabinet are appraised of the work underway in response to the national Middle Tier review and to ensure that the Vale of Glamorgan Council can respond to the outcomes of the review and meet the required deadlines for the transition to new arrangements as required by the Welsh Government.

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposed new arrangements for the delivery of the two core functions carried out presently by the Central South Consortium (CSC) namely school improvement and professional learning.
- 1.2 School improvement involves the deployment of Improvement Partners to provide support and challenge primarily around school self-evaluation and development planning. Professional learning entails the development and delivery of professional learning opportunities for school leaders and practitioners, including support for the new curriculum.
- 1.3 As part of the review of regional arrangements for school improvement (in response to the Middle Tier Review), Cabinets in each of the 5 Local Authorities agreed that Professional Learning and Curriculum Support should continue to be organised and delivered across the 5 Local Authorities within the CSC regional footprint. Whereas the school improvement element would be undertaken by individual Local Authorities, developing an operating model which empowers and enables schools to take greater collective responsibility for their own improvement and that of other schools within their locality. Therefore, the changes proposed do not simply seek to localise the current regional operating model but develop a new one.
- 1.4 In relation to developing the new arrangements for professional learning and curriculum support, it was noted that:

- the professional learning offer should be led by the priorities of schools and Local Authorities articulated through local governance arrangements;
  - support and promotion of school-to-school working within a revised self-improving system should continue to develop;
  - the delivery model and the scope and breadth of the offer should continue to evolve to support greater school led delivery of professional learning opportunities, networking within the region and pan Wales;
  - simplified and streamlined governance arrangements should be developed to reflect the change in scope and complexity of regional working; and
  - savings are realised to support greater value for money.
- 1.5** Further work has been undertaken to determine the scope and scale of Professional Learning and Curriculum Support to be delivered regionally and the governance and legal framework to underpin it. This paper sets out these proposals.
- 1.6** Welsh Government is in the process of developing national strategic direction and support functions for education, clearly defining the roles, responsibilities, functions and expectations for school improvement, including those related to professional learning and curriculum. The National Centre for Learning Welsh has already been established. A new Education Improvement Team (EIT), and national body for professional learning and leadership are also being created.
- 1.7** Local Authorities and/or partnerships are working with Welsh Government in the development of these national support programmes and will be responsible for the facilitation and delivery of these.
- 1.8** The National Professional Learning body will be established in April 2025 and operational from the academic year, 2025. It will be responsible for the development and delivery of professional learning (PL) and support in areas including:
- school leadership/NPQH
  - research and enquiry
  - coaching and mentoring
  - improving teaching practice/pedagogy based on evidence and research
  - Welsh-medium practitioners
  - System leadership
  - Key priority areas, e.g. equity, ALN, qualifications, digital.
- 1.9** The National body will also be responsible for the development of PL and support in further areas, with LA support to manage and deliver this. These areas are:
- Teaching Assistants Learning Pathways (TALP)
  - Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Induction
  - Teaching Welsh as a subject.

- 1.10** The Welsh Government has also suggested work to be undertaken nationally to support particular areas where economies of scale are needed (e.g. international languages, digital competence, and relationships and sexuality education (RSE).
- 1.11** The National Centre for Learning Welsh will be responsible for the development/commissioning for Welsh language learning for practitioners.
- 1.12** As detailed above, whilst the delivery of PL and support in a small number of areas will become the responsibility of the National body, there remains ongoing expectations for local management and delivery of PL and support in many key areas.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** In determining the operating model for professional learning and curriculum support offered across the 5 Local Authorities, the following additional considerations have guided the approach:
  - Professional learning and curriculum support provided across the 5 Local Authorities will be a fully commissioned service working on behalf of the Local Authorities aligning to the priorities of their schools.
  - The professional learning and curriculum support service will be rebranded as a new service, representing the change in focus and remit of the service.
  - Local Authorities will sign up to for a minimum of three years (to facilitate medium term planning). Additional services / areas can also be supported on an individual LA basis, based upon specific priorities.
  - The offer will be adaptable and flexible to reflect the future development of the national body for professional learning and leadership support and will link to the developing national programmes, their expectations of Local Authorities, as well as the relevant terms and conditions of grant funding.
  - Delivery methods will continue to be flexible, and a range of methodologies will be used to provide the greatest level of choice and accessibility to delegates, maximising value for money.
  - Professional learning and curriculum support should promote and enhance school to school working, contributing to the development of a self-improving system.
- 2.2** The proposed regional PL and curriculum support service will continue to support the breadth of the curriculum but with reduced central capacity, whilst retaining facilitation of a school-to-school self-improving system. Priorities will be provided to the regional service by LAs, and the PL and support to school will be built on those priorities, as well as on regional analysis of intelligence.
- 2.3** A revised self-improving strategy will be developed, ensuring the principles commonly found in successful school systems remain.
- 2.4** Professional learning and support will continue to provide opportunities for regional and local collaboration, both vertical and horizontal, for school leaders, governors, and teachers and teaching assistants.

- 2.5** The service will continue to support the LA statutory functions in the areas of Outdoor Education, SACRE / SAC and act as the Appropriate Body on behalf of the Local Authorities.
- 2.6** Following discussions with Directors across the region, it has been agreed that continued support for school-to-school working in pursuit of a self-improving system is required. It is proposed that these activities will include:
- Funding and support for the three existing regional networks (Welsh-medium and special schools/PRUs).
  - Lead practitioners. School-based, funded roles to provide expertise and capacity in the planning and facilitation of PL and support in specific priority areas.
  - School-based funded specific roles, e.g. PL facilitators, mentors, assessors, etc. System leaders and regional leaders of governance (RLGs) would sit within the LA and would not form part of the regional service.
  - Regional collaboration projects focused on specific priorities.
- 2.7** During 2025-26, the service would work in partnership with Local Authorities and school leaders to re-develop a self-improving strategy and model to meet the needs of the new arrangements.
- 2.8** The estimated costs for the proposed Regional Service for the Vale of Glamorgan will be in the region of £768K which is based on current LA contributions using the draft Indicator Based Assessments (IBAs) published by Welsh Government (draft budget 2025/26).
- 2.9** With regard to the School Improvement element of the new way of working, it is proposed that the Vale of Glamorgan creates a School Improvement Team which will sit in the Learning and Skills Directorate.
- 2.10** The work undertaken by the school improvement service will include:
- Schools leading their own self-evaluation and improvement planning as an iterative process supported by the LA and other schools.
  - Schools being part of collaborative improvement arrangements involving groups of schools (horizontal or vertical collaborations), enabling leaders and teachers to engage with learning and leadership in other schools supporting a collective understanding of progression.
  - LAs, in partnership with school leaders, facilitating and supporting collaboration to tackle barriers to learning at the earliest possible stage.
  - LAs working with other LAs and the national school improvement capacity to ensure system-wide evidence-based approaches to improvement.
- 2.11** In addition to the core roles within the school improvement service, more bespoke pieces of intensive work will be required at individual school level for schools in a statutory Estyn follow-up category (significant improvement or special measures) or where the level of need is very high due to school performance concerns. This may involve resourcing more bespoke support

packages provided via the regional PL and curriculum support teams, collaborative learning partnerships or the school improvement service.

- 2.12** Funding for the new School Improvement Team will be secured from the current core contribution to Central South Consortium and elements of the Local Authority Education Grant with the total budget for the Vale of Glamorgan Council which is currently in the region of £411k. This cost is based on one financial year and will be pro rata based on the September transfer date.
- 2.13** The functions of school improvement are currently delivered via a formal Joint Committee (JC) arrangement. The characteristics of the JC arrangement (and underpinning legal agreement) include elected Member representation from each LA within the agreement, with the Managing Director of CSC accountable to the Members of the JC. Additional governance structures and expectations on reporting to the JC and individual LA Scrutiny Committees as well as Welsh Government are outlined within the legal agreement.
- 2.14** The legal agreement underpinning CSC establishes a 'School Improvement Service' under the direction of the Management Board and Joint Education Committee and identifies a Managing Director accountable to the JC. The JC arrangement also means that CSC is legally required to produce its own annual Statement of Accounts compliant with Codes of Practice and Accounts and Audit Regulations which are subject to external audit by Audit Wales. CSC is also required to report on its activities and performance in a number of forums (including LA scrutiny arrangements). The legal agreement will need to be amended to reflect the change of scope for CSC and this provides an opportunity to re-consider the basis of the partnership between the 5 Local Authorities.
- 2.15** Under the proposed new arrangements, reflecting the revised scale and scope of regional working and the importance of making efficiencies in administration, it is recommended that the revised model is no longer governed by a JC.
- 2.16** Instead, the new service would move to a collaboration model whereby the inter-Authority legal agreement establishes principles of collaboration between the 5 LAs to deliver services to support school improvement across the region. Whilst the service would continue to be hosted, it will remain accountable to all LAs as set out in the legal agreement with a 'Strategic Group' or Management Board as the decision-making forum with chairing of this rotated between the Directors. The Lead Officer for the new service, would be accountable to this group / board.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act") requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

- 3.2** Support for learners contributes to the Council's Wellbeing Objectives drawn from the Corporate Plan 2020-25. There is specific alignment with our wellbeing objectives to work with and for our communities and to support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth.
- 3.3** The report supports the improvement of standards and outcomes in schools and aligns with the objectives listed in the Learning and Skills Directorate Plan 2025-26.
- 3.4** The report evidences the importance of collaboration with schools to establish a shared and joint endeavour to delivering the wellbeing objectives related to school improvement.
- 3.5** This report recognises the importance of identifying best practice in learning, provision and leadership in schools which will meet the needs of all children and young people over the long term.

#### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1** There are no climate change implications arising directly from this information report.

#### **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

##### **Financial**

- 5.1** Each constituent Local Authority makes an annual financial contribution in accordance with the terms of the financial protocol set out in the legal agreement. Contributions and apportionments (including liabilities/losses) are based on the respective proportion of the relevant indicator-based assessment (IBA) of each constituent Local Authority for the relevant financial year.
- 5.2** All Central South Consortium staff are employed by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) in its capacity as host local authority and on its terms and conditions. Notwithstanding RCTCBC being the employer in law, all liabilities attached to the employment of staff within the Central South Consortium (including potential redundancy costs) shall be a cost to the Central South Consortium Joint Education Committee and apportioned in accordance with the financial contributions of the legal agreement.
- 5.3** Redundancy costs for current Central South Consortium staff who do not secure a post in the new models will be shared between the constituent Local Authorities of Central South Consortium based on IBAs as outlined in the current legal agreement.
- 5.4** It is anticipated that the Vale of Glamorgan's contribution to the costs associated with the operational arrangements set out in this paper will be in the region of £768k per annum. This does not include the estimated redundancy and early retirement costs which will occur as a result of the movement from the current CSCS arrangements to the new regional body. RCTCBC are unable to provide an



estimate of potential redundancy costs. The Council will be charged for a proportion of such costs based on the IBA percentages.

- 5.5** At present, it is important to note that the Local Authority has no identified budget to cover redundancy costs which will be required to be met from Council reserves.
- 5.6** From September 2025, it is proposed that the School Improvement Team is employed centrally to undertake the school improvement function. It is estimated that the annual staffing budget for these staff will be £411k, and the pro rata cost for the period September 2025 to March 2026 is £240k.
- 5.7** The current arrangements for the Central South Consortium (CSC) will remain in place until the end of August 2025. Therefore, the CSC will invoice the Vale of Glamorgan for 5/12ths of the 2024/25 allocation, which is estimated in the region of £643k based on the £1.544M paid to CSC for 2024/25.
- 5.8** The 2024/25 contribution to the CSC was made up of £970k in grant funding from Welsh Government under the Local Authority Education Grant and £574k of Council budget. The LAEG grant funding lines allocated to the CSC were for Professional Learning, Curriculum Reform, Welsh Education and Standards in Education. The same grant funding streams for 2025/26 have been cut by £255k, as Welsh Government has directed funding instead to the new national body for Professional Learning.
- 5.9** The transition and proposed full year costs are set out in the table below. The funding shown for 2025/26 reflects the reduction in WG grant funding for 2025/26.

	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>Full Year new model</b>	<b>2025/26 transition Year</b>
Contribution to CSC	£1,543,594		£643,164
New Model Cost (option 2)		£768,000	£448,000
School Improvement Staff		£410,726	£239,590
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,543,594</b>	<b>£1,178,726</b>	<b>£1,330,754</b>
<b>Funding Available</b>			
LAEG Grants for Curriculum and Professional learning	£970,035	£714,965	£714,965
LAEG Match funding at 24/25 Levels	£83,998	£83,998	£83,998
LA Base Budget for CSC 2425 Levels	£489,561	£489,561	£489,561
Subtotal Funding Available using current LA funding levels	<b>£1,543,594</b>	<b>£1,288,524</b>	<b>£1,288,524</b>

Increase in LAEG match funding for 25/26 transitional year			£42,230
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- 5.10** On an annual basis, the cost of the new model (£768k) plus the estimated staffing costs for the school improvement function (£411k) are affordable within the reduced funding available, whilst the full year costs following transition represent a reduction of factors such as pay inflation and uncertainty regarding future grant funding streams must also be considered.
- 5.11** For the 2025/26 transitional year, the provision will cost £42k in excess of budget available, due to the reduction in Welsh Government grant (£255k) and the 5 month period required to fund the current CSC proposals. It is envisaged that the Learning and Skills Directorate will meet the £42k shortfall for the 2025/26 year using the Councils budget for grant match-funding and any other grant funding which can be identified as eligible.

### **Employment**

- 5.12** Subject to any decision by Cabinet, if these revised models are formally agreed, then a 'management of change' document will then be created. This document will be shared and consulted upon with both the trade unions and Central South Consortium staff and will cover areas such as TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment), any matching or interview arrangements and retirement/redundancy matters.
- 5.13** In addition, whilst Rhondda Cynon Taf is currently the host employer, a working group of HR staff from across the 5 Local Authorities will be established to help manage the transition to the new arrangements.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 5.14** The current legal agreement sets out the way in which any liabilities of the current joint committee will be dealt with upon termination of the agreement and this will now be progressed in line with decisions of Cabinet (and subject to agreement across all five Councils).
- 5.15** The adoption of either proposal as detailed within the report would require each of the constituent Councils to enter into a legal agreement which would provide the legal framework to support the operation and governance of whichever model is adopted.

## **6. Background Papers**

None.