

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	11 MARCH 2025
Report Title:	FUTURE LOCAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE
Responsible Officer:	LINDSAY HARVEY CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the Council's policy framework or procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	This report contains information about the proposed operating model for school improvement services to support Bridgend schools (and its pupil referral unit).

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- provide Cabinet with a further update in respect of the future direction for school improvement services for Bridgend schools (following the report to Cabinet on 19 November 2024);
- provide Cabinet with an update in relation to national and regional professional learning arrangements; and
- seek Cabinet approval to the proposed operating model (in terms of local school improvement and regional professional learning services) as detailed in this report with specific financial implications.

2. Background

- 2.1 Further to the report to Cabinet on 19 November 2024, which outlined the plans for re-configuring school improvement services in line with the recommendations from Welsh Government's 'Middle Tier Review', it was agreed that further updates would be provided to Cabinet in relation to the development of the proposed operating model for school improvement arrangements and for professional learning as they are developed.
- 2.2 Following meetings with directors of education and senior HR officers (from the five constituent local authorities within the Central South Consortium region), proposals

for school improvement arrangements for Bridgend schools have been developed for Cabinet's consideration.

- 2.3 The future operating model for the provision of professional learning for school staff is outlined below.

3. Current situation/proposal

- 3.1 Since the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2024, good progress has been made in relation to school improvement services being delivered at a local authority level alongside the potential professional learning and curriculum support across Wales and on a regional footprint. However, in respect of professional learning and curriculum support, it is clear that the development of any regional offer must take into consideration the national arrangements. This includes Welsh Government's newly established Education Improvement Team (EIT) and the National Professional Learning Body (NPLB), as well as the National Centre for Learning Welsh.
- 3.2 It is understood that Welsh Government's EIT will provide policy and strategic direction for the national support for curriculum design, progression and assessment, and literacy and numeracy. 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.
- 3.3 The NPLB will be established in April 2025 and will be operational from the start of the school year 2025-2026 (that is, September 2025). It will be responsible for the development and delivery of professional learning and support in areas including:
- school leadership/National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH);
 - research and enquiry;
 - coaching and mentoring;
 - improving teaching practice/pedagogy based on evidence and research;
 - Welsh-medium practitioners;
 - system leadership; and
 - key priority areas (for example, equity, additional learning needs (ALN), qualifications, and digital learning).
- 3.4 The NPLB will also be responsible for the development of professional learning and support in further areas, with local authority support to manage and deliver this. These areas are:
- Teaching Assistant Learning Pathway (TALP);
 - newly qualified teacher (NQT) induction; and
 - teaching Welsh as a subject.
- 3.5 The National Centre for Learning Welsh will be responsible for the development and commissioning of Welsh language learning for practitioners. As detailed above, while the delivery of professional learning and support in a small number of areas will become the responsibility of the national body, ongoing expectations remain for the local management and delivery of professional learning and curriculum support in many key areas.

Proposals for a regional professional learning and curriculum support service

- 3.6 In determining the operating model for professional learning and curriculum support services offered across the five local authorities, the following additional considerations have guided the approach:
- professional learning and curriculum support service provided across the five 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) and additional services/areas can also be supported on an individual local authority 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; and
 - professional learning and curriculum support services should promote and enhance school to school working, contributing to the development of a self-improving system.
- 3.7 The proposed regional professional learning 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 local authorities, and the professional learning and curriculum support to schools will be built on those priorities, as well as on regional analysis of intelligence.
- 3.8 Professional learning and curriculum support will continue to provide opportunities for regional and local collaboration for school leaders, governors, and teachers and teaching assistants.
- 3.9 The service will continue to support the local authority statutory functions in the areas of outdoor education, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACRE)/Standing Advisory Councils for Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC) and act as the appropriate body on behalf of the local authorities. This revised service will also include a retained business support function.

Proposals for local school improvement services

- 3.10 It is proposed that a new local School Improvement Team (SIT) will be established and will sit within the Education, Early Years and Young People's Directorate. The work undertaken by the SIT will include:
- supporting schools to secure continuous improvement; and
 - working with schools to develop effective school-to-school working, on a cluster, transitional (between primary and secondary), local authority and, specifically in respect of special and Welsh-medium schools, regional basis.
- 3.11 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 professional learning and curriculum support teams, collaborative learning partnerships or the school improvement service.

Future governance structure

- 3.12 Reflecting its revised scale, the regional professional learning and curriculum support service should be based upon an inter-authority legal agreement which will establish the principles of collaboration between the five local authorities to deliver services to support schools across the region.
- 3.13 The service will continue to be hosted by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) but be accountable to all local authorities with a strategic group or management board, to be set out in the legal agreement, as the decision-making forum with chairing of this rotated between the five directors of education within the region. The lead officer for the service, would be accountable to this group/board.

Human resources implications

- 3.14 Subject to any decision by Cabinet, if these revised models are formally agreed, then a 'management of change' document will then be co-developed by the HR Lead Officers in each respective local authority. 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.
- 3.15 Furthermore, while RCTCBC is currently the host employer, a working group of HR staff from across the five local authorities has been established to help manage the transition to the new arrangements.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty, and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services, and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant

or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report, however a further Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken once proposals for future school improvement services are further developed

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment provides a comprehensive summary of the outcomes expected from the implementation of the service.

Long-term	Supports the improvement of standards and outcomes in schools.
Prevention	Development of collaborative working arrangements to secure school improvement, preventing standards from slipping, working with the local authority to monitor the progress of all schools.
Integration	Supporting school improvement is key to ensuring that outcomes for schools are achieved thus helping to support a successful economy.
Collaboration	The local authority works closely with schools, Estyn and other partners to deliver the well-being objectives related to school improvement and to provide appropriate support aligned with findings from evaluation.
Involvement	This area of work involves all stakeholders in school improvement. Schools work closely with Improvement Partners to refine their improvement plans or post-inspection action plans and to identify strategic support from the local authority and elsewhere (as required) reflecting the diversity of stakeholders involved in aspects of school improvement.

6. Climate Change Implications

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

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no safeguarding or corporate parent implications arising directly from this information report.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The cost of the new **local** school improvement arrangement for Bridgend is estimated at £486k per annum. This will be funded partly from the existing budget for the contribution to Central South Consortium and partly from the (£225k) budget pressure approved in Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC's) Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025-2026.
- 8.2 The cost of delivering the **regional** professional learning and curriculum support service on behalf of BCBC is expected to be in the region of £780k. This will be

funded from a combination of the Welsh Government Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) and an element of the £225k budget pressure. The new service model for professional learning and curriculum support will be a standard offer across all local authorities and will be funded proportionately by local authorities, in line with the current arrangements.

- 8.3 Funding for the new **local** school improvement service and the **regional** professional learning service will be secured from:
- the current core contribution to Central South Consortium (£406,000);
 - the MTFS budget pressure (£225,000); and
 - elements of the LAEG (£629,000).
- 8.4 This means that the total cost of providing the local school improvement service and the regional professional learning service will be in the region of £1.26m.
- 8.5 To support this regional proposal, it is also recommended that RCTCBC hosts the regional arrangement. The operation of Central South Consortium is governed by the terms of a legal agreement dated 20 April 2015, entered into between the constituent authorities that form the Central South Consortium. RCTCBC acts as the host local authority and provides the relevant support services required by the Central South Consortium to operate the service.
- 8.6 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 IBA of each constituent local authority for the relevant financial year.
- 8.7 All Central South Consortium staff are employed by 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 five constituent local authorities and apportioned in accordance with the financial contributions of the legal agreement.
- 8.8 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.
- 8.9 Bridgend's contribution to the costs associated with moving from the current model provided by Central South Consortium to the operational arrangements set out in this paper are not yet confirmed. This also includes the unconfirmed potential redundancy costs.
- 8.10 A recurring budget pressure of £225,000 for 2025-2026, and an additional recurring budget pressure of £225,000 for 2026-2027 (£450,000 total budget pressure going forward from 2026-2027), to support the transition and delivery of school improvement services, including the strengthening of school-to-school working,

within Bridgend over the next five years was included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 26 February 2025.

- 8.11 The current cost of Central South Consortium's service is just over £10m. BCBC's contribution to that cost is £1.6m, which is a mixture of grant and core funding. The total cost of the new arrangement (professional learning and curriculum support plus school improvement) is currently estimated at around £1.26m.
- 8.12 It is worth noting that, in the short term, there will be additional costs (such as redundancy costs) as the current service is remodelled. At present, the potential redundancy costs in respect of Central South Consortium staff is unknown. However, it is anticipated that BCBC will need to contribute 14% (in line with the current agreed proportions) in respect of these costs. No funding has been identified to cover these potential costs.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- agree that school improvement services will be delivered on a local basis, as outlined in the report (from paragraph 3.10);
- agree that the proposed professional learning and curriculum support service, which will continue to be delivered on a regional basis, as outlined in section 3.6 to 3.9 of the report and that RCTCBC becomes the host for the arrangement;
- agree that the governance arrangements for the proposed regional professional learning and curriculum support service should transfer to a collaboration arrangement as outlined in section 8 of this report;
- note the financial position as detailed at section 8 of this report; and
- provide the Corporate Director (Education, Early Years and Young People) with the delegated authority to implement the revised service models following approval of this report.

Background documents

None