



## REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2024

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**Report by:** Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director

**Subject:** The future of school improvement in North Wales

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### 1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 Allow members of the Joint Committee to make informed decisions about the future of school improvement in North Wales.

### 2.0 Background

2.1 On December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language halted the Middle Tier Review accepting the interim findings as final.

2.2 On December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Welsh Government rationalised pre-16 education grants that were allocated to Local Authorities and Regional Consortia into the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG).

2.3 On January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language published a written statement: [The next stage in the review of school improvement - the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales.](#)

### 3.0 Considerations

3.1 Clarification is needed around key milestones:

- Impact assessment of cuts on current staffing.
  - Detail required around the 3 tiers described in the Ministerial Statement:
    1. Supporting school-to-school working at a local level
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2. Supporting school-to-school collaboration and networking across local authorities and at national level

3. Supporting school improvement at national level

- Identification of new partnerships.
- Process of ratifying new partnerships.
- Developing new structures for school improvement.

### 3.2 Risks

- Welsh Government do not currently have a detailed plan of how the future school improvement service should look like.
- Delays in decision making from Welsh Government and Local Authorities.
- Lack of clarity on national direction putting pressure on local budgets.
- Staff morale, wellbeing and motivation.
- Timelines for Local Authorities to establish new partnerships and the staff appointment process need to be carefully aligned.
- Pressure on Host Authority.
- Significant cost of redundancies.
- Schools' engagement with school improvement in the short term.
- Team configuration - reduction in secondments and redundancies could cause an imbalance in the support for different sectors.
- Quality and impartiality of legal and HR advice.

3.3 It is unlikely that Welsh Government will fund any transition from current school improvement arrangements to the new. Are Lead Members confident that reducing economies of scale and working in smaller partnerships will improve on current provision?

## 4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to note the report and consider the risk implications for 2024-25 and beyond.

## 5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 It is unclear how much this significant change in policy will cost in difficult budgetary times.

- 5.2 The formulae for distributing funding to schools shows that Welsh medium/bilingual schools are losing out significantly compared to the current financial year (2023-24).
- 5.3 The Terms and Conditions for how schools will be required to spend grants from the reform pot is unclear. This could lead to funding been spent elsewhere.
- 5.4 Potentially significant redundancy costs.
- 5.5 Unclear of the closing down liabilities for current arrangements for Local Authorities and set up costs for any new partnerships.
- 5.6 The regional school improvement funding contribution from the Local Authorities is the lowest since the inception of GwE. This is far lower than in other regions.
- 5.7 Whilst potentially losing economies of scale, the partnerships could be building their school improvement services from a very low resource base.
- 5.8 The cost to release school staff to address the recommendations proposed regarding supporting school to school working at a local level is unknown.

## **6.0 Equalities Impact**

- 6.1 No assessment has been undertaken to assess the potential impact of these changes on areas such as the Welsh Language, equality, workload, finance.

## **7.0 Personnel Implications**

- 7.1 GwE staff moral and motivation is extremely low.
- 7.2 There is no clarity regarding alternative job options for school improvement staff post March 2025.
- 7.3 Redundancies will be required to meet the significant cut to the core budget from Local Authorities and significant reductions in grants which are now held by the Local Authorities.
- 7.4 Reduction in secondments and redundancies will affect team configuration and cause an imbalance in the support for different sectors.

## **8.0 Consultation Undertaken**

8.1 No formal consultation carried out by Welsh Government.

## **9.0 Appendices**

9.1 Appendix 1 – UCAC Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, Welsh Parliament

9.2 Appendix 2 - Letter to Chair of GwE Joint Committee from Prospect members

9.3 Appendix 3 – Letter from Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee, Welsh Parliament, to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language - Follow up from general scrutiny session

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## **OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS**

### **Monitoring Officer:**

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

### **Statutory Finance Officer:**

Clearly, changes in the arrangements for providing the school improvement service will have a financial impact, but without full clarity on the future strategy, it is difficult at this point to predict in detail what these financial implications will be. A large part of the impact will need to be considered at individual authority level but I will be working closely with GwE officers over the next months, to assess and mitigate any impact on the service provided by GwE.