**CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM**

**REPORT FOR JOINT COMMITTEE**

**19th DECEMBER 2019**

**JOINT EDUCATION SERVICE**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE LEAD CHIEF EXECUTIVE – REVIEW OF THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE CONSORTIUM**

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## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update members on the current position following the ISOS review of Central South Consortium and to acknowledge progress to date.

1.2 To present a detailed implementation plan attached at Appendix A to take forward the ISOS recommendaton to re-model the Consortium.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Review and accept the detailed implementation plan to remodel the current Consortium approach;

2.2 Request that the ISOS report attached at Appendix B is shared with the Cabinets of the five Local Authorities to the Consortium before the end of February 2020, and the five councils consider and restate their commitment to a joint approach to school improvement through the Consortium;

2.3 Request that a report is presented to the next Joint Committee meeting that sets out an indicative three year budget for the Consortium to make longer term planning easier.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Members agreed to commission ISOS to undertake an independent review of the Consortium at their October 2018 Joint Consortium Committee meeting. The context to the review was the national changes to the education system and the financial pressures facing schools and Local Authorities.

3.2 As Members will be aware, at a national level Welsh Government is making many changes to the education system in Wales, with a new curriculum from Foundation Phase through to Key Stage 5, new accountability frameworks, new approaches to supporting children with Additional Learning Needs, the implementation of schools as learning organisations, the introduction of a National Academy for Educational Leadership (endorsing programmes which will in turn attract funding), the launch of a professional learning model (which will impact upon school to school programmes) as well as changes to the way in which Estyn will inspect schools and local authorities. These changes are being made with no direct increase in the funding available to schools and local authorities.

3.3 The review was therefore asked to consider the following questions:

- How well are we performing currently and how well do we understand our own performance and strengths and challenges?
- Are there any other examples and work we can learn from in other consortium in Wales or other local education systems particularly around the development of a school led-system?
- Is the current model fit for purpose for the future taking into account WG planned changes to the education system?
- Is the model affordable over the next 3-5 years, with a likely continued period of austerity?
- What needs to change and how would you implement this change over the next 3-5 years?

3.4 The review was undertaken in two phases: an initial evidence gathering phase in November and December 2018 and further development and testing of proposals in February and March 2019. During the course of the review Isos have spoken to senior Consortium staff, LA representatives including Lead Members for Education, Chief Executives and Directors, over 20 Headteachers, 2 Governors, Trade Unions representing other school based staff, other Consortia in Wales and Welsh Government. A full list of interviewees is included in the final report from ISOS.

3.5 ISOS presented their final report to Chief Executives on the 29th April 2019. The rest of this report provides an overview of the ISOS findings and recommendations about the way forward.

4. **SUMMARY OF ISOS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 The full ISOS report is included at Annex A. It is structured around the five questions the review was asked to address. The main findings are summarised below.

4.2 **Section 1: How well are you performing currently and how well do you understand your own performance and strengths and challenges?** The data shows that schools have made good progress over the last 5 years against most key performance measures supported by the work of the Consortia and Local Authorities but that key performance challenges remain. These include the need to:

secure further improvement to match the performance of the fastest improving Local Authorities; to narrow the gap in outcomes for eFSM pupils; to secure further improvements to ensure all schools in the region are judged good or excellent by Estyn; to respond to new challenges around Wellbeing, Attendance and Exclusions.

4.3 **Section 2: Are there any other examples and work you can learn from in other consortium in Wales or other local education systems particularly around the development of a school led-system?** Isos looked at work in other Consortium in Wales as well as drawing on our research into the way local education systems are developing in England. They identified a number of potential lessons including: looking at the way others have developed and used Cluster working to support improvement; ensuring the links between the different levels are clear so clusters are connected up locally and local partnerships are connected to the Consortium; looking at whether there is more you could do to strengthen and deepen the engagement from a wider range of Headteachers across the region; and learning from other Consortium in Wales around their approach to planning and budgeting.

4.4 **Section 3: Is the current model fit for purpose for the future taking into account Welsh Government planned changes to the education system?** Interim feedback from conversations with stakeholders was presented to Joint Consortium Committee in December 2018. Subsequent conversations largely confirmed these messages which show there are many strengths and successes of the current model. However they also highlight a number of challenges the Consortium will need to address moving forward including the folllowing:

1. **Leadership and capacity gaps.** The absence of permanent leadership, gaps at a senior level and uncertainty around the future of the Consortium have impacted its ability to do its job effectively over the last 12-18 months. There is a need therefore to reset the vision and ensure the Consortium has the leadership, credibility and capacity to drive forward work across the system in partnership with Local Authorities and schools.
2. **Clarity about roles and responsibilities.** There is a need to set out again for everyone involved the respective roles of the Consortium, Local Authorities and Schools and to show how the connection between the Consortium and the work of Local Authorities can be strengthened. Senior Challenge Advisers also need to be more effectively connected to the wider work of the Consortium to play a stronger system leadership role.
3. **Tension between the Consortium's role as a regional school improvement service and delivery arm for Welsh Government.** This tension needs to be managed more effectively so Local Authorities and schools understand and see how their priorities fit alongside and/or are different from national priorities which the Consortium is being asked to deliver against and how funding is being used to support them.
4. **Support schools to implement the new curriculum.** This is the biggest challenge facing the system in the coming years and the Consortium needs to ensure that the school to school support structures that exist through Pioneer Schools, Hubs and Clusters have sufficient expertise and capacity for the task.
5. **Determine the future Challenge Adviser model.** There is a need to continue to improve the quality of Challenge Advisers support and challenge to schools

and to determine the future role of Challenge Advisers in relation to different types of schools and the fit with Peer Review.

6. **Strengthen Governance.** There is a need to be clearer about the role and purpose of different groups and to rationalise and simplify the current model. There is also a need to further strengthen the engagement of Headteachers and System Leaders in Governance.

7. **Funding pressures.** For schools and Local Authorities this remains the biggest challenge in the system so any action the Consortium takes will also need to take account of these pressures and deliver further savings where possible.

4.5 **Section 4: Is the model affordable over the next 3-5 years, with a likely continued period of austerity?** The report provides an overview of current core and grant funding and shows what it is currently being spent on. It identifies spending on Challenge Advisers and other core CSC staff as the two areas with the greatest potential for further efficiencies, given the current limitations around grant funding. It includes more detailed analysis of the potential savings in relation to the Challenge Adviser budget and Senior Management structure. It includes scenarios showing what a 2%, 5% and 10% annual reduction looks like and concludes that achieving even a 5% annual saving would be very challenging and require the significant savings to be delivered from the Challenge Adviser budget.

4.6 **Section 5: What needs to change and how would you implement this change over the next 3-5 years?** ISOS identified a set of options for the potential way forward:

1. Local Authorities take back all school improvement functions and end any form of regional arrangements
2. Local Authorities take back some school improvement functions but retain a regional delivery function to support national priorities
3. Identification of a Lead Local Authority to take responsibility for delivery of all school improvement functions on behalf of others
4. Formal mergers between Local Authority education services so joint LAs undertake all school improvement functions
5. A more formalised shared services company model where LAs commission and hold it to account but don't oversee the governance
6. A merger with another regional school improvement service
7. Re-modelling of the current Consortium model

In discussion, **options 2 and 4** emerged as the most likely alternatives to the current regional arrangements and ISOS has undertaken further analysis of each of these options alongside **Option 7** to remodel the current Consortium model. ISOS conclude having looked at each of the options that Option 7 - to remodel the consortium - is the one that builds most logically on where we are now and provides certainty and stability to schools during a period of significant change. ISOS highlight in the rest of the report a number of areas they recommend focusing on to strengthen delivery and argue that these steps would be necessary in the short term anyway

even if a different decision is taken about the way forward longer term.

**5.0    PROGRESS TO DATE**

Detailed updates on progress are included within the implementation plan in Appendix B. Items of progress to note include:

- Managing Director appointed November 2019;
- Consultation on senior challeng advisers underway;
- Acting Managing Director and or members of senior leadership team attended all Local Authority headteacher meetings ;
- Revised Central South Wales Challenge model communicated to schools;and
- Initial review of governance models

**6.0    NEXT STEPS**

Short term priorities include:

- Consult and agree a revised governance model;
- Establish a senior leadership structure;
- Review and consult on revised senior challenge adviser & challenge adviser models;
- Publish the revised communication strategy; and
- Review and amend presentation of funding models and monitoring reports

**7.0    CONCLUSION**

7.1    It is acknowledged that some progress has been achieved since the conclusion of the ISOS review

7.2    The plan attached at Appendix B provides a robust set of agreed actions for delivering the remainder of the recommendations in a timely fashion

7.3    Working in partnership with the five local authorities, the Central South Consortium will be well placed to deliver school improvement functions effectively, and support schools to manage the major reforms across the region.