

STATEMENT

BY

THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE The Future Delivery of Education Services in Wales

DATE 20 November 2012

BY Leighton Andrews, Minister for Education and Skills

"Last week we discussed the national implementation plan Improving Schools.

Delivery of the plan under current arrangements is reliant upon the middle tier of local authorities and regional consortia.

Members will recall the publication in March 2011 of the report by the independent task and finish group on the structure of education services in Wales, chaired by Viv Thomas. The report recognised that regional consortia could tackle issues relating to resources, capacity and outcomes. It concluded that the economy of scale of the emerging regional consortia could release resources to the front line and deliver high-quality support services to schools.

Since September 2012, the consortia have started to deliver school improvement services on a regional basis. In some areas good progress has been made but overall progress is, to put it mildly, patchy. Local authorities and consortia gave me an assurance that they will have teams of system leaders based upon the very best school improvement officers and excellent head teachers. Certainly some very able new system leaders have been appointed in some areas. But whether they will inspire confidence overall remains to be tested.

Since the introduction of Estyn's Common Inspection Framework in September 2010, 15 local authority inspection reports have been published by Estyn. Newport, Conwy, Denbigh, Carmarthen and Neath Port Talbot all good.

Anglesey – in special measures, with an intervention board appointed.

Blaenau Gwent – in special measures, run by commissioners.

Pembrokeshire – in need of significant improvement under the direction of a Ministerial Board.

Torfaen - significant improvement

Powys - significant improvement

We then have Wrexham, Cardiff, Flint, RCT and Caerphilly as adequate – or as I have said before, barely good enough - and in Estyn monitoring.

Estyn have recently inspected Bridgend, Merthyr and Monmouth and re-inspected Pembrokeshire. These reports and Estyn's judgements have not been published yet.

So we have no excellent local authorities but 5 good ones. 5 are in a formal Estyn category and 5 are being monitored by Estyn.

Nor have local authorities in general been effective in delivering efficiencies, including promised savings through the creation of consortia, or through the reduction of surplus places. As we have seen during discussion on the School Standards Bill, they have rarely used their powers of intervention to address failure when it arises in schools.

Furthermore both I and the Minister for Local Government and Communities have repeatedly called upon local authorities to make joint appointments when vacancies arise. In respect of posts for Directors of Education and Chief Education Officers, this has largely fallen on deaf ears.

I have said repeatedly I would not have invented 22 local education authorities. I have also said that the fragmentation of education authorities in the mid-1990s was one of the contributing factors for the downturn in educational performance a decade later, as effective challenge and support was lost in many parts of the system and time, energy and resource was dissipated. I have given local authorities time and money to get their house in order but the evidence is overwhelming that this has not occurred.

All too often I am being told that local authorities have failed to provide adequate tailored human resources support to schools. In too many local authorities, schools have inadequate access to bandwidth because the local authority has not recognised the specific needs of schools, or local authority ICT policies are too restrictive to allow schools to make the best use of new technology.

The report on the structure of education services in Wales made a number of key recommendations for consortia to undertake, one or two of which have been met but many of which have not been met or met only sporadically.

There was a further recommendation that an in-depth review should be conducted in the autumn of 2013 to determine whether there is need for further structural change to deliver the best possible education in Wales.

I am no longer prepared to wait until 2013.

I have instructed my officials to scope out a more wide-ranging review of the delivery of education services. This will look at what should be undertaken at school, local authority, regional and national level.

The review will look at a number of options for delivery:

whether we should move to forms of regional delivery, and what the boundaries of those regions in the future should be, taking account of the regional footprint of delivery in public services amongst other options.

whether responsibilities for school improvement should be removed from local authorities and vested in a more streamlined regional service accountable to Welsh Government

whether statutory merger of the education services of local authorities under joint management by a number of authorities could be a solution.

whether we need to go further and remove all education functions from local government and create regional school boards accountable to Welsh Government, either with or without a level of local government representation.

The review will consider whether schools should be directly funded by Welsh Ministers, and/or whether there is scope for cooperative ownership of schools at a local level, combining secondary schools and the primary schools in their clusters, with shared systems of governance, which could mean reforming the system known as local management of schools. Such a system could operate in tandem with any of the proposals outlined above for regional delivery of education services.

I have not ruled anything in or out but the time is right for a full review and obviously the consequence of potential change would need to be considered.

The initial scoping for this project will be completed by Christmas. I will then establish a review group which will report to me by the end of March 2013. This group will work closely with the group chaired by Glyn Mathias, looking at roles and responsibilities in relation to school governance.

I appreciate that given the change of control in many local authorities in May, there is new leadership in place which cannot be blamed for the failures of recent years. However, it is clear that there are problems in our education structures which are impacting on educational outcomes".

End.