

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee: 18th September, 2017

Report of the Managing Director

Co-ordinated Scrutiny of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service

Purpose of the Report

1. The report proposes arrangements for strengthening democratic accountability and scrutiny of the School Improvement function in the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service.

Recommendation

That the proposed arrangements attached at Appendix A to the report be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

Reason for the Recommendation

In order that the relationship between the Scrutiny function and the Central South Consortium can be strengthened on a regional level by establishing a working group to consider regional performance and the sharing of best practice and information.

Background

2. The Central South Wales Consortium is responsible for school improvement on behalf of five Local Authorities, Bridgend, Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan. The Consortium is accountable to Local Authorities through the pre-existing Central South Consortium Joint Education Committee comprising a relevant Cabinet Member for each Local Authority. The Consortium's performance is currently scrutinised on an annual basis by the relevant Scrutiny Committee in each Local Authority and with representatives of the Consortium being invited to attend meetings where necessary on an ad hoc basis.
3. The accountability of the Consortium and the scrutiny structure is critically important since the statutory responsibility for the performance of schools resides in individual Local Authorities. Therefore, a joint Working Group is proposed to be established from representatives of the five Local Authorities and constituted with the Chairmen of the above respective Scrutiny Committees and Scrutiny Support Officers with the

view to considering proposals to deepen the Consortium's relationship with the scrutiny function and to consider regional performance and share best practice and information.

4. It is intended that the Working Group will offer an element of co-ordinated scrutiny with a specific focus on regional working. A research paper published by Cardiff Business School in 2013, found that a co-ordinated model of collaborative scrutiny could offer:
 - A clearer specification of the accountability role that joint local scrutiny could perform in scrutinising collaborations and partnerships and how Elected Members best contribute to this role;
 - The presentation of a clear rationale for regional service delivery and regional scrutiny to Elected Members;
 - Further clarity on the governance and service delivery configurations of Welsh public services;
 - Sufficient resource and capacity to deliver collaborative scrutiny;
 - Guidance to partnerships, Consortia and other collaborations.

Relevant Issues and Options

5. It is proposed to establish a Working Group consisting the Chairmen of the Education Scrutiny Committees in each of the Local Authorities (or a nominated representative of the Scrutiny Committee) supported by a nominated Scrutiny Officer in each case.
6. That the Working Group will meet three times a year with meetings scheduled shortly after each meeting of the Joint Committee takes place.
7. The Working Group's terms of reference to consider standing items such as:
 - (i) The Consortium's progress against its three-year Business Plan on a regional basis;
 - (ii) Regional performance trends;
 - (iii) The sharing of best scrutiny practice across the region;
 - (iv) The Group to also report annually to the relevant Scrutiny Committee in each Local Authority and/or feedback to the next meeting of the relevant Scrutiny Committee in each Local Authority;
 - (v) To share a note of its meetings with the Joint Committee and to receive a response to these from the Joint Committee.
8. To offer an element of co-ordinated scrutiny with specific focus on regional working, the Working Group considered the ERW (the Regional Education Consortium serving the west of Wales and Powys) model which had been held as an example of good practice by the Wales Audit Office. That model had been preferred by the six Local Authorities within ERW who had agreed a regional Forward Work Programme and a range of common actions with regard to scrutiny activity and general Member engagement and development having regard to the regional School Improvement Service.

9. The Central South Consortium Model has therefore been based on this similar model with the intention to provide Elected Members with the required oversight of scrutiny locally to:
- secure the effective co-ordination of regional work;
 - to ensure that the local statutory responsibility for school improvement and the work of locally employed officers are overseen locally;
 - to not to add to the bureaucratic burden and the work of both officers and Members and to minimise the risk of duplicating roles;
 - to enhance all Members' information on the region's work and to allow high quality challenge and focused accountability of the region's work and build on best practice.
10. Following a recent meeting of the Scrutiny Chairmen, where the way forward for the Working Group was discussed, it was informally agreed that if established the City of Cardiff Council would facilitate and support the first meeting of the Working Group subsequently followed on a rota basis. It is planned that a Forward Work Programme for the Central South Consortium Overview and Scrutiny Working Group will also be developed.
11. A copy of the report to the Central South Consortium Joint Committee is attached at Appendix A.
12. The Committee is therefore being asked to consider the document and approve the establishment of a joint working group as a way forward for the scrutiny of the Central South Consortium by each Council represented. The document will be presented to the Central South Consortium Joint Committee for consideration once comments / approval have been received from the five Local Authorities Scrutiny Committees.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

13. Member and staff travelling costs.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

14. There are no direct implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

15. There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

Crime and Disorder Implications

16. There are no direct crime and disorder implications as a result of this report.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

17. There are no direct equal opportunities implications as a result of this report.

Corporate/Service Objectives

18. Working with Partners to Achieve an Aspirational and Cultural Vibrant Vale; continuing to improve standards of achievement for pupils through sharing excellence between schools and the targeting of resources.

Policy Framework and Budget

19. The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

20. Not applicable as the matter is a county-wide issue.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

21. Learning and Culture

Background Papers

Contact Officer

Karen Bowen

Officers Consulted

Legal Services

Responsible Officer:

Rob Thomas, Managing Director

Democratic accountability and scrutiny

Purpose:

This document sets out arrangements for strengthening democratic accountability and scrutiny of the school improvement function in the central south Wales consortium.

The paper seeks the agreement of the consortium's joint committee to put these arrangements in place.

This paper proposes to deepen the consortium's relationship with the scrutiny function on a regional level by establishing a working group to consider regional performance and share best practice and information.

The working group would offer an element of coordinated scrutiny with a specific focus on regional working.

"..collaborative scrutiny should only be undertaken where it is likely to add value for all potential contributors and should not be practiced for its own sake. The added value, it was argued, needs to be evident not only to scrutiny teams but also to the leadership of local authorities, other elected members, senior officers, those being scrutinised and the general public." (Excerpt from *Developing a culture of collaborative scrutiny: an evaluation of practice and potential*. Cardiff Business School report 2013)

A research paper published by Cardiff Business School in 2013 found that a coordinated model of this kind could offer:

- 1 A clearer specification of the accountability role that joint local scrutiny could perform in scrutinising collaborations and partnerships (versus inspectorates and regulators), and how elected members best contribute to this role
- 2 The presentation of a clear rationale for regional service delivery and regional scrutiny to elected members
- 3 Further clarity on the governance and service delivery configurations of Welsh public services
- 4 Sufficient resource and capacity to deliver collaborative scrutiny
- 5 Guidance to partnerships, consortia and other collaborations

*(Extract from *Developing a culture of collaborative scrutiny: an evaluation of practice and potential*. Cardiff Business School report 2013, quoting the view of scrutiny officers)*

Proposed model:

That the working group consist of the chairs of education scrutiny in each of local authorities (or a nominated person other than the chair), supported by a nominated scrutiny officer in each case.

Meet three times a year shortly after each joint committee meeting

Consider standing items such as:

- i. The consortium's progress against its 3-year business plan on a regional basis
- ii. Regional performance trends
- iii. Sharing best scrutiny practice across the region

The group would also:

- Report annually to the relevant committee in each local authority (and/or feedback to the next meeting of the relevant scrutiny committee in each local authority?)
- Make recommendations to the joint committee and receive a response to these from the joint committee