

# Report

## Cabinet

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### Part 1

Date: 11 December 2024

**Subject** **The Future of Newport School Improvement Services**

**Purpose** For Cabinet to agree a suitable option for the delivery of School Improvement Services in Newport.

**Author** Chief Education Officer

**Ward** All Wards

**Summary** In January 2024 Welsh Government commenced the 'Middle Tier Review' which asked all local authorities to consider next steps in planning school improvement, aligned to new national guidance. This report looks at the options available for the delivery of school improvement services in Newport with accompanying appraisals.

**Proposal**

1. To continue to commission school improvement services from the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service (EAS) for the foreseeable future; and
2. To mandate the Chief Education Officer to work with partners to explore the potential for changes to the governance of EAS and to implement changes to the delivery of services by EAS which reflect stakeholder feedback and national school improvement guidance.

**Action by** Chief Education Officer

**Timetable** Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- The Chief Executive of Newport City Council
- The Strategic Director for Policy & Transformation
- The Newport Headteacher School Improvement Group
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years

**Signed**

## Background

In 2012 The Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service (EAS) was established in response to the Education Minister, Leighton Andrews twenty-point education reform plan. At this time the expectation was set, that all local authorities would participate in joint school improvement consortia arrangements.

The EAS continues to provide all school improvement functions across Newport, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Monmouthshire councils. Governance arrangements are secured through a Company Board and the Joint Executive Group which contains membership from local elected member, Cabinet Members for Education and a nominated lead Chief Executive from across the region.

In January 2024 Dr Dylan Jones and ISOS was commissioned by the previous Minister for Education and Welsh Language (Jeremy Miles) to conduct a Middle Tier Review with stakeholders across Wales. This paper will look at the Middle Tier Review (MTR) with a spotlight on options and a recommendation for School Improvement Services in Newport.

The Middle Tier Review has removed the former 'expectation' that local authorities work in partnership with Regional Consortia School Improvement Partners, in traditional geographical footprints. Partnership working is however still required and single local authority school improvement services have been significantly discouraged by Welsh Government

The recommendations and expectations from the Middle Tier Review must work hand in hand with the new national guidance on School Improvement which is currently in its final draft.

Each local authority must submit an application to Welsh Government on their revised school improvement partnership arrangement. The application must reflect the draft School Improvement guidance. Applications will be accepted or refused based on these criteria.

### **How does the Current EAS Model take in to account the Revised Welsh Government School Improvement Guidance 2024?**

In June 2024, the draft guidance 'A collaborative model between schools, LAs and Welsh Government' was shared outlining aims and objectives.

The aim of the policy is to support the system in collectively raising educational standards in Wales as we mature into a self-improving system. The guidance sets out Welsh Government policy expectations for a new, school-to-school collaborative approach to self-evaluation and improvement: it should be rooted within an open culture, with collective responsibility between LAs, schools and groups of schools. The Schools in Wales as learning organisations model sets out the key characteristics to deliver this culture. The aims of the guidance are noted below, alongside corresponding current local delivery mechanisms and considerations for next steps.

It should be noted that the current delivery of School Improvement by the EAS is highly reflective of the new national School Improvement guidance (2024).

<b>The aims of the guidance</b>	<b>Current local practice</b>	<b>Further considerations</b>
<b>1</b> Improve the quality of leadership and teaching and learning by embedding and enabling deep and purposeful collaborative improvement and collective responsibility as the foundations of the school improvement model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-constructed school improvement model</li><li>• Clear universal work programme for SIPs focussed on SDP priorities, teaching and learning and self-evaluation.</li><li>• Professional Discussions.</li><li>• Termly supported self-evaluation.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-constructed local Teaching and Learning Strategy (to include appendices for literacy and numeracy).</li><li>• A co-constructed local self-evaluation and improvement strategy for schools.</li><li>• Provide local opportunities for leaders to work within and across other settings.</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team around the school meetings.</li> <li>• HTs undertaking the role of SIPs.</li> <li>• Partner schools e.g. s2s intensive support.</li> <li>• Cluster governor professional learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further develop local approaches to shared leadership arrangements through collaborations, including all through school models.</li> </ul>
2	Develop an open, supportive culture which enables self-evaluation to become a mechanism for improving schools and the wider school system, rather than as a compliance exercise within an accountability system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular termly supported self-evaluation activity with all schools.</li> <li>• Extended supported self-evaluation in schools that require a more in-depth activity leading to precise follow up support for teaching and learning.</li> <li>• Piloting a cluster peer review approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider removing the LA thematic element from the termly SSE so that schools can focus on self-evaluation linked to their own priorities.</li> <li>• Use a local sampling approach to evaluate provision and pupil progress in identified areas to write a precise local evaluation.</li> <li>• Revise the universal offer for SIPs to ensure that SSE activity is broader and more balanced and always includes enough first-hand evidence to make a robust evaluation of pupil progress.</li> </ul>
3	Enable LAs to create a local collaborative improvement infrastructure which allows all schools and LAs to: <p>a. improve the quality of self-evaluation and improvement within schools, where high-quality collaborative working, active professional learning and enquiry, and effective peer support and challenge are central.</p> <p>b. continue to develop a shared understanding of progression and expectations for learning.</p> <p>c. develop a more authentic, collective understanding of local priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Partner School model enables collaborative working, active professional learning and enquiry, and effective peer support and challenge.</li> <li>• Teaching and Learning Framework.</li> <li>• New guidance: Self Evaluation and Improvement Planning.</li> <li>• Local expectations of effective cluster working.</li> <li>• Local professional learning offer linked to priorities.</li> <li>• School Support Overview and local SSE themes enables collective understanding of local priorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-constructed local agreement that outlines the expectations of effective cluster working*.</li> <li>• Consider different models of peer review*.</li> <li>• Consider how SIPs and broader team can become more involved in supporting LA functions e.g. ALN, attendance / exclusions*.</li> <li>• The development of Local Collaboratives e.g. HT cluster leads coming together to develop a more authentic, collective understanding of local priorities*.</li> <li>• Simplifying the universal PL offer so that is focusses on a 'back to basics' approach and supports schools to address national priorities*.</li> <li>• To co-construct local examples of assessment and progression tracking systems.</li> <li>• To share local examples of effective long, medium- and short-term planning in schools.</li> <li>• Develop local portfolios to exemplify a shared understanding of progression and expectations for learning.</li> </ul>
4	Enable school leaders and LAs to focus time and energy on building, and releasing, school-based capacity to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of funded systems leaders through the SIP and Partner School model.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore purposeful models for Secondary-to-Secondary collaborations*.</li> </ul>

	support local system improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of vertical school to school support at individual and school level.</li> <li>• Cluster (horizontal) collaboration to continue to develop a shared understanding of progression and expectations for learning.</li> </ul>	
5	Enable LAs to work in partnership with each other and Welsh Government to ensure evidence based good practice is shared systematically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner Schools model at local and wider contexts.</li> <li>• Supporting Our Schools Website – sharing effective practice.</li> <li>• Local case studies / videos and impact captures.</li> <li>• Good practice events and Partner Schools delivery PL.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further develop local improvement intelligence through the creation of an 'LA on a Page' to ensure local intelligence is precise and systematically shared locally and nationally.</li> </ul>
6	Provide a supportive national infrastructure to ensure local improvement intelligence informs national priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local areas of strength and improvement priorities are identified.</li> <li>• The SSO is an agile repository which enables local improvement intelligence to inform national priorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The introduction of local pathways for school leaders to develop their system leadership skills*.</li> </ul>

The following information's considers current performance of Newport schools linked to Estyn Judgements and any subsequent case for change.

### Performance of Newport Schools and settings

The performance of nearly all schools and settings across the city are good or better. Where previously schools have been in an Estyn category or causing concern and subject to Local Authority intervention, performance has improved. Twenty-five schools have been inspected by Estyn since May 2022. 44% of schools inspected were asked to write best practice case studies which is more than double all Wales average.

Newport Education Service know their school well. Where support is required, early support is brokered at pace to prevent schools from causing concern.

### Stakeholder Feedback

In Spring 2024, a new stakeholder group of Headteacher was established to focus on school improvement. The Headteacher 'School Improvement Group, (SIG)' is made up of 16 Headteacher (10 primary, 5 secondary and a special school Headteacher) which is representative of 29% of Headteacher workforce, from across the city.

This group has considered the strengths and opportunities for change in respect of school improvement services. Their feedback is noted below:

#### Headteachers overall value:

- Quality assurance activities, which support and challenge school leaders to deliver the statutory elements of a school's work, for example school development planning.
- The current professional learning offer, which includes support from partners schools, regional consortia advisor support, (primaries only) and the wider professional learning offer provided by the EAS, with the option for schools to buy-in external consultants.
- The Partner School funding model which retains additional funding at school level and within the local authority.

- LA representation as a part of Headteacher performance management arrangements.

**Headteachers overall do not value:**

- Supported Self Evaluation (SSE), activities which do not focus on the school’s improvement priorities.
- School Improvement Partners (SIP) attending governing body meetings to share the ‘School’s Support Overview document’.
- School Improvement Partners who use their role as an opportunity to disproportionately income generate, with multiple schools.
- A proportion of meetings instigated by the EAS, which have limited value to school leaders.

**Secondary Headteachers do not value:**

- Current NQT Induction
- The professional learning offer; subject specific support.

**Headteachers identified key aspects of school improvement work which requires further refinement:**

- The quality assurance of School Improvement Partners.
- The role of School Improvement Partners.
- Support for schools which need to be more school directed and led.
- The focus of support i.e. this should be focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The desegregation of support and audit- style activities.
- The over emphasis and focus on current cluster working (as defined by a secondary school and its feeder primary schools).
- Administrative processes e.g. grant planning tool and share point.

**Options Available and considered with Risks:**

The following information describes three potential models to deliver Newport School Improvement functions with strengths and threats. The descriptors and board view of each model have been created to determine a preferred option to conclude this paper.

**Option 1: Remaining in a static position with the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service providing a service to Newport and other local authorities across the region. Features of this include:**

- Governance Issues remaining static (Company Board)
- Common regional protocols and processes across all local authorities
- SIPs for Newport Schools from surrounding local authorities or core sips
- Principal SIP form central EAS
- Governors Support Service provided
- Regional Professional Learning offer to continue Schools to School Support to continue
- Cluster focus to remain in place
- Regional Headteacher Strategy Group to be led by EAS

<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secures ongoing delegation of funding to schools</li> <li>• The current model provides many features in common with revised national school improvement guidance.</li> <li>• There have been many successes for Newport schools linked to this model, particularly where SIPs have been strong.</li> <li>• The local authority has its own School Improvement Lead and Intelligent Client</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider stakeholder feedback shows a desire to review Company Board and consider alternative governance models.</li> <li>• Not all local authorities currently in the model may remain – this may weaken the current EAS staffing structure and resources available for all partners.</li> <li>• Further MTR recommendations link to bespoke systems and processes to support local issue and ongoing dialogue and collaboration with local authorities.</li> </ul>
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<p>(DCEO) to maintain a good working relationship and positive outcomes for the city.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EAS has always ensured that their practice is reflective of national priorities and educational research and has adapted over time in line with regional requests. There is a good track record of positive change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newport Headteacher School Improvement group feedback shows a strong preference for adaptation and change to the current regional model to better suit Newport's Schools, especially in the secondary sector.</li> </ul>

**Option 2: Continue to commission services of the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service, making further changes which represent stakeholder feedback and national school improvement guidance. Features of this include:**

- A review of the Company Board model is considered alongside alternative governance models.
- The Partnership continues to employ current EAS staffing (as much as possible – note if one of the current local authorities exits this will have resource and staffing impact).
- Overtime further changes are made to ensure school improvement services reflect changing times, educational research, national school improvement guidance, local need, the further empowerment of local school leaders.
- Schools delegated funding continues to be secured to allow Headteachers to act as School Improvement Partners and schools to act as 'Leads' for school improvement themes (Partner Schools).
- Overtime, further opportunities are found to employ school improvement staff through Newport City Council, demonstrating co-ownership.
- Newport maximises its own SIPs and schools to schoolwork within the city with more Newport schools supporting other Newport schools (where standards are high, and quality is strong).
- Newport local authority officers and advisory staff (linked to Attendance, GEMS, ALN, Inclusion and Early Years) work seamlessly with school improvement partners to maximise support for schools with SIPS.
- Newport becomes front and central to the branding of school improvement work within the city.
- The Newport Headteacher School Improvement Group remains in place and works collaboratively with the LA on changes to school improvement systems and processes over time.
- More Newport schools become Partner Schools, providing support linked to their specific areas of strength.
- Secondary horizontal working groups become a significant feature of the new partnership with greater opportunities to source and offer support from local secondary schools within the city.
- Cluster working is realigned to 'contextual working groups' rather than traditional feeder schools link.
- Quality assurance processes are developed with school leaders (at all levels) to maximise their opportunities to become Partner Schools.
- A mixed economy of core / casual SIPS is in place with greater opportunities for local authorities to directly employ school improvement staff when vacancies and funding allows.
- A Secondary specific DHT network is established to secure school improvement practices and support leadership development and succession planning.

### Opportunities

- A revised governance approach may reduce some bureaucracy for the EAS and local authorities.
- Working to change and improve over time has less risk of destabilising school improvement and will help to retain high quality staff currently working within the system.
- Schools delegated funding can remain secure.
- Newport can maximise their income generation for Partner School work.
- Secondary schools have a greater opportunity to work collaboratively and reduce duplication and better quality assure provision for subject specific support.
- Working in a local context can be highly beneficial to understanding Newport communities, learners and their similarities.
- Developmental opportunities for school and LA staff are maximise and succession planning within the city is strengthened.
- Newport leaders will feel an improved sense of collaboration and empowerment and ownership around school improvement activities.
- Better alignment between the school improvement service and advisory staff linked to attendance, GEMS, ALN, Inclusion and Early Years, to provide seamless support to school.

### Threats

- The review of the Company Board is uncharted territory which will require a SWOT analysis.
- Potential loss of staff expertise, through EAS staff seeking work elsewhere, at a time of uncertainty.
- Changes in partnership over time may result in destabilisation of a partnership staffing structure over time.

**Option 3: Newport reverts to a local authority led School Improvement Service and offers to collaborate with other local authority partners on a buy back basis. Some services could be purchased from other local authorities e.g. a shared Governor Support Service. The features of this include:**

- All school improvement is designed by Newport and is provided by a Newport core staffing structure. This includes a Head of School Improvement, a Principal School Improvement Partner, a mixed economy of core SIPs and Headteacher SIPs, Professional Learning Lead, Learning, Teaching & Curriculum Lead, Core subject specialists, Lead for Governor Support, additional support for equity, education and wellbeing, learning intelligence and administration. This model would require additional funding of £800k.
- Governance arrangements link to current local authority systems e.g. Cabinet Member, Scrutiny and Cabinet Reporting.
- A Newport Headteachers School Improvement Group remains in place.
- Core staff have multi-dimensional roles to facilitate the LEAG School Improvement Grant T&C's

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff from the EAS may be able to TUPE across to Newport, although specific staff cannot be requested.</li> <li>• Improved alignment between the school improvement staff and advisory staff linked to attendance, GEMS, ALN, Inclusion and Early Years, to provide seamless support to school.</li> <li>• Newport will have autonomy over staffing, functions and processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial penalties linked to disassembling a regional partnership.</li> <li>• The cost of model 3 is beyond the current funding available – this would reduce schools delegated funding or wider council funding.</li> <li>• Council staffing has also reduced over time. Commencing with limited staffing presents a risk for future capacity.</li> <li>• Staff absence could not be covered which may reduce support for schools at times.</li> <li>• Other LA's buying in a service can choose to pull out at any time which can destabilise budgets and resources.</li> <li>• Prior advertising of school improvement staff demonstrates that there is sparsity of professionals. Headteachers are reluctant to leave their posts. Local authority posts have less favourable pay, terms and conditions. Secondment arrangements are unaffordable.</li> <li>• Welsh Government have instructed LA's not to work in total isolation. Buying in one element of a shared service does not maximise opportunities for seamlessness. For example – if Newport were to buy in Governors Service from another local authority, there can be a disconnect between leadership and the quality of Governing Bodies.</li> <li>• Providing services for other local authorities can reduce a local authorities ability to focus on its own local needs. Report writing and quality assurance for other local authorities is time consuming and overly burdensome.</li> <li>• Providing a service for another local authority can deplete resources quickly for example a LA moving into Special Measures would need a significant amount of resource which maybe too challenging to find.</li> <li>• Newport may be responsible for managing and quality assuring HT SIPs outside of their own LA.</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention of high-quality School Improvement Partners is challenging in sufficient numbers; even through recruiting current Headteachers and Core SIPs.</li> </ul>

## Financial Summary (Capital and Revenue)

The Local Authority receives a series of grants, where terms and conditions state that such funding must be spent in line with School Improvement functions.

£1,953, 523 School Improvement Grant income is utilised to support a School Improvement Service for Newport with an additional the local authority annual core contribution of £626, 633.

This provides a total of £2, 580, 156 for the EAS to facilitate a school improvement function. However, currently schools receive a further direct contribution of £1,444, 792 for School-to-School work (e.g. Partner Schools) and for Headteachers to deliver a School Improvement Partner role



## Risks

Risk Title / Description	Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Risk Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	Risk Mitigation Action(s) What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	Risk Owner Officer(s) responsible for dealing with the risk?
Council Funding or Welsh Government Grants reduce overtime	M	M	School Improvement models fluctuate overtime. Budgets for school improvement are closely monitored. Where necessary, efficiency can be made and delivery programmes can be redeveloped, prioritising key themes pertinent to the local authority context.	Chief Education Officer

\* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

### Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The Newport Corporate Plan 2022-2027  
The Newport Education Service Plan 2024-2025

### Options Available and considered

Option 1: Remaining in a static position with the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service providing a service to Newport and other local authorities across the region.

Option 2: Continue to commission services of the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service, making further changes which represent stakeholder feedback and national school improvement guidance

Option 3: Newport reverts to a local authority led School Improvement Service and offers to collaborate with other local authority partners on a buy back basis. Some services could be purchased from other local authorities e.g. a shared Governor Support Service.

### Preferred Option and Why

**Option 2: 'Continue to commission services of the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service, making further changes which represent stakeholder feedback and national school improvement guidance'.**

On the basis that.

- Newport schools are in a stable position and have improved outcomes over time.
- There is scope to meet Headteacher stakeholder views.
- Welsh Government do not want local authorities to work in isolation
- A Newport standalone Advisory Service is more expensive and risks the reduction in schools' income generating through SIP and School to School work.
- That the current EAS model meets new School Improvement Standards and provides economies of scale.

## **Comments of Chief Financial Officer**

This report provides cabinet members with a comprehensive report for options for ongoing support and improvement for Newport schools. There would be financial impacts with moving away from the current model with costs likely to rise and risks around financial sustainability of a model centred on individual LA's model. The recommended option therefore is based in improving the current model and making it more efficient/effective for Newport.

## **Comments of Monitoring Officer**

The relevant legislative background is set out in the report. The Council is required to adopt a mechanism by which school improvement services will be delivered over the next few years. The report sets out three options and lists the benefits and drawbacks of each. The analysis above indicates that the preferred solution would be to continue to commission services from the EAS but with further changes to reflect stakeholder feedback and national guidance. As the report notes, this would include a review of the EAS board and changes to the organisation's governance. However, it should be added that these are matters which are not entirely within the control of this Council and would need to be resolved in collaboration with other participant authorities and EAS itself. This means that it would not be possible to guarantee a given outcome. Nevertheless, it is apparent from the options appraisal above that the proposed solution is more desirable than the alternatives and it would therefore be appropriate for the Cabinet to adopt the recommendations of the Chief Education Officer.

## **Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation**

This report provides cabinet members with a comprehensive report for options for ongoing support and improvement for Newport schools. The report and options given are in line with relevant legislation and guidance. This is inclusive of Newport's Corporate plan and also Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2014.

An FEIA has been completed. At this stage of consideration there are no HR implications.

## **Scrutiny Committees**

This report has not been through Scrutiny Committee. However, Scrutiny Partnerships have assessed an EAS Value for Money report on an annual basis. All comments from the committee have supported the local authority in their commissioning arrangements to date.

## **Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:**

A FEIA on the options is embedded here:



FEIA.docx

The reports content contributes to the Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act and the Wellbeing Goals. The report supports:

- A Prosperous Wales: An effective School Improvement Service supports a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing fair work.
- A More Equal Wales. This report demonstrates that Newport schools will continue to secure appropriate School Improvement support regardless of socio-economic circumstances or context.
- Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. All School Improvement models must include the development of the Welsh language and Welsh culture within schools and settings.

**This report also supports the 5 ways of workings through:**

1. Integration and Collaboration: The report demonstrates how national and local priorities of Welsh Government, School Improvement Services, the local authority and schools work together to meet the wellbeing objectives.
2. Long Term: Good quality School Improvement Services in schools safeguard the long-term needs of schools and its learners.
3. Prevention: This report shows how early intervention and preventative with good quality School Improvement Services support schools and learner outcomes

**2010 Equality Act**

This report does not contain any specific reference to the 2010 Equalities Act.

**Socio-economic Duty**

All options for a School Improvement Service must support learners disadvantaged by poverty and any other earners considered to be vulnerable.

**Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

This report supports the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure. Schools Improvement Services will support schools in English Medium and Welsh Medium settings. All schools (and the local authority) share the common priority of supporting one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and the Welsh Language Measure. Support and professional learning will be provided by the School Improvement Services to enable schools to thrive and meet their recommendations linked to Welsh Language

**Consultation**

The report was completed in consultation with the Chief Executive, Strategic Director and Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years.

**Background Papers**

N/A

**Dated: 4 December 2024**