

Developing a Walsall Learning Consortium

Introduction

At a critical time of radical system change we are faced with a new context of diminishing resources, changing educational landscapes and shifting responsibilities and accountabilities. The national intention is to create a 'self improving' system with increased school based autonomy to provide improved performance.

The Council recognises and acknowledges these changes and will clearly continue to play a key role in supporting both schools and children in Walsall through the delivery of key statutory services and school improvement support. It is also made clear in the Education Act 2012 that councils have are required to perform the role of facilitators and brokers in this new educational climate. Many successful councils have moved to create Learning consortiums / partnerships to ensure this role is developed with Heads to benefit all schools and children.

The intention for Walsall's Learning Consortium is to work within existing communication structures to encourage the widest levels of participation for school to school support, thus providing Headteachers with a solid platform to create enhanced collaboration and consistent delivery.

Purpose

A Walsall consortium would be set up using existing structures (see draft model) to create a unique opportunity for greater collaboration and support which includes council investment to benefit all participating schools to benefit all Walsall children

The main Aims will be:

- Work with the whole family of Walsall schools/academies to ensure that all children are able to achieve their potential and that inequalities are addressed.
- Move forward with all schools in a collaborative manner whilst maintaining individual school autonomy.
- Develop a structure which places Headteachers as key decision makers to provide and strengthen effective partnerships based around school to school support.
- Make best value of council investment with schools providing match funding to create a foundation for engaging best practice experts from local schools or those with regional or national recognition.
- Creating a new model of working which compliments present service delivery and adds value through a collaborative based approach.

Assumptions

This model is based on the premise that the council will make available an additional £500k funding which will be match funded by all or at least the majority of Walsall schools. The match funding mechanism can be agreed by schools forum and could be calculated on a per pupil basis.

The council will be a partner in the Learning Consortium and termly feedback will be given relating to both progress and impact of activities undertaken or support provided.

The present decision making structures already in place will be used to identify and prioritise what support is procured and how funding is allocated. This will be discussed and delivered through WASH, Primary forum and Cluster network (details to be finalised following consultation with Heads).

Other services, businesses and key local groups could become involved when the consortiums have been established and are working effectively. This may include Health, Social Care, Police and other key partners.

Learning Consortium - Benefits

- Strengthen present provision to make it “ Better together for young people in Walsall”
- Stronger collaboration between all Walsall schools achieving added value.
- Vehicle for central procurement/commissioning of services achieving economies of scale.
- Additional investment for schools which demonstrates non statutory commitment from the Council providing benefits for children, young people, parents and schools.
- Head Teachers empowered to make strategic decisions about common issues and priorities.
- Tackling priorities that cross traditional boundaries and may be local, regional or national.
- Minimise bureaucracy and give Headteachers funding to support school based improvements
- Create a Learning Partnership using existing structures to independently of existing school improvement services

Potential risks

The present and future landscape means that councils have diminishing influence and schools have greater autonomy. This may provide great opportunities but could also bring with it the concern that some schools become isolated or collaboratives begin to fragment. The introduction of a learning consortium provides a strong platform for continuing school to school support. This would help provide a structure with funding to help provide opportunities through Teaching schools and other schools to encourage and access the best possible training and support opportunities.

Who will run the consortium?

The consortium **will be run by Headteachers** through the structures already in place, i.e. Primary Forum and Secondary WASH. The council will offer facilitation support in the areas of finance, legal procurement and administration. In the suggested model (see attached) the learning consortium work would be phased based and in two parts Primary/Special and Secondary with two separate Headteacher forums making decisions.

What role will the council have?

It would provide £500K funding split on a per pupil basis (to be match funded by schools) across all Walsall Schools/Academies. The council would provide support as required for finance, legal, procurement and admin. The council would be a partner in any discussions relating to learning consortium activities but not the final decision maker.

How would the funding work?

The LA will provide £500K split proportionately on a per pupil basis across Primary and Secondary consortiums. The council would expect that all or at least a significant majority of schools in both phases would match fund the investment made by the council.

How can this be achieved?

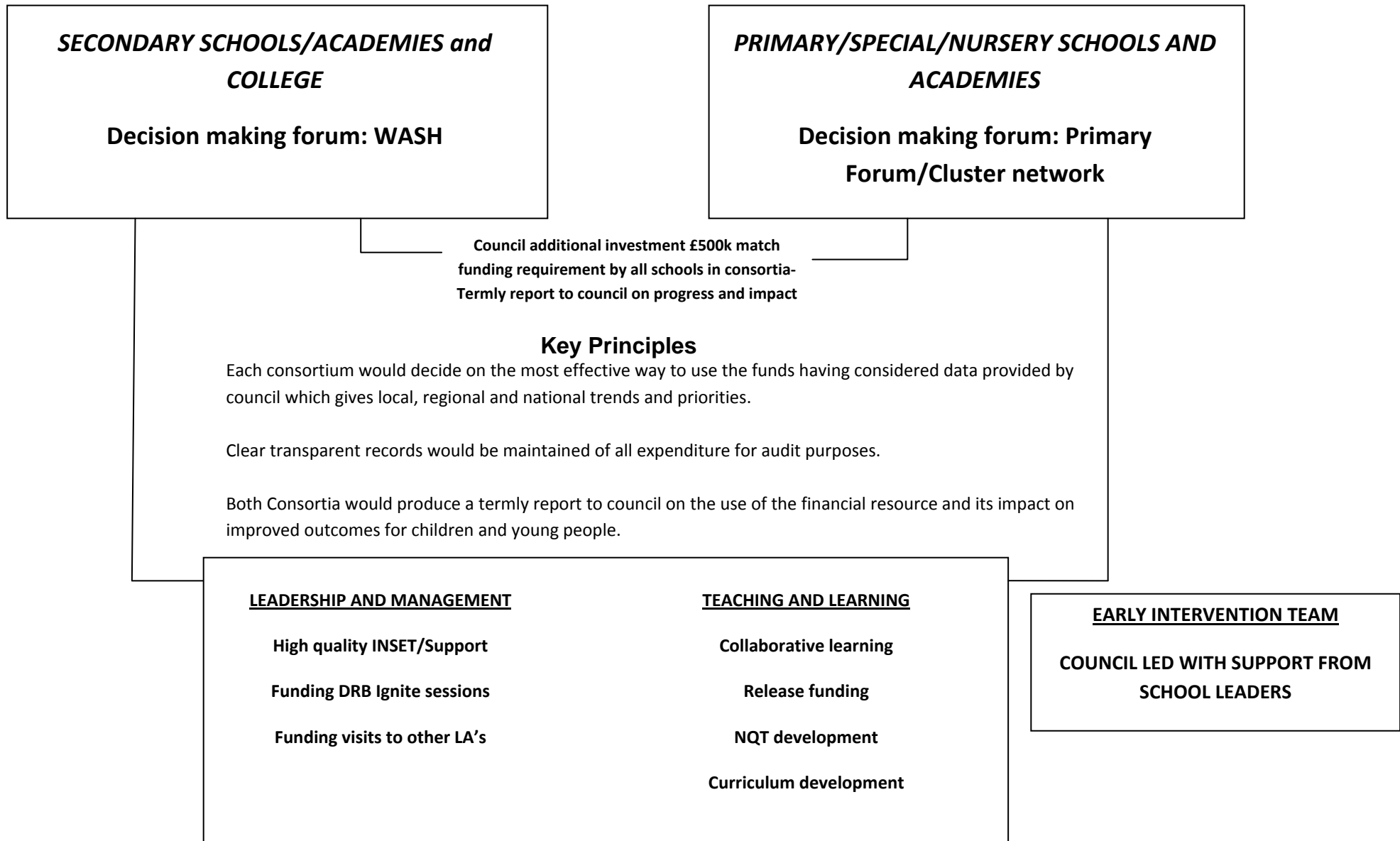
By all/most schools agreeing and signing a Memorandum of Understanding which would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Put in place a **legally binding MOU** between Schools and the Council based on the following key principles:

1. All schools to have the option to be included or represented in the Learning Consortium.
2. Council principle role is to provide initial investment, resources and to ensure value for money. In addition the council could provide corporate support for:
 - i. Finance
 - ii. Legal
 - iii. Procurement
 - iv. Administration
3. Schools principle role is to commission support in order to meet key priorities across Walsall schools in a collaborative school model.
4. Develop a governance model whereby Head Teachers have Strategic decision making authority over the commissioning of support through the Learning consortium through the Executive Board.
5. Create working capital for the Learning Consortia.
 - a. Schools to determine the formula for match funding for the Learning Consortium.
 - b. Council will match fund up to £500k in the first year.
6. An agreement with a mechanism to agree a refresh of arrangements (or not) for future years.
7. Annual review of effectiveness of the Learning Consortium and future suite of services required.
8. Schools supported by the Council will develop a suite/directory of services to deliver the collaborative approach.

Learning Consortium-Final draft model



Key Principles

- Each consortium would decide on the most effective way to use the funds having considered data provided by council which gives local, regional and national trends and priorities.
- Clear transparent records would be maintained of all expenditure for audit purposes.
- Both Consortia would produce a termly report to council on the use of the financial resource and its impact on improved outcomes for children and young people.

Briefing Note

1. Structure- In order to meet the needs of all children and young people of Walsall there will be two boards focussing upon specific phases of a young person's educational journey. These are as follows:
 - Nursery /Special/Primary
 - Secondary/Academy/Post 16 / 6th Form

A structure for each will need to be worked up which ensures the co-ordination of work streams, delegation of funding, monitoring and evaluation of activities etc. This will involve Head teachers from each board and representatives will be selected by colleagues to represent them.

2. Area of Focus-The areas identified should be fundamental firstly to ensuring school improvement and secondly to schools/academies working collaboratively together. The two specific areas are:
 - Teaching and Learning
 - Leadership and Management
3. Funding-The local authority wish to work in partnership with all educational providers. To this end funding will be set aside to each of the boards to enable development activities in the 2 areas to take place. There is however the expectation that this will be match funded by the 2 executive boards. For example £200k + match funding of £200k will give each board a sum of £400k to plan and engage in activities.
4. Processes-All schools will be able to be part of the board for their phase of education. There maybe the opportunity to develop some cross phase activity work perhaps linked to transition e.g. writing Y6 to Y7. Schools could meet in clusters, Heads report back at Heads forum for each board. Both boards would be expected to feedback regularly at cluster network meetings on developments-these are currently held half termly. Actions and impact will be reported to the Executive Board

5. Examples of activities

Teaching and Learning -

- Curriculum meetings for subject co-coordinators /SENCOs/Assessment co-ordinators
- High quality INSET from high profile consultants: Tim Ryland / Alan Peat / Chris Quigley/Andy McDowell
- Collaborative learning-development of learning walks sharing knowledge and practice
- Providing release funding for above

Leadership and Management -

- Funding DRB ignite sessions
- Funding leadership visits to other LA's-Wigan, Liverpool etc
- Funding inspirational leadership speakers
- OFSTED surgeries/Andy McDowell

6. Local Authority involvement: As well as promoting the development of these 2 executive boards, the LA would engage in ensuring statutory services are met and with regards to this will create an Early Intervention arm that will support identified schools. This may be formed in partnership with the 2 boards by brokering /facilitating key support from teachers and leaders within Walsall schools.