

REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVES (RICS) INTERIM REVIEW

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out findings of an interim review of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). The overall aim of this review was to explore how RIC establishment had been taken forward in each region.
- 1.2 This review took place in mid to late 2018, nine months after the RICs were jointly announced in October 2017 and six months after they produced their initial improvement plans. The review therefore covers 'phase one' of RIC development and planning. The research will inform and support further development of the RICs and provides a baseline for future review.
- 1.3 Overall, stakeholders felt that RICs were in their early days of operation, and that the timetable for setting up structures and developing plans had been tight. Stakeholders also felt it was important to recognise that phase one RIC activity has largely been taken forward without additional resources. The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed.
- 1.4 It is recommended that Community Services Committee:
- a) Note that the main finding from the report indicate that the work of the RIC's require to be further developed particularly in relation to school engagement making an impact at school and classroom level.
 - b) Endorse the continued involvement of Argyll and Bute Education Service within the Northern Alliance; and approve the involvement of the service in taking forward the joint work within the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan to ensure this impacts in all schools.

REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVES (RICS) INTERIM REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out findings of an interim review of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). The overall aim of this review was to explore how RIC establishment had been taken forward in each region.
- 2.2 There are six RICs, involving between three and eight local authorities. They are:
- I. **Forth Valley and West Lothian Collaborative** - involving Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian Councils;
 - II. **Northern Alliance** - involving Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney and Shetland Islands Councils;
 - III. **South East Collaborative** - involving Edinburgh City, East Lothian, Fife, Midlothian and Scottish Borders Councils;
 - IV. **South West Collaborative** - involving East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway Councils;
 - V. **Tayside Collaborative** - involving Angus, Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils, and
 - VI. **West Partnership** - involving East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils
- 2.3 Argyll and Bute is part The Northern Alliance RIC and is committed to improving the educational and life chances of children and young people.
- 2.4 RICs bring local authorities together, alongside Education Scotland, to secure excellence and equity in education. They facilitate collaborative working across the region, developing different ways of working together to build excellence and equity in the Scottish education system
- 2.5 This review took place in mid to late 2018, nine months after the RICs were jointly announced in October 2017 and six months after they produced their

initial improvement plans. The review therefore covers 'phase one' of RIC development and planning. The research will inform and support further development of the RICs and provides a baseline for future review.

2.6 The review involved in-depth discussions with:

- regional stakeholders - including all six regional leads for RICs, all six Education Scotland regional advisors, and 12 wider regional stakeholders such as colleges, universities, parents, Directors of Education and elected members;
- national stakeholders - including COSLA, ADES, SOLACE, Education Scotland and Scottish Government, and
- school staff - including 39 head teachers and 8 other teachers (largely principal teachers) at 42 schools across Scotland.

2.7 Argyll and Bute Education Service through involvement of 2 schools took part in this report.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Community Services Committee:

- a) Note that the main finding from the report indicate that the work of the RIC's require to be further developed particularly in relation to school engagement making an impact at school and classroom level.
- b) Endorse the continued involvement of Argyll and Bute Education Service within the Northern Alliance; and approve the involvement of the service in taking forward the joint work within the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan to ensure this impacts in all schools.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 KEY FINDINGS/ PROPOSALS

4.1.1 Key findings

Overall, stakeholders felt that RICs were in their early days of operation, and that the timetable for setting up structures and developing plans had been tight. Stakeholders also felt it was important to recognise that phase one RIC activity has largely been taken forward without additional resources. The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed.

4.1.2 **Governance and planning**

Regional and national stakeholders were broadly content with the governance arrangements established for RICs. They felt that arrangements had been set up in a way which suited each region, and which recognised and linked with local authority decision making structures.

Some national stakeholders felt that it was a real achievement to have all local authorities signed up to the RICs, with appropriate structures and early plans in place.

The key factors felt to enable successful governance included:

- buy-in from senior officers and elected members;
- clear links between partners, schools and elected members, and
- a clear focus on overall intended outcomes.

In most cases, regional and national stakeholders believed that there was a shared vision and aims for the RIC at senior officer level within participating authorities. However, a few regional stakeholders were unsure about the rationale of the RIC concept, and there was some lack of clarity about the concept of additionality and what it meant in practice.

Overall, regional and national stakeholders felt that it was a significant achievement to have produced phase one RIC plans within the timescales.

Planning processes were felt to work well where:

- plans were informed by data and research;
- each partner had a clear understanding of their priorities, and
- there was a focus on enhancing rather than duplicating activity.

Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that RIC plans were well connected to national priorities. However, regional and national stakeholders felt there was more work to do on connecting the plans with school priorities. The schools involved in the research largely felt positive about the connection between school, local, regional and national priorities and plans.

Most regional and national stakeholders felt that more needed to be done to develop ways of meaningfully measuring progress, including strengthening the sharing, collating and analysis of data across the region.

4.1.3 **Stakeholder engagement**

Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that more work needed to be done to engage stakeholders and schools more widely, raising awareness and involving them in planning and participating in RIC activity.

Engagement with schools and development of the offer to schools were key priorities for phase two RIC activity. However, most felt strongly that the main initial point of contact and support for schools should continue to be the local authority, with a need for clarity about the role of the RIC and how it fits with and complements existing support.

4.1.4 **Support and joint working**

Regional stakeholders felt that the support offered by regional advisors was good and helpful. Regional stakeholders were interested to see how the regional offer of support from Education Scotland would develop in the future.

While the availability of resources to support phase two of RIC activity was welcomed, most regional stakeholders felt that the early phases of RIC development were challenged by limited resources and tight timescales. Most regional stakeholders thought the approach by Scottish Government felt top-down, which was hard to reconcile with the local, bottom-up approach required for RICs.

4.1.5 **Impact**

So far, regional stakeholders believe that the RICs have encouraged joint working between officers in different local authority areas. RICs have also tested approaches to engaging with and supporting schools, often through small scale tests of change and targeted work with schools across different workstreams.

All stakeholders indicated that it would take time to see an impact. However, some school staff gave very positive early examples of sharing best practice, skills development and influencing practice around areas of leadership, self-evaluation, moderation of assessment, improvement methodologies, parental engagement, maths, early literacy and equality.

Overall, school staff were very positive about the idea of learning from one another across the region, and welcomed opportunities for networking, building skills and developing their practice.

4.2 The work of the Northern Alliance RIC positively supports the Education Strategy key themes of Our Children, Our Future.

4.3 **NEXT STEPS**

4.3.1 Argyll and Bute Education Service will be involved with the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative in the following key areas:

- Sustaining Rural Education;
- Digital Learning;

- Systems Improvement and Leadership;
- Emerging Literacy Programme;
- Maths and Numeracy Programme, and
- Poverty and Closing the Rural Attainment Gap.

4.3.2 These areas are identified as workstreams within the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative and have a lead. The developments within each of these workstreams will support the engagement of staff at school and classroom levels.

4.3.3 Engaging with schools was a key priority for regional stakeholders, with many focusing on enhanced communication and engagement as part of their phase two work.

4.3.4 School staff felt it was important to continue raising awareness of the RIC among all school staff and make sure that school staff had the capacity to engage in joint working, both through resources and smart use of technology to reduce travel time and costs.

4.3.5 Some head teachers were motivated by the potential for joint working and sharing practice through the RIC. However, some cautioned that it was important to understand that changes are not going to be instant.

4.3.6 RICs were also planning to further develop their governance arrangements, for example through developing mechanisms for sharing costs and resources effectively, and widening membership to include a wider range of partners.

4.3.7 Regional stakeholders indicated that longer term, their vision largely remained as set out in their phase one RIC plans. Overall, there remained a focus on creating spaces to innovate, share practice and learn, in an empowered environment.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Overall, stakeholders felt that RICs were in their early days of operation, and that the timetable for setting up structures and developing plans had been tight. Stakeholders also felt it was important to recognise that phase one RIC activity has largely been taken forward without additional resources. The availability of resources to support phase two plans was welcomed.

5.2 Regional, national and school level stakeholders all felt that more work needed to be done to engage stakeholders and schools more widely, raising awareness and involving them in planning and participating in RIC activity. Engagement with schools and development of the offer to schools were key priorities for phase two RIC activity. However, most felt strongly that the main

initial point of contact and support for schools should continue to be the local authority, with a need for clarity about the role of the RIC and how it fits with and complements existing support.

- 5.3 Argyll and Bute Council Education Service is committed to partnership working within the Northern Alliance RIC. Continued engagement with all stakeholders is a priority area and will be a focus for session 2019-2020

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy In line with national Education policy
- 6.2 Financial At this point in time there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.
- 6.3 Legal At this point there is no direct legal implications.
- 6.4 HR The Northern Alliance is currently finalising its workforce plan. The workforce plan will seek to ensure equitable resource allocation, develop and implement protocols for joint working and provide greater clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the Northern Alliance will continuously review workforce allocation.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: The key findings task the Northern Alliance with providing equity of access to the Northern Alliance developments.
- 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics None
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty None
- 6.5.3 Islands The Collaborative approach being developed across the Northern Alliance will support our Island and school communities. There are opportunities to work with other authorities with islands for example, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles.
- 6.6 Risk Not supporting the Northern Alliance's work outlined in the Regional Improvement Plan could create a negative reputational risk for Argyll and Bute Council. The Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan supports the delivery of the LOIP through the delivery of the NIF and the National Governance review. The Collaborative's Plan support education outcomes and Getting It Right For Every Child [GIRFEC] delivery across the authority. Failure to support the further development of the work of the

Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative may cause reputational damage for Argyll and Bute Council and put into question the organisation's commitment to raising attainment and closing the gap. The risk is low.

- 6.7 Customer Service The Northern Alliance seeks to ensure that consistent improvement support is available to the entire region. The Northern Alliance is committed to ensuring staff have access to the practical improvement support they need, when they need it. A risk is that this message is not clearly communicated to staff and there is a lack of understanding amongst schools regarding the role of the Northern Alliance.

Douglas Hendry
Executive Director of Customer Services

Anne Paterson
Head of Education: Lifelong Learning & Support
Chief Education Officer

Councillor Yvonne McNeilly
Policy Lead for Education and Lifelong Learning

For further information contact:

Anne Paterson, Head of Education: Lifelong Learning & Support/Chief Education Officer

Argyll House, Alexandra Parade, Dunoon, PA23 8AJ.

Email: anne.paterson@argyll-bute.gov.uk Telephone: 01546 604333

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Regional improvement Collaboratives (RICs) Interim review

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/regional-improvement-collaboratives-rics-interim-review/pages/4/>