

NORTHERN ALLIANCE: PHASE 3 REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report shares the progress achieved in the Northern Alliance Phase 2 Regional Improvement Plan and outlines the priorities which are to be taken forward in the Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan.
- 1.2 The Northern Alliance is a Regional Improvement Collaborative [RIC] between eight local authorities, across the north of Scotland: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar [Western Isles], Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands. The Northern Alliance is committed to improving the educational and life chances of children and young people.
- 1.3 Each RIC has to produce a Regional Improvement Plan. The Regional Improvement Plan is tasked with outlining how the RIC intends to reduce inequalities and target improvement in the four national priorities from the National Improvement Framework [NIF]. The Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan for the Northern Alliance was submitted to Education Scotland on 2 September 2019.
- 1.4 The Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan was approved by the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Forum and was presented to the Northern Alliance Convention of Convenors at their meeting on Friday 11 September.
- 1.5 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:
- Note the progress made in the Phase 2 Plan;
 - Note the contribution of Argyll and Bute Officers to the Phase 2 and Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plans, and
 - Endorse the Northern Alliance Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report shares the progress achieved in the Northern Alliance Phase 2 Regional Improvement Plan and outlines the priorities which are to be taken forward in the Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan.
- 2.2 The Northern Alliance is a Regional Improvement Collaborative [RIC] between eight local authorities, across the north of Scotland: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar [Western Isles], Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands. The Northern Alliance is committed to improving the educational and life chances of children and young people.
- 2.3 Each RIC has to produce a Regional Improvement Plan. The Regional Improvement Plan is tasked with outlining how the RIC intends to reduce inequalities and target improvement in the four national priorities from the National Improvement Framework [NIF]. The Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan for the Northern Alliance was submitted to Education Scotland on 2 September 2019.
- 2.4 The Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan was approved by the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Forum and was presented to the Northern Alliance Convention of Convenors at their meeting on Friday 11 September.
- 2.5 Officers of Argyll and Bute Education Services have made significant contributions to the implementation of the Phase 2 Plan and the development of the Phase 3 Plan.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:
- Note the progress made in the Phase 2 Plan;
 - Note the contribution of Argyll and Bute Officers to the Phase 2 and Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plans, and
 - Endorse the Northern Alliance Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 The Northern Alliance Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan can be accessed at Appendix 1 and the Phase 3 Plan also includes a summary of progress made throughout the Phase 2 Plan.

4.2 The Phase 2 Plan was significant in scale and ambition and the challenges of recruiting people to lead on specific work streams was significant given that we did not receive our funding allocations from Scottish Government until December 2018. Given time for adverts to be placed and interviews to be held, leads were not identified for all areas of work until March 2019 and the progress report on the use and impact of the funding had to be submitted to Scottish Government by 31 July 2019. This had an impact on the Northern Alliance's ability to truly add value as a collaborative, although there have been some significant successes in areas such as Emerging Literacy and Learning Estates where really positive collaborative working has been demonstrated and where real value is being added to the work of individual local authorities.

4.3 Officers of Argyll and Bute Education Services have made significant contributions to the implementation of the Phase 2 Plan in relation to:

- Leadership Workstream
- Quality Assurance
- Emerging Literacy
- Curriculum
- Languages 1 +2
- Self Evaluation
- Numeracy
- Secondary Head Teacher Group
- National Improvement Framework Conference

Argyll and Bute Officers have taken a lead role in the Early Learning and Childcare Workstream. An Officer is seconded to lead by providing support and challenge across the 8 Northern Alliance Authorities. The Head of Education: Lifelong Learning and Support is the sponsor for this Workstream.

The Heads of Education in Argyll and Bute have lead roles within the Northern Alliance Director's Forum providing strategic direction for the implementation of the Regional Improvement Plans.

4.4 The geography of the Northern Alliance and the lack of ability to release staff from schools to work together due to staffing constraints have also had an impact on the pace of improvement and whilst technology has been used to great effect across the Alliance, it has not always proved reliable. Furthermore, some of the local authorities within the Alliance have different permissions with regards the IT systems which can be used. For example, not

all local authorities allow the use of Office 365, which offers key tools for collaboration.

4.5 At a meeting of the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Forum in June 2019, it was agreed that the Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan needed to be more streamlined and more focused on what would make a clear and demonstrable difference to individual teachers and schools and be more closely aligned to the National Improvement Framework (NIF). A questionnaire was sent to all teachers across the Northern Alliance to ask what areas of support they would be looking for from the collaborative in order to add value to their work. A copy of the survey responses can be accessed at Appendix 2. Furthermore, an analysis of each of the eight NIF plans from the constituent local authorities was undertaken to look for the areas of greatest commonality where the Northern Alliance could add the greatest value.

4.6 The Northern Alliance Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan will have four key work streams, which are;

- Curriculum
- Raising Attainment and Closing the Gap
- Sustaining Education
- Leadership

4.7 The Northern Alliance has also submitted a funding request to the Scottish Government for additional resource to support the collaborative activity to be undertaken.

4.8 Education Scotland has been restructured and the support/development functions of the agency have been split. The support/development functions have been aligned to the RIC areas and a Northern team is in place, led by a Senior Regional Advisor. This team will work with the Northern Alliance local authorities to deliver the Phase 3 Plan. The Education Scotland Northern team will also be available to provide bespoke support for individual local authorities as required.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Northern Alliance Regional Improvement plan has been accepted by Education Scotland and will form the work for session 2019/20 for the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative.

5.2 Officers from Argyll and Bute will take forward the plan within the Northern Alliance regional improvement collaborative and at Authority level.

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 island authorities 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.

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For Further Information:

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Regional Improvement Plan

Appendix 2 – Survey Response Summary