ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 10 JANUARY 2017

CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW: EMPOWERING TEACHERS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This report highlights the opportunity to respond to a consultation on national governance arrangements for Scottish education. It seeks committee's contribution to Angus Council response to this consultation.

1. **RECOMMENDATION**

   It is recommended that the Children and Learning Committee:

   (i)   Endorse Angus Council's response to this consultation as outlined in section 5 of this report.

   (ii)   Consider and provide any amendments or additions to Angus Council's response.

2. **ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/CORPORATE PLAN**

   This report contributes to the following local outcome(s) contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

   Our children and young people are confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1   The Scottish Government's 'Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education: A Governance Review' is seeking views on how education in Scotland is run, including who should take decisions in relation to the education of children and young people, and how funding can be made fairer. It also asks about the support teachers and practitioners need to do their jobs well and how this can be improved. The Scottish Government aims to hear from as many people as possible.

3.2   Education is the defining mission of the Scottish Government with the commitment to deliver excellence and equity for all children and young people - raising standards for all and closing the educational attainment gap between the children from the most and least deprived areas in Scotland.

3.3   The governance of the education system has not been reviewed since devolution and this current review is seeking views on how education – from early years to secondary schools – is run to ensure that it delivers excellence and equity for all children and young people.

4. **CURRENT POSITION**

4.1   This consultation closes on the 6th January. Given this timescale, Angus Council has submitted a response to this consultation. This response is outlined in section 5 of this report.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1   *What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?*

Partnership working – formal and informal approaches to working together across and within agencies and authorities generally works well in Scotland. Key relationships between local authorities and organisations are overall strong.

Shared policy agenda – from practitioners to policy makers, Scottish education is signed up to improving outcomes for our children and young people. The co-ordination and co-operation at local level is vital to facilitate this.

5.2   *What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence & equity for all?*

A lack of focus and support on issues of Additional Support Needs. Little focused resource is targeted at supporting the growing number of children and young people with additional support needs.

A greater focus and air time on issues that have less impact on the achievement of children – need a national focus on learning, quality of teaching and high expectations.   References to 'fulfil potential' arguably do the opposite to what is intended; leading to the perception that children have potential that can be 'filled' up and is then gone, rather than the reality that everyone always has potential that can be stretched and grown with the right learning environment and intervention.

Different and competing monitoring and measurement arrangements and planning cycles.

Vast national guidance with a limited coherent overview. Timing of guidance and mixed messages from Education Scotland. The growth of national bodies like SCEL whilst capacity at local level to manage increased demands these organisations make diminishes. Teachers' professional relationship with the SQA.

5.3   Comment on the principles that underpin approach to reform:

No one can argue with the principles of equity, excellence and empowerment. These are however open to individual interpretation and it is unlikely that all the stakeholders in Scottish education mean the same by the use of these words. 'Closing the gap' has become unhelpful shorthand to describe the work of schools. Breaking the inter-generational poverty gap should be the shared priority of all agencies working with families and communities. Nothing short of a whole systems approach will impact on the poverty related attainment gap. It is a coherent approach across all agencies including government that will lead to the movement of the attainment distribution curve. The Governance Review should not focus too narrowly on schools. We need to acknowledge the wider system within which our children develop and achieve.

5.4   *What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children's learning and school life being taken at school level?*

The majority of schools have effective systems in place to take decisions about learning at school level. In Angus, focused work has taken place over recent years to provide schools with a broad flexible framework of guidance in which individual schools can shape their delivery to meet the needs of their context. We emphasise that schools are different and need individualised ways of working in order to meet the needs of their school community. That said, the vast evidence-base of educational research should not be ignored. It is clear which interventions work best. Working within a local authority of connected schools under broad guidance that encompasses this evidence-base ensures that schools have the support and challenge they need to shape their individual offer.

Increased autonomy at school level could lead to increased levels of bureaucracy potentially diverting school managers away from their priority focus of learning and teaching. There

needs to be an emphasis on professional leadership development to support any greater autonomy. There are already challenges in recruiting headteachers and this key role must remain attractive to able candidates. Our experience is that headteachers require regular personnel advice to manage staffing situations and can lack experience in this area.

There requires to be clarity on where the responsibility for monitoring outcomes lies.

Some schools may be subject to disproportionate parental pressure with potentially adverse impacts on inclusion for children with Additional Support Needs or behavioural difficulties.

There is a need to ensure that the collective focus for improving Scottish education rests squarely on the need to create cultural change. A long time could be spent on reviewing and recreating structures with limited or no impact on learners.

5.5   *What services & support should be delivered by schools?*

Any system must be sufficiently flexible to allow for the strategic management of staffing, for example the transfer of surplus staff. Currently effective systems exist to manage the movement of staff between schools in one local authority. Autonomy for staffing creates a risk of staffing competition developing between schools leading to wage inflation and competitive advertising of posts. In Angus we have effective whole authority approaches to recruitment which involve our headteachers. Fully devolving staffing arrangements to individual schools will create an increased administrative burden. This is especially the case in small schools where headteachers also have a considerable class teaching commitment. The creation of any new or additional posts would require careful control and risk management and responsibilities in relation to equal opportunities need to be safeguarded. Arrangements also need to retain an overview of the experience of students and probationers to ensure they have a quality placement and secure induction to the profession. This requires local as well as administrative knowledge.

5.6   *How can children, parents & communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life?*

All schools are striving to find the most effective methods of involving their parental community. This should be bespoke to each school community. We see no need to legislate this. It is already recognised by schools and parent bodies that those parents actively involved in the life of schools do not always fully represent the range of parents and families in the school community. The creation of more formal processes in this relationship may polarise this issue.

Children and young people should continue to be supported to have the greatest voice in driving school improvement.

Universities need to have closer working relationships with local authority employers and schools. This partnership must be respected as mutually beneficial for pathways of progression in the teaching profession.

5.7   *How can the governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare particularly in remote and rural areas?*

Local Authorities, with appropriate funding, are best placed to provide early learning and childcare in all communities. Recent national developments have arguably created a separate entity for early years provision. It would be helpful to realign policy and practice requirements for the 0 to 18 age range.

5.8   *How can effective collaboration amongst teachers & practitioners be further encouraged & incentivised?*

Schools need to be part of a bigger whole. Schools should be concerned about all of Scotland's children and young people, not just those under their roof. Schools are not discrete establishments and need to work in collaboration. It is clear that teacher collective efficacy has the biggest impact on achievement. This should be embedded as an expectation from initial teacher education. The research on effective collaboration of teachers should be used as an evidence-base. There is a clear role for supporting school leaders to ensure that this happens and finding creative ways to free up teachers to do this well. The lack of supply cover provides a real practical barrier to effective collaboration but it must be borne in mind teachers already have sufficient non-contact time for such activity.

If schools have greater autonomy from local authorities in the future, they should have less autonomy from each other. There should be a clear focus and expectation on the collaboration that works:

- Collective autonomy
- Collaborative inquiry
- Collective responsibility
- Collective efficacy
- Collective impact

5.9 *What services & support functions could be provided more effectively through clusters of Schools?*

It is unclear what is meant by 'clusters' of schools. If this refers to a secondary school and associated primaries, then there are examples of very good work that already happens in this forum. There are however other forms of clusters that better meet the needs of individual schools. Increased governance of clusters, for example the need to produce an improvement plan may well diminish their effectiveness. Again the research on effective collaboration needs to be implemented – teachers should work together with other teachers on similar issues that they think similarly about. If a 'cluster' mainly becomes a forum for the dissemination of resources it is likely to become a barrier to effective collaboration.

5.10 *What services or functions are best delivered at regional level? This may include functions or services currently delivered at local or national level.*

There are issues of duplicate reporting in the finance and resource area which could be rationalised, saving work and making governance more efficient. There is scope to streamline and rationalise the array of national inspection and audit organisations. The role of Education Scotland should be clarified. The roles of Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and Audit Scotland should be analysed to ensure they all add value, not duplication or contradiction, to the outcomes that are being sought.

The role of GTCS is seen as vital for maintaining the health of the profession. It should however have a clear function for overseeing the maintenance of registration arrangements for teachers. There needs to be an analysis of how SCEL is contributing to this national picture of organisations and how its offer is distinct from others.

A definition of what is meant by "regional level" is required including clarity on statutory roles before any judgement on what could be delivered at, or by, such a term can be made. There may well be scope to facilitate professional networks and leadership development at a regional level as well as some aspects of quality improvement.

5.11   What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?

Where there have been examples of formal associations of Scottish local authorities these have worked well at officer level, but difficulties were encountered at the political level. There is concern within elected members that there could be an erosion of local democracy.

Possibilities for increased sharing do exist in the area of Additional Support Needs provision, but these need to be guided by shared expectations. Possibilities exist for psychological services teams to work on a regional basis.

The NHS in particular requires to be involved to ensure its role in integrated children's services is consistent to holistic, partnership approaches.

Clarity is needed on who would be the employer in any regional arrangement. If HR functions are centralised in any regional arrangement then there must be an assessment of the residual capacity in corporate departments to support other services. It is possible to centralise certain administrative HR functions, but the need to retain local knowledge is also significantly important. Lessons should be learned from the regionalisation in FE which has had some adverse impact on learners.

5.12   What services or support functions should be delivered at national level?

This needs careful consideration in light of the focus of this consultation on the devolution of power and proposed autonomy for schools. Individual proposals would have to be carefully analysed.

5.13   How should governance support teacher education and professional learning in order to build the professional capacity we need?

This needs to be central to any approach going forward. Practical issues such as funding and teacher cover need to be addressed to make teacher professional learning fully operational. A careful balance of addressing individual teacher learning needs and wishes alongside an analysis of what makes a difference to children and young people is needed.

5.14   Should the funding formula for schools be guided by the principles that it should support excellence & equity, be fair, simple, transparent, predictable and deliver value for money?

There is only one public pound and it is essential that finance is used effectively to add value. Fair funding is an essential feature of an equitable system alongside early childhood, health & care, wellbeing in school, curriculum for equity and early intervention.

5.15   *What further controls over funding should be devolved to school level?*

There needs to be a coherent approach to risk assessment and risk management in relation to staffing issues. For example, how exigencies such as maternity leave would be met, and covered, financially? Any revision of DSM arrangements should retain the current flexibilities for carry forwards.
Devolved Management of Resources Committees in every school should make their decisions public for local accountability and elected member and parental scrutiny.

5.16   *How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?*

Education systems don't improve when there is standardisation. They do better where there is customisation: a focus on collaboration; trust-based responsibility; collective autonomy and equity.

5.17   *Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the governance of education in Scotland?*

Yes - It is our view that this consultation is framed around leading questions, limiting the nature of our response. It is therefore difficult to respond without knowing some more detail of what is being proposed. It would be helpful to have greater clarity on the drivers for the changes proposed and how these contribute to the delivery of an overall educational improvement strategy. It is also noted that this consultation includes no information about the legal responsibilities that currently lie with Councils.

Considerable thought needs to be given to transition to any new arrangements with adequate lead time to allow proper planning and implementation.

To support teacher professionalism there should be a review of non-contact time in line with other successful systems. Any developments in this area would require present issues of teacher shortage to be resolved in order, for example, to ease the supply cover situation.

Scotland needs a systemic approach to improvement that takes into account local context with a clear purpose to make a difference

6.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1   There are no current financial implications arising from this report.

NOTE: The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:

'Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education: A Governance Review' Scottish Government, 2016

https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/empowering-schools/a-governance-review

REPORT AUTHOR: **Pauline Stephen, Head of Schools and Learning**
EMAIL DETAILS: **Childrenandlearning@angus.gov.uk**