

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

March 2023

“Shaping the future” programme with schools - update on the approach

Executive summary

This report works through a timeline of activity in relation to how as a Council we have worked with the system to shape the future. It covers initially both contextual information and key activity that has taken place between the Summer 2022 and the Spring of 2023. It then moves on in more detail to share the principles and approach of our new school improvement framework for maintained schools before concluding with a short narrative on the Wiltshire Learning Alliance.

Context – A timeline of actions

1. Summer Term 2022

As a Local Authority in the Summer Term 2022 we engaged with all our school leaders on the future landscape of education in a ‘Shaping the Future’ meeting. This was set in the context of the government White Paper that was launched on 28 March 2022 which outlined a number of measures including:

- Schools offering a minimum school week of 32.5 hours by September 2023
- Ofsted inspecting every school by 2025, including the backlog of ‘outstanding’ schools that haven’t been inspected for many years
- £100m investment to put the Education Endowment Foundation on a long-term footing so they can continue to evaluate and spread best practice in education across the country
- By 2030 all children benefiting from being taught in a school in, or in the process of joining, a strong Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)

The last bullet point here is significant as it placed a timeline in which Local Authorities, Regional Director’s teams, the DfE and MATs were then needing to work to as a fully academised system.

As part of this, the DfE created an opportunity for Local Authorities to register an interest in establishing a Local Authority Enabled Multi-Academy Trust. Wiltshire Council along with other Local Authorities put in significant time and resource in developing a strong registration of interest, including securing external legal advice as part of this. At a regional level the registration of interest was taken forwards, along with one other in the South-West to the DfE nationally; it was recognised as a strong application.

2. Autumn Term 2022

In the Autumn Term of 2022, a number of actions were taken forwards with our maintained schools to then navigate the mixed landscape of maintained schools and academies. The activity can be summarised as follows:

- Development of a maintained architecture strategy group to look at models of school organisation including collaboration and academisation
- Development of a working group of Head teachers and officers to review and then draft a new School Improvement Framework for maintained schools for 2023-2026

- Resources to support schools seeking to either collaborate locally or strengthen existing partnerships
- Resources to support schools that were actively pursuing the route of academisation including a guide to all our MATs
- Development of Academy Roadshows in the four localities that were designed to provide a safe space for schools that were looking at MAT options. They could hear from MAT leaders through a single venue opportunity rather than having to approach individual MATs

In the autumn term, the local authority supported school leaders and governors, in a mixed landscape of maintained schools and academies, to make the best decision for their school.

- The Local Authority was committed to ensuring that all maintained schools were in control of their own destiny and recognised that we had strong schools that were maintained and strong schools that were academies
- There was no expectation that schools should join MATs but appreciated that this might be an option that some school leaders and governors wished to explore

In the second half of the Autumn Term it was announced by the DfE that the Schools Bill would not progress in the third session of parliament. However, officials still planned to prioritise pushing through legislation for some “priority” proposals in separate bills. One of the key elements of the White Paper, the timeline for all schools to join a MAT, was therefore no longer going to be legislated on. There remained though a clear line from the DfE that the ambition was still there that all schools would benefit from being part of a MAT. So, although the timeline had been removed the intention remained the same.

3. Spring Term 2022

In February we received notification from the DfE that the LA Established MATs would no longer be taken forwards centrally. There had been significant interest in this type of model from both our maintained schools and also our Standalone Academy Trusts (SATs).

Our position as a Local Authority though remains unchanged in terms of supporting all schools within the system. What has changed is the timeline around academisation and therefore some work has needed to adapt as a result. It was anticipated that groups of schools would convert over the next 7 years but the level of conversion may not be as high as originally anticipated now.

In the short term there will be less pressure potentially on our internal services such as legal, property and HR in supporting a number of conversions. There is likely to continue to be a small number of schools choosing academisation as their future pathway alongside those that are required to academise due to an Ofsted inspection outcome.

The local authority’s role therefore continues to be one of providing the right support and guidance to our maintained schools moving forwards and this will include:

- Implementing a new and ambitious School Improvement Framework for maintained schools that operates within a mixed landscape and secures better outcomes for our children and young people

- Providing schools with guidance and support in navigating academisation to ensure that if they choose the MAT route they have the best information to hand

In addition, as a system, we will continue to work through the Wiltshire Learning Alliance (WLA) on our strategic priorities.

The School Improvement Framework 2023-2026

4. The new School Improvement Framework for 2023-2026 has been developed by the Head of School Effectiveness, with Regional Leads in education (RIEL) and serving Head teachers.

5. The central premise of this **school improvement framework** is to outline how the local authority will discharge its **duty for the academic years 2023-26** in relation to improving the quality of education in our maintained schools. It is set within the context of **de-delegation**, whereby maintained schools are de-delegating funds to support the delivery of school improvement across Wiltshire maintained schools and therefore as key stakeholders, school leaders should be involved in the scoping of the model. It aims to recognise the diversity and autonomy of the Wiltshire school system whilst defining the role of the local authority, outlining statutory responsibilities and arrangements to support school improvement acknowledging that the responsibility of school improvement lies with each school. It will be annually reviewed in line with school forum maintained school decisions on de-delegation.

6. Central to the delivery of school improvement in Wiltshire is **the ‘Family of Schools’ model** which sets an expectation on schools to work collaboratively and in partnership. The model accepts that for most Academies this is delivered through an agreed Trust approach and that for our maintained schools this will be developed through relationships and partnerships that are being developed both within and across the regions. The premise of schools working in families is that no school gets left behind.

7. The new framework references strong and effective hub collaboration as a core to school improvement. At the heart of the model is the Regional Lead (RIEL) who will have oversight of the hubs that operate within their region, below this structure the School Improvement Advisor SIA/s then sits central to the working operation of each hub. It is recognised that some hubs may cut across the geographical borders of a region. In the context of maintained Secondary and Special schools, these will operate in the context of school improvement as one hub.

8. The role of the SIA is to be a coach and facilitator who can quickly identify the very best practice that exists, builds confidence amongst Headteachers and senior leaders through an approach of challenge and support. They will be outward facing, building connections within groups of schools and beyond; collaborating to verify best practice.

Diagram 1: The Regional Model

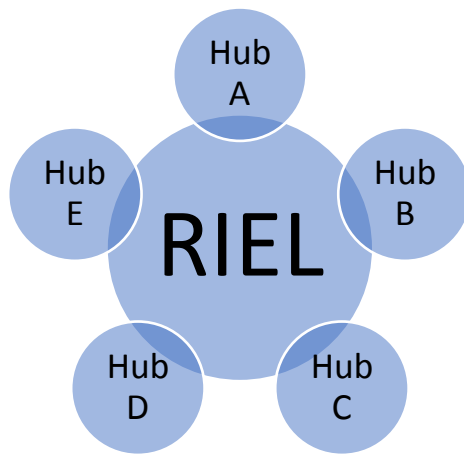
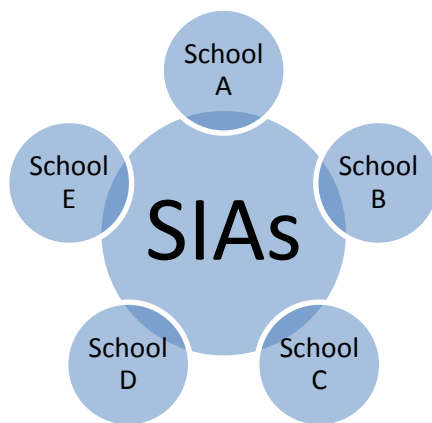


Diagram 2: The Hub Model



9. Schools will work within hubs that are not necessarily geographical and there is no specificity of size. There will be one/two SIA allocated to each hub (depending on the size and needs of the Hub) and an allocated RIEL. Each hub will identify a hub chair – who will be one of the head teachers from the hub.

10. Standalone Academy Trusts (SATS) and small MATs can also be actively involved under this model; they will need to trade with the Local Authority to purchase days, but the model is intended to be inclusive of all schools. There is a difference between our larger established MATs that are able to discharge their functions around school improvement and those that are small or standalone that may wish to be part of this model.

11. For Local Authority maintained schools we recognise that school capacity in the context of being able to give or receive support can be quite fluid and over the course of time is likely to change depending on a range of circumstances. We have recognised it is important therefore to have a model which acknowledges this and enables for capacity to be developed and utilises the strengths that exist within the system. The language as defined in the new framework talks about the level of capacity that is either needed or could be provided by a school; with an emphasis on quality assuring best practice in schools that are secure. It also allows for schools to both give and receive capacity. The focus starts with what schools can expect to receive as part of this model and then focuses on the criteria for potential capacity

giving and receiving. There are four basic levels of capacity which are agreed in partnership with each school. These levels would determine different approaches.

12. As all maintained schools are de-delegating it is important that they can see the practical difference that the new School Improvement Framework will make on the ground. For schools in need of capacity this is about intensive support and regular accountability meetings and gauging the right support whether from central services, external partners or through school to school support. We recognise the need to be robust in our processes to ensure that no maintained school is judged inadequate or receives a second consecutive requires improvement judgement moving forwards.

13. For those schools that are secure and retaining strong outcomes, the offer is about quality assuring aspects of best practice, involvement in networks, action research and opportunities to engage with strong performing schools both within the County and in other Local Authority areas. We believe that through this we can see a greater number of schools retain or gain an outstanding inspection judgement.

14. The intention is that every maintained school is actively engaged in a hub by September 2023.

Wiltshire Learning Alliance (WLA)

15. Underpinning the work of the system is the **Wiltshire Learning Alliance (WLA)** which continues to serve all schools across Wiltshire. It comprises of stakeholders from across the education sector, including representatives from the maintained and academy sectors, partner organisations, officers and elected members. At the heart of this is the vision, 'Wiltshire Learning Alliance: working together for the best possible life chances for every child and family'. This means that all Alliance members will be:

- Outward looking and forward thinking.
- Learn from each other, seeking and sharing best practice.
- Collectively accountable for improving the life chances of all or children and young people.

The **WLA** meets to support the whole system of improvement within Wiltshire and includes membership from maintained schools, academies, LA Officers and system leaders. Now in its second year of operation the WLA continues to work to both promote the vision and develop some strategic actions to realise this at school level. In 2022-2023 the strategic areas of focus for the WLA have been:

- Leadership and Governance
- Disadvantaged Learners

With a strong school improvement framework and approach, we see this contributing more broadly to the work of the WLA moving forwards.

Conclusion

16. The last 12 months have seen significant changes take place nationally through the government White Paper and subsequent decisions thereafter. The Council remains committed to all schools and continues to work with leaders and governors on their chosen pathway. The ambitious school improvement framework for the next 3 years will provide the necessary support and challenge; opportunities to strengthen the system through the Wiltshire Learning Alliance will continue to be developed. There are some overall improvements in Ofsted outcomes and with this approach we will expect to see this pattern continue.

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