



# Case studies: Innovative local authority school improvement approaches

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## Annex 1 - Exemplars of local authority of the future

**Model 1** – The traditional model, where local authorities commission and provide most of the services from their own teams, although all local authorities commission from their schools and other providers to some extent. Most local authorities in this category provide services for all their schools, and not just those causing concern, although they charge to varying degrees for their services.

### Case Study 1 : Wandsworth : 81 Schools

#### Brief description of approach to school improvement:

A strong local authority with an inspection team, highly regarded by schools, that can demonstrate the impact of their work and with a relatively low cost (see below). Clear about their role, setting vision and expectations, monitoring school performance (gathering intelligence from hard and soft data) and acting promptly to commission, broker or provide support before problems become too serious. To ensure this, it plans to retain a SIP type structure, though much more flexibly operated, available to all schools including academies. Further, the local authority intends to ensure effective succession planning, continue to challenge good schools as well as satisfactory and at-risk schools, brokering in support from Wandsworth schools incorporating National College programmes, and from other providers and supporting other schools in maintaining an '*upward trajectory*'. The local authority is clear, that with increasing school autonomy, arrangements need to have the support of schools. Wandsworth also seeks to strongly influence future school provision through its academies and free schools commission. See the key feature below.

#### Cost of provision (excluding National College programmes):

- £1.1m for a core team, halved from 2010/11.
- Additional Intervention funding of £165k.

All funded by the local authority.

#### Key Feature:

Wandsworth has set up an academies and free schools commission with elected member, school and parent representation, chaired by Baroness Perry, to take a strategic view of school provision, including proposed academy and free school sponsors. A good example of maximising community influence in a very sensitive area and seeking to ensure that quality of educational provision and the local democratic process strongly influence any Department for Education decisions.

## Case Study 2 : Stockton : 74 schools

### Brief description of approach to school improvement:

Key to Stockton's success, as with other local authorities, has been a highly regarded local authority Education Improvement Service supplemented with equally highly regarded externally commissioned school improvement advisers. The offer is based upon a pragmatic and innovative use of school advisers which is described below. This is complemented by the use of National and Local Leaders in Education and the development of school-to-school support. The Campus Stockton partnership brand and ideal is key to the approach of Stockton. This is led by a Campus Stockton Board, a representative group of headteachers who work with the local authority officers to define services to schools and provide robust monitoring and challenge to local authority services. It has the potential to develop into a formal school-led model if that is what the partners want. The Board embodies the shared belief that Stockton will only be successful if partners work together as articulated by the Chief Executive: *'We are committed to developing and strengthening 'Campus Stockton' because we believe we will have the greatest impact on our children and young people through a strong and dynamic partnership.'*

#### Cost of provision 2011-2012:

- School Improvement Service and support across the local authority, as per Section 251 statement, line 2.1.9, £1.192 million funding.
- Additional Intervention funding from DSG granted through School's Forum, £136k.

### Key Feature: An innovative School Improvement Adviser programme

The Education Improvement Service (EIS) has developed a very focussed programme of support for schools that are underperforming; this involves collaborative reviews of the schools to identify the strategies needed to raise standards and a short, intense intervention plan, to provide urgent support for school improvement. A further collaborative review benchmarks progress and most schools then go into short exit plans or become self-sustaining in their school improvement

EIS has taken the opportunity to tailor a flexible service around the provision of School Improvement Advisers. Each school has access to at least three sessions which they can shape to best meet their needs. In doing so, schools (through leadership teams and governing bodies) can take ownership of the programme of professional support and commission a bespoke package to reflect:

- their own school improvement priorities;
- the changing profile of the school;

- the timing of their school self-evaluation cycle; and
- the changing face of staff development needs.

The programme that is devised draws on best practice from other schools and providers so that the School Improvement Adviser is often accompanied by additional support and expertise on visits to share and disseminate successful practice. The consequent analysis is used for corroboration of the school's self-evaluation against the Ofsted framework and provides evidence for performance management and data for the governing body and local authority scrutiny.

Headteachers recognise the success of this approach and all but one have requested support to move them forward in their school improvement regardless of their current judgement, i.e. supporting satisfactory schools to good, good to outstanding and maintaining the excellence of outstanding schools.

**Model 2** - Where local authorities commission services to support schools. For some local authorities this commissioning is almost entirely from their own schools. Most of these local authorities seek to provide for all their schools, not just those causing concern.

### **Case Study 3 : Hertfordshire : 519 Schools**

#### **Brief Description of approach to school improvement:**

Hertfordshire's school improvement approach has built upon a longstanding emphasis on school autonomy (going back to the 1950s); a focus in Hertfordshire on the self-improving school (assess, plan and do), peer-to-peer support and challenge for over 10 years. The local authority believes that peer-to-peer challenge is effective because they broker the schools involved and act as a back-up if it is needed. There is a strong tradition of schools buying services from the local authority (£20m's worth in 2010/11). 90% of primaries buy back the full offer and all secondary schools buy at least some of the 'HIP' offer, (Hertfordshire's version of the School Improvement Partner). This has meant that the move to set up a social enterprise company The Hertfordshire Learning Trust, owned 80% by schools and with the local authority as a 20% partner, has been a fairly natural step with school-to-school support and challenge as the main method of ensuring a self-improving system. The core team which provides a refined HIP type offer enables the local authority to engage with all schools including academies. See below the key feature for more detail.

#### **Cost of provision (excluding National College programmes):**

Core Team cost funded by the local authority has been reduced from £9m to £6m for next year. This has been topped up for intervention work by DSG funding of £600k.

#### **Key Feature: The Hertfordshire Learning Trust**

'The Hertfordshire Learning Trust' which is planned to go into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013, will be owned by all schools, including academies. It is responsible for:

- setting the vision and strategy for the education service;
- delivering all the local authority statutory school improvement functions, including categorisation of where schools are, undertaking interventions, ensuring effective challenge and support with local authority continuing to enable;
- supporting a self-improving system incorporating National College programmes;
- selling services to schools; and
- is able to sponsor free schools or academies.

The local authority is planning to provide significant pump-priming for the company.

## **Case Study 4 : Warrington (87 schools) and Halton (63 schools)**

### **Brief Description of approach to school improvement:**

Warrington and Halton have formed a joint venture company with SERCO called 'Aspire' to take over some local authority staff and offer services to all their schools. Aspire has been operational since September 2011. Any profits are split three ways. The local authorities have committed to ploughing profits back into Children's Services priorities. With little money, in particular the loss of National strategy funding for consultants, they saw this as the best way to provide schools with the high level and quality of services that they were used to. The two local authorities only have three academies between them and services are highly valued. Aspire is based in Warrington. The partnership with SERCO has had the benefit of bringing in an experienced provider and preserving jobs of valued local authority staff who would otherwise have faced redundancy. It is hoped that Aspire will be able to part fund these posts by selling services within Halton and Warrington and to other local authorities and schools and discussions have begun. More details of the offer are set out below. Warrington believes that it is working well with 65% of schools choosing to buy into SERCO.

Both local authorities retain a core team which provides the core local authority functions of commissioning, including monitoring Aspire's service quality, monitoring school performance especially those at-risk or only satisfactory and statutory support and intervention. They undertake some intervention work themselves and commission the rest from Aspire. The relationship with Aspire is overseen by Operational and Strategic Management Boards supplemented by the Aspire Director attending the half termly school support meeting.

#### **Cost of provision (excluding National College programmes):**

- Core Team:
  - Warrington: A core team of 5 FTE Senior Advisers. This is funded by the local authority. They receive re-imburement from Aspire via credits with the Learning Bank if they provide services through them, for example, advising on headteacher performance management.
  - Halton: A core team of 6FTE. This is funded by the local authority.
- Additional Intervention funding:
  - a) Warrington retains a small budget for “schools causing concern”.
  - b) Halton has deposited some intervention funds into the partnership. This money will be used to support schools and settings in adverse categories or schools experiencing temporary difficulties.

#### **Key Feature: Setting Up a Joint Venture Company**

Schools have the option whether or not to use Aspire. Warrington and Halton feel that this is very important that the schools take responsibility for who they choose to provide services even if they are subject to intervention. Like the New York district model, schools are given the earmarked funding to spend on the provider they choose. Each school has a nominated link with Aspire and they can subscribe at three levels; bronze, silver or gold. Schools causing concern are expected to buy at the gold level. School-to-school support was an important part of the planning for the offer, with schools being given credits for services they offer. This is in its early days. Price and service offer flexibility have been critical as schools get used to paying for what was free before and Aspire have needed to make adjustments. A simpler subscription model for 2012-13 is proposed. The joint procurement of SERCO by the two local authorities has not yet led to other kinds of joint commissioning.

Warrington and Halton clearly feel that this has worked well for them and for their schools, enabling the retention of experienced staff and providing an additional choice for them. That is the most important point. School-to-school support which was intended to be a key feature is in its early days, as is further joint commissioning by Warrington and Halton. One of the key questions is whether Aspire are successful in persuading other local authorities and schools to buy into this approach to ensure viability.

## **Case Study 5 : Wigan : 134 schools**

### **Brief description of approach to school improvement:**

Another very striking model. School-to-school support is the model adopted by Wigan to meet both the statutory local authority functions and to enable a self-sustaining school system. A very small, highly valued local authority core of two plus the head of service who has other responsibilities beyond school improvement. They work through eight consortia: five primary and three secondary (note that the phases are treated separately) who are responsible for the performance of their schools. The focus of the local authority team is:

- monitoring school performance largely based on data;
- production of annual school performance profiles based on methods agreed with schools and discussed with them. On this basis schools are categorised to identify low performing/underperforming schools which support a school- to- school approach driven through primary and secondary consortia;
- co-ordinating communication across eight consortia;
- contracting with consortia and providing additional funding to undertake interventions for schools jointly identified as in need;
- as a fallback, to provide challenge where a consortium feels unable to do so effectively or procure someone else to do it on their behalf as some do;
- quality assuring consortia services and help develop school -to-school support system;
- helping to broker academy sponsors/ primary federations;
- maintaining a directory of good practice.

### **Cost of provision: (Excluding National College Programmes)**

- Core Team of two plus part a Head of service (pro rated).
- Additional intervention funding of £300k (£200k primary and £100k secondary).

### **Key Feature: School consortia-led self-improving system**

The School Improvement Consortia are responsible for the improvement of all member schools and for delivering interventions. They can draw on NLEs, LLEs and Wigan Leaders of Education and the intervention budget. A consortia representative sits on the School Improvement Board which holds the consortia to account, agrees the school categorisation, identifies areas of strength and weakness and disseminates the success. The local authority is responsible for running the Board, but would only overrule the heads if there was a disagreement over their statutory responsibilities. Otherwise it would be up to the heads. It is therefore quite close to Model 3 with heads leading. The local authority reports that the model has developed rapidly and there is great enthusiasm for it. What is striking is its simplicity and radicalism - it really puts heads at the heart and it is very low in cost. Wigan would also say that the contribution through the National College programmes and 'From Schools For Schools' pump-primed by the Department for Education, are critical to making the system work.



**Model 3** – A local authority that has handed the commissioning role to an overarching partnership body.

### **Case Study 6 : York : 68 schools**

#### **Brief description of approach to school improvement:**

The York Education Partnership (YEP) - discussed further below -oversees school based education policy and commissions all school improvement. It is a whole system approach for all schools including academies. Key to delivery is the 'Hub' made up of highly regarded local authority staff which is responsible for: monitoring; school performance; the impact of interventions in school, (incl. academies where Department for Education agree); for providing support for maintained schools below floor targets and those at-risk; for allocation of resources to vulnerable schools from the commissioning budget; for development of school-to-school support; and for the deployment of the City of York partners, NLEs, LLEs and SLEs. The role of the Teaching Schools can be accommodated and add value in this arrangement but precise processes as to how, are still being explored. York is clearly Model 3. There are links to all schools that want it, in addition to the schools causing concern. 95% of schools bought in in 2011/12 and this has given confidence for the YEP to top-slice the Dedicated Schools Grant to establish an enhanced commissioning budget without an individual subscription route being necessary for 2012/13.

#### **Cost of provision: (Excluding National College Programmes)**

- Core Team, the 'Hub', currently costs £1.2m reducing to £750k. Funded by the local authority.
- Additional commissioning funding of £320k to support intervention and wider system support funded from the DSG in agreement with schools. Other funding comes through NLEs etc.

#### **Key Feature: York Education Partnership**

York, following a thorough consultation with schools, set up York Education Partnership to provide a collective vision for education in York and to respond to the desire amongst schools for a sector led approach to running a self-sustaining system. It is in the early days (two meetings) but it is generating a lot of enthusiasm. Schools are in the majority.

Secondary schools have six seats and primary eight (reflecting their relative share of the school population) representing clusters. There is an independent chair, a highly respected former Director Education from Scotland which the DCS regards as very important. Further and higher education institutions are also represented. An elected member and local authority officers are present but do not have a vote. It strengthens coherence and reduces bureaucracy by subsuming the Schools Forum, the 14-19 Partnership and the Admissions Forum. The YEP is responsible for the York education vision, the school improvement

strategies, including intervention and school provision issues.

It is early days but York is articulating an educational vision for the City, maintaining a collective and integrated approach, owned by all schools including two academies, to the key challenges of providing a financially sustainable whole system approach to school improvement, school admissions and school provision. They have recognised the need to engage education leaders more directly in strategic decision-making. They have recognised that decisions about funding, previously the preserve of the Schools' Forum, cannot be dealt with in isolation from the city's vision and strategy for education. Camden and Sheffield have followed a similar approach.