

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services
DATE	25 January 2018
REPORT TITLE	Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/18/010
DIRECTOR	Helen Shanks (Acting)
REPORT AUTHOR	Aisling MacQuarrie

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT:-

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to:
- Provide information on the work of the Northern Alliance, a Regional Improvement Collaborative for the north of Scotland;
 - Endorse the work of the Northern Alliance; and
 - Seek support from the Committee for the emerging Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Committee:
- a) Endorse the continued work of the Northern Alliance; and
 - b) Support the initial (phase 1) Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan; and
 - c) to note that phase 2 of the Improvement Plan would be reported in Autumn 2018.

3. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES / OTHER HEADINGS AS APPROPRIATE

3.1. Northern Alliance: Regional Improvement Collaborative

- 3.1.1 In June 2017 the publication Education Governance: Next Steps document set out the Scottish Government's proposals for an empowered school led system. The proposals recognise that such an empowered school led system will require excellent, accessible improvement support which is aligned to the National Improvement Framework [NIF] and informed by performance data. To this end, the Scottish Government established six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) with the aim of bringing together a range of professionals with a relentless focus on supporting teachers, and a range of other staff on how provide support to improve children and young people's

attainment. The Northern Alliance is a 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.

3.1.2 The Northern Alliance is committed to improving the educational and life chances of children and young people. Since its inception the Northern Alliance has sought to develop a culture of collaboration, which has resulted in the sharing of expertise in a range of areas. By building on the Northern Alliance's collective experiences as a RIC it is confident it will make a meaningful difference to the lives of children and young people.

3.1.3 Each RIC has been asked by a joint Steering Group, consisting of the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Local Government, to produce its own Regional Improvement Plan. Each Regional Improvement Plan has to indicate clearly how the RIC intends to reduce inequalities, target improvement in the four national priorities from the NIF. Importantly, it is also recognised that a degree of flexibility is required to allow RICS in their Regional Improvement Plans to reflect appropriately the needs and improvement priorities of the schools they support.

3.2. Priorities

3.2.1 To this end, the high level priorities outlined in the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan are aligned to the aims of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the NIF (see Appendix A). This initial plan covers the period up until the end of the school year in 2019 although this may be subject to change following the outcome of the Scottish Governments consultation on the Education Bill. The priorities outlined in the Regional Improvement Plan highlight the aims of the NIF, however, the activities and outlook of the Northern Alliance are far broader. The Alliance champions a child and family-centred approach to address the achievement gap and to drive improvement.

3.3. Timescales

3.3.1 The development of the plan is an iterative process. The Regional Improvement Plans are to be developed in phases. The initial Regional Improvement Plan (Phase 1) is to be submitted to the Chief Inspector of Education by 30th January 2018 for feedback. The second phase will develop Phase 2 of the Regional Improvement Plan further and provide greater detail through additional analysis and consultation. Phase 2 of the Regional Improvement Plan is expected to be submitted to Education Scotland for sign off in Autumn of 2018.

3.4. Ongoing Development

3.4.1 As a first step in the process, the draft Regional Improvement Plan (see appendix A) evidences the strengths of the Northern Alliance's collaboration

and provides a meaningful starting point to further enhance and enrich the work of the Alliance.

- 3.4.2 We will add to and amend the Regional Improvement Plan as we learn from what works well, where change is needed and importantly to react to feedback and requests from schools and teachers to aid their work with children and young people.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. At this point in time there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Education Bill consultation – Regional Improvement Collaborative

- 5.1.1 The legislative underpinning of the RICs is the subject of consultation as part of the wider Education Bill. In particular, the potential for a requirement set out in legislation that local authorities participate in RICs. The Scottish Government advise that the outcome of the consultation process will inform how RICs continue to develop.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

6.1 Financial:

- 6.1.1 The Northern Alliance has secured funding from the Scottish Government of £385,000 for 2017/2018 and 2018/2019. The funding will enhance the work of the Northern Alliance to strengthen resources that support learning and teaching.

- 6.1.2 A financial risk is the financial pressures on Aberdeen City Council and the other local authorities, which may limit the capacity of the local authority to resource the collaborative improvement priorities. To this end, the Northern Alliances is committed to sharing best practice to mitigate against these risks. This is remains a medium risk.

6.2 Employee:

- 6.2.1 Lack of workforce capacity to deliver the Regional Improvement Plan. The following actions will be implemented to mitigate against this risk:
- clarity of roles and responsibilities
 - develop equitable resource allocation
 - develop protocols for joint working
 - continuous review of workforce allocation

The risk remains low-medium.

6.3 Customer / citizen:

6.3.1 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. To minimise this risk the Northern Alliance has developed a website that is user friendly and profiles the work of the Northern Alliance. The website also makes available all guidance and materials. The Northern Alliance will also consult with schools, teachers, parents and children to engage with them and respond to their needs. The risk remains low.

6.4 Environmental:

6.4.1 It is unlikely that there will be a negative impact on the environment as a result of the Northern Alliance's Regional Improvement Plan. This risk is low.

6.5 Technological:

6.5.1 The Northern Alliance covers a vast area, 58.4% of the landmass of Scotland. Given the geographic reach of the Alliance it frequently utilises I.T and digital technologies to overcome distance and enable all officers and partners to participate in meetings /workshops irrespective of geography. It is also a cost effective option as it reduces travel costs. There is a low risk that if the IT infrastructure is not effective it will hinder involvement and delay the pace of change. The risk is low.

6.6 Legal:

6.6.1 Legislative changes to the Education Bill becoming substantially different may have implications for RICs. To mitigate against this the Regional Improvement Plan will be flexible to accommodate any new duties. The risk remains low.

6.7 Reputational:

6.7.1 Not supporting the Northern Alliance's work outlined in the draft Regional Improvement Plan could create a negative reputational risk. The Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan supports the delivery of the LOIP through the delivery of the NIF and the National Governance review. The Northern Alliance's Regional Improvement Plan supports educational outcomes and GIRFEC delivery across the city and region. Failure to support the Northern Alliance's Regional Improvement Plan may cause reputational damage for Aberdeen City Council and put into question the organisation's commitment to raising attainment and closing the gap. The risk is low.

7. IMPACT SECTION

7.1 Economy

7.1.1 Implementing improvement in the four priorities set out in the plan will help break the cycle of deprivation and support the developing the young workforce. These changes will positively impact on our economy and support the theme of Aberdeen Prospers.

7.1.2 The Northern Alliance will also share best practice and innovation solutions to overcome shared challenges such as teacher recruitment, which in the long term should have a positive impact on our economy. This will support the LOIP themes of Aberdeen Prospers and Children are our Future.

7.2 People

7.2.1 Successful implementation of the phase 1 of the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan will lead to improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. There will be a positive impact on children, young people and families including those with protected characteristics, which will support our work in ensuring that people are resilient, included and supported when needed.

7.3 Duty of Due Regard

7.3.1 Central to the work of the Northern Alliance is the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the shared aim to achieve equity in educational outcomes, with a focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap. This is of particular interest to the Northern Alliance given the challenges of both rural and urban poverty experienced by the region. The high level priorities outlined in the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan are aligned to the aims of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the NIF. A number of workstreams outlined in the Regional Improvement Plan directly support the above-mentioned priorities. The Emerging Literacy, Numeracy, Maths Attainment and Modern Foreign Languages programmes contribute to directly improving attainment. The Regional Improvement Plan offers the Northern Alliance an opportunity to continue to grow and improve on education and children's services issues through shared expertise, scale and capacity.

7.4 Place

7.4.1 The Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan takes account of local need and will have a positive impact on individual communities across the Aberdeen City. It also encourages the sharing of best practice across the north of Scotland region, which will be to the benefit of Aberdeen City.

7.5 Technology

7.5.1 The Northern Alliance is committed to using innovative technological solutions to reduce the need for officers to travel for meetings across the north of

Scotland. The use of video conferencing technologies is a more effective use of resources – ensuring the better use of officer time and reduces travel overheads.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Regional Improvement Collaborative: Guidance on Developing Regional Improvement Plans [Scottish Government, December 2017]

Education Governance: Next Steps – Empowering Our Teachers, Parents and Communities to Deliver Excellence and Equity for Our Children [Scottish Government, 15th June 2017]

9. APPENDICES (if applicable)

Appendix A: Draft Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan

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