Covering Paper to support the CSC Draft Business Plan 2016/17

1. The paper provides a draft of the CSC business plan for the 2016/17 year. It extends our thinking based on discussions with the Strategy Group and Directors about our vision and what the long term delivery model for the Consortium should look like. It builds on the SER outcomes in defining improvement priorities for the forthcoming year and proposes a draft revenue budget to fund the business plan.

2. We do not yet have completed targets for the region, as not all schools have yet completed their target setting process (due to be agreed with governors by 31st December) although the vast majority have and Challenge Advisers are working to ensure they are sufficiently ambitious. We will provide a draft target setting summary by the time of the Joint Committee meeting.

3. The business plan proposes a 5% cut to the Consortium revenue in line with cuts likely within the Local Government settlement. We have yet to receive information about the future levels of grant funding and so whilst we will seek to increase proportion of grant which is delegated, the business plan does not include further details on grant budgets.

4. We will bring to the March meeting of the Joint Committee will bring the final Business Plan with budget, targets and final planning framework. It will be supported by approved and costed action plans under each improvement plan with intended impact.

Questions for Members of the Joint Committee

- **Does the vision and areas for development within the vision represent your view of the future development of the Consortium and the self improving school system?**

- **Do the improvement priorities represent fully enough the areas which need strengthening from our own self evaluation report?**

- **Do the actions appear sufficiently linked to the improvement priorities and represent what is needed in the region?**

- **Are you content in principle with the 5% cuts to the Consortium budget which is proposed in thus business plan (see also finance paper to the Joint Committee)?**

- **Would the Joint Committee like to receive by correspondence an interim version of the Business plan by the end of January including final provisional grant and revenue budget and targets?**

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Central South Wales: A vision for a networked learning school system

Introduction

The region of Central South Wales is the most populous region of Wales. It covers over 400 schools and a third of the school age population of Wales - 135,000 school aged children.   It is also the region that contains the highest number and proportion of children living in poverty.

Reaching from the post industrialised valleys in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and north Bridgend to the more affluent coastal regions of the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff the capital city, the success of schools in this region hold the key to future economic and social success of Wales.

Historically the region as a whole has underperformed against schools elsewhere in Wales. However since 2012 the region has seen steep and sustained improvement at every level and in every authority.
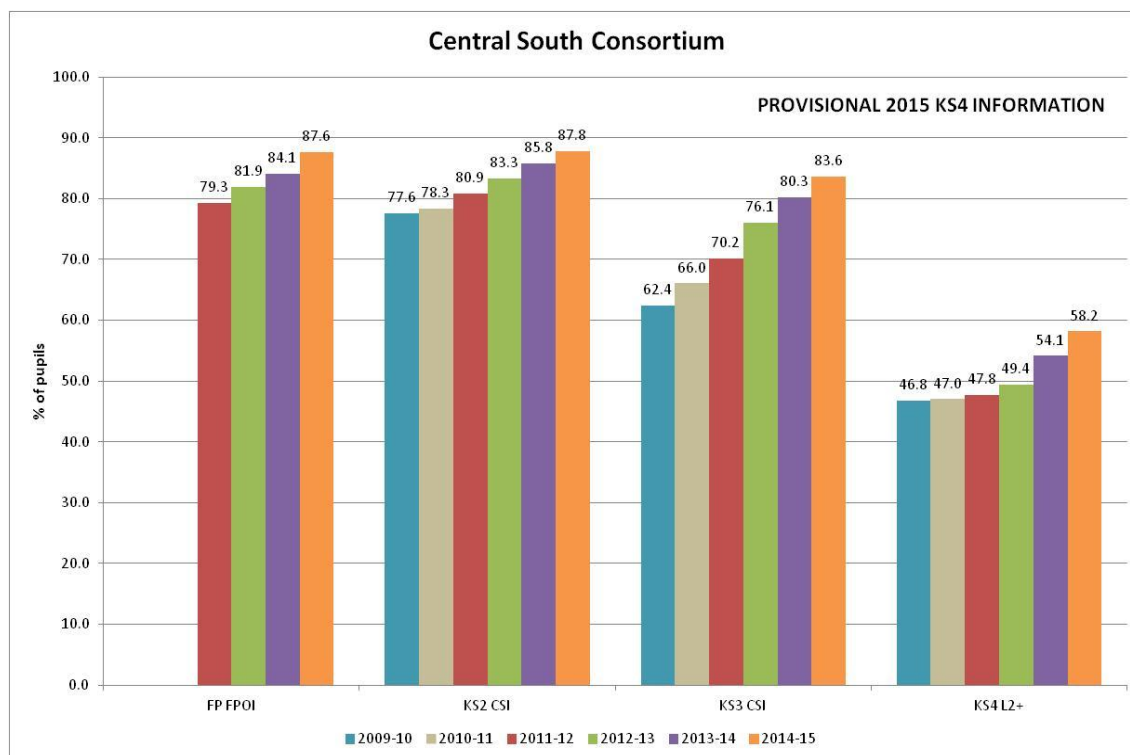
In 2015 pupils in schools across the Central South region again improved their outcomes significantly, setting a three year consistent upward trend of improvement at rates faster than the national rates of improvement. This was particularly evident at the Level 2+ indicator of 5x A*- Cs including English/Welsh and mathematics.

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Level 2 Threshold including English/Cymraeg and mathematics
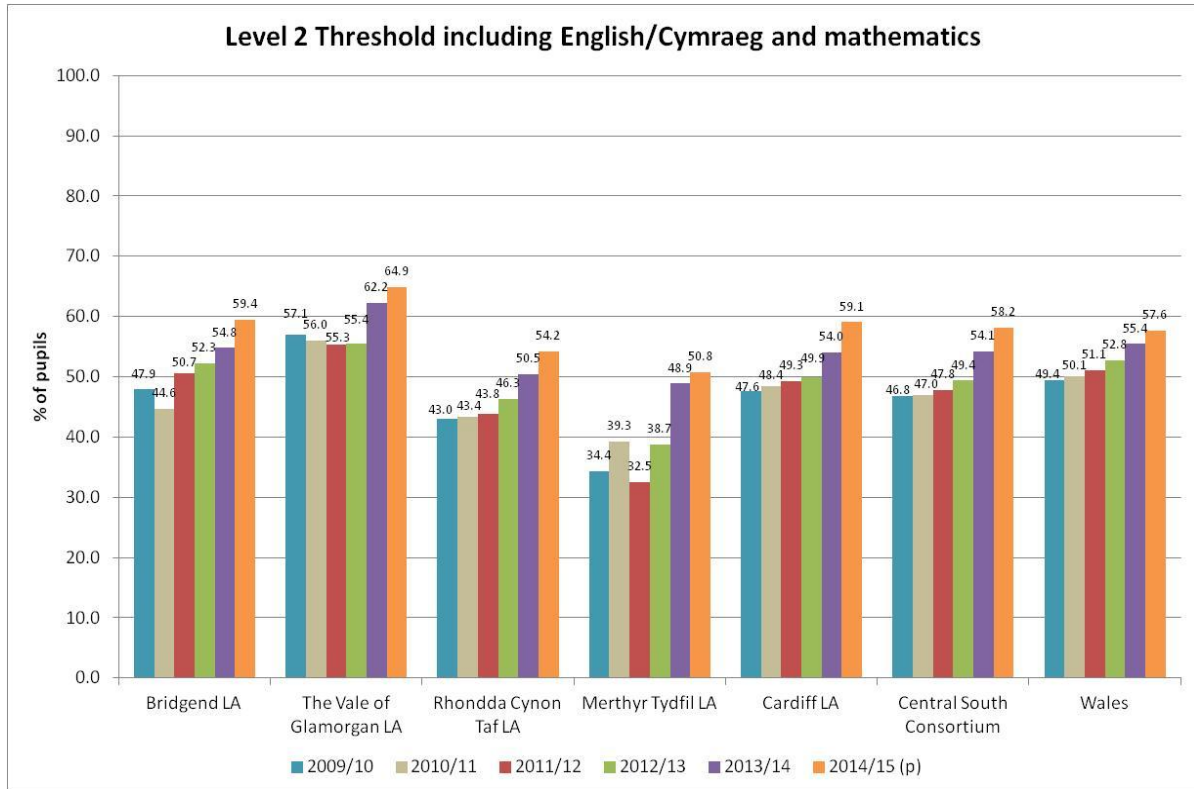
Inspection outcomes are also indicating improvement including in leadership and teaching and the outcomes of vulnerable children are improving faster than the average, closing, but not fast enough, the gap between those living in poverty and their peers.

The region, previously amongst the worst performing in Wales, now sits at or above the national average at every indicator.

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Our vision: To build a self improving school system

Our ambition as a region is for schools in the Central South region to provide the best education for children across Wales and can rival their counterparts across the UK.

To do this we want to shift school improvement from a model that is dependent on central support to a by schools for schools model, building capacity for collective improvement across the system.

We want a system where schools care about improvement for all as much as for their own school.

And we are making good progress.

In January 2014, backed by the five authorities and drawing on international research, schools across the region led the way in launching a strategy to develop a 'self improving school system'.   The strategy was based on six principles which are commonly found in successful school systems:

- Schools are communities where collaborative enquiry is used to improve practice;
- Groupings of schools engage in joint practice development
- Where necessary, more intensive partnerships support schools facing difficulties;
- Families and Community organisations support the work of schools;
- Coordination of the system is provided by school leaders;
- Local authorities work together to act as the 'conscience of the system'.

The strategy has been led by the Central South Wales Strategy group.   All schools are part of School Improvement Groups (SIGs), there are 60 pathfinder partnerships in place, school improvement hubs provide professional learning and peer enquiry is developing leadership capacity. We have seen much progress in engagement and understanding of a self improving school system. Increasingly there is evidence of impact on capacity at system and school level and on attainment.

Taking our strategy forward

There remain a number of areas we need to further develop if we are to develop a sustainable system of school improvement which can support schools to be the best in Wales and beyond. These are:

1. More explicit opportunities to build **sustainable leadership capacity**, operating at a system level with the appropriate incentives to develop the best head teachers and a system to spot and develop talent for future leadership at a system level
2. Ways to develop **systematic, deeper professional learning opportunities** at all levels of the system as the norm for teachers across the region - with a tight focus on impact and disciplined routes of sharing learning across schools
3. A need to drive **harder forms of collaboration (including federations) to build capacity** in the system in leadership and teaching and learning and increase efficiency in the use of services by schools
4. Effective **consistent challenge and intervention** to drive change rapidly and robustly where it is most needed
5. Significant **work with governors and local elected Members** to improve the wider understanding about the benefits of hard collaborative school systems.

3

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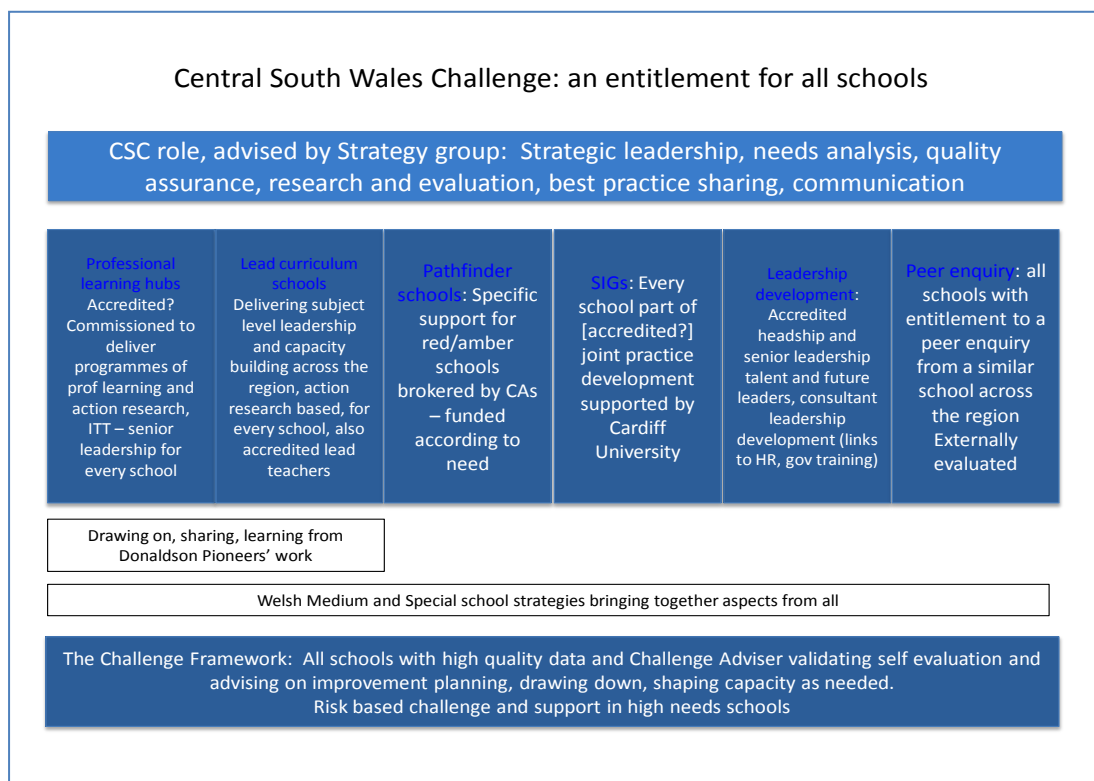
The 2018 vision

By 2018 we would expect the school improvement system to be radically transformed. We want to see a system of school improvement explicitly led, organised and provided by schools.

By September 2018: A Central South Wales networked learning community run by schools for schools which includes:

1. **All schools as part of an accredited school improvement group or network** which sets priorities each year, provides most school improvement support and evidences impact in capacity and pupil attainment across schools;

2. **Expert teachers working at subject level across and within the system from lead subject specialist schools** providing subject level support to all schools focused on need**;**

3. **Lead schools commissioned to develop professional learning programmes** for all school staff including initial teacher training, with joint practice development the predominant learning model. All lead schools working as part of the Successful Futures development model building the new curriculum into their practice;

4. **All schools able to commission a formal peer enquiry** from experienced trained peer enquirers (current Headteachers) as part their self evaluation and improvement planning;

5. **High quality leadership programmes for all heads, a future leaders programme and a 'system leadership' model** identifying and funding experienced heads empowered to work swiftly and rapidly with vulnerable schools with clear priorities for improvement.

   This model might look like the below.

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Central South Wales Challenge: an entitlement for all schools

CSC role, advised by Strategy group: Strategic leadership, needs analysis, quality assurance, research and evaluation, best practice sharing, communication

Professional learning hubs Accredited? Commissioned to deliver programmes of prof learning and action research, ITT – senior leadership for every school	Lead curriculum schools Delivering subject level leadership and capacity building across the region, action research based, for every school, also accredited lead teachers	Pathfinder schools: Specific support for red/amber schools brokered by CAs – funded according to need	SIGs: Every school part of [accredited?] joint practice development supported by Cardiff University	Leadership development: Accredited headship and senior leadership talent and future leaders, consultant leadership development (links to HR, gov training)	Peer enquiry: all schools with entitlement to a peer enquiry from a similar school across the region Externally evaluated

Drawing on, sharing, learning from Donaldson Pioneers' work

Welsh Medium and Special school strategies bringing together aspects from all

The Challenge Framework: All schools with high quality data and Challenge Adviser validating self evaluation and advising on improvement planning, drawing down, shaping capacity as needed.
Risk based challenge and support in high needs schools

The networked learning community is underpinned by:

6. **Governors and local elected Members** engaged in and sharing principles of system level improvement as well as improvement in local school outcomes;

7. Authorities **work together to achieve a rapid increase in the number of formal federations** in place and to develop learning about the variety of models for achieving economies of scale between schools [moving towards a presumption in favour of federation where circumstances allow];

8. **The consortium, on behalf of authorities, identifies the needs of schools and quality assures support** provided across the system at a system level . It reduces its focus and staffing to work only with the most vulnerable schools to **support effective self evaluation and improvement planning intervening** rapidly and robustly where needed; and

9. The strategy is supported by a **strong emphasis on evaluation and research**.

This business plan is focused on the development of our vision and sets out the areas where we expect to make progress in responding to needs across the region in 2016/17.

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Priorities for improvement in 2016/17

As we move towards the delivery of our vision in 2018, we continue to review the impact of our work in schools across the region. Our SER provides analysis of the areas of strength and improvement priorities for the region. This can be accessed [here].

In 2016/17 our delivery plan, based on our self evaluation, are set out in the following pages.

Our ambition in 2016/17 is:

To transform the outcomes of learners across the region so that schools in the region are the best performing in Wales and rival schools across the UK.

We will do this through a focus on two improvement priorities:

1. **Improving the capacity of the system to be self improving; and by**
2. **Further developing the Central South Consortium to be a high performing organisation.**

We have set out what this will mean we do in 2016/17. Each improvement objective is underpinned by a detailed plan which will be reported against in year.

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Ambition in 2016/17: **To transform the outcomes of learners across the region so that schools in the region are the best performing in Wales and rival schools across the UK. With particular focus on three areas:**

       a.   **Improving standards in literacy**
       b.   **Improving standards in numeracy**
       c.   **Improving standards for vulnerable learners**

This core improvement priority will be monitored through performance against the three areas. It will be delivered through our two areas for improvement set out below.

Core Improvement priority: To transform the outcomes of learners across the region so that schools in the region are the best performing in Wales and rival schools across the UK.	
Areas for action	**What we will do in 2016/17**
To raise standards in literacy/ English/ Welsh	- Improve the literacy skills of boys especially in writing and raise standards in language all authorities and especially Merthyr in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3 - Improve performance at level 2 in English, especially for boys, and so increase outcomes further at L2+ - Improve performance in Welsh first language at GCSE
To raise standards in numeracy/ mathematics	- Improve the numerical reasoning skills of boys and girls - Improve the attainment of boys and girls in mathematics in all authorities in the Foundation Phase and key stages 2 & 3 - Improve performance at level 2 in mathematics for boys and especially for girls and so increase outcomes further against the level 2+ threshold
To improve the outcomes achieved by specific groups of learners	- Reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment by improving the performance of eFSM pupils in all authorities, and especially in RCT and the Vale at the expected outcome/ level and the outcome/ level above - Meet the regional floor target for eFSM pupils in the primary sector and the national target at L2+ - Improve the proportion of more able pupils reaching the higher than expected outcomes/ grades (FP, KS2, KS3) and the higher examination grades at GCSE and at A level - Improve the attainment of other vulnerable groups (LAC, minority ethnic pupils, SEN pupils) - Improve performance against the level 1 threshold - Improve the attendance of pupils vulnerable to underachievement

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Improvement Priority ONE

Further develop the capacity of the school system to be self improving through the Central South Wales Challenge. In particular by:

- a. **Improving the quality of Leadership and Governance.**
- b. **Improving the quality of teaching and learning**
- c. **Reducing the variation between schools in the region**

Improvement Priority ONE: Further develop the capacity of the school system to be self improving through the Central South Wales Challenge.	
Areas for action	**What we will do in 2016/17**
To improve the quality of leadership and governance	• Deliver, accredit and evaluate the first year of the leadership development programme to make sure all aspects of leadership are supported • Develop a policy with authorities to learn from and support the expansion of hard collaborative models including federations across the region • Develop new models of leadership through a consultant/systems leadership programme • Establish a senior leaders in education programme and evaluate • Use joint practice development and collaboration between schools to improve leadership at all levels, so every school is part of a high quality [accredited] school improvement group • Continue to develop joint practice at leadership level through the brokered pathfinder programme with evaluation • Roll out the peer review programme for all schools • Improve governance through training and the bespoke consultant governors • Establish a single governor training service for the region • Improve HR specialist advice services to schools • Develop a strategy for improvement across the Welsh Medium sector which is led by the sector
To improve the quality of learning and teaching	• Develop and share the key features of good and excellent learning and teaching across the region led by schools in the region • Use joint practice development to develop a continuum of professional learning pathways for all school based staff through hub/lead schools linked to the New Deal Pioneers developments • Work with Higher Education to provide classroom based initial teacher training and induction for NQTs • Develop learning and teaching at subject level including lead literacy and numeracy schools through lead schools in each subject including the Foundation Phase Alliance • Establish and accredit lead teachers at subject level to share practice • Develop and grow expertise across the region in effective strategies to close the gap for vulnerable children and evaluate progress • Improve consistency and reliability of teacher assessment • Deliver a consistent approach to funding 14-16 alternative provision through delegation of the 14-19 grant

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	• Support schools' leaders to meet the requirements of change in the curriculum and external qualifications through support for new Qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate
To reduce the variations in performance between schools	• Share regular timely and high quality school level data and analysis with all schools and authorities as part of a joined up data strategy across the region • Review the effectiveness and efficiency of the Challenge and Review framework in supporting schools in inverse proportion to need and adjust accordingly • Review the target setting policy in line with new performance measures and performance maintaining high expectations at pupil level • Work with local authorities to intervene swiftly where there is insufficient progress, with clear roles and funding evidencing impact of action • Secure improvement at pace in red and amber support schools reflecting what works through effective intervention • Evidence how better brokerage of support, including sharing best practice, at a school and strategic level meets the needs of schools and is impactful • Strengthen the coordination of joint working with inclusion services to evidence stronger joined up challenge and support for vulnerable children • Evidence how the challenge and support of self-evaluation and improvement planning in green or yellow support schools improves capacity • Work collaboratively to achieve consistency in attendance strategies • Improve quality and consistency teacher assessment of with other consortia • Review the challenge framework and impact of challenge advisers alongside SCC with recommendations for long term planning

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Improvement Priority TWO:

To develop as a high performing organisation, by:

- a. **Improving performance management**
- b. **Reviewing and sharpening governance and accountability**
- c. **Evidencing effective use of resources.**

Improvement Priority TWO: To develop as a high performing organisation	
Improvement objectives	**What we will do in 2016/17**
To improve performance management	• Set out the detail of strategic direction in planning over a two year period • Improve the provision of in year data and data at individual pupil level to support self-evaluation and strategic planning • Establish clear targets, success criteria and specific actions when planning and monitoring all improvement work including school-to-school support and central services and take corrective action where needed • Strengthen evaluation of the impact of programmes and sources of support and use the lessons learned to inform future practice • Evaluate and continue to improve procedures for individuals' performance management
To strengthen governance and accountability	• Work with local authorities to improve further reporting to scrutiny committees and the sharing of effective practice between committees to promote consistency • Develop the role of the Advisory Board in influencing strategic direction, agreeing priorities for improvement and assuring quality • Review governance annually • Identify risk and report the effect of measures to mitigate risk • Consult with key stakeholders – headteachers, governors, pupils, local authorities, diocesan authorities, Higher and Further Education and business
To strengthen further the management of resources and improve efficiency	• Continue to strengthen arrangements for monitoring the use and impact of financial resources against regional priorities with a systematic focus on value for money • Work with the three other regional consortia to share effective practice in learning from challenge advisers, school to school strategies and effective use of resources, identify opportunities to collaborate to build capacity and operate with maximum efficiency

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How will we know we have made progress?

Target setting

Our targets are based on those of schools set at pupil level incorporating benchmarks with additional challenge provided by Challenge Advisers against benchmarks.

[The final position on targets has yet to be completed, will be agreed through governing bodies by end of autumn term.]

Our 2016/17 targets are:

- Close the gap in outcomes for children and young people in poverty and for looked after children by [xxx] 2016/2017.

- Raise standards in English and Welsh first language and mathematics so that...

- Raise standards at key stage 4 in English by a further [xx] Welsh by [xx] and mathematics by [xx] by September 2015 compared with September 2015

- Improve outcomes at Level 2+ by at least a further [xx] by September 2015 compared with September 2015.

- Improve attendance to reach an average of at least 95% in both sectors by September 2016.

Accountability for impact

This Business plan is underpinned by more detailed plans against each improvement priority. We evaluate progress against each area reporting termly to the Joint Committee. In addition we:

- Provide an annual SER to the Joint Committee each year and at least one performance report to Scrutiny Committees, ideally in January of each year.
- We produce a summary SER each term to the Advisory Board to collate our live in year evaluation activity against each areas of our business plan.
- Monitor a monthly dashboard against in year data collections as well as inspection.
- Review the performance of red and amber schools termly with authorities and provide a termly progress report to each authority ahead of a formal minuted progress report.
- In addition we report termly to the Welsh Government's Challenge and Review sessions.

Local authority Annexes

This business plan describes our core business which has been agreed wtith the five authorities and will be resourced according to need as set out in our framework of Challenge and Support. Alongside this business plan we produce each year a LA Annex which sets out the support or

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dedicated work required in each LA which will be funded, led or resourced by the Consortium. This is agreed in the summer progress reviews and reviewed following the results in the early autumn term. LA progress reports update against these annexes.

Governance

Our Governance Model is as follows:

- The Joint Committee agrees strategy and business plan, and agrees and monitors budget and performance meets four times a year.
- Directors of Education meet monthly with a strategic decision making role and Operational Group also meets monthly to review the operational running of the organisation.
- The Advisory Board (half termly) has a role to review evaluation, value for money and impact and contains representatives of our Stakeholder Groups: Headteacher Representative Group, Governors Group and Directors Group.
- We report to each authorities' Scrutiny committee at least annually as part of an agreed annual joint scrutiny plan.

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Resources

Our revenue assumptions incorporate a 5% efficiency saving each year of the next two years which may be used to recycle resources into bringing together regional services.

The budget for the organisation for 2016 – 2017 is outlined below. Local Authority contributions have been reduced by 5% from 15 / 16 levels. The actual apportionment by local authorities is based on the appropriate IBA's published by Welsh Government as part of the 2015 / 16 revenue budget settlement.

CATEGORY	Proposed Budget 2016 – 2017 £
Expenditure	
Employees (including secondments and school led capacity building)	3,650,528
Premises	540,744
Transport	40,000
Supplies and Services	501,290
Repayment of Redundancy Costs	100,000
Commissioning (Additional Support to Schools)	0
Support Services	111,100
GROSS EXPENDITURE	**4,943,662**

INCOME	Proposed Budget 2016 – 2017 £
LA Contributions	4,195,662
Ty Dysgu Income	400,000
Grants & Other income	348,000
TOTAL INCOME	**4,943,662**
NET EXPENDITURE	**0**
Budget to be confirmed at Joint Committee March 2016	

Grant Assumptions [to be confirmed following allocation of grant by WG]

We will seek to increase our delegation to schools which last year reached 86% and will provide minimal efficient monitoring reports to Welsh Government against grant terms and conditions.

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Draft Self-evaluation Report

Executive Summary

November 2015

Key Question 1: Outcomes

Positive Features

Performance in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3 in the key indicators has improved over a three-year period at outcome 5+, level 4+ and level 5+. The greater rate of improvement in the last two years means that performance is close to or above Welsh averages in most indicators.

Performance against the level 2+ threshold has risen significantly over the last two years and is now above the Welsh average. The number of schools where fewer than 40% and less than 50% of pupils reach this threshold has reduced significantly.

More able pupils are achieving better outcomes and their achievement has risen at a faster rate at outcome 6 in the Foundation Phase, level 5 at key stage 2 and level 6+ at key stage 3. Performance is now close to or above Welsh averages in most respects.

Performance in Welsh second language in primary schools has improved significantly over the last three years.

The proportion of A*/ A grades at GCSE has been higher than Welsh averages over the last two years.

Performance has met or exceeded targets in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3.

Schools' performance in 2015 compares much more favourably with that of similar schools at all phases/ key stages than was the case in 2013.

There has been a greater impetus in the rate of achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) than for those not eligible over the last three years and so the gaps have narrowed in the Foundation Phase and at key stages 2 and 3 at the expected outcome/ level. More eFSM pupils reached the level 2+ threshold in 2015 than in 2014.

The performance of minority ethnic pupils has improved significantly against the level 2+ threshold and is now in line with or ahead of that of White UK pupils across the region.

The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has fallen over the last three years, although the extent of the drop varies between authorities and is still too high especially in Cardiff.

There has been sustained improvement in rates of attendance over the last four years across the region and in each local authority. Performance is now above Welsh averages in both primary and secondary schools.

Areas For Improvement

The improvements in performance in the primary and secondary sectors started from a low baseline and are not yet at a point where pupils can compete as successfully as they should with their peers across the UK and internationally.

Although performance has improved at key stage 4 it is still below targets and the pace of improvement necessary to meet these more challenging targets has been evident in only the last two years.

Performance against the level 1 threshold has improved less than in other indicators and is the result of underachievement by boys and more vulnerable groups in particular.

Outcomes in literacy/ English are generally lower than in the other core subjects in the Foundation Phase and key stages 2 and 3. Boys' performance is weaker than that of girls, especially in writing skills and is weakest in Merthyr.

Although there is improvement in both English and mathematics at key stage 4, the gap in performance has widened. Girls' performance is weaker in mathematics than in their other subjects in all local authorities and especially in the Vale of Glamorgan. Boys' performance in both English and mathematics is weakest in Merthyr.

The outcomes achieved by eFSM pupils are still too low especially at the higher levels and grades and against the level 2+ threshold where the gap with the performance of nFSM pupil is still too wide. Together with pupils who have a special educational need, they are more likely to be absent or excluded from school.

Other groups vulnerable to underachievement – in particular looked after children and pupils with SEN -do not achieve well enough, especially in literacy and numeracy.

The performance of more able pupils at the higher grades at GCSE and A level is uneven across the region. It is not strong enough in Merthyr and RCT and expectations are not yet high enough in the Vale and in some aspects of performance in Bridgend and Cardiff.

There are undue variations in the performance of similar schools, especially concerning the performance of eFSM pupils and particularly in some aspects of performance in the Vale at key stage 2 and key stage 4 and more broadly in RCT.

The variations in performance are also evident in the lack of sustained improvement in some higher performing schools, the variations in outcomes in Schools Challenge Cymru schools, the fluctuations in performance year on year in Welsh first language in Welsh-medium schools at key stage 4.

Key Question 2: School Improvement Services

Positive Features

Schools have been provided with sound guidance to support school self-evaluation and improvement planning, including the new statutory requirements. The place of self-evaluation and planning at the centre of school improvement underpins how the national categorisation system is implemented across the region.

Assessment of the quality of leadership and teaching is now a more explicit part of challenge advisers' judgements about schools' capacity to improve.

The Framework for Challenge and Support provides clear expectations about key school improvement processes and encompasses suitably differentiated procedures for challenging and in intervening in schools where there is underperformance. The operation of the Framework is supporting improvement at greater pace in a majority of these schools which is also reflected in the outcomes of categorisation.

The quality of the challenge and rigour of the monitoring procedures by challenge advisers in schools requiring red or amber support has improved. Quality assurance of challenge advisers' written reports, and of their work directly with schools, is also more robust.

The consortium's improvement targets are closely aligned to the aggregated targets for schools. There is a clear expectation in the dialogue between challenge advisers and schools that targets should reflect high expectations and outcomes that should compare well with those of similar schools.

Action to identify concerns about progress in schools causing concern and work to recommend to local authorities use of the full, range of statutory powers is now more robust and consistent across the region. Most schools make strong progress when identified for follow up after inspection and intervention has been successful in building the improvement capacity of a number schools to avoid either the need for follow up or to reduce its seriousness.

The CSWC Challenge has extended significantly the resources to build capacity in the system through school-to-school support with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy and closing the gap. The sources of support available for underperforming schools and for schools seeking to improve their practice and pursue excellence are now more extensive. Support for schools to implement the Welsh Government's national priorities is evaluated positively and is effective in most instances in building the capacity of the schools supported to improve their practice.

Provision to support the development of leadership and teaching is given a high priority. Programmes are configured to meet identified needs and are more strongly focused on school and classroom-based professional practice.

Areas for improvement

Although the number of schools requiring Estyn monitoring following inspection has reduced and there have been improvements in the proportion of schools judged to have good or better, standards, teaching and leadership, there are still too many schools requiring following follow up in the two statutory categories in some parts of the region such as Cardiff and RCT.

Despite the improvements in the quality of the work of challenge advisers and the greater confidence in the accuracy of judgements made, there are still some inconsistencies. The sharing of practice to improve skills and build capacity is not yet developed enough.

Schools and challenge advisers have access to a wide range of trend, comparative and benchmarking data to support self-evaluation and the review of performance. However, access to pupil level data and live, in-year data to strengthen challenge and support is not yet developed sufficiently.

Expectations and strategies to meet more demanding targets are not strong enough in a minority of schools.

In a minority of schools causing concern progress is too slow. In these cases, action is not always taken swiftly enough or there are multiple and complex challenges that inhibit the pace of improvement.

The evidence base about strengths and weaknesses to inform decision making about priorities to be addressed through the leadership and teaching programmes and the work of lead schools is not yet developed in sufficient depth.

Communication and collaboration with Schools Challenge Cymru advisers is stronger and support is provided more systematically. However, there are inconsistencies which compromise the region's ability, in tandem with the local authorities, to have a fully accurate view of progress and needs in every case.

Support for Welsh-medium schools is also planned now in more structured ways but is still at an early stage of development. Brokerage of support is becoming more effective but evaluation of the impact of the support in its various forms on outcomes is stronger in some areas than in others and literacy and numeracy continue to be the most frequently occurring areas for improvement from inspection.

Mechanisms to monitor the progress of schools requiring green or yellow support are in place. However, strategies that enable challenge advisers to retain a good knowledge of each school, while not compromising the school's responsibility for its own improvement, need to be more tightly structured.

Support for governors is improving through training programmes, more regular communication and bespoke support for governing bodies that are less effective. However, these developments are more recent, are not yet extensive enough and require more evidence of impact.

Key Question 3: Leadership

Positive Features

Leaders articulate well, and develop in partnership with schools, the ambition for a self-improving school system, a shared commitment to improving all pupils' outcomes and to reducing the impact of poverty on attainment that align closely with the national model for regional working.

Leaders have created a climate where schools increasingly accept their prime responsibility for raising standards and this has had impact in: the greater rate of improvement in outcomes primary and secondary schools; the pace of improvement in a majority of red and amber support schools; the improved outcomes in increasing numbers schools involved in collaborative working.

The ambition is supported effectively by a three-year vision in the service's business plan. There is a clear line of sight between vision, principles and action in the service's key documents.

The service's governance arrangements are sound, meet national requirements and make clear that the consortium is a joint partnership. Decision making is open and transparent.

Elected members provide good leadership through their commitment to high expectations for all learners in the region and strong support for the service's strategic direction.

The Joint Committee and advisory board are increasingly effective in influencing and questioning decision making and the effectiveness of the region's work in addressing priorities.

Self-evaluation provides a comprehensive and honest evaluation of strengths and weaknesses.

There is now a much closer link between the outcomes of self-evaluation and priorities in the business plan. Plans have clearer detail about targets, success criteria and the actions to be taken and are now a better tool for determining the extent to which improvement is occurring as planned.

The development of professional learning communities and partnership working between schools has been given a high priority and are prominent features of the school system in the region. There is increasing evidence of impact on improving outcomes and practice.

Partnerships and joint planning between the consortium, local authorities, headteachers and the Welsh Government are strong and are key factors in the rapid change that has occurred in the region over the last two years.

The deployment of resources is closely aligned to the business plan's priorities. Financial control procedures are systematic and effective.

Areas for improvement

The impact of leadership is not yet strong enough in a number of areas: the outcomes achieved by vulnerable groups; the number of schools requiring statutory follow up after inspection in some parts of the region; the variations in performance between similar schools.

Although the vision for a self-improving system is clear, the practical steps to implement this vision over the medium term are not yet developed in enough detail.

The role of the Joint Committee in evaluating performance and of actions to mitigate risk to improve the impact of business planning and assessment of value for money is improving but the degree of challenge provided needs to be more consistent.

The role of the advisory board in challenging and supporting the service with regard to the impact of policy and planning on outcomes and practice is not yet fully developed.

Although communication is improving, the relative roles and responsibilities of the consortium and local authorities are not yet fully understood by all key stakeholders.

Processes to improve assessment of the progress of plans in year and the action that needs to be taken in response are developing but they are not yet embedded strongly enough as part of performance management.

Systems to support individual performance management and quality assurance are now stronger. However, implementation is not yet as embedded as it needs to be to promote greater consistency.

There are variations in the depth of collaborative working between schools. Identification of a baseline and success criteria at the outset of partnership work to support evaluation and professional learning are now better established but require further development to achieve greater consistency.

Partnerships with pupils, governors, the diocesan authorities and local authorities' inclusion services are not yet developed to the extent needed.

Strategic planning of partnership working between the regional consortia to promote quality, consistency and efficiency is beginning to be established but is not yet as prominent a feature as it should be.

Leaders review and make changes to service provision to support the principles of the self-improving system, secure continuous improvement and value for money on a more systematic and regular basis than previously. However, work to evaluate evidence about the effectiveness of services against costs and monitoring of the impact of the deployment of grant require more rigour.

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