REPORT TO: **EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON 3 FEBRUARY 2021**

SUBJECT: **FOR INFORMATION: NORTHERN ALLIANCE REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE – PROGRESS UPDATE**

BY: **DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE, EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To inform the Committee of the work undertaken by the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative in 2019/20.

1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified Committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic In the case of this committee the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Children and Young People Services, Governance, Strategy and Performance, (para 9 of the minute refers).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Northern Alliance is a Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) between eight local authorities across the North and West of Scotland: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highlands, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands, with a shared vision to improve the educational and life chance of our children and young people through collaboration.

2.2 Now in the second year of Phase 3 of the Regional Improvement Plan, the Northern Alliance local authorities remain committed to improving outcomes and closing the gap across our wide and varied communities through working together and adding value to local authority activity.

2.3 The Northern Alliance continues to strive to achieve Workstream priorities which remain aligned to the National Improvement Framework (NIF) priorities and have been developed collaboratively with local authority practitioners and national partners.

2.4 As a collaborative it is vital to remain agile and make appropriate adjustments to priorities to reflect changes to national priorities and current circumstances.

2.5 Activity and associated impact across the workstreams in 2019-20 includes:

Numeracy & Maths

2.6 The small schools' network was established providing support from the Northern Alliance and Education Scotland for principal teachers within single staff member departments in secondary schools, developing peer-to-peer collaboration digitally and subsequently reducing professional isolation. Accompanying this, is the teach-meet approach, the aim of which is to encourage local practitioners to share examples of what is working in their classroom practice.

2.7 Using the teach-meet approach for 3 events received very positive evaluations with the sessions providing opportunities to network, collaborative and build confidence. This approach has been adapted for online delivery of twilight session as part of the Northern Alliance CLPL offer.

1+2 Modern Language Development

2.8 Class teachers engaged with development officers to ensure high quality implementation of the 1+2 language policy. As part of this activity, online language resources for practitioners in both French and Gaelic have been developed. These accessible bite-sized resources aim to upskill practitioners effectively to implement and deliver high quality additional language learning within the classroom.

2.9 Through increased accessibility, resources are building an increased shared understanding of high quality implementation across the Northern Alliance.

Early Years

2.10 In January, the Northern Alliance Emerging Literacy Network was re-formed with representation from each of the Local Authorities. This network worked together to evaluation the implementation of Emerging Literacy across the Northern Alliance and report on progress. Partnership working included colleagues from the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYIC) and the National Allied Health Professional (AHP) Lead. Links have also been made to the National Practice Guidelines for the Early Level – 'Realising the Ambition'.

2.11 A series of recommendations has also been included within the Evaluation Report which will further support the quality and sustainability of Emerging Literacy across the Northern Alliance.

Raising Attainment & Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap

2.12 Upskilling of practitioners continues through twilight sessions, breaking down area demographic data as well as exploring the opportunities to gain insight from children, young people and families with lived experience through the 'Our Voice' project. This aims to provide a place-based approach to informing school priorities and interventions.

2.13   This has facilitated Local Authorities and schools to find and interpret data based on their local context in order to understand the nature of poverty in their community and therefore implement policy and practice to best tackle the attainment gap. There has therefore been improved practice regarding specific policy in schools in mitigating the barriers to learning that poverty has created.

Sustaining Education in our Communities

2.14   Working with individual authorities, training has been provided on the moderation of building core facts assessments.

2.15   This will enable teams to take a more holistic approach to these assessments, which in turn will lead to more accurate assessments of the learning estate and subsequently ensure that the best quality learning environments are available for children and young people.

2.16   An Interrupted Learners Programme was developed by e-Sgoil to support and reengage learners from across the Northern Alliance with education where this has not been possible. This model was developed with extensive input from multidisciplinary professionals (such as Education Psychologist, Occupational Therapist and our Autism Practitioner).

2.17   This innovative approach provides an online, interactive and supportive learning community where pupils feel in control. This proof of concept provides a model of working for young people to learn in a safe and comfortable environment and remain engaged in their learning. The prospect of extending or replacing this model provides an opportunity to support vulnerable young people within a number of contexts.

Leadership

2.18   An increased range of professional learning programmes and activities has been developed for leaders at all levels. These programmes enable participants to work collaboratively with colleagues to enhance and extend their own leadership skills and consider how they apply them in their own context.

2.19   Feedback from the Aspiring Middle to Leadership prototype was very positive and the programme will run next session co-facilitated by the Workstream Lead. Evolving Systems Thinking was paused with 3 days remaining and is now underway again in a revised online format. A final evaluation will be carried out once the programme is completed.

2.20   Further detail of Workstream Priority Improvement activity as set out in the Regional Improvement Plan can be found in the Progress & Impact Report 2019-20 (**Appendix 1**).

3.   **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

3.1   In late March the Northern Alliance team held a strategy session to refocus its vision in light of COVID-19. Work has been undertaken to reshape

workstream priorities, outcomes and processes in light of the impact of the pandemic whilst understanding the needs of the system going forward and growing connections with practitioners across the Northern Alliance.

3.2 The Workstream Lead for 'Sustaining Education in our Communities' has worked alongside 'Response and Recovery' representatives from every local authority in the Northern Alliance and has also participated at a national level in response to the challenges of COVID-19. Northern Alliance officers collaborated through weekly meetings and sharing successes. Northern Alliance learning estate developments prior to this situation have also supported local authorities through utilising profiles for schools, leading to ease preparation for returning to school and ELC.

3.3 As a result of coming together to create a shared support strategy, the Northern Alliance Central Team had a clear, shared understanding of how the Collaborative should move forward in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, firm foundations were being made for developing a longer term plan for working together. Data which evidences the impact of these actions is accessible through a data Sway - Supporting Evidence.

Highlights form the data sway include (between January and June 2020):
- An increase in collaborative engagements recorded.
- An increase in number of practitioners involved in collaborative engagements.
- An increase in Northern Alliance Twitter followers from 3681 to 4009.
- Increased number of visits to the Northern Alliance Glow SharePoint site from 4041 to 11,883. An increase of 7,842 visits attracting 1,205 new viewers.

3.4 From the data it can be seen that following an initial dip in collaborative engagements in early April, data increased significantly towards the end of April and throughout the rest of the school term. It is important to recognise the increased time and opportunity for most education staff to access and engage in online professional learning opportunity prior to the return to school in August. Barriers to collaboration which existed before such as a travel and costs are no longer issues with the increased use of online platforms for meetings, engaging with workstream networks of practitioners and for learning.

4. SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FOR 2020-2021

4.1 The appointment of a Quality Improvement Manager to operationalise the RIC plan has had a significant positive impact on the pace of developments and the evaluation of impact. The team have a renewed focus of the Northern Alliance vision and the work in their individual roles. A set of drivers has also been developed to drive forward improvement priorities and support the Regional Improvement Collaborative to respond in an agile way to the changing educational landscape.

4.2 The developed drivers are:

- **Agile ways of working** – Harnessing new platforms, norms and routines in how we work, collaborate and communicate.
- **Building relational capital** – Strengthening trust, connections and collaboration, reducing competition and silos.
- **Digital learning transformation** – Adapting and exploring our approaches to learning and being online.
- **Working alongside one another** – To explore new and emerging practices in learning and teaching.

4.3 Full detail of all improvement activity for each Workstream priority and additional areas of focus can be found in the Regional Improvement Plan: Phase 3 (amended September 2020) (**Appendix 2**).

5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**
The work in the RIC plan supports local work to meet the Council's Our People objective in relation to providing opportunities where young people can achieve their potential to be the best they can be.

(b) **Policy and Legal:**
None

(c) **Financial implications:**
Continuation of Scottish Government funding.

On 23 October 2020, a grant resourcing request for £895,233.34, the majority of which is staffing costs, was submitted to the Scottish Government for continued funding for the period of 1 August 2020 – 31 March 2021. Agreement was confirmed in November 2020 that Scottish Government funding will continue for Regional Improvement Collaboratives from August 2020 to March 2021. At the same time, informal indication was received of continued funding for RICs to March 2022.

A guarantee of continued funding would provide stability for the Collaborative in moving forward on the regional improvement plan as we strive towards realising our vision for our children and young people across the Northern Alliance.

(d) **Risk Implications**: none

(e) **Staffing Implications:** none

(f) **Property**: none

(g) **Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**: none

(h) **Consultations**: none

5.   CONCLUSION

5.1   The Committee is asked to note the progress of the Northern Alliance as outlined in the Progress & Impact Report 2019-2020 and the amended Regional Improvement Plan: Phase 3.

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Background Papers:
Ref: SPMAN-1108985784-456