



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 MARCH 2014

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

ENSURING EDUCATION EXCELLENCE IN LEICESTERSHIRE: LEICESTERSHIRE EDUCATION EXCELLENCE PARTNERSHIP – INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Purpose of report

1. To present to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee a report summarising the outcomes of the internal audit of the Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership (LEEP) (attached as Appendix A).

Policy framework and previous decisions

2. At its meeting on 9 April 2013, the Cabinet agreed to the development of a new policy through a partnership approach with maintained schools and academies (the LEEP).
3. On 9 July 2013 the Cabinet approved the continued development and implementation of the LEEP and agreed that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee would provide assurance.
4. At its meeting on 9 September 2013 the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report that provided further detail about the progress of the LEEP.
5. On 11 November 2013 the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the first monitoring report outlining the progress made in implementing LEEP. The following points arose from discussion at that meeting:
 - (i) There was a strong desire from schools to work in partnership through the LEEP. However, to ensure this continued, the operation of the LEEP would need to be supported with evidence of it achieving positive outcomes;

- (ii) The Internal Audit Service had been conducting a review to assess the County Council's approach for securing improvement through the LEEP and to ensure this was sufficiently robust;
- (iii) The £350,000 funding allocated in the County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy in February 2013 was not a school improvement budget. Such funding had been allocated to support the development of the partnership with a view to encouraging schools to work together to secure improvements and thus making the best use of the resources now allocated directly to them for this purpose;
- (iv) Information about the LEEP had been distributed to all School Governor Chairs and briefings had been held to ensure details of the partnership arrangements were widely available;
- (v) When an academy is causing concern, neither Ofsted, nor the academy, are obliged to notify the County Council of any concerns raised following an inspection. However, the LEEP offered the opportunity for details of any concerns to be shared and addressed collaboratively. The LEEP approach supported the view that schools were best placed to support other schools experiencing difficulties.

Internal Audit Findings

6. The County Council's Internal Audit Service undertook a review of the governance and implementation of the LEEP in November 2013. The objective was to provide assurance to the Council that there are effective arrangements in place to support school improvement that ensures educational excellence across Leicestershire.
7. The audit is not intended to give assurance that the LEEP is functioning effectively; the report acknowledges that it is too early in the LEEP's existence to do this. However, the Internal Audit Service gave a rating of 'substantial assurance' for the LEEP's implementation and governance. The final report was positive about the LEEP's development and implementation, finding that there are good structures and governance in place, backed by clear principles of partnership working.
8. None of the report's recommendations were considered to have a 'high importance' rating to address a serious control weakness. The main recommendations were linked to systems and procedures.
9. The report concluded that although in its embryonic stage, there is a high level of participation and engagement with key partners and work is under way to extend the LEEP across all localities.

Conclusion

10. The Internal Audit Service has provided substantial assurance about the LEEP at this early stage of development. This report was scrutinised by the LEEP Strategic Group, which felt confident that the suggested recommendations raised were being considered and addressed appropriately (see Appendix B).

Resource implications

11. The County Council approved its budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy at its meeting on 19 February 2014. The budget included a growth item of £350,000 to support educational excellence in Leicestershire. The budget will continue to support the release of school staff to provide collaboration through a self-supporting schools system and provide for administrative support. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the contents of this report.

Equal Opportunities Implications

12. The Education Act 1996 identifies the local authority role in ensuring that all children achieve the fulfilment of their educational potential, including the most vulnerable.

Risk Assessment

13. The risks to the County Council arising from the development and implementation of the LEEP are kept under regular review by lead officers within the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) and are recorded in the CYPS Departmental Risk Plan.

Environmental Implications

14. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

15. The report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be circulated to all Members of the County Council via the Members' News In Brief Service.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet on 9 April 2013 – Ensuring Education Excellence

Report to the Cabinet on 9 July – Ensuring Education Excellence

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2013 – Ensuring Education Excellence in Leicestershire: Development of Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 November 2013 - Ensuring Education Excellence in Leicestershire: Performance of the LEEP Monitoring Report

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Appendices

Appendix A - Outcomes of the internal audit of Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership (LEEP)

Appendix B - LEEP Internal Audit – December 2013 Response to recommendations.