

Regional Director – Department for Education

To: CYP Committee

Meeting Date: 28th November 2023

From: Executive Director of Children, Education and Families

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Outcome: The Committee requested the Regional Director attend to update on key issues relevant to Cambridgeshire and answer questions relevant to their responsibilities.

Recommendation: Note the background contents of the report to aid the discussion in the meeting around the Regional Director's role and his oversight of educational and social care outcomes in Cambridgeshire.

Voting arrangements: No vote required

Officer contact:

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1. Background

- 1.1 During the last year, members of the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee and Spokes have requested the attendance of the Regional Director (formally the Regional School Commissioner) to attend the CYP committee to share an update on their responsibilities, including academy schools.
- 1.2 The agenda item is intended to be a discussion around the role of the Regional Director (RD) and their work with schools in Cambridgeshire. It is hoped the chance to meet with the Regional Director will give the Committee members a better understanding of their role and how it operates in a mixed environment of educational delivery. This report has been prepared by officers to give background on the role and the RD will provide a verbal overview of their responsibilities in the meeting.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The role of the Regional Director is to act on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. Regional directors work locally across children's social care, SEND, schools and area-based programmes to improve outcomes for children, families and learners. Their main focus is on academy schools, but they also have a wider remit for all aspects of education and social care.
- 2.2 Nationally, there are 9 regions covering the East of England, East Midlands, North West, North East, South East, London, South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber. These are aligned to Local Authority boundaries and the East of England covers the following local authority (LA) areas –
 - Bedford
 - Cambridgeshire
 - Central Bedfordshire
 - Essex
 - Hertfordshire
 - Luton
 - Norfolk
 - Peterborough
 - Southend-on-Sea
 - Suffolk
 - Thurrock
- 2.3 Regional directors' main responsibilities include:
 - addressing underperformance in schools, academies, children's social care and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services, offering support, and where necessary intervening, to deliver rapid improvement.
 - taking decisions on academy sponsor matches and significant changes to academies.

- deciding on new free schools (including the final decision in local authority free school presumptions).
- taking decisions on the creation, consolidation and growth of multi-academy trusts (MATs).
- supporting local authorities to ensure that every local area has sufficient places for pupils.
- delivering across a number of key programmes by building the department's presence locally through working closely with stakeholders, local authorities, MATs, Ofsted, and other local government departments.
- making sure local needs inform policy development.
- leading the response to area wide special educational needs (SEN) inspections, ensuring effective challenge and support to enable areas of weakness to be remedied quickly.
- taking the lead on ensuring there is an appropriate response to safeguarding cases arising in academies in their region, working closely with local authorities and Ofsted.
- promoting financial health in the academy trusts and free schools sectors.
- leading on ensuring strong governance in academy trusts – this does not include financial governance issues as they are overseen by the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).
- delivering across a number of key programmes emerging from the schools white paper, the SEND and AP (Alternative Provision) green paper, and from the care review.
- deciding on changes to admission arrangements where the Secretary of State has agreed a limited derogation to support fair access.
- deciding on applications for an exemption from providing a “broadly Christian” daily act of collective worship, which can be replaced with collective worship that reflects the faith background of the academy’s pupils and the population the academy serves.

2.4 More details on the regional directors’ responsibilities in relation to schools can be found here - [commissioning high quality trusts](#) and [regional directors decision making: 2022](#)

2.5 Each regional director is supported by an [advisory board](#) which advises on academy related decisions. Advisory board members provide a source of challenge and insight to the Department for Education (DfE) on academy-related decisions. Advisory Board members are not decision makers. The terms of reference for advisory boards can be [found here](#). Advisory board members help inform the decision making process by providing opportunities for DfE regional directors and the wider DfE regions group to draw on their sector experience. They may also provide advice based on their particular areas of expertise, such as trust governance, school improvement and school budget management.

2.6 Each board are made up of up to 8 members:

- 4 elected by local academy headteachers
- 2 appointed by regional directors
- 2 are co-opted with the agreement of DfE ministers

2.7 The constitution of the East of England group is as follows

Elected members

- Tim Coulson (Unity Schools Partnership)
- Clare Flintoff (ASSET Education)
- Sarah Skinner (South Suffolk Learning Trust)
- Josephine Valentine (Danes Educational Trust)

Appointed members

- Mark Farmer (Bridge Academy Trust)
- Alistair Kingsley (Hamptons Academy Trust)

Co-opted members

- Lawrence Chapman (SENDAT)
- Brian Conway (St John the Baptist MAT)

2.8 Of the members of the East Advisory Board, only one school is represented in Cambridgeshire via the Unity School partnership.

2.9 Officers work closely with colleagues from the DfE across a wide range of issues. There is a positive relationship although there can be challenges around roles and responsibilities in areas such as complaints, safeguarding and outcomes.

3. Alignment with ambitions

3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

Effective working with schools and trusts can lead to better educational outcomes and improved life chances.

- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

Both the RD and the LA have a shared objective of strong educational outcomes for Cambridgeshire. Effective challenge and support across all educational settings are undertaken by both organisations.

4. Significant Implications

- 4.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.7 Public Health Implications

Education and Health are intricately linked. Locally, improving outcomes for children is one of the 3 ambitions of the Joint ICS Health and Wellbeing strategy. The Director of Education is joint SRO for 'Priority 1: Ensure children are ready to enter and exit education, prepared for the next phase in their lives' and action is co-ordinated through the Family Hubs Board and School-aged Health Improvement Partnership.

- 4.8 Climate Change and Environment Implications on Priority Areas

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation:

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

Yes

Name of Officer: Josette Kennington

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes or No

Name of Officer: Simon Cobby

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Raj Lakshman

If a Key decision, have any Climate Change and Environment implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Yes or No

Name of Officer: N/A

5. Source documents

5.1 [The Regional Director's Role](#).