

Developing a Sheffield Strategic Partnership: Background Briefing

Purpose

To enable the setting up of a school led strategic education partnership which can:

- Develop a shared strategy and ways of working for system leadership at the city level.
- Strengthen action on selected priority areas which have widespread support.

Timescale

To report by November 2023

Membership

Jonathan Crossley-Holland - Chair

Andrew Jones – SCC Director of Education

Stephen Betts - CEO Learn Sheffield

Education leaders - tbc

Priorities for the Strategic Partnership

It is for the Working Group to develop proposals.

Stephen Betts has produced documents in the past, for example the response to post covid 19, and is working on another on the possible Civic Role of a partnership.

An exercise with a small group of MATs produced this list of priorities. This exercise has given an initial view of the potential priorities, but we will want to undertake more detailed consultation with schools and more detailed mapping of existing work to help determine where most value could be added.

- **Attendance.** This was the issue most often mentioned in our discussions and was seen as something that is a current issue for most trusts and schools. We know that it also has a high national profile now with strong interest from the DfE, OFSTED and Children's Commissioner amongst others. Some thought this would be a good issue for the partnership to

focus on to start with because no-one had the answer yet and all trusts and schools might have something to learn from each other. It would also potentially provide a window into a range of other issues associated with support for vulnerable learners but provide a more focused way of looking at these. Others cautioned that attendance had proved a tough and intractable problem to tackle in the past and that we shouldn't necessarily see this as an area with quick wins.

- **Support for Vulnerable Learners.** This included a wide range of issues including SEND, Alternative Provision, Exclusions, and Mental Health. Common to many of these was a frustration about a lack of support and a desire to have a conversation with the LA and a wider range of partners about the support available. There was also interest from some Trusts in whether there was more they could individually and/or collectively do to think about their own support offer for these learners.
- **School Improvement/Effectiveness.** There were mixed views on this. Some felt that this was where the competition between trusts made the collaboration most difficult and that people would be reluctant to share their "trade secrets". Others felt that there were a set of challenges that all trusts and schools were struggling with such as how to raise performance of schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the city and narrow gaps and that there would be valuable learning and conversations to be had between trusts. Some wondered whether a softer approach was needed here to start to break down barriers, for example, using peer reviews and other opportunities to visit each other's schools or trusts as a way of starting this conversation or facilitating networks for leaders below CEO level across trusts e.g., bringing secondary and primary leads together to work on something specific like improving transition.

Key Questions for the next stage of planning:

- how widely should schools and trusts be consulted to decide on the priority/priorities?
- how many priorities should the partnership work on at the start?

Organisation of the Partnership

Key Questions for the next stage of planning:

- for the main partnership, what representative structures will be needed and how might they operate?
- how many people are needed for partnership discussions?

- how widely should schools and trusts be consulted about membership and when?
- how will the partnership consult and communicate with schools and trusts?

Leadership of the partnership

An individual is needed to chair the main partnership discussion. There might be advantages in not having existing school or trust leaders to chair either group, although any external choice would need to be carefully selected to avoid them appearing to have their own agenda. The partnership might also decide to encourage some independent champion(s) for key priorities (for example a high profile 'attendance czar' as suggested in the Learn Sheffield strategy if this priority was chosen).

Membership – any partnership will need to have broad engagement, transparent discussions and processes, but have a small leadership group that is representative to enable focussed discussions to take place.

Key Questions for the next stage of planning:

Do the advantages of an external chair for the Partnership outweigh the disadvantages?

- which candidates could be considered and how would they be approached and selected?
- who can develop job descriptions?
- where would funding come from to recruit an external chair and fund?
- What other research/administrative support with the Partnership need and where will that come from?

Funding and co-ordinating capacity

The Working Group will need to consider whether any of the priorities and proposed activity will need funding to support their implementation. The working group will also need to consider further how the work of the partnership will need to be co-ordinated and driven forward and where this capacity might come from.

Key Questions for the next stage of planning:

- how much funding might be needed to develop work on the chosen priority or priorities?
- how will the work of the partnership be co-ordinated? For example, who/which organisation will develop partnership plans; convene meetings; consult and communicate with schools, trusts and other partners; and help to drive forward actions and ensure people deliver on work to be undertaken?
- how will the Partnership embed the ways of working that are expected?

Advice will be sort from a range of organisations to ensure we aare following best practice,

Expected outcomes

- Proposals that meet the Purpose produced by September.
- The LA, Learn Sheffield and most MATs and maintained schools engaged and fully supportive of the Proposals.
- Robust funding and support arrangements for the first two years.
- Independent lead secured for the Partnership.
- An agreed terms of reference for the Partnership.

JCH/4/7/23