Scottish Government RIC Review - Verbal Update by Director of Education, East Renfrewshire Council and RIC Lead noted.

6 With reference to the minutes of 21st November 2023 noting an update regarding the Scottish Government (SG) Review of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), the committee noted a further verbal update on progress of the review by Mark Ratter, Director of Education, East Renfrewshire Council and Regional Lead Officer, highlighting

(1) that the review had been published in January 2024 and had concluded that

(a) RIC engagement with, and support to, pupils and practitioners across early years, primary, special and secondary settings had continued to expand and deepen since the last evaluation of the RICs;

(b) evaluation of RIC supports by practitioners who were directly engaged with RICs were consistently strong and that RICs had continued to strengthen collaboration across and between local authorities, between RICs and with other partners; and

(c) overall, the review had made it clear that RICs were engaging with approximately 30% of schools whilst accounting for 0.1% of education spending in Scotland;

(2) that in a statement to Parliament in November 2023, the Cabinet Secretary indicated that it had been decided, in light of the review, that the funding for RICs would be tapered, repurposing that funding to better support teachers in classrooms and that the plans around Centre for Teaching Excellence was not yet clear, however, funding for the RICs would reduce in 2024/25 and then stop;

(3) that in November 2023 the level of funding had not been confirmed and that as a RIC we had started to explore and plan for a range of scenarios for next stage depending on the final funding provided;

(4) that funding for 2024/25 had been clarified by the SG on 30th January 2024 and for 2024/25 RICs had been provided with 50% of the 2023/24 funding, which for the West Partnership (WP) had amounted to around £750,000;

(5) that following confirmation of the funding the WP team had begun to finalise scenario planning to ensure the continuation of the highly effective programmes and networks on the 50% funding for the coming year, and a priority would be working with school staff and central officers to build a more established and effective networked learning system particularly in those areas where there was no WP core team or funding;

(6) that discussions with Directors and Chief Education Officers had highlighted the need for the WP to continue to add value to the work of individual Local Authorities (LAs) and to continue the focus on

(a) the aspiration to build a networked learning system across the WP, thereby adding value to the work of individual Las;

(b) continued buy-in to maintain a strong collective focus on pedagogy; and

(c) support and scope for a flexible approach, to enable the participation of teachers, middle and senior leaders to shape and drive the work of the WP, more directly;

(7) that in planning for 2024/25 WP officers were considering each programme, collaborative enquiry activity, professional learning activity and network against a set of criteria to establish which had the most significant impact and reach and where WP activity was different from other local and national offers;

(8) that WP officers were currently in the process of developing more detailed plans setting out the themes that they would continue to collaborate on and how those would be supported strategically and operationally in 2024/25 and beyond;

(9) that part of those plans would be setting out the required staffing in terms of the WP Core Team for 2024/25 and what that might look like in 2025/26 and beyond, which would then be used to inform the WP Improvement Plan for next year, and given the reduction in funding and work, discussion was taking place nationally about the expectations in relation to planning and reporting; and

(10) that the expectation was that Directors would finalise these in the next few weeks and present them to this Committee at the next meeting on 28th May 2024 along with discussion at the relevant LA Education Committees as appropriate.

After consideration, the committee

(i) thanked Mark for his update; and

(ii) noted concerns and disappointment raised by Members regarding the reduction of RIC funding, especially given how well they had been performing.