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To: Heads and Chairs of Governors of all North Yorkshire schools

Dear Colleague

Most will have seen the White Paper "Educational Excellence Everywhere" published on Thursday of this week (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-excellence-everywhere>). In advance we had seen the publication of the consultation on school funding and a number of trailer speeches heralding the planned move to a fully academised system. Over the coming days we will see, I am sure, publication of a number of executive summaries which can only assist our collective understanding but in advance of this let me express some initial thoughts.

There is no doubt that the ambitious language in the White Paper - which recognises how "education unlocks opportunity helping children from all backgrounds to shape their own destiny" - is one we recognise and particularly share. When we read the following it could well have been written locally and have featured in "Young and Yorkshire", our local Plan.

"Education is the hallmark of a civilised society, the engine of social justice and economic growth, the foundation of our culture and the best investment we can make in the future of our country."

The White Paper also echoes our long held local emphasis on the workforce and the recognition that, only through people, great leaders and great teachers, will success for all be delivered. "The quality of teaching is more important to pupil outcomes than anything else a school can control." I hope you believe that the call of the White Paper to "trust effective education leaders giving them freedoms and powers" also has local resonance. The work of the Commission, the drive to more sector led improvement, the support to develop collaborative arrangements of whatever form demonstrates that trust in school leaders is firmly in place in North Yorkshire.

Whilst the White Paper says that "outcomes matter more than methods" this statement applies only to teaching and not organisational form. The White Paper is clear that all schools will either be an academy or will have initiated conversion in order that by 2022 the system will be fully academised.

I am pleased the White Paper does not enter again into the denigrating language about the historic work of Local Authorities that appears to have become the norm for speech writers of key Ministers recently. As we and Wilshaw have always maintained there are both good MATs and good LAs. However in the

White Paper itself we do not see a single unhelpful reference to “controlling LA bureaucrats” anywhere in its 124 pages!

We do see a lot of references however to the need to build capacity to create the “scaffolding” to support a more autonomous school system. The need to ensure there are no areas where autonomous leaders are “unable to access the support and tools from within the system”.

I am concerned about how synchronised those developments will be - where new high quality MATs will spring from, when the new National Teaching Service and Excellence in Leadership programmes will be in place, when 800 more NLEs will be appointed, how the Regional Schools Commissioner will have capacity to intervene to transform underperforming academies as promptly and seamlessly as possible. Will sufficient “scaffolding” of this nature be in place when the expectation is that Local Authorities will step aside from school improvement activity by September 2017?

The direction of travel appears non-negotiable but we have an ongoing collective responsibility to our young people and our workforce. Massive progress has been made in North Yorkshire in the delivery of good and outstanding education and we must ensure that momentum is maintained.

The denigration of Local Authorities in the field of education has been disrespectful to many talented individuals who have worked tirelessly to deliver improvement over recent years. In the White Paper it is encouraging to see reference to the importance of retaining “expertise in the system and ensure children continue to benefit from the best talent in local authorities”. That section goes on to say “we expect that some individuals working in local authority teams will leave to set up new trusts or join existing ones and become academy sponsors”.

I have asked officers to undertake some initial work to develop this further and to see whether there are new models which could be developed which may have a home within a new partnership infrastructure. To explore how we ensure that greater autonomy is delivered safely, building on and not fragmenting the strong local education community.

Alongside this, the funding sub-group of the Education Partnership met yesterday to consider the consultation on school funding. The potential redistribution of education funding throughout England is to be welcomed. However the fine print makes it clear that the DfE intends to end local discretion in how funding is allocated to schools. We will continue to lobby for a formula – national if needs be – that ensures all schools in North Yorkshire are resourced appropriately. Once we have had the chance to undertake more detailed work on the proposals we will write again to schools.

I will certainly seek to prioritise attendance at the next set of Improvement Network meetings where we can continue this debate but any initial thoughts and comments on this message would as ever be appreciated.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Sayer', written in a cursive style.

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