
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE 8/07/19

Present:

Councillors: Phil Wynn - (Chair - Wrexham County Borough Council), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Meirion Jones (Anglesey County Council), Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Denbighshire County Council) and Cemlyn Williams (Gwynedd Council).

Co-opted non-voting Members:

Haf Williams (Primary Schools' Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Ian Roberts (Wrexham County Borough Council), Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council), Dafydd Ifans (Conwy County Borough Council).

Officers present: Iwan G Evans (Host Authority - Gwynedd Council), Hefin Owen (Host Authority - Gwynedd Council), Hywyn Jones (Host Authority - Gwynedd Council), Arwyn Thomas (GwE Managing Director), Susan Owen Jones (GwE Business Manager), Rhys Howard Hughes (GwE Assistant Director), Alwyn Jones (GwE Assistant Director), Bethan Roberts (GwE), Annes Siôn (Host Authority Members' Support Officer - Gwynedd Council).

1. ELECT VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was decided to postpone the decision until the September meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Prior to any apologies being received, Coun. Julie Fallon was welcomed to her first meeting and Coun. Garfield Lewis was thanked for his contribution over the period.

Apologies were received from Coun. Ian Roberts, Arwyn Williams (Anglesey County Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council), Dafydd L Edwards (Host Authority - Gwynedd Council), Sion Huws (Host Authority - Gwynedd Council).

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declaration of personal interest was received by any member present.

4. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent matters.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting held on 22 May, 2019 as being correct.

In regard to the 'GwE Accounts' item - one of GwE's Assistant Directors will be leaving his post, however will not be replaced so as to meet the necessary cuts for this year. It was added that a report will be presented soon noting this in full.

6. FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2018/19

DECISION

The Statement of GwE Accounts (subject to audit) for 2018/19 were received and noted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that Section 12 of the Public Audit Act (Wales) 2004 notes that a Joint Committee consisting of more than one authority is a Local Government body, and that Section 13 of the same Act stipulates that a Joint Committee must keep accounts that will be subject to an audit by independent auditors. It was noted that the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2018 note, where overturn is greater than £2.5 million, that a statement of accounts must be prepared in accordance with the CIPFA code for Joint Committees. It was emphasised that a simple and concise "out-turn" report had been presented in May, which is more useful for internal purposes, whilst the Statement of Accounts is more suitable for governance purposes. It was added that the statement would be subject to an audit by Deloitte, and it was outlined that an 'ISA 260' report would be produced and presented to the Joint Committee on 11 September 2019.

Some aspects of the statement were highlighted, including the Pension fund. It was noted that the Balance Sheet contains an assessment by the Fund's Actuary, Hymans, of the Joint Committee's share of the Pension Fund liability. It was noted that liability has increased in 2018/19.

It was noted that there is a major change in terms of Short-Term Debtors for this year, mainly due to money from a number of grants having arrived during, rather than after, the end of the financial year.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was questioned why Property expenditure had increased so much this year, in comparison to last year. It was noted that GwE had relocated to a slightly more expensive building in Mold, however that more training could be conducted at the new building, enabling GwE to attract income. It was noted that the issue had already been highlighted when setting the budget for 2019-20 at the Joint Committee in February 2019.
- It was questioned why the number of staff paid in excess of £60,000 had increased, in comparison to last year. It was noted that the threshold of £60,000 had remained unchanged for years, despite salaries having increased with salary inflation.
- It was questioned why grants had reduced in comparison to last year. It was noted that one-off grants had been received in 2017/18, and that there had been a cut in the Education Improvement Grant in 2018/19.
- Grants were discussed noting that a number of grants had now been set within the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant.
- Under the heading 'EIG - Match Funding', it was asked why there was zero contribution from Wrexham - it was noted that this is a technical issue, as it is an assessment by individual councils as to what elements of their match funding are defined as devolved or non-devolved. It was noted that the devolved element does not appear in GwE's accounts, and that a match funding gross contribution is relative given the devolved element and non-devolved element. It was proposed that a paper highlighting the issue be presented at the next Joint Committee if desired, however the proposal was rejected.

7. 2018-19 GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

DECISION

Accept and approve the Annual Governance Statement.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that this statement is presented on an annual basis. It was noted that GwE is responsible for conducting an efficiency review of its Governance framework, including the internal management system. It was asked who holds GwE to account and in terms of the Joint Committee's policies and decisions. Details were shared regarding Governance, noting that this involved scrutiny meetings with Local Authorities, visits by Estyn and meetings with the Welsh Government. GwE's Managing Director emphasised that external accountability is demanding.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was asked how valuable the reviews are for GwE, and their cost. It was asked whether there was a better system GwE could use to avoid the cost.
- It was noted that GwE is a relatively young body and is a partnership set-up, therefore regular regulation ensures the success of partnership work.
- It was noted that external reports are important and that the circle of local and regional authorities is tight.

8. RISK REGISTER

DECISION

To accept the latest risk register.

DISCUSSION

The risk register was presented, noting that it is a regularly updated working document. It was noted that amendments have been made, and it was suggested that some risks be removed from the register. It was added that the register is reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Joint Committee.

9. PEER ENGAGEMENT

DECISION

To approve the development of a Peer Engagement Model in North Wales, as outlined in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that schools are expected to be self-improving and collaborating with other schools in order to raise standards and narrow the attainment gap. It was noted that school categorisation will continue for another year.

It was noted that the report attempts to identify a potential pattern for developing a peer engagement model. It was added that the regional approach has already adopted a cluster approach model. It was noted that discussions had taken place on several occasions within the Joint Committee as to the complexity of all these changes in schools. However, the work is still ongoing.

It was said that the model prioritises schools and has been created alongside schools. It was noted that the principles have been established with Heads, and that almost 300 heads have shown interest in assisting with the work.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was conveyed that it is necessary to create this model. Allocating money to clusters will allow them opportunity to decide how to determine their priorities.
- It was noted that no Estyn inspections will be carried out in 2020/21. There will be a new inspection framework in 2021 based on peers and collaboration.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN