
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE 11/11/20

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), Ian Roberts (Flintshire County Council) and Cemlyn Williams (Gwynedd Council).

Co-opted non-voting Members: Claire Armitstead (Secondary Schools' Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council), Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Dafydd Ifans (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Geraint Davies (Denbighshire County Council).

Officers present: Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Dafydd Edwards (Gwynedd Council Head of Finance, Host Authority), Sion Huws (Senior Lawyer - Corporate, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Susan Owen Jones (Business Manager, GwE), Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive, Anglesey County Council), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director, GwE), Gareth Williams (Chair of GwE Advisory Board), Hywyn Jones (Group Accountant, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Gwion Jones (Senior Accountant, Gwynedd Council - Host Authority), Bethan Eleri Roberts (Performance Management Manager, GwE), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader, Gwynedd Council) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Team Officer, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Phil Wyn, Wrexham County Borough Council, was elected Chair for 2020/21

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Meirion Jones, Isle of Anglesey County Council, was elected Vice Chair for 2020/21.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Councillor Ian Roberts (Flintshire County Council), Jonathan Morgan (Special Schools' Representative), Iwan Evans (Gwynedd Council), Richard Collett (Primary Schools' Representative), Karen Evans (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent matters

6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the record presented appropriately reflected the meeting held on 15 September 2020.

7. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS : INTERNAL AUDIT

DECISION

Arrangements were approved as noted in point 4.1 of the report, adding as an exception, where appropriate, that some individual audit reports will need to be presented to the Joint Committee as and when the need arises, rather than waiting for the annual report.

Discussion

The report was presented, noting that the item is presented following the discussion in the last meeting. Thanks were expressed to the Head of Finance and the Managing Director for outlining the protocol and its context. The agreed process was explained, noting that at the beginning of an audit year there will be an agreement as to what will be audited, and this will be shared with the Joint Committee.

It was noted that the Joint Committee needs to make it known whether it requires an annual report or that audit reports are put before the Joint Committee. It was emphasised that the Host Authority Internal Audit Manager will report to the GwE Joint Committee, not to Gwynedd Council.

Comments arising from the discussion:-

- The protocol was welcomed, noting that not all audit items as confirmation of proper administration of grants need to come to the attention of the Joint Committee when they arise, not counting exceptions where it will be appropriate to present them individually, rather than waiting for the annual report.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

DECISION

The reports were noted and accepted.

Discussion

The GwE Managing Director presented the audit reports, and he noted there are two elements, namely the Pupil Development Grant and the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant (RCSIG). Attention was drawn to the 'High' assurance level of the audits, which is a reflection of the appropriate arrangements in place for the administration of grants.

Thanks were expressed to all staff members who have been a part of the work involving grants, and to the Host Authority Internal Audit Unit for ratification. Nevertheless, the Chair noted that the Joint Committee accepts the previous recommendation that this

type of report will not need to be put before the committee in future.

9. RISK REGISTER

DECISION

The Joint Committee reviewed the contents of the register and accepted the information.

Discussion

The report was presented, and it was noted that the risk register is a regular item on the Joint Committee agenda. It was stated that major risks are highlighted red. The Head of Finance emphasised that the first risk as regards cuts to GwE's Core budget depends on the Government's grant settlement for local authorities in 2021/22. In addition, there will be an announcement on 22 December, therefore it is not possible to look at the budget until January.

During the discussion -

- Thanks were expressed for the work undertaken in such a different situation due to Covid-19. It was emphasised that the way of working has had to change, and it was noted that GwE has adapted its work so as to continue to provide services and support the region's schools and their communities.

10. BUDGET - QUARTER 2 MONITORING

DECISION

The report was accepted.

Discussion

Host Authority Head of Finance and GwE Managing Director noted there was no striking news to report as regards the budget, but that he is providing an update on the financial situation for the 2021/21 financial year.

A net underspend of (£31,502) is estimated, mainly due to a saving in the core travel expenses budget, as school sites are closed because of the pandemic.

Reference was made to the report that explains in detail the reasons for the overspend and underspend.

In response to a question about reclaiming losses from Welsh Government, GwE Managing Director noted that GwE will so where possible, and the Head of Finance confirmed that recompense occurs mainly via the constituent authority accounts.

11. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

DECISION

The self-assessment tool and the Additional Learning Needs Professional Offer

were both approved, which will support Local Authorities and schools to implement the reforms as set out in the Draft Learning Needs Code for Wales.

A further report was requested for the next meeting, noting how the self-assessment tool will work and any financial implications arising as a result of the draft Learning Needs Code.

Discussion

It was noted that Karen Evans is leading this work across the north. The regional ALN Transformation Team produced the self-assessment tool in order to support Local Authorities to assess their readiness for implementing the draft Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales. It was emphasised that the tool will enable local authorities to acquire a better understanding of the areas for improvement and to understand their current strengths. It was confirmed that it will also give a regional overview of how ready Local Authorities are for implementing the ALN reforms.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was asked whether there is financial support from Welsh Government for implementing the Code. It was expressed that the Government has noted it as a neutral cost exercise.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the additional cost from this Code.
- The importance of raising parents' awareness was noted when moving to a new plan.
- A further report was requested for the next meeting, noting any financial implications arising as a result of the draft ALN Code for Wales.

12. INDEPENDENT REVIEW - QUALIFICATIONS 2020

DECISION

It was agreed that the region's main priority during the next phase is to give secondary schools the appropriate support to help KS4 and KS5 learners to receive fair accreditation. In order to implement this it was agreed to use reserves, which are as a result of the underspend.

It was decided to write to the Minister for Education, firstly to thank her for her announcement of 10 November on the arrangements for awarding qualifications in 2021, and to note concerns arising from the meeting.

It was decided to write to Geraint Rees, Chair of the Design and Delivery Group, outlining concerns noted.

DISCUSSION

The GwE Managing Director presented the report on the Independent Review of awarding Qualifications in Wales and comments were received from the Secondary Schools' representative. It was added that the Minister had made this announcement one day prior to the Joint Committee meeting.

Thanks were expressed to all Headteachers and forum Chairs who have been key in conveying the region's standpoint on the matter to the Minister.

Joint Committee members discussed the report and the Minister's statement was welcomed. It was noted that the announcement will give Headteachers and teachers an

opportunity to focus on teaching for the time being. However, several questions were raised as regards implementing the statement and that there is a need for clarity as soon as possible.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the independent review reflects the needs of learners rather than the examination system.
- It was expressed that Headteachers and teachers need to have the opportunity to lead on the follow-up discussions and that the Joint Committee should request to meet members of the committee.
- It was suggested that this could be a new way of assessing without examinations in the traditional manner.
- Clarity was requested regarding the situation for pupils in the future in 2022, taking into account that some pupils will have no experience of sitting examinations. The need to consider the health and well-being of these pupils was noted.
- It was noted that the Joint Committee authorises using revenues as a result of underspend to support schools with any additional costs that arise as they implement the recommendations.
- It was suggested to write to the Minister for Education to show appreciation for her statement.
- It was agreed that it would be an idea to convey the concerns of the Joint Committee to Geraint Rees, as Chair of the Board.

13. BLENDED LEARNING RESOURCES

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and to support the regional approach and model so as to ensure continuity of learning in north Wales.

Discussion

The report was presented, noting that the report gives an overview of the support available to schools.

There will be a library of blended learning resources available for regional schools, created by teachers, for teachers. Clusters and alliances are in the process of gathering, co-constructing and sharing resources with each other and across the region. This resource will be available via the GwE Support Centre and includes resources from the Foundation Phase up to Key Stage 5. It will allow schools to continue their strong joint working practices through sharing the resources developed. It will be a means to support colleagues across north Wales during this challenging time, and beyond. GwE SIAs will be available to facilitate and support this work. It is hoped that this will lessen the workload, and allow schools to plan for any eventuality.

14. WELLBEING REPORT

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and to support the regional approach

to supporting children's well-being and the well-being of the region's workforce.

Discussion

The report on the regional approach to supporting children's well-being and the well-being of the region's workforce was presented. The contents of the plan was discussed, noting that a series of workshops will be offered to school leaders and education officers.

There will be flexibility for schools to participate in these sessions and use them in their own schools if they wish. Claire Chidley, a highly respected and experienced expert in the field and who works regularly with SOLACE, will be facilitating the workshops.

GwE Managing Director referred to the report, which outlines what the programme will offer. It was noted that the universal offer will be in the form of one 'live' event to launch the programme, and 185 Headteachers have registered to date, which is very encouraging. Following this, a series of webinars will be offered, which will focus on various themes and aspects of well-being and resilience.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was acknowledged that the programme is interesting, and notes several methods of supporting well-being.
- Recognition was given to the authorities who are already providing such workshops so as to support Headteachers and school staff.
- Members welcomed the report, noting its importance in the current climate.

15. ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and it was agreed to hold further discussions following publication of the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and it was noted that the Joint Committee is already aware of the Estyn thematic review. It was added that a one day session was held back in October, and that Estyn has also held meetings with the Local Authorities. It was expressed that numerous documents and summaries had been sent to Estyn as part of the preparation work.

It was emphasised that the report is a summary of what was presented to Estyn and outlines the work programme, the main outcomes and its impact. No formal feedback has been received from Estyn as yet, and a full national report will be published in December. It was added that local authorities and regional consortia will receive written feedback on their work. The need for further discussion following receipt of the report was noted.

Comments arising from the discussion

- Understanding was expressed as regards the need for the report, but the timing of undertaking the exercise during this time was questioned.

16. SCHOOLS IN CATEGORY

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and the next steps were agreed. It was decided to write to Estyn to request prompt guidance and clarity as regards the situation.

Discussion

Joint Committee members were updated on the current situation regarding schools in Estyn Statutory Category and Estyn Review. GwE Managing Director reported the challenges facing schools due to Covid-19.

It was reported that Estyn and GwE visits have been postponed for a while, but that pastoral visits will re-commence this half term. It was noted that no written reports will be produced for the time being. This was elaborated upon, noting that feedback from these visits will assist Estyn to identify the appropriate time to re-commence formal monitoring.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the region is naturally concerned that there is no clarity as regards the next steps.
- It was expressed it is encouraging to hear that Estyn has discussed these matters internally, and that the outcome will be shared in the coming weeks.
- It was suggested to correspond with the chief inspector to seek clarification and hold further discussions.

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 12:35pm

CHAIRMAN