

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

This statement meets the requirement to produce a Statement of Internal Control pursuant to Section 5 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 (as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2108).

Part 1: SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

GwE was established as a Joint Committee to be a regional school effectiveness and improvement service by the 6 north Wales local authorities in 2013 by undertaking the functions that are detailed in an agreement between the Joint Committee and the authorities. In the agreement, the Councils have agreed to work together in a partnering relationship to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service to be accountable to, and undertake the statutory functions of the Councils in respect of school improvement and effectiveness.

The Councils' vision was to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement service to be accountable to, and undertake the statutory responsibilities of, the six local North Wales Authorities in respect of the duties to monitor; challenge; provide support services for curriculum continued professional development and management of schools, and in addition provide services that can be commissioned by schools and local authorities.

GwE is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

In discharging this overall responsibility, GwE is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk and adequate and effective financial management.

Part 2: THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which GwE is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the authorities that are part of GwE to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of GwE's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework described above has been in place at GwE for the year ended 31 March 2019 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

Part 3: THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

3.1 Membership

The Councils have entered into an Agreement to establish and implement GwE pursuant to the powers conferred on them by Section 9 of the Local Government Wales Measure 2009, Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 Sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972 and associated Regulations.

Membership of the Joint Committee includes one member each from Isle of Anglesey County Council, Gwynedd Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, and Wrexham County Borough Council with voting rights.

The Statutory Chief Education Officers, one from each local authority in north Wales, are currently officer members without voting rights.

One Diocese Representative, one Primary Schools Representative, one Secondary Schools Representative, one Special Schools Representative and one Governor Representative are co-opted non-voting members.

3.2 Functions

The Councils have signed an agreement on 13 February 2013 to formalise each of their roles and responsibilities in respect of the Service, and have appointed Gwynedd Council the Host Authority for operating and maintaining the Service in accordance with the terms of the agreed Final Business Case.

The agreement is comprehensive, and includes information on governance and administrative aspects of the Joint Committee. The agreement is the foundation of GwE's governance framework.

3.3 Principles

By signing the agreement, the Councils have agreed that they would maintain their relationship in accordance with the following principles of good governance:

- Openness and Trust

In relation to the Agreement the Councils will be open and trusting in their dealings with each other, make information and analysis available to each other, discuss and develop ideas openly and contribute fully to all aspects of making the joint working successful;

- Commitment and Drive

The Councils will be fully committed to working jointly, will seek to fully motivate employees and will address the challenges of the Service with drive, enthusiasm and a determination to succeed;

- Skills and Creativity

The Councils recognise that each brings complementary skills and knowledge which they will apply creatively to achieving the Councils' objectives, continuity, resolution of difficulties and the development of the joint working relationship and the personnel working within it;

- Effective Relationships

The roles and responsibilities of each Council will be clear with relationships developed at the appropriate levels within each organisation with direct and easy access to each other's representatives;

- Developing and Adaptive

The Councils recognise that they are engaged in what could be a long term relationship which needs to develop and adapt and will use reasonable endeavours to develop and

maintain an effective joint process to ensure that the relationship develops appropriately and in line with these principles and objectives;

- Reputation and Standing

The Councils agree that, in relation to this Agreement and the Service generally, they shall pay the utmost regard to the standing and reputation of one another and shall not do or fail to do anything which may bring the standing or reputation of any other Council into disrepute or attract adverse publicity to any other Council;

- Reasonableness of Decision Making

The Councils agree that all decisions made in relation to this Agreement and the Service generally shall be made by them acting reasonably and in good faith;

- Necessary Consents

Each Council hereby represents to the other Councils that it has obtained all necessary consents sufficient to ensure the delegation of functions and responsibilities provided for by this Agreement; and

- Members and Officers' Commitments

Each Council shall use its reasonable endeavours to procure that their respective members and officers who are involved in the Service shall at all times act in the best interests of the Service, and respond in a timely manner to all relevant requests from the other Councils.

Part 4: EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

GwE has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control.

Gwynedd Council is the Host Authority of the Joint Committee. As a result, therefore, reviews of the effectiveness of the Local Code of Governance, the Constitution and the system of internal control of that authority will also incorporate the basis of the Joint Committee's governance.

Following the review conducted by Wales Audit Office & Estyn in January 2015, Welsh Government asked Estyn to follow up their review by inspecting and reporting on each consortium individually. The Estyn Regional Inspection took place during the two weeks commencing 18 April 2016. The report on the quality of school improvement services provided by the North Wales Consortium was produced on 30 June 2016.

https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/GwE_1.pdf

The report was presented to the Joint Committee on the 6th of July 2016 with further discussions along with the presentation of the Regional Business Plan & Post Inspection Action Plan to the Joint Committee on the 22nd of September 2016.

<http://www.gwegogledd.cymru/Content/Uploaded/Downloads/GWE/360c646b-bb14-49c2-b26a-0328fcf69fe.pdf>

In October 2017 (w/c 16 October 2017), Estyn visited GwE to review the progress made against recommendations noted in the inspection. The report following the monitoring visit was produced by Estyn on the 16th of November 2017.

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/GwE%20Consortium%20en.pdf>

The report was presented to the Joint Committee on the 22nd of November 2017.

<http://www.gwegogledd.cymru/Content/Uploaded/Downloads/GWE/59e92e08-bd75-43bd-af30-1a07e981736c.pdf>

GwE's progress was endorsed by Estyn following their re-visit. The Estyn report concluded that since the core inspection, GwE has conducted an intensive and comprehensive review of its work and its effect on standards, provision and leadership across the region. The report also comments that stakeholders at all levels have increasing confidence in GwE's ability to provide an effective school improvement service and that significant changes have been made to management structures to distribute leadership and ensure clear lines of accountability.

Progress against four of the recommendations were judged to be very good, with strong progress noted for the other two recommendations. Estyn also commented on the significant pace of improvement and acknowledged that much had taken place over a very short period of time. GwE has a clear three-year plan that sets out how, in close collaboration with key stakeholders, it will strengthen leadership, improve teaching and learning and increase aspiration to impact on standards and accelerate the pace of improvement in regional secondary schools.

The focus is now on support and on capacity-building for a self-improving system. Challenge Advisers have become 'Supporting Improvement Advisers' (SIA) and this is more than a name change – it signals a determination to build trust with key stakeholders and to move away from a top-down approach to school improvement, developing a more long-term, supportive and sustainable strategy.

There is strong focus on accountability, continuous review and constant emphasis on achieving progress in accordance with the regions priorities. The evaluation processes in place are cyclical and

ongoing and there are clearly defined lines of accountability. Agreed priorities and areas for improvement for 2019-20 are based firmly on the findings of the self-evaluation processes.

GwE is held accountable through various forums throughout the year namely Welsh Government, National Assembly for Wales Children Young People and Education Committee, Estyn link meetings and Local Authority inspections, Local Authority Scrutiny Committees, Local Authority County Quality Boards, GwE Management Board and the Joint Committee, in accordance with the Accountability Framework.

In the Denbighshire inspection report (February 2018), Estyn concluded that:

The roles and responsibilities of the authority and its regional school improvement consortium (GwE) are defined clearly and understood well by authority officers, the consortium's staff and school leaders. Through senior officers, elected members and GwE staff, schools in Denbighshire are challenged robustly about their performance, including the outcomes for pupils, the quality of teaching, the care they provide, and the quality of leadership. Schools are often supported well and in proportion to their needs following appropriate school categorisation.

Schools that are identified as causing concern receive considerable support and, where necessary, intervention. In most cases, this results in schools improving at an appropriate pace.

Schools are supported well in aspects of national priorities, for example in improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and in preparing for curriculum reform. Aspiring and serving senior and middle leaders in schools have access to good quality professional learning opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

The Welsh Government annual autumn Challenge and Review meetings are chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education focusing on performance, progress, planning and budgets in the context of national priorities. The last meeting was very positive and it was expressed that it had set a high bar, demonstrating the political maturity of the Joint Committee.

In September 2018, Steve Munby – an education consultant on leadership and system reform - reviewed GwE's current practice and direction of travel and the following were identified as areas of strength:

1. The team has built credibility with schools. Increasingly at secondary level GwE has serving head teachers (either on a secondment basis or as part-time associates). Primary advisers usually have head teacher experience.
2. Relationships with local authorities, including those with the six education portfolio leads are very strong.
3. The professional learning programme is based on need rather than on the interest and specialism of the advisers.
4. The new G6 instrument has the potential to save schools time and to integrate the various scrutiny and monitoring requirements whilst at the same time supporting school self-evaluation. It has very significant potential.
5. Internal business plans are robust and are monitored systematically – they connect activity with impact and with budget monitoring. This is impressive.
6. Some of the clusters are working very well and demonstrating outcome-focused collaboration and collective responsibility; though this is still a minority.
7. GwE is doing impressive work to enable pioneer schools to provide some strong collaborative leadership across their clusters for the new Welsh Curriculum, though this is still patchy.
8. The new proposed system for analysing the expected progress of pupils, linked to value-added and contextual factors, is highly impressive and could help to shift the culture away from

- competition with other schools and away from focusing on borderline pupils towards focusing on every child and his or her progress.
9. It is very early days but the new emphasis on using small data for school improvement has great potential to increase the confidence of schools towards school-based approaches to improvement and can empower teachers to take greater responsibility for improving teaching and learning and support for children in their classrooms/schools.
 10. There is a new approach to creating a directory of successful practice which can be shared electronically. This has the potential to support the dissemination of good practice in a practical way.
 11. Very significant progress is being made on leadership development – linked to impressive leadership development programmes and the new direction provided by the NAEL. This is a huge step forward and has great potential to improve the quality of school leadership.

In his report, Steve Munby concludes that:

The direction of travel that GwE has adopted is exactly the right one. Much is now in place to move things forward strongly – leadership, clear direction, culture, mission and focus, relationships, credibility with schools and local authorities, systems, quality assurance, data. Above all GwE should hold its nerve and keep doing what it is doing.

I am coming away from these two days feeling positive about the prospects for success in North Wales, in spite of the numerous challenges. The quality of the GwE team is high and the strategies are impressive. The direction of travel is the right one and the team are open to external challenge whilst determined to do the right things for the schools and the children in North Wales.

Objectives

A Full Business Case has been provided for the Service, dated March 2012, with the business case showing evidence that clear objectives have been established and are SMART and that an appropriate work programme is in place.

A 3 Year Business Plan is in place for the service which has been approved by the Joint Committee & Welsh Government. The Business Plan ensures an appropriate work programme (annual business plan) is in place & monitoring reports are presented to the Joint Committee at their meetings.

Robust and detailed business plans, based firmly on the findings of self-evaluation processes, contribute significantly to the effective management and development of individuals and teams. GwE's improved planning and performance management model articulates clearly the vision, values, priorities and objectives of the service. The clarity of its strategic direction and robust accountability framework are key strengths in moving forward. This strong focus on accountability, continuous review and a constant emphasis on achieving progress in accordance with priorities is leading to significant improvement in performance of GwE staff, individual schools and regional outcomes. GwE priorities are also clearly aligned to the national priorities as outlined in *Education in Wales: Our National mission*.

Structure, Roles and Responsibilities

The Joint Committee has been established, with appropriate membership.

The terms of reference of the Joint Committee set out some of its responsibilities together with a list of members of the Joint Committee and voting rights. The role of the Authorities has been identified in the Agreement.

As a result of the adoption of the National Model For Regional Joint Working the governance structure of GwE was reviewed. This involved creating an Advisory Board and a Management Board and a review of the structure of the Joint Committee. The review of the agreement is in the process of being completed.

Leadership

The Joint Committee met on the following dates:

- 23/05/2018
- 04/07/2018
- 26/09/2018
- 28/11/2018
- 20/02/2019

Risk Management

There are rigorous and comprehensive arrangements in place to accurately identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document, which is updated on a regular basis in order to identify increasing risks or risks which are no longer deemed as high level. It is reviewed every month in a senior leadership meeting and the Management Board and the Joint Committee review the register on a quarterly basis.

Through effective management of risks to the region, GwE is able to support the region's objectives, make effective use of resources and meet the outcomes as intended.

Performance Management Systems

Under the agreement, the Service's Managing Director will report annually to the Joint Committee and to each individual Council on the performance of the Service in undertaking Functions and achieving Key Service Objectives.

The Annual Report for 2017/18 was presented to the Joint Committee at their meeting on 23/05/2018.

The clear and robust accountability framework is a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans on all levels of planning address all aspects of the work of GwE, and clearly note the contribution of the service to the transformation agenda. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.

There are detailed self-evaluation arrangements. Plans are reviewed on a quarterly basis, evaluating progress and impact. Staff on all levels fully understand their responsibility for continued improvement and accountability.

Each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core lead adviser. Progress towards agreed outcomes on a local authority level is reviewed regularly in meetings between the lead adviser and Local Authority. Ongoing issues are referred to GwE Senior leaders in a timely manner.

Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities. Consequently, GwE leaders accurately identify areas of good performance and areas for development, or areas where there is an element of risk in terms of improving experiences and educational outcomes for learners.

Budget

We like everybody else are living in a very difficult financial climate and have to make some difficult decisions. We are grateful for the support of the Chief Executives across the Region and our Elected Members in the Joint Committee for their advice and support in making the best decisions to support our learners and schools.

Value for Money

The consortium has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation on financial arrangements is effective, and GwE staff, the host local authority and Joint Committee all review the core funding and grant expenditure on a regular basis.

A robust financial analysis supports the work of delivering the business plan. A medium term financial plan and workforce plan are both aligned with the business plan. Through increasingly effective use of data to identify key priorities, the link between the business planning process and decisions regarding financial planning is strengthened as the work streams that underpin the business plan clearly note the resources to be used.

A formal framework was produced to assess the wider value for money provided by GwE. The judgement is now consistent across all stakeholders on how to measure the value for money of GwE activities within the structure and objectives of the business plan.

User Needs and Complaints

The Service follows Gwynedd Council complaints procedure. During 2018/19 no complaints have been received.

In addition, it is possible for schools to provide feedback via the User Group that has been established to provide support to the Joint Committee as well as challenge. Appropriate representatives from secondary and primary schools of the 6 authorities belong to the user group.

The User Group is operating effectively because:

- It has the right to report and make recommendations to the Joint Committee on any matter within the scope of functions of the Service.
- The group met on the following dates:
 - 04/05/18 (secondary)
 - 08/05/18 (primary)
 - 28/06/18 (primary)
 - 18/10/18 (secondary)
 - 24/10/18 (primary)
 - 28/11/18 (primary)
- The group includes:
 - 6 Secondary representatives, one from each Authority
 - 6 Primary representatives, one from each Authority
 - 1 representatives of Special Schools
 - School Governors - 1 representative per Council.

Corporate Policies

At the balance sheet date, GwE function under the corporate policies of the host authority.

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the **review of the effectiveness of the governance framework** by GwE, and that the arrangements **continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework**.

Part 5: SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES

The processes outlined in previous sections of this statement describe the methods used by GwE to identify the most significant governance issues that need to be addressed.

The overall conclusion has been based upon:

- An open approach to engaging with stakeholders, planning and delivering services, and reporting and scrutiny of GwE's performance;
- Clear arrangements for decision making that were supported by robust service management and financial management arrangements;
- The reporting of understandable priorities and ambition, as set out in GwE's Business Plan, with progress reports demonstrating improvement in outcomes and performance at the same time as maintaining financial stability;
- Sound arrangements to support elected Members and Officers in the effective discharge of their responsibilities and also in maintaining high standards of conduct when undertaking business on behalf of GwE;
- Developing medium term financial planning arrangements that can be built upon further in 2019/20.

Notwithstanding this overall position, the assessment has identified areas where improvements are deemed necessary to further reinforce the effectiveness of GwE's current arrangements. These are detailed in our Business Plan for 2019/20 & Risk Register and in particularly Strategic Objective 6, i.e. ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business and operational support that provides value for money. Plans are reviewed on a quarterly basis, evaluating progress and impact; the Joint Committee will receive reports on progress at their meetings.

Part 6: OPINION

Following changes to the National Model, the review of the agreement is in the process of being completed.

The strategic objectives within the GwE Business Plan 2019/20 have been approved via the GwE Governance & Accountability structure; approval by the GwE Joint Committee was given at their meeting on 22 May 2019.

GwE Lead Officer

Date : _____

ARWYN LLOYD THOMAS

GwE MANAGING DIRECTOR

GwE Chairman

Date: _____

COUNCILLOR PHIL WYNN