
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2020

Present:

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

Co-opted non-voting Members: Haf Williams (Primary Schools' Representative) and Claire Armitstead (Secondary Schools' Representative).

Non-voting Officers: Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Jenny Williams (Conwy Borough County Council), Karen Evans (Denbighshire County Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council) and Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council)

Officers present: Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Sion Huws (on behalf of Gwynedd Council Monitoring Officer, Host Authority), Dafydd Edwards (Gwynedd Council Head of Finance, Host Authority), Hywyn Jones (Gwynedd Council Senior Accountant, Host Authority), Susan Owen (Business Manager, GwE), Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive, Anglesey Council), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director, GwE), Gareth Williams (Chair of GwE Advisory Board), Annes Sion (Gwynedd Council Democracy Team Lead, Host Authority), Sioned Mai Jones (Gwynedd Council Democracy Team Officer, Host Authority) and Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager, GwE).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Dr Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council) and Ian Roberts (Wrexham County Borough Council).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 November 2019 as correct.

5. NATIONAL CATEGORISATION

DECISION

To note the information in the report, expressing concern about the arrangement nationally. Joint Committee members were asked to raise their concerns with the Education Minister in the Welsh Local Government Association meeting. The Management Board was also asked to undertake a review of arrangements locally.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented and the process explained, expressing that it is a continuous process. It was noted that schools can appeal, but that no schools have done so this year.

It was stated that regional moderation has taken place and that regional samples have been sent for moderation nationally. It was added there were no amendments following national moderation. It was explained there is no national analysis, but, overall, there is an increase in green category schools, with 10% of schools in the red category. It was added that the primary profile is positive overall.

Comments arising from the discussion

- Concern was raised about the arrangement nationally. It was noted that it is difficult to understand and the need for consistency was emphasised.
- It was noted that parents and the press misinterpret the colours associated with the support category when the categorisation is published on 'My Local School'.
- It was emphasised that it is the Local Authority that determines the colours.

6. GWE BUDGET 2019/20 - 3RD QUARTER REVIEW

DECISION

The report was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that the 3rd quarter review estimates a net overspend of £27,000, which is a fairly neutral situation in the context of total expenditure. It was added there is no significant change to what was reported in quarter 3 - which highlighted an overspend of £36,000. It was emphasised there is no need to worry about the overspend as it is under control.

Attention was drawn to the financial variances. In terms of employees overspend, the reduction in Supporting Improvement Advisers has been implemented since 1 September 2019; consequently, there is a one-off overspend in 2019-20. The budget was not perused as there is not much change since the previous report.

7. 2020/21 BASELINE BUDGET

DECISION

It was decided to adopt the baseline budget for 2020/21, as presented in

Appendix 1 of the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that the contribution of Local Authorities is central to the baseline budget. It was expressed that the budget reflects the decision of the chief executives to add inflation in full and to not implement a cut in 2020/21. It was added that this is due to a better financial settlement for Local Authorities than that received in recent years. It was noted that as a result of this there is no savings column in the budget. In recent years, GwE has received significant cuts.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was asked where the decision was made that Local Authorities will add inflation in full and not implement a cut. It was explained that a discussion took place between the Chief Executives in January. The discussion was a fair one, looking at the implications of this. It was noted that all Chief Executives were unanimous on this.
- It was noted that some schools are facing a financial deficit. It was expressed that decisions regarding school budgets are made by the Local Authorities.

8. EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT GRANT - REVIEW

DECISION

It was decided to:

1. Delay review of allocation of FPh element of EIG until Welsh Government has made its situation clearer on whether to ultimately transfer the FPh grant, or not.
2. Undertake a review of EIG School Effectiveness finance groups
3. Review current use of Grant elements that are not delegated.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting how the Education Improvement Grant is allocated within the region. So as to have regional consistency, how the EIG is used and delegated will need to be looked at. Specific elements and the financial conditions were scrutinised. It was noted there have been significant cuts to the core budget and the grant budget in the past. The recommendations of the report were summarised, and permission sought to undertake a review of this grant in its entirety.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was agreed that the person undertaking the review must be independent of GwE and skilful in terms of understanding complex budgets.
- Concern was expressed that we are still running an old system, and that it is timely to look at this matter and have consistency and equity.
- It was noted that the review is welcomed. It is believed there has been inconsistency historically in delegation rates to Local Authorities, and that the review will bring about greater clarity across the region.

9. EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT GRANT 2020/21

DECISION

It was decided to delay the decision so as to have guidance from the region's Chief Executives on financing additional resources for Wrexham PIAP. An urgent meeting will then be held to make a decision on the matter.

DISCUSSION

Councillor Meirion Jones chaired this item. Thanks were expressed to Hefin Owen, Gwynedd Council, for his work and good wishes extended for his retirement.

It was noted that in the last Management Board meeting it was agreed for the Education Improvement Grant to be distributed in the same way as last year and to undertake a review as we go. An increase of £560k in the grant was noted for the Foundation Phase this year. It was discussed whether to use this additional resource to finance the additional resources for implementing the Wrexham PIAP. It was expressed that the estimate for support is £300k. The recommendations and the 5 options were described.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was noted that 3 Local Authorities have already been reviewed by Estyn, but that 3 are awaiting this review. Concern was expressed that the other Local Authorities will require additional support after the Estyn review.
- There was consensus to assist Wrexham, but it was questioned whether this is the appropriate financial source for this as it is intended for the Foundation Phase.
- The preferred option was 3.4.4, but it was noted that the Joint Committee will need further guidance on what is meant by partial funding i.e. what percentage or amount. It was suggested that Wrexham will have to find most of the money required.
- It was explained that Wrexham is meeting with Estyn at the end of March. It was noted that the Joint Committee should not delay its decision in fairness to Wrexham and that it should reconvene before 25 March, so as to give clarification to Estyn on the way forward.
- The need for a special meeting following the discussions of the Chief Executives was noted.

10. 2019-20 BUSINESS PLAN - QUARTER 3 MONITORING REPORT

DECISION

The monitoring report for quarter 3 was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The recommendation was noted and the report was accepted.

11. GWE BUSINESS PLAN 2020-2023 - REGIONAL PRIORITIES

DECISION

The draft Business Plan and the regional priorities for 2020-2023 were approved.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and it was noted that this year is the last year of the current 3-year business plan, and that this draft notes the direction of travel for the next 3 years. The priorities were outlined: it was noted that the priorities are a combination of improving provision, leadership and outcomes in schools, along with implementing the reform journey. It was noted that the strategic objectives align with national priorities and that GwE has a central role.

It was noted that discussions had taken place with schools regarding the priorities and challenges. It was emphasised that the main priority is the reform journey.

Comments arising from the discussion

- The need to conduct discussions with school Governors was noted.

12. GwE RISK REGISTER

Decision

The Risk Register was noted and accepted.

13. WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS

Decision

It was decided to undertake a review of the current GwE Core Lead role and of information sharing systems between Local Authorities and GwE.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented. It was noted that in a recent GwE Management Board meeting a recommendation was made to review the GwE Core Lead role and the structure across the region together with information sharing systems between Local Authorities and GwE.

It was added that Welsh Government is piloting a scheme, in conjunction with stakeholders, so as to have a holistic view of the provision for schools.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was expressed that discussions between Welsh Government, Local Authorities and GwE have matured.
- In terms of information sharing between Local Authorities and GwE, it was expressed that G6 is available but that Authorities also have systems. The need for a review was emphasised, as there is inconsistency across the region. The need for a clear protocol was noted, a protocol on how information will be shared and the risks arising from this.
- It was decided that a further discussion on information sharing is needed in the next meeting.

14. MEETINGS CALENDAR

DECISION

The meetings calendar was approved, and authority given to the Chair to make changes as required.

The meeting started at 10:30am and concluded at 12:15pm.

CHAIR