
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE - 26/05/2021

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: Jonathan Morgan (Special Schools' Representative), Richard Collet (Primary Schools' Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Dafydd Ifans (Wrexham County Borough Council), Geraint Davies (Denbighshire County Council) and Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council).

Officers present: Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Sion Huws (Senior Lawyer - Corporate, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Susan Owen Jones (Business Manager, GwE), 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), Lowri Jones and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Team Officers, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from the following: Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive, Anglesey County Council), Claire Armitstead (Secondary Schools' Representative), Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council), Arwyn Thomas (GwE Managing Director) and Karen Evans (Denbighshire County Council).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declaration of personal interest was received.

3. URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the record presented appropriately reflected the meeting on 24 February, 2021.

Reference was made to a comment under Item 11 of the minutes. Members were updated that GwE is working with an adviser as regards engaging with parents to promote the supporting of learning. It was elaborated that a regional group has been established to develop bilingual resources that will be available to schools after half term.

5. GWE ACCOUNTS 2020-2021 - REVENUE OUT-TURN

DECISION:

- a) To note and accept the Income Account and Revenue Expenditure for 2020/21 presented in Appendix 1 as the final financial situation.
- b) The Joint Committee approves a financial transfer to earmark underspend from 2020/21 (£83,326) to GwE's reserves.

DISCUSSION:

The Head of Finance, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority presented the report noting a revenue out-turn at the end of the 2021/21 financial year.

It was noted there is an £83,000 underspend, mainly due to savings from travelling expenses. It was recommended the underspend be transferred to GwE's reserves. Reference was made to the report in order to further explain the expenditure and underspend during the year.

It was added that GwE's current financial situation is lean and prudential at the end of the financial year.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Joint-Committee, was grateful for the comprehensive report, and GwE Assistant Director corroborated this.

6. GWE BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022

DECISION:

To approve GwE's Regional Business Plan for 2021-2022.

DISCUSSION:

The Business Plan was presented by GwE Assistant Director noting it outlines the vision, values and behaviour of the service, as well as regional priority areas for improvement.

In addition, the Business Plan addresses the strategic priorities of Welsh Government and the Local Authorities, which are within the remit of GwE.

These priorities are supported by the detailed plans of the service, and each Local Authority also has a detailed business plan.

Progress against the Regional Business Plan is reported on a quarterly basis to the Joint Committee.

7. RISK REGISTER

DECISION:

- a) To note and accept the content of the report.
- b) The Joint Committee will be briefed on the Risk Register during the next discussion in relation to correlating risks associated with the recruitment of leaders, and also the recruitment of qualified bilingual staff.

DISCUSSION:

The latest risk register was presented by the GwE Business Manager who explained its purpose, which is to formalise the process of identifying risks and take subsequent action. GwE's risk register is a working document and is regularly reviewed. It is presented to the Joint Committee annually, and when new risks are identified and there is a need for the Joint Committee to be aware of them. Reference was made to the pack noting that the risks have been updated and highlighted in red for the information of the committee.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- Risks regarding the recruitment of Headteachers as a result of the pandemic were highlighted. It was asked whether there is an update on this within the region.
- It was noted that a few leaders are choosing to retire early and it is therefore important to consider this as a higher risk.
- It was requested that Headteachers' workload and their extended responsibilities be taken into consideration. It was added there is a need to look at the reasons why recruitment is a concern, offering that it is due to the range of responsibilities and accountability on Headteachers.

In response to the comments, GwE Assistant Director noted:

- NPQH numbers have been strong in recent years; however, not everyone who gains the qualification takes up a Headship.
- The need to ensure the well-being of Headteachers as a priority was highlighted.

8. ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS: SUMMER TERM 2021

DECISION:

To accept the report.

DISCUSSION:

The report was presented by GwE Assistant Director for information purposes in order to note that the assessment situation reflects the situation in 2020 i.e. that there is no expectation for teachers to undertake assessment or moderation. In addition, it was noted that KS4 results will not be published at a school level, only at national level.

It was added that schools do not have to conduct literacy and numeracy tests, however, schools are encouraged to conduct them if possible for internal assessment purposes.

9. THE REFORM JOURNEY: THINK PIECES

DECISION:

- a) To accept the report.
- b) The intention is to share developments with Elected Members and the wider community in order to raise awareness of GwE'S ongoing work in ensuring the success of the new curriculum in 2022.

DISCUSSION:

The report was presented by GwE Assistant Director noting that a collection of papers has been jointly produced by GwE team members who have been working with guidance and support from Professor Graham Donaldson.

The Think Pieces aim to encourage discussion and support schools with their preparations for the Curriculum for Wales. It was added that these have been shared with schools in a series of webinars and that they are useful to stimulate discussion about what needs to be put in place for the new curriculum.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- GwE officers were thanked for their work on the new curriculum, and pride conveyed in relation to the close relationship with Professor Graham Donaldson.
- Pride in the work was expressed and an enthusiasm from the opportunities that arise from the curriculum as a way of putting Wales on the map.
- It was indicated that these need to be shared with education scrutiny committees and on a wider scale in order to raise awareness of the work undertaken.
- This was corroborated, noting the need to get the message out to parents and local authorities as regards the big change that is in under way and the opportunities arising in light of the curriculum.
- It was noted that the pandemic has cast a shadow on this work, and the importance of the work being brought to light at this time was expressed.

In response to the comments GwE Assistant Director noted:

- The work is recorded as webinars, therefore the work may be shared with joint committee members, parents and governors so as to highlight this work.

10. ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW: RECOMMENDATIONS

DECISION:

- a) To note and accept the content of the report.
- b) Joint Committee members will be briefed in the autumn on the steps taken to meet the recommendations within Estyn's thematic review.

DISCUSSION:

GwE Assistant Director presented the report noting a list of recommendations has been received from Estyn as a result of the review.

It was noted that Estyn has already visited the authorities and GwE to discuss progress against the recommendations, and reference was made to the report which outlines this progress to date.

As there was only a short space of time between the publication of the report in December/January and the recent visits, it was suggested that the Joint Committee be updated in the autumn on the steps taken to deliver against the recommendations noted in Estyn's thematic report.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the report is useful in that it indicates practice across the region.
- It was asked whether there is more work to be done to deliver against the recommendations, and if so, the need to update the joint committee in the autumn was proposed.
- It was stated that the recommendations are appropriate and that they highlight the excellent work undertaken by the 6 Local Authorities and GwE.
- Other members of the joint committee expressed their gratitude for the work undertaken by GwE, LAs and schools.

The meeting started at 10.30am and concluded at 11:20am.

CHAIR