

**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 2018).

**Part 1: SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY**

1.1 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.

1.2 The 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.

1.3 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.

1.4 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**

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 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.

2.4 The governance framework described above has been in place at GwE for the year ended 31 March 2021 and up to the date of approval of the 2020/21 statement of accounts.

**Part 3: GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS**

3.1 The GwE Management Board monitors matters of governance continuously in a disciplined manner, raising a wider awareness of these, and promoting a wider ownership of the Annual Governance Statement.

3.2 To demonstrate good governance, GwE must show that it is complying with the core (and supporting) principles contained within the Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (CIPFA / Solace, 2016). This statement has been prepared in accordance with those principles.

3.3 An outline is given of the Governance Areas and GwE’s arrangements to deal with these, and the effectiveness of these arrangements, in the remainder of this section of the Annual Governance Statement.

3.4 For each governance principle, an evaluation has been made based on a combination of:

- A review of relevant reports & documents prepared during the year;
- The review of progress made against the Business Plan;
- Discussion with and based on comments received from officers, SLT & the Management Board.
- Continuous reflection on the effectiveness of the work, both internally & externally, i.e. Estyn, Steve Munby, Education Development Trust.

3.5 Since March 2020, to the date of publication of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts, GwE has been responding to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Where this has had a significant and visible impact on GwE’s governance arrangements, this has been noted below.

Principle A	Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
Assessment	Assured

*How we do this:*

- GwE follows the host authority (Gwynedd Council) operating rules, which details how decisions need to be made and the procedures to be followed to ensure they are efficient, transparent and available to local people.
- The GwE Inter Authority Agreement have agreed to the following principles of good governance:
  - Openness and Trust
  - Commitment and Drive
  - Skills and Creativity
  - Effective Relationships
  - Developing and Adaptive
  - Reputation and Standing
  - Reasonableness of Decision Making
  - Necessary Consents
  - Members and Officers’ Commitments

- The voting members of the GwE Joint Committee are governed by the Code of Conduct of their relevant Council. The Codes of Conduct for Councillors and employees within the Constitution of the host authority are built upon the principles of openness, transparency and honesty.
- As part of the Regional Business Plan the following service and personal values are embedded within the service and have been set to enable the service to achieve the vision & objectives for delivery. These include:
  - Trust
  - Show no bias
  - Fairness
  - Respect diversity
  - Supportive and collaborative
  - Bilingual
  - Objectivity
  - Demand high standard
  - Integrity
- GwE, supported by the host authority, has procedures in place to ensure the Joint Committee meetings are conducted effectively and decision making is effective.
- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all meetings of the Joint Committee during 2020/21 have been held virtually via Zoom. Guidance was produced for Members in relation to Attending Virtual Meetings.

Principle B	Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
Assessment	Assured

*How we do this:*

- The Joint Committee meetings are open meetings and all papers are published on the host authority (Gwynedd Council) website & the GwE website.
- The Joint Committee meetings have a forward calendar of meetings set out for the year ahead.
- GwE is a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the pandemic and in moving forward.
- Full stakeholder engagement via various forums both within & outside the formal governance structure.
- During 2020/21, GwE have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. GwE has also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance and blended learning and to provide advice on formative and continuous assessment. It has also strengthened the working relationship between those parties with positive professional exchanges, ensuring that the stakeholders are getting quality advice and resources.
- GwE encourages stakeholder engagement and feedback via a broad range of communication and engagement methods. Examples include: attendance at Headteacher Federation meetings; cluster groups; weekly bulletin; social media etc.

- One of the main strengths of work across North Wales has been the consistent messaging from the six local authorities through their political education portfolio holders and directors working with GwE to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff.
- GwE have produced a series of reports that we have shared with the Management Board and the Joint Committee during the year. These reports include the views of schools, staff and local authorities on the effectiveness of regional practice. Each report describes the quality of the provision and identifies areas for improvement to drive the learning agenda forward.
  - Effective collegiate and collective regional approach between the six local authorities and GwE.
  - Joint working has ensured strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
  - Establish clear lines of communication with key stakeholders.
  - Reports for the Joint Committee
  - Weekly meetings with Management Board and Education Portfolio Holders - key strategic and political decisions.
  - Share regular updates and ensure contact and support.
  - Share information, key messages and work streams with LAs / Elected Members.
  - Update key stakeholders on various GwE matters.
  - Share regional information and ensure consistent messages.
  - Ensure consistency as regards national and regional information.
  - Ensure effective communication.
  - Prepare and co-ordinate regional meetings, for example the Management Board and Joint Committee.
  - Liaise with key stakeholders.
- Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance and blended learning. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.

Principle C	Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
Assessment	Assured

#### How we do this:

- GwE's overall vision is reflected in the 3 year business plan & is further strengthened in the annual business plan.
- The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of our internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on our current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities. The Business Plan also addresses Welsh Government and the Local Authorities strategic priorities that fall within the remit of the work of GwE. Each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser
- 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. Progress towards agreed outcomes on a local authority level is monitored on a quarterly basis and discussed 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.
- 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 is in place to assess the wider value for money provided by GwE. The judgement is consistent across all stakeholders on how to measure the value for money of GwE activities within the structure and objectives of the business plan.

Principle D	Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- GwE has an agreed Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) that sets out clearly how the Joint Committee operates and how decisions are made and procedures need to be followed to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability.
- The Joint Committee is a joint committee constituted by the Councils under section 101(5) and 102(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 and section 20 of the Local Government Act 2000. Meetings of the Joint Committee are subject to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 including the provisions on access to information and meetings held in public.
- Members of the Joint Committee and the public have the full benefit of access to the Joint Committee papers and supporting information.
- The Joint Committee meets a minimum of three times a year.
- The IAA identifies the following two categories of decisions together with the means by which they will be taken:
  - ‘Joint Committee Matter’ – being a matter which is to be decided upon at a quorate (3 voting members) meetings of the Joint Committee by those present and entitled to vote and any such decision will be binding on all the Councils;
  - ‘Matter Reserved To The Councils’ – being a matter which will have to be referred to each Council for decision and, for the avoidance of doubt, any such matter will not be dealt with by the Joint Committee (as the case may be) until the matter has been determined by all of the Councils. If the Councils fail to reach the same decision in respect of such matter then the matter shall be referred under Dispute Resolution as a dispute for resolution.
- The terms of reference and delegated powers of the Joint Committee are to promote joint working in the delivery of the Service through:
  - facilitating constructive partnership working;

- engaging with key interested bodies and stakeholders when appropriate;
  - carrying out such other activities calculated to facilitate, or which are conducive to the successful delivery of the Service;
  - to oversee the management of the Service and ensure that the Service is provided and performs in accordance with the expectations of the Partner Authorities as reflected in the Full Business Case, Inter Authority Agreement and agreed Annual Business and Commissioning Plans;
  - to approve the budget for the Service on an annual basis;
  - to approve the business plan for the Service on an annual basis;
  - to monitor and manage the risks associated with the Service;
  - to ratify requests from the Service for additional budget funding from individual Councils;
  - to approve the staff structure of the Service;
  - to appoint the Managing Director of the Service;
  - to decide on disciplinary action against the Managing Director;
  - where required, to determine or arrange for the determination of appeals in relation to Human Resources matters.
- The Joint Committee is supported by a Management Board with the following terms of reference:
    - Co-construct the annual Business Plan, including the individual appendices to identify specific requirements at individual LA Level;
    - Monitor progress against the priorities and outcomes identified in the Business Plan on a regular basis;
    - Have arrangements in place to make sure that GwE financial controls and systems are robust;
    - Provide professional advice to the joint committee with regard to the appointment of the Managing Director;
    - Regularly report to the joint committee.
  - During the COVID period GwE has continually reflected on the effectiveness of the work. Both internal and external resources have been used to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of the work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure.

Principle E	Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
Assessment	Assured

*How we do this:*

- GwE has re focused several times during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, communication & engagement within the leadership structure of GwE has been regular and clear. Daily meetings of the Senior Leadership Team were supported by weekly meetings of the GwE Management Board and Education Portfolio Holders.
- This enabled key strategic and political decisions to be made with clarity and confidence. This resulted in consistent messaging from the local authorities through their political education

portfolio holders and directors working with GwE to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff.

- The Education Portfolio Holders have been given numerous briefings & kept up to date on all developments via reports & verbal updates. They have also been given the opportunity to access webinars & resources.
- Staff in GwE have adapted their work over the last year in order to continue to provide effective services and support for all their school communities during the COVID pandemic. During this very difficult period, GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning.
- The OECD's transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.
- The service in its entirety has re focused several times during this period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. The ability to be flexible and agile and to work effectively together in different teams, often cross sector, has had significant impact on organisational behaviour and external perception. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service.
- Weekly staff meetings have contributed to a consistency of approach in ensuring common messages to school teachers and leaders. There has been a strong emphasis on modelling appropriate and supportive behaviour throughout the period.
- GwE has worked on the strengths of individuals within the team and redeployed them where they have provided the maximum impact in their roles in supporting individual local authorities, schools, clusters, subject and phase networks. This bespoke provision of support based on strong principles of collaboration, exchanging and sharing and developing the best practice is a key learning principle that we will continue to develop in the next stages of evolving the service.
- The consistency and quality of challenge and support to schools is good. Regular training, support and discussions ensure that Supporting Improvement Advisers' knowledge and understanding of national and local developments, and the implications of this on their roles, is good.
- Quality Assurance processes continue to develop and evolve in line with national developments and principles. The annual Professional Review process has continued during the year.
- Messages and information are communicated clearly and on a regular basis to all employees. Generic, purposeful and effective support programmes are offered. Full and sector team meetings offer regular opportunities for collaboration, consultation and contributing to discussions and decisions regarding GwE's direction of work during a period of considerable change.
- GwE has also worked on a weekly basis from the beginning of spring 2021 with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop its own staff to effectively support schools with the new curriculum.

Principle F	Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
Assessment	Assured

*How we do this:*

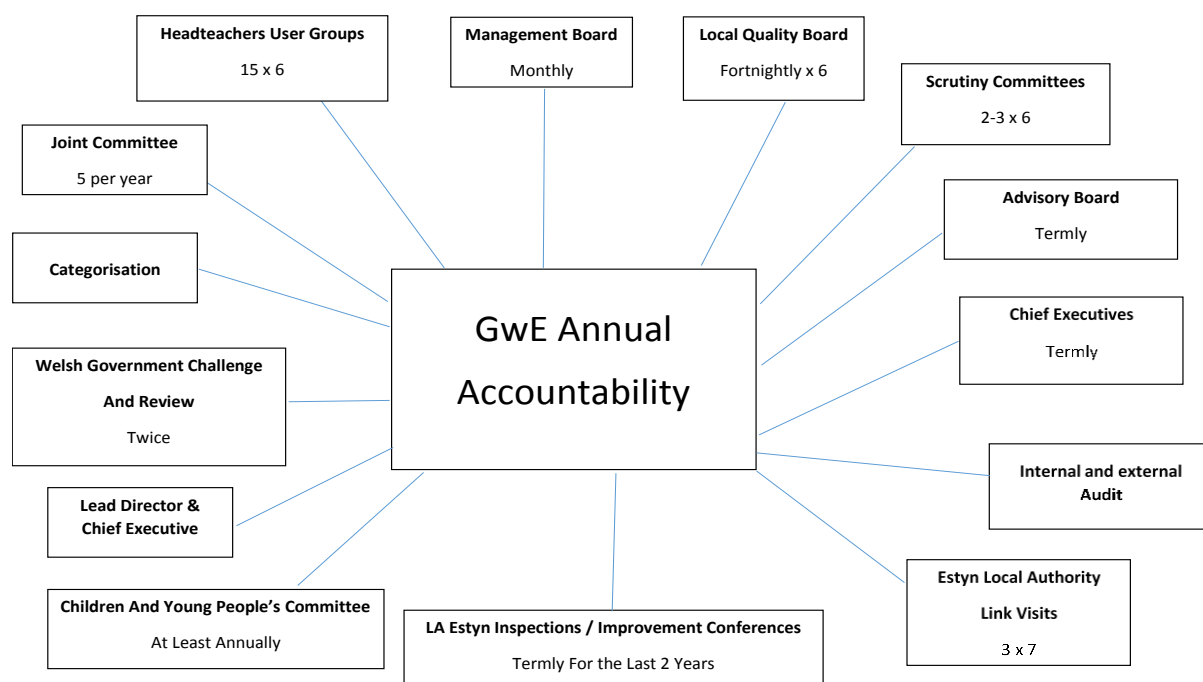
- The clear and robust accountability framework in a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans on all levels of planning address all aspects of the work of GwE. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.
- There are detailed self-evaluation arrangements. 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 adviser. Progress towards agreed outcomes on a local authority level is monitored on a quarterly basis and discussed regularly in meetings between the lead adviser and Local Authority. Ongoing issues are referred to GwE Senior leaders in a timely manner.
- 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.
- 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 is in place to assess the wider value for money provided by GwE. The judgement is consistent across all stakeholders on how to measure the value for money of GwE activities within the structure and objectives of the business plan.
- 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.



Principle G	Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability
Assessment	Assured
Future actions	The Joint Committee will be given an opportunity in a future meeting to consider and adopt an Internal Audit Charter, as is required under the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

*How we do this:*

- The Joint Committee meetings are open meetings and all papers are published on the host authority (Gwynedd Council) website & the GwE website.
- GwE has annual accountability to various stakeholders throughout the year as can be seen in the following diagram.



- GwE is a 'relevant body' which must maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and system of internal control. In order to comply with these statutory requirements, the internal audit service of the host authority is provided to GwE in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards ("PSIAS"). The Standards are relevant to every internal audit service provider for the public sector, whether internal, shared service or external.
- During the year & at the request of the Joint Committee, the GwE Managing Director, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer & Head of Finance in Gwynedd Council, reviewed the internal audit arrangements. As a result, the following process for identifying the need for internal audit and acting on the recommendations was agreed:
  - Identify the need for audit in specific areas. This work plan will be developed where possible through consideration of risk registers, performance reports, business plans etc.
  - Meeting between the host authority's Audit Manager and GwE's Managing Director.

- To agree the audit program for the year with the Management Board.
  - Content of the programme to be shared with the Joint Committee.
  - The Audit Unit of the host authority to conduct the audits.
  - Share draft audit reports with relevant GwE management for accuracy and agree actions to address any risks.
  - The host authority's Audit Unit to send audit reports to GwE's Managing Director and relevant managers.
  - Relevant GwE officers to act on agreed actions (administrative issues not requiring Joint Committee input).
  - GwE Managing Director to share individual audit reports with Management Board.
  - The host authority's Audit Manager submits an annual report to the Joint Committee on any audits carried out during the year.
  - Relevant GwE officers to act on Joint Committee decisions.
  - GwE officers to report progress as necessary to the Joint Committee.
- GwE has succeeded in managing and evaluating itself regularly and as a result external accountability bodies opinions have been positive.

#### **Part 4: SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

4.1 The above assessment indicates that there are no issues which are a significant governance issue.

4.2 Each of the areas of governance has been reviewed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and we are satisfied that GwE has been able to modify its working arrangements in order to cope with the crisis.

#### **Part 5: GOVERNANCE MATTERS IDENTIFIED**

5.1 Progress on Identified Governance Matters 2019/20

The table below provides an update on progress for those proposals for improvements identified during 2019/20:

<b>Core Principle</b>	<b>Proposal for improvement</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Update on progress</b>
Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.	Ensure the governance review is finalised.	Host authority / Managing Director	Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has been at the heart of the service during the last 12 months. This joint work facilitated has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.

Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership & the individuals within	That staff development continues & is built upon during the next year ensuring that staff receive any new support requirements / developments as a result of Covid-19.	Managing Director	During this very difficult period, GwE has kept true to its vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning.  Staff have received significant professional learning during the year.
Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	That the value for money framework is enhanced during the year in order to demonstrate further the prioritisation of resources.	Managing Director	GwE has continued to provide value for money & has worked within its budget again this year. The Mid Term Financial Plan including the value for money framework will be reviewed during 2021/22.

**Part 6: OPINION**

We are of the opinion that the governance arrangements described above offer assurance that our governance arrangements work well overall. However, we intend to take measures to deal with the matters noted above during next year in order to improve our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these measures will deal with the need to improve as identified in the effectiveness review, and will monitor their operation as part of the next annual review.

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**GwE Lead Officer**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

ARWYN LLOYD THOMAS

GwE MANAGING DIRECTOR

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**GwE Chairman**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

COUNCILLOR PHIL WYNN