
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE - 12/07/2023

Present:

Councillors: Julie Fallon (Chairperson) (Conwy County Borough Council), Beca Brown (Cyngor Gwynedd), Dafydd Roberts (Anglesey County Council), Phil Wynn (Wrexham County Borough Council), Mared Eastwood (Flintshire County Council).

Co-opted non-voting Members: Dylan Davies (Secondary Schools' Representative).

Non-voting Officers: Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council), Marc Berw Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Garem Jackson (Cyngor Gwynedd), Clare Scanlon (Conwy County Borough Council) and Ruth Thackray (Denbighshire County Council).

Officers present:

GwE - Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director), Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager) and Meleri H Roberts (Translator).

Cyngor Gwynedd - Host Authority - Ffion M Evans (on behalf of Head of Finance Department), Siôn Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Gwion Jones (Senior Accountant) and Einir Davies, Ellie M Evans and Ffion E Evans (Democracy Services Officers).

At the beginning of the meeting, sympathies were extended to Lowri Gwyn (translator) and her family in their recent bereavement.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Nicola Stubbins (Denbighshire County Council), Geraint Davies (Denbighshire County Council), Dr Lowri Brown (Wrexham County Borough Council), Dewi A Morgan (Cyngor Gwynedd) and Graham Boase (Denbighshire County Council).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the record presented of the meeting on 24 May was accurate and an update was given on the following from the minutes:

Item 10 - Review of Current Operating Arrangements and Staffing Structure - it was confirmed that a meeting had taken place and that an announcement was expected in the next few days which would also reflect national needs.

Item 12 - Reform Journey Celebration Event - 22/06/2023 - all those involved were congratulated for its outstanding success and it was noted that very good feedback had been received.

5. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS, SUBJECT TO AUDIT, FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2023

The Statement of Accounts was presented by the Assistant Head of Finance, who confirmed that the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 require the Joint Committee to prepare annual accounts. As GwE's turnover exceeds £2.5 million, full accounts must be prepared rather than an annual return as prepared for smaller Joint Committees, which are much more straightforward.

It was confirmed that the accounts had been completed and released since the end of June for audit by Auditors Wales.

As a side-effect of Covid, there had been an extension in the statutory timetable for auditing accounts, with the audit completion date being the end of November this year. As a result, a post-audit version will be presented at the December meeting.

At the meeting on 24 May, a report was had on the year-end financial position for 2022/23, in a simple outturn format. It was reported that an overspend of £139K arose from intentional expenditure on prioritising essential plans during the year to support schools, however that it was funded from reserves. However, the Statement of Accounts in a standard format is for external and governance purposes.

Although the document is lengthy, it was noted that it conforms to the CIPFA standard format in terms of the main statements. It was noted that:

The Narrative Report presents information regarding the accounts and GwE's vision and priorities, financial strategy, financial performance and elaborates on the main matters. Table 2 marries the position reported in the year-end outturn with that in the Income and Expenditure Statement in the Accounts.

The Movement in Reserves Statement summarises GwE's financial position, and this statement marries the income and expenditure position with the balance sheet position and includes information about both usable and unusable reserves. It was confirmed that there had been a substantial movement in unusable reserves over the year. It was noted that usable reserves, i.e., GwE reserves had reduced by £2K by the end of March 2023 to £1.154 million.

Note 10 provides an analysis of GwE general reserves and NQT reserves. £139K has been used to fund overspend over the year and £137K placed in the NQT fund over the year.

Note 15 - Unusable Reserves shows a movement of £9 million due to the pensions situation. It was confirmed that pensions have moved from being commitments to assets, and that this is a general picture seen, due to market conditions in general. This has resulted in there being considerable movement in the balance sheet position of Joint Committees and Local Authorities.

In terms of Officers' Remuneration, it was confirmed that inflation means that there are more salary bands in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22.

Reference was made to the £2.8 million reduction in Grant Income between both years. It was noted that several one-off grants had been received in 2021/22 as a side-effect of Covid, a

number being substantial and late in the year, however that such grants have not been received in 2022/23, which is a similar situation to that of the Councils.

It was confirmed that there were no exit packages in 2022/23 and 2021/22.

It was noted that there had been a movement in Pension figures due to market conditions.

The Joint Committee was asked to note and accept the Statement of GwE Accounts (subject to audit).

IT WAS RESVOLVED

To note and accept the Statement of Accounts, subject to audit, for the year ending 31 March 2023.

6. GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

GwE's Managing Director presented the Governance Statement and confirmed that he was aware that some Joint Committee members were already familiar with the status of the meeting and the need for a governance statement. He referred to the seven principles being measured, and the process of publishing a Business Plan at the beginning of the year and reporting on progress over the year:

- A Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- B Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- C Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
- D Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- E Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- F Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- G Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

It was noted that it was pleasing to report the examples of the Service's work were considered to be supporting schools, and that there was a strong desire to continue to collaborate.

The comment about collaboration was reinforced, noting that sustained unity of voice in North Wales is extremely important in moving forward, and that cross-regional working and strong unity had meant that a great deal had been achieved.

All staff were thanked for their work and the transparency and integrity of the Statement were also appreciated.

IT WAS RESVOLVED

To accept and approve the Governance Statement.

7. EVALUATION AND IMPACT STRATEGY

GwE's Assistant Director presented the Report with a request for Joint Committee members to approve the 'Evaluation and Impact Strategy'.

It was noted that there is a need to question what is working and not working, and the monitoring element was drawn to the attention of the Joint Committee. It was noted that the impact of short-term matters can be captured in the form of questionnaires or evaluation forms, however that there is a need to look at the behaviour of practitioners and impact on learners as far as intense programmes are concerned. It is difficult to gauge the exact impact of training, despite the close collaboration with schools. The danger of trying to capture the impact of everything was noted. It was confirmed that the documents only give a taste and that discussions will be ongoing with the Authorities.

The floor was opened for questions/comments:

It was noted that the Strategy is clear and that it is possible to contribute to the principles. It was felt that the evaluation approach/method was robust and there was a willingness to support the strategy and collaboration.

It was asked how Elected Members could be assured that their schools were making progress? It was confirmed that the work is conducted at a school level and at a Local Authority level.

It was noted that it is a crucial document in the wider aspects, involving higher-level discussions. The principles are underpinning and there is a need for transparency. The principles set the picture and outline collaboration.

Given that it is a programme for the next 3 or 4 years, it was asked whether staff well-being and resilience (noted for the Spring Term) should be a higher priority? It was confirmed that there is room to play around with the timetable, however that time needs to be allowed for evaluation to show actual/long term impact.

It was confirmed that a lot is going on. It was reported that consideration needs to be given to how to reduce work pressures on teachers, despite their commitment to the work.

The valuable discussion was welcomed.

IT WAS RESVOLVED

To accept and approve the Evaluation and Impact Strategy

The meeting started at 10:30am and concluded at 11:15am.

CHAIR