
GwE JOINT COMMITTEE
22.09.16

Present: **Councilor Eryl Williams (Chair)**
 Councilor Michael Williams (Vice Chair)

Councillors: Chris Bithell, Kenneth P. Hughes, Wyn Ellis Jones a Gareth Thomas.

Co-opted Members (non-voting): Jonathan Morgan (Special Schools Representative)

Officers (non-voting): Ian Budd (Lead Director – Chair of the Management Board (Flintshire County Council)), Dafydd Ifans (Wrexham County Borough Council), Julian Molloy (Denbighshire County Council), Dr. Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council).

Also Present: Huw Foster Evans (GwE Managing Director), Alwyn Jones (GwE Assistant Director), Susan Owen Jones (GwE Business and Finance Manager), Martyn Gray (Welsh Government Representative), Dafydd Edwards (Host Authority Head of Finance – Gwynedd Council), Clare Edge (Deloitte Company), Iwan Evans (Host Authority Legal Services Manager – Gwynedd Council), a Glynda O'Brien (Host Authority Member Support Officer - Gwynedd Council)

Apologies: Delyth Molyneux (Anglesey Council), John Davies (Wrexham County Borough Council), Karen Evans (Denbighshire County Council), Arwyn Thomas (Gwynedd Council), Rhys Howard Hughes (GwE Assistant Director), Diane Chisholm (Primary Schools Representative), Alison Fisher (Governors Representative), Geraint Rees (Welsh Government Representative) & Gareth Jones (Chair of GwE Advisory Board).

1. CHAIR ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (a) A special welcome was extended to Mr Martyn Gray, Welsh Government Representative, who would attend future meetings in place of Mr Geraint Rees.
- (b) The Chairman noted that he would be resigning from the Chair following this meeting but will remain as a member of the Joint Committee. Therefore an Election of Chair item would be required in the next Joint Committee meeting.

GwE Managing Director thanked the Chairman for his commitment and contribution as Chair of the Joint Committee.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest received from any members present.

3. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of this meeting, held on July 6 2016, as a true record.

3.1 Matters arising from the minutes

It was noted that GwE Joint Committee meetings are held at 9:30am in accordance with previous arrangements and not 9:00am as outlined in record 10 of the last meeting's minutes.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

4. INITIAL REPORT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE REGION

A report was presented by the GwE Managing Director on the end of key stage performance of the school year 2015/16.

It was noted that an initial report on the end of key stages was presented due to no access to comparative and full benchmark data for any key stage. Members were talked through the content of the report and reference was made to the range of data for the key indicators in each key stage. It was stressed that care must be taken when considering the information as the information for all Wales regarding Key Stage 4 has not been announced so far.

Reference was made to the main messages for all of the key stages as well as those elements which require attention, which have already been included in specific business plans.

In the context of Key Stage 4, an increase of 2.6% was noted compared to last year with the increase varying across the local authorities. It was noted that around a third of the schools are within 1% to their final projection for the TL2+ threshold; approximately two thirds of schools achieving or within 5% to the projection and 6 schools only where their performance is over 10% below the projection.

Reference was made to Key Stage 5 (i.e. 6th form) stating that it is difficult to come to a meaningful conclusion on performance as the provision varies across the region. From the data collected by schools, there appears to be a need to improve the performance of A*-A grades.

During the discussion that followed, the following points were highlighted and responded to by the relevant officials:

(a) The comprehensive report presented was welcomed but in terms of the aspects that require attention, there were concerns regarding which of the elements would be given an emphasis and if additional resources would be needed to achieve them.

In response, GwE Managing Director explained that many of the elements are current and day to day work. Whilst acknowledging the challenge facing GwE, without question it would be necessary to look at evidence where good progress was seen in grouping firm yellow category schools with green category schools. There would never be enough resources to act on detail.

It was further stated that enormous challenges were to be overcome this year regarding Key Stage 4 in terms of the changes in GCSE specifications.

GwE Assistant Director emphasised that Level 3 business plans set out what needs to be done to drive improvements in individual schools with the resources being directed in accordance with the demand. It was noted that Subject Challenge Advisers have been appointed for core subjects that would enable the service to target better support for these subjects in Key Stage 4.

Disappointment was expressed in regard to Conwy standards, specifically in the KS2/KS3 pattern. Although improvement was shown in Key Stage 4 on last year, there was concern that Conwy schools were not keeping up with the rest of the schools in the North and Wales. The need to improve the performance of these schools was stressed.

It was acknowledged that the lack of progress is due to a small number of Conwy secondary schools not reaching the expected target.

(dd) While being aware of problems in some schools, a discussion is needed regarding how much support schools in the red category receive due to a small number of schools taking a large percentage of the available resources.

(e) A Member noted that it is individual authorities who are responsible for education with the support of GwE and it was questioned if there is an overreliance on the support of the service.

(f) The Lead Director / Chair of the Management Board was in agreement with the comments above and noted that an agreement was had with the Chief Executives of the local authorities regarding the next steps. In light of this, matters of urgency within individual schools can be identified and dealt with promptly. It was noted that the level 2 plans for all individual authorities include key plans for the authorities to judge and address any matters appropriately.

(ff) In terms of school leadership, it was expressed that there was a lack of programmes to develop school leaders in the past and that steps have been taken recently to develop comprehensive programmes for school leaders at all levels. Additionally, recruiting problems were experienced in parts of the region.

(g) Attention was drawn to the variations in grant levels across the 4 regions and, as a result, the difficulty caused to the region in terms of value for money for the resources available. It was further noted that this concern has been brought to the attention of the Welsh Government.

Resolved: To accept, note and give thanks for the comprehensive report.

5. REGIONAL BUSINESS PLAN 2016-18 & POST-INSPECTION ACTION PLAN

GwE Managing Director presented a Level 1 regional business plan incorporating the post-inspection action plan.

Attention was drawn to the regional priorities in response to Estyn recommendations. It was noted that the Managing Director and Chair of the Management Board shoulder responsibility for implementing the plan as accountable officers. The new system would ensure accountability with level 2 and 3 annual plans covered under the level 1 plan and providing further details regarding the action steps to be taken, and the outputs and success criteria to achieve. The business planning framework offers three levels of accountability for delivering and providing a structure for monitoring progress effectively.

The Senior Challenge and Support Adviser would be accountable to the Directors of Education in order to ensure a better focus of local needs within the school.

The following points were highlighted:

- (a) It was welcomed that the Senior Challenge and Support Adviser would be accountable to the Directors of Education and a part of a team as it was felt that this was missing in the past and members of the Joint Committee were delighted with the new order which would be more beneficial.
- (b) That the consistency of the Challenge Adviser is important.
- (c) In response, it was explained through the level 3 plan that the Directors of Education expect GwE to comply effectively and that emphasis on discussions with the authorities is crucial.
- (d) In the wider context, the Lead Director / Chair of the Management Board noted that, as the reorganisation of the local government is no longer a priority, there will be a lot of discussion with the Welsh Government regarding the delivery of education. Therefore, the consortia would be key bodies for delivering and examining the key successful matters that can be incorporated in the national plan.

Resolved: To accept, note and approve the report.

6. REGIONAL NETWORKS

A report was presented by the Lead Director / Chair of the GwE Management Board regarding the role of the Regional Networks.

It was reported that the Management Board had recognised the need to ensure transparency in relation to the strategic role of the regional networks and their accountability to the Joint Committee. A workshop was held to discuss the role of the networks as well as options in terms of the most efficient and effective model to make progress against the regional business plan.

Further discussions at the next Management Board meeting and a detailed report will be presented in the Joint Committee's next meeting on the findings of the Management Board regarding developing an action plan for the new structure of the regional networks.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the content of the report.

(b) To approve the Management Board to further discuss and present the report to the Joint Committee in the next meeting.

7. FINAL ACCOUNTS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2016 AND RELEVANT AUDIT

- (a) The Head of Finance (Gwynedd Council) presented a statement of the post-audit accounts; Wales Audit Office report, together with a letter of representation prepared on behalf of the Joint Committee, explaining that the pre-audit accounts have been presented to the Joint Committee at its last meeting.
- (b) Attention was drawn to the Deloitte Company report as part of the work carried out in accordance with statutory functions and Clare Edge, of the Company, was welcomed to the Joint Committee. Clare Edge reported that the accounts and the work carried out by the Head of Finance and Team was excellent and there were no mistakes except for two small issues in terms of adjustments. It was further reported that they had not identified any elements of risk.
- (c) In response to a query regarding the contributions of local authorities, it was explained that the contributions vary depending on the Welsh Government annual grant allocations to the individual local authorities.

Resolved: (a) To accept, note and approve the information.

- (i) "ISA260" report by Wales Audit Office**
- (ii) Statement of Accounts 2015/16 (post-audit)**

(b) To ask the Chair and Gwynedd Council Head of Finance (as GwE Statutory Finance Officer) to certify the Letter of Representation.

The meeting began at 9.30a.m. and came to an end at 10.40a.m.

CHAIRMAN