
GwE JOINT COMMITTEE
06.11.13

Present: **Councillor Eryl Williams (Chair)**
Councillor Sian Gwenllian (Vice-chair)

Councillors Wyn Ellis Jones (Conwy County Borough Council), Chris Bithell (Flintshire County Council), Michael Williams (Wrexham County Borough Council)

Non-voting Co-opted members: Ms Rosalind Williams (St Asaph Diocese), Mr Jeremy Griffiths (Primary Schools Representative), Mrs Annwen Morgan (Secondary Schools Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Mr John Davies (Wrexham County Borough Council), Mr Dewi R Jones (Gwynedd Council), Mr Geraint James (Conwy County Borough Council), Mr Ian Budd (Flintshire County Council)

Also Present: Mr Huw Foster Evans (GwE Chief Officer), Mrs Susan Owen Jones (GwE Business and Finance Manager), Mr Iwan Evans (Host Authority Legal Services Manager - Gwynedd Council), Mr Dafydd Edwards (Host Authority Head of Finance - Gwynedd Council) and Glynda O'Brien (Host Authority Members Support Officer - Gwynedd Council)

Apologies: Councillor Ieuan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Dr Gwynne Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council)

1. **CHAIR ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(a) A welcome was extended to Ms Rosalind Williams, her first Joint Committee meeting, and Mr Geraint Rees from the Welsh Government

(b) The Chair referred to the bereavement that has befallen Dr Gwynne Jones in losing his father-in-law and expressed sincere condolences to him and his family in their loss

2. **DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declaration of personal interest has been received by any Member present.

3. **MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of this committee, which was held on 8 July 2013, as correct .

4. **PROGRESS REPORT**

A report was presented by the GwE Chief Officer outlining progress on developments and GwE delivery

The GwE Chief Officer led the Members through the report making reference to:

- performance indicators of the Service, which arise from the Full Business Case
- System Leaders' programme of work
- meetings and training that he has attended since starting his work on 1 September 2013
- data collected by the Service on the outcomes of primary and secondary schools following Visit 1 and Visit 3, Appendix 1 of the report, noting that the change is relatively small
- literacy and numeracy update, noting that one of GwE's Senior System Leaders continues to work as the region's main link with the National Support Programme
- national reading and numeracy tests, noting that the situation on a regional level with regard to collating the data is improving
- Pupil outcomes in the primary and secondary sectors for the region
- schools in ESTYN category
- the future, noting it is important that the Service is able to continue to work with schools to improve quality, moving the balance to be more proactive and developing a sustainable model to include:
 - working with good schools to become better
 - promoting school-to-school support
 - refining judgement on outcomes
 - developing the ability to commission

Arising from the above the following points were highlighted:

(i) In response to a query by a Member on the criteria for the capacity to improve and the visits that are focused on leadership, the need was felt to be totally clear and careful of what is reported. The Chief Officer explained that the System Leaders would come to a judgement based on pupil outcomes only during this term's visit. Another Member was of the opinion that leadership is key to improvement in any establishment.

(ii) With regard to primary sector outcomes, a Member noted that it is not possible to make a distinction with regard to the Free School Meals indicator; the Chief Officer responded by noting that he had not received the national data as yet.

(iii) The gap between boys and girls seems to be widening in North Wales; the Chief Officer explained that, while accepting it had increased to 10.1 pp by 2012, the increase in boys' performance (7.1 pp) in North Wales since 2008 is greater than the national increase (5.2 pp).

(iv) Concern about further developments stemming from the Robert Hill Report and how much of this concern, with regard to outcomes in North Wales, is conveyed to the Minister for Education.

In response, the Chief Officer explained that the rate of increase in TL2+ outcomes in North Wales between 2008 and 2013 had been more rapid and a 44.6% increase is to be seen in 2008 to approximately 54.8% in 2013. It was also noted that the gap between North Wales and Wales has widened more rapidly in 2013 and that it is this momentum that needs to be maintained.

The Chief Officer emphasised the need to be proactive rather than reactive, concentrating on what will happen and not look back too much on past performances. We must also come to a stronger position in the national discussions with regard to when data is received and the quality of that data.

(v) Therefore, stemming from the above frustrations, a Member suggested that the GwE Joint Committee should present a message to the Welsh Government expressing concern and requesting that they present the data sooner as well as considering refining the data, sending what is useful for the purpose.

(vi) It was understood that the Minister for Education is meeting the Leaders next Thursday and there would be an opportunity then to express the concerns.

(vii) In response to a query about the fall in the results of Welsh as First Language to be below the figures for Wales, it was recognised that this must be monitored, not forgetting that North Wales is linguistically different to other regions.

(viii) With regard to capacity to improve, it was observed that consistency is important and it was questioned if it used with the other regions. In response, the Chief Officer explained that similar methods are used and that a national procedure will be developed.

(ix) In response to a query by a Member on how it will be ensured that the Service is targeted according to need in schools, the Chief Officer explained there would need to be a system in place to promote the sharing of expertise between schools and maintain partnerships

(x) In response to a query by a Member on the local authority's judgement on ESTYN schools, which are referred to in Appendix 2 of the report, the Chief Officer explained that his attempt was to describe what is included in the service level agreement.

(xi) Stemming from the above, with regard to the schools and local authorities, it was noted that it is key to define responsibilities pertaining to co-arrangements and the danger of lack of understanding of the responsibilities is a matter of concern.

(xii) A Member noted that discrepancies between teacher assessments and external assessments need to be addressed.

(xiii) A Member emphasised that GwE needs time to focus on and to be able to respond to the supporting element in order to improve quality in

schools, and that a moratorium should be placed for GwE to make any structural changes.

(xiv) With regard to the expectations of GwE pertaining to the Deprivation Grant for schools, the Chief Officer noted there would be 100% allocation to schools. The role of GwE would be to monitor the effect of the grant on the developmental work of schools. With regard to strategic guidance, it was further noted that Departments within the local authorities are required to ensure that schools provide a plan that has been checked by the Finance Department, in order to ensure that they conform to the relevant conditions

(xv) Thanks were given to the GwE Chief Officer for a very comprehensive report, which gave rise to a beneficial discussion

It was decided to: (a) Accept the report and note its contents with regard to current GwE developments and the main performance indicators

5. **2013/14 GwE BUDGET FINANCIAL REVIEW REPORT**

Presented: Report by GwE Chief Officer and Host Authority Head of Finance (Gwynedd Council) outlining the latest financial review of GwE Budget for 2013/14.

(a) The Host Authority Head of Finance (Gwynedd Council) presented the financial report as a result of monitoring the GwE budget in 2013/14, referring to the Business Case of the Project Group as a basis for drawing up the original budget. Further reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report, which highlighted the differences, drawing attention to an estimate of a total net underspend of £413,000 against the budget, £380,000 of which is on staff appointments, and £162,000 of which is permanent

(b) The GwE Chief Officer noted the reason for the underspend; namely that the salary scales of officers had been set lower than what had been included within the Full Business Case, equivalent to the permanent underspend of £162,000. Also, the budget for the commissioning plan was only 7% of the GwE budget, while the Robert Hill Report stated that 15% was an insufficient proportion of the budget for commission work. Approximately 20-25 schools within the region required additional attention (within the red category) and 104 schools required support (within the amber category) and the current budget would not therefore be sufficient, unless part of the underspend could be used appropriately for the commissioning budget during 2013/14, and the rest of the underspend earmarked for reinforcing the commissioning budget in 2014/15.

(c) A Member noted that given the national financial climate the Welsh Local Government Association should discuss the possibility of safeguarding the budget for school improvement in the future

It was decided to: (a) Accept, thank and note the contents of the financial report, noting the underspend and support the request of the GwE Chief Officer to use part of the undersepend for 'commissioning', where appropriate, in 2013/14 and earmark the rest to be carried forward

in 2014/15 in a specific fund to reinforce the commissioning budget in the future

(b) Ask the GwE Chief Officer and Host Authority Head of Finance (Gwynedd Council) to present a report in the next Joint Committee meeting updating the 2013/14 budget situation and to draw up the 2014/15 budget, setting out the permanent transfers recommended, continuing to work within the current GwE budget cost envelope

**6. THE NATIONAL MODEL FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:
MAKING THE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL CONSORTIA IN WALES
STRONGER**

Mr Geraint Rees, Welsh Government, thanked the Committee for the invitation to the meeting. He outlined his career, noting that he had been an education practitioner for 27 years in very varied contexts such as in Kenya, in a prison, in schools and in a college for further education. He is now on secondment as part of a team of four who will be working collaboratively with the four regional consortia

There was a desire by the Welsh Government to draw up a National Model for making a difference in classrooms for the children of Wales. It was noted that there are four experts leading the project, namely Robert Hill, Joyce Redfearn, David Reynolds and Gareth Williams and that areas have been divided as follows:

- (1) What is the purpose of the regional services and their terms of reference? (it was clearly noted that local authorities are the cornerstones for supporting education)
- (2) Who manages the work and ensures that procedures are correct?
- (3) What is expected of the regional service?
- (4) How do we move from a traditional model to a model that promotes success in schools, schools supporting each other, an open culture between schools, a Headteacher assisting another Headteacher and, in the same way, a teacher assisting another teacher

An opportunity was given to Mr John Davies, Wrexham County Borough Council, to give details on the weekly Group discussions that he and the GwE Chief Officer have been part of in Cardiff for some time. He expressed that the region has invested a lot of time in developing a framework and is moving forward with the commissioning process. It was a matter of concern in the Group discussions that this is being disregarded, with discussions leading towards more sharing of services and that regions are expected to contribute towards these services through the service level agreement. It would be essential to discuss this further with the Financial and Legal Departments

The GwE Chief Officer added that the relationship between GwE and the authorities is not totally clear for the future and that this needs to be further developed

Also, a Member expressed that an explanation is required from schools with regard to roles in improving quality in schools

Several Members expressed dissatisfaction with regard to the new proposed National Model, noting the following concerns:

- it would be quite different to what has been established regionally and that Cabinet Members would not be a part of it as it would be managed by a group of experts
- it is foreseen that the GwE Joint Committee will be annihilated
- the accountability of Elected Members, which adds value to the Joint Committee, would be lost
- maximising the work in classrooms needs to be focused on rather than creating new models
- the model promotes competition rather than sharing good practice. It is believed there is a lack of understanding between authorities and schools of what constitutes sector leading practice. It was pointed out that the ESTYN Framework notes it is impossible for a school to be deemed as 'excellent' unless they share good practice and promote schools to make improvements
- the model is based on work in the South East which is implemented by a private company and a separate Board
- changing the procedure/model is premature as the current model has not had an opportunity as yet to analyse its success

To conclude, the Members were unanimous that it is important to convey the message to the Government that statutory responsibility for education is to remain with the local authority. It was added there is an opportunity to draw up a three year business plan by February and that reference needs to be made to the work already achieved over the last eighteen months in order to change the Government's perception of the slow implementation of the consortium.

In response, Mr Geraint Rees noted that there was no intention for everything to be in place by next April. Financial resources would need to be recognised and further discussions held.

It was decided to: Accept, note the above and request Mr Geraint Rees to convey the concerns of the Joint Committee to the Minister for Education with regard to the new National Model for School Improvement

7. **GwE USER GROUP MINUTES**

For information, the minutes of the meeting of the above Group, held on 4 June 2013, have been received

8. **GwE SENIOR SYSTEM LEADER PROFILES**

For information, a profile of each GwE Senior System Leader has been received

The meeting commenced at 1.45 p.m. and concluded at 3.45 p.m.

CHAIR

