
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE – 05/10/22

Present:

Councillors: Julie Fallon (Chair) (Conwy County Borough Council), Ieuan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Ian Roberts (Flintshire Council), Phil Wynn (Wrexham County Borough Council), Beca Brown (Gwynedd Council).

Officers Without a Vote: Dr Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council), Marc Berw Hughes (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Geraint Davies (Denbighshire Council), Dafydd Ifans (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Owen Owens (Gwynedd Council).

Officers present:

GwE – Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director) and Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager).

Gwynedd Council, the Host Authority – Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Hywyn Lewis Jones (Group Accountant), Gwion Ellis Jones (Senior Accountant) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 7:

Ruth Thackray: Senior Leader – Curriculum for Wales

Present for item 8:

Elfyn Jones: GwE Regional Leader – Secondary

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Vice-Chair Gill German (Denbighshire County Council), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director of GwE), Graham Boase (Denbighshire Council), Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council), Karen Evans (Wrexham County Borough Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire Council) and Claire Armistead (Secondary Schools Representative).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES

It was confirmed that the minutes presented from the previous meeting held on 13 July 2022 were correct.

5. GwE BUDGET 2022/2023 – FIRST QUARTER REVIEW

The report was submitted by the Host Authority's Group Accountant and the following main points were noted:

- It was reported that an initial review of the budget had anticipated a net underspend of £116,306.00 by the end of the current financial year (2022/23).
- It was explained that sickness and staff turnover, secondments and maternity leave along with recruitment difficulties had contributed to this underspend.
- It was explained that a number of visits and meetings were now held virtually and therefore GwE was spending much less money than anticipated on travel.
- It was confirmed that GwE's fund had been £437,503.00 at the beginning of the current financial year (2022/23) and it had been estimated that the GwE fund would be £553,808.00 by the end of the current financial year (2022/23).

RESOLVED

- To accept and approve the Report for the first quarter review of the GwE 2022-2023 budget.

6. GwE BUSINESS PLAN 2022-2023 – QUARTER 1 MONITORING REPORT

The report was submitted by the Managing Director of GwE, and the following main points were noted:

- It was explained that GwE had developed 31 business plans that reflected the regional and national priorities.
- It was emphasised that Quarter 1 had been spent developing the business plans to be operational before the end of the current financial year (2022/23).
- A quarterly progress report was submitted to the Local Authorities on the regional priorities also providing an overview per individual local authority.

In response to an enquiry regarding GwE's regional fields of improvement, the GwE Managing Director noted:

- That schools had been concentrating mostly on continuing to provide education of the best standard possible throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. He confirmed that they continued to do this by ensuring that they safeguarded the health of pupils and staff. As the threat of the illness remained present, schools needed time to grow in confidence that the impact of Covid-19 would be lesser in future.

RESOLVED

- To approve the quarter 1 monitoring report of the GwE Regional Business Plan 2022-2023.

7. THE REFORM JOURNEY: PROGRESS REPORT

The report was submitted by the Senior Leader – Curriculum for Wales and the following main points were noted:

- It was mentioned that the report reflected on the past year looking at how primary and secondary schools were preparing for the new curriculum which had come into force in September 2022. It was noted that the report looked in particular at the summer term prior to the curriculum coming into force.

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- It was explained that Welsh Government has shared 6 steps to prepare for this change in the curriculum and it was noted that schools were coping well with these steps.
- It was added that feedback from school leaders confirmed that additional steps were needed to reach these targets especially given the role of progression, assessment and pedagogy in the local context.
- It was explained that primary schools had engaged well in preparing for the new curriculum and that they were being supported by Curriculum for Wales through a series of workshops, webinars and models.
- It was explained that work was being done with secondary schools this year to focus on pupils moving to year 7, and next year the work would focus on years 7 and 8.
- It was confirmed that secondary schools were looking at local identity to ensure that the curriculum was embedded using suitable means.
- It was emphasised that pedagogy and self-evaluations varied from school to school and that strategies were being developed regularly. Support was provided to encourage well-being for all and schools were encouraged to collaborate to create a network of staff that were able to support each other through this reform journey.

The GwE Managing Director expanded on these points noting the following main points:

- An aspiration was expressed to present an update on the curriculum to new local authority members following the May 2022 elections, or to all local council members to update them on curriculum developments.
 - In response to the comment, the Chair noted that holding an on-line update may be an option to update many members at the same time.
- The GwE Managing Director referred to the requirements for measuring the schools' progress and accountability. It was noted that the structure, shape and direction of the curriculum was difficult to determine, and therefore schools needed time to become confident on the best method to use taking advantage of the aspects that were most relevant to them. It was added that bridging and collaboration would take place naturally through local, geographical needs and learning experiences as time went on.

In response to an enquiry about the timetable in terms of when the assessment methods would be mature enough to be able to interpret whether these educating methods were more successful than the previous ones, the GwE Managing Director noted:

- It would take considerable time to be able to compare this. He went on to explain that this was mainly due to the new systems looking at well-being, learning experiences and the experiences against the four purposes. It was explained there was a need for detailed discussions in the future to seek to adopt a fair method of assessment given that the curriculum method was of a local nature and that different aspects affected different locations within the various local authorities. It was also explained that political advice and guidance was needed on this matter.

RESOLVED

- To note and accept the report which highlights schools' preparations to adopt the Curriculum for Wales in light of the renew and reform agenda.

8. GwE WORK PROGRAMME DURING AUTUMN AND SPRING TERMS 2022 - 2023

The report was submitted by the GwE Regional Leader – Secondary, and the following main points were noted:

- It was explained that the joint-committee was already aware of the expectations and the requirements of the new national school improvement guidance. It was reminded that GwE, the Governors and Local Members were responsible for holding the regime to account on a local level and that Estyn shared the same responsibilities regionally and nationally.
- It was noted that this report highlighted the work programme for this term as well as successive terms to support every school to respond to the requirements of the new framework.
- It was confirmed that the report had been approved by the GwE Management Board and regional Headteachers had been consulted at Strategic Forums and at the GwE Conference for senior leaders at Venue Cymru on 22 and 23 September 2022.
- Detailed attention was given to the new guidance for improving schools noting the following points:
 - Schools were expected to possess robust self-evaluation processes along with the mechanism for improvement. It was also expected that schools had processes for planning and maintaining improvements.
 - It was explained that schools were not alone in this as the local authorities and the regional consortia would ensure that they had support to maintain improvements.
 - It was explained that one of the main duties of the LA, GwE and Estyn was to evaluate these procedures and improve them effectively. This meant there had to be a clear system of accountability for everyone to know what needed to be implemented and what additional intervention was needed.
 - It was emphasised that evaluation and improvement procedures had changed over the last two years in light of the pandemic and therefore the work programme was not as simple as it looked at first sight. This derived from the fact that schools had faced very serious challenges to ensure that the children of the region continued to receive first rate education, safely. This meant that providing a high standard of education, well-being and health and safety had been a priority over the last two years rather than updating evaluation frameworks.
 - The headteachers of some of the schools in the region had expressed their gratitude for the Joint-committee's stance, it had helped to ensure that teachers' assessments were used to assess pupil attainment during this time, as it had operated as a very effective system in an uncertain time.
- It was noted that Estyn had now begun visiting schools again to carry out inspections, and the following main points were noted:

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- The Estyn inspection frameworks had not changed much since before the Covid-19 crisis.
- It was explained that schools continued to cope with the additional problems deriving from the pandemic such as attendance, well-being, staff turnover and loss of basic skills.
- To support schools on their improvement journey every school would receive a bespoke support plan highlighting the support that was most suitable for them.

Members of the Joint-committee were given an opportunity to share observations and ask questions:

- It was agreed there was a need to recognise the new challenges deriving from the pandemic. It was recognised there was a need for inspections to look at schools individually. It was emphasised that inspections, in general, were a key part of ensuring that pupils received education of the highest standard.
- It was noted that schools were also dealing with new challenges such as staff and pupil well-being along with matters such as the increase in the cost of living. It must be borne in mind that schools had grown to be community hubs in several areas and that education was going in the midst of an unprecedented period.
- It was proposed that it would be useful to offer training to governors to ensure that they understood the new Schools Improvement Framework.
- It was mentioned that it would be useful to receive input from the Welsh Government Minister for Education on these matters as there would be some time before we could measure the success of the new procedures and that staff and pupil well-being were currently at very concerning levels.

RESOLVED

- To accept and approve the report which outlines the main focus of the GwE Work Programme during the Autumn and Spring Terms 2022-23.
- To write to the Welsh Government Minister for Education to receive input.
- To arrange a meeting with Estyn to discuss these matters further.

9. GwE AUTUMN TERM REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The report was submitted by the GwE Managing Director for the Members' information and the following main points were noted:

- There had been an excellent response to the conference, with approximately 500 people attending over the two days. This was the first conference for GwE to hold following the lockdown periods.
- A summary of the conference was provided:
 - A talk by Dafydd Iwan to encourage a million Welsh speakers.
 - Practical workshops.
 - Question and answer sessions.
 - Presentation by Professor Graham Donaldson.

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- It was added that there had been much emphasis on the well-being of individuals, leaders and staff as well as the post-Covid educating process throughout the conference.

Members of the Joint-committee were given an opportunity to share observations and ask questions:

- Gratitude was expressed to the business team responsible for arranging the conference and it was seconded that the feedback reaching the Members was very positive.
- It was asked whether it would be possible to share a recording of Professor Graham Donaldson's speech with the Members and others who had been unable to attend, due to the positive feedback.

In response to the enquiry about Professor Donaldson's speech, the GwE Managing Director noted that GwE could contact him to see if this was possible.

RESOLVED

- To accept and note the report on the GwE regional conference.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 11:50am.

CHAIR