
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE – 23/11/22

Present:

Councillors: Beca Brown (Cyngor Gwynedd), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Gill German (Denbighshire County Council), Ieuan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Phil Wynn (Wrexham County Borough Council),

Officers without a vote: Dylan Davies (Secondary Schools Representative), Jennie Downes (The Church in Wales), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council), Marc Berw Hughes (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Garem Jackson (Cyngor Gwynedd)

Officers in attendance:

GwE – Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director), Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager).

Gwynedd Council, Host Authority – Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department), Siôn Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Gwion Jones (Senior Accountant), Einir Rh Davies and Lowri H Evans (Democracy Services Officers).

Present for item 5: Yvonne Thomas – Audit Wales

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Dr Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council), Geraint Davies (Denbighshire Council), Karen Evans (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Ian Roberts (Flintshire County Council).

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 meeting held on 5 October 2022 were correct.

5. TO APPROVE THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR ON THE GWE ACCOUNTS

The report was presented by the Head of Finance Department who confirmed that the Members of the Joint Committee had already received the information in draft form (13 July), but an Officer from Audit Wales had now approved the accounts. He referred to three corrections that had been made to the accounts during the audit, these were highlighted in Appendix 3 as follows:

Updating the number of staff in some pay bands

Grant funding amounts – in which lines they appear within the accounts (see the explanation)

A couple of typos, which have now been corrected.

The Audit Wales Officer elaborated on the above, and confirmed that the report showed a clear and fair picture, drawing attention to the following matters:

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Independent working
Electronic signatures

She confirmed that they were not matters of significance, and that there were no misstatements.

Thanks were expressed for the detailed reports and for the joint-working.

RESOLVED

To accept and approve the report on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales, to approve the 2021/22 accounts, and to authorise the Chair to sign the letter of representation on behalf of the Joint Committee.

6. GWE BUDGET 2022-23 – QUARTER 2 REVIEW

Submitted – the Quarterly Review which forecast an underspend by the end of 2022/23 as follows:

Employees – Quarter 2: underspend (£46,552) in relation to staffing costs compared with: underspend (£84,046) forecast at the end of Quarter 1
Building: Quarter 2: £25,367 overspend in relation to income shortage, but this income stream is expected to improve. An overspend of £25,367 had been forecast at the end of Quarter 1
Transport: Quarter 2: underspend (£59,759), as a result of less travelling, and new ways of working. At the end of the 1st Quarter an underspend of (£46,771) was forecast

It was noted that there was a net total underspend of £91,900.

The Managing Director of GwE reported that Quarter 2 was always difficult and that the main activities took place in Quarter 3 (September to December) where they would expect to see a change.

It was questioned, since reserves were not permitted, whether there was a minimum reserves threshold? It was confirmed that there was no restriction on how the underspend fund may be used, such as for transition or buying time. Although there was no specific figure, at least £100,000 was assumed.

The Managing Director of GwE reminded those present that before lockdown, the reserve budget had been less than £200,000. He noted that they must wait for the December Settlement and examine the implications going forward.

The Chair referred to issues with vacant posts and recruitment and enquired if there were challenges in terms of secondments, and confirmation was given that this had been a challenge in the secondary sector for some years, but it was now a cause for concern in the primary sector too.

RESOLVED

To accept and approve the report on the GwE Budget 2022-2023 – Quarter 2 Review

7. GWE 2022-23 REGIONAL BUSINESS PLAN – QUARTER 2 MONITORING REPORT

The report was submitted by the Managing Director of GwE, providing an illustration of activity from July to September. It was confirmed that discussions had taken place on the curriculum, that the support work was continuing and that schools were willing to share where they had reached thus far.

In terms of Leadership, the officer stated that many were attending the courses, and many of these could potentially be future leaders.

It was noted that it was pleasing to see the Llais Ni project coming to fruition.

Members enquired about the figures in terms of training and supporting clusters with the transformation. The Managing Director of GwE noted that they were at a point of change. There was a significant shortage of supply teachers, and although it was good to have the face-to-face meetings, presentations were now being recorded because of the pressure on small schools. Different schools were at varying levels of maturity.

Reference was made to tracking progress and pupil assessment, specifically in respect of 360, and how this correlates with the new framework. The Managing Director of GwE confirmed that key work had been carried out in terms of pupils' skills and that the tracking work was continuing.

He referred to the Workshops on Evaluating and Capturing Impact, and noted the need to compile a paper on this and work with schools on the layout of the report, with the same principles running through them.

The Chair confirmed that it would be good to have input. It was confirmed that the Managing Director of GwE would submit a paper to the joint committee when more information was available.

RESOLVED

To accept and approve the Quarter 2 Monitoring Report – GwE 2022-2023 Regional Business Plan.

8. THE INTENTION TO REVIEW CURRENT OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAFFING STRUCTURE

The report was submitted by the Managing Director of GwE, requesting permission to carry out this piece of work with the Joint Committee's support. He noted that there would be emphasis on strengthening the close collaboration that already existed between GwE and the Local Authorities.

The Chair noted that this was very timely and that the Joint Committee would be glad of the opportunity to make observations in due course. The Managing Director of GwE confirmed that the Joint Committee would have the opportunity to feed into the paper and discuss it further.

RESOLVED

To accept and approve the intention to review the current operational arrangements and staffing structure.

9. THE JOINT COMMITTEE'S LETTER TO THE MINISTER FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Following the previous meeting and the pressure in terms of accountability, it was confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Minister, and a copy sent to the region's schools for information. It was noted that the letter had been addressed at the Headteachers' Forum and that the Joint Committee's support had been appreciated. It was confirmed that it would be placed back on the agenda for another meeting in future, as the response from the Minister's office had arrived late.

RESOLVED

To accept and note the contents of the Joint Committee's Letter to the Minister for the Welsh Language and Education

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 11:20am

CHAIR