

SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION – EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SCHOOL VISITS

a. GwE

- Cost – although there is greater understanding of the commissioning element, there are questions about whether value for money is being given and whether they need to be priced down? (As an observation, this is a matter to be discussed further at the Scrutiny Committee, as the Committee considers what the Authority is commissioning from GwE and the efficiency of the work arising from that commission)
- The need to ensure that green schools are not ignored (This has already arisen in the Scrutiny Committee – the response given was that each school receives attention and any early signs receive prompt attention)
- The school-to-school model needs to be considered e.g. collaborating between similar schools from other counties to avoid competition between neighbouring schools and from the same area (This is clearly a model that has considerable potential but many risks also in terms of schools assisting each other but also risks to the stronger schools in terms of losing resources and specialisms)

b. Cynnal

- Need to review the Service offered by CYNNAL (There were considerable differences amongst heads on the efficiency of Cynnal Services. There was a feeling that Cynnal, in its current form was a bit of an inheritance from Cynnal's original structure, prior to the establishment of GwE, and there is a need to consider whether it is possible to meet the need in a different way)
- Learning from the experience of other areas. (All other Welsh counties were contacted to seek information about their support structures. 12 very varied responses were received. Reference was made to the responses of the counties of Carmarthen and Ceredigion who, amongst others, provide the IT Service internally with favourable feedback. There were very few observations on collaboration apart from Neath-Port Talbot. It was noted that there was scope to look further at good practice in the provision of indirect services to schools by other Welsh authorities.)
- An analysis of the costs (Information on Cynnal's costs was sought)

c. The Authority's Services

- To ask the Education Department to discuss in detail with the Investigation the model for the Area Offices (There was a discussion on this and the Investigation expressed a view on the most appropriate services to be supported from the Area Offices)
- The arrangements for the SLA were considered – a need for a contact point for specific services e.g. building maintenance (This is a matter to be reviewed in monitoring the development of the Area Offices for the future)

- Financial guidance – a projected 3 year budget (this is a matter to be discussed with the Education Department but it appears, at the moment, that it could prove difficult to guarantee this because of the nature of the annual financial settlements that the Council itself receives)