
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present:

Councillors: Phil Wynn (Chair - Wrexham County Borough Council), Meirion Jones (Anglesey County Council), and Cemlyn Williams (Gwynedd Council).

Non-voting Officers: Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council)

Officers present: Arwyn Thomas (GwE Managing Director), Dafydd Edwards (Statutory Finance Officer - Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Sion Huws (on behalf of Gwynedd Council Monitoring Officer, Host Authority), Susan Owen Jones (GwE Business Manager), Alwyn Jones (GwE Assistant Director), Annes Sion (Committee Officer, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Hywyn Jones (Senior Accountant, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), and Bethan Roberts (GwE Performance Management Manager).

Video link: Clare Skivens, Senior Manager, Deloitte Auditors

1. ELECTING A VICE- CHAIRPERSON

Coun. Meirion Jones (Anglesey County Council) was elected as Vice-chair for 2019/20.

2. APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from Coun. Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Coun. Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Denbighshire County Council), Coun. Ian Roberts (Flintshire Council), Dr Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council), Ian Roberts (Wrexham County Borough Council), Dr Gwynne Jones (Anglesey Council), and Gareth Williams (Chair of GwE Advisory Board).

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declaration of personal interest was received by any member present.

4. URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair signed the minutes of this committee held on 8 July as being correct.

6. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2018/19

DECISION

The documents presented were accepted, noted and approved, i.e.:

- 'ISA260' report by the Auditor General for Wales, and
- the Statement of GwE Accounts for 2018/19 (subject to audit).

A recommendation was made for GwE's Management Board meeting to include an agenda item to agree specifically on the distribution of the Education Improvement Grant, on an annual basis.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that it encompasses the accounts presented to the Joint Committee in July. It was noted that the accounts have remained relatively unchanged since that meeting. An error was noted in the English version of the report to the Joint Committee. It was explained that the financial figures in the Statement of GwE Accounts remain unchanged, however that the language has been changed slightly.

The Senior Manager from Deloitte Auditors noted that the accounts were of a high standard, and that no major changes needed to be made. Council staff were thanked for their work. The recommendations made by Deloitte were highlighted, namely for GwE's Management Board to include an agenda item to agree specifically on the distribution of the Education Improvement Grant, on an annual basis.

Deloitte were thanked for their work.

7. EFFICIENCY SAVINGS TARGET

DECISION

Changes to the permanent staffing structure were confirmed, meaning that savings can be made to meet the target of £206,485.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that savings from previous years are to be found, as well as the savings target established when setting the budget for 2019/20. It was noted that GwE has found the efficiency savings by changing the permanent staffing structure. One of GwE's Assistant Directors was said to have been appointed to a new role in a local authority, and had left his post at the end of August 2019. GwE's Managing Director said that he was eager not to appoint a replacement Assistant Director, and for the work to be distributed between the remainder of GwE's senior management.

It was noted that a meeting of North Wales' Chief Executives was due to be held in November, which will give an indication of the local authorities' financial contributions and GwE's budget for 2020/21.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- GwE was thanked for looking at the historical savings target and for ensuring that it is settled before facing GwE's financial challenge by 2020/21. The wide-ranging possibilities as regards local authorities' 2020/21 settlement were noted. GwE's situation in 2020/21 will hopefully become clearer by Christmas.

8. GWE BUDGET 2019/20 - 1ST QUARTER REVIEW.

DECISION

The report was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that the budget reflected the situation prior to amendments following the previous report which met the savings target. Following those amendments, it was confirmed that expenditure will give a balanced reflection of the budget and reflects a satisfactory financial situation in 2019/20.

9. BUSINESS PLAN 2019-20 - QUARTER 1 MONITORING REPORT

DECISION

The monitoring report for quarter 1 was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The monitoring report for quarter 1 was presented. It was noted that the Business Plan had already been approved by the Joint-Committee. It was noted that the Plan sets out the priorities across the region. GwE's expenditure was said to be on track.

10. DISCUSSION PAPER - REPORTING ON PERFORMANCE FROM SEPTEMBER 2019 ONWARDS

DECISION

The principles noted in the report were accepted, as was the need to produce a set of questions for Welsh Government, WLGA and Estyn seeking clarity on how best to use performance data and information to improve learner and school performance.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, noting that past performance reports tended to look at key stage performance, however that it is now on new territory. Reference was made to a joint publication by Welsh Government, WLGA and Estyn noting the expectation for local authorities and regional consortia to support schools to make appropriate decisions about their curriculum to avoid restricting learner choices. It was also said that the publication noted that evaluating individual school performance, rather than producing aggregated data at a local authority level, is more useful than supporting and challenging individual schools with their improvements. The implications of this were sought.

New interim measures were said to be in place for Key Stage 4 this year. Although 2019 data is currently available regarding historical performance measures, calculating first entry rather than the best result renders any comparison with previous years invalid. It was therefore noted that it is not possible to look back and see trends, which poses the question as to what should be presented to scrutiny committees. It was explained that every authority needs to have data, however that this raises many questions.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- The need to discuss this further was noted - would Welsh Government consider running workshops in order to secure national understanding and consistency?
- In terms of scrutiny, would it be an idea to hold a regional meeting with Scrutiny chairs, local authority heads of education and GwE to ensure regional understanding and consistency? It was explained that some scrutiny meetings within the authorities are scheduled to meet soon - perhaps there may be a need to withhold in terms of reporting back on performance.
- The need was noted to produce a set of questions for Welsh Government, WLGA and Estyn seeking clarity on how best to use performance data and information to improve learner and school performance, prior to WLGA's conference next week so that answers can be given at the conference.

The meeting started at 10:30a.m. and ended at 14:15.

CHAIRPERSON