
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE 20/05/20

Present:

Councillors: Phil Wynn (Chair - Wrexham County Borough Council), Meirion Jones (Anglesey County Council), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Ian Roberts (Flintshire County Council) and Cemlyn Williams (Gwynedd Council).

Co-opted non-voting Members: Haf Williams (Primary Schools' Representative), Claire Armitstead (Secondary Schools' Representative), Jonathan Morgan (Special Schools' Representative).

Non-voting Officers: Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Karen Evans (Denbighshire County Council), Ian Roberts (Wrexham County Borough Council), Vicky Barlow (Flintshire County Council) and Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council).

Officers present: Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Sion Huws (on behalf of Gwynedd Council Monitoring Officer, Host Authority), Dafydd Edwards (Gwynedd Council Head of Finance, Host Authority), Hywyn Jones (Group Accountant, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Susan Owen Jones (Business Manager, GwE), Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive, Anglesey Council), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director, GwE), Gareth Williams (Chair of GwE Advisory Board), Annes Sion (Gwynedd Council Democracy Team Leader, Host Authority) and Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager, GwE).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Coun. Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Claire Homard.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the record presented appropriately reflected the meeting on 26 February 2020.

5. GWE'S FINAL ACCOUNTS 2019/20 - REVENUE OUTTURN

DECISION

The Income Account and Revenue Expenditure for 2019/20 was noted and accepted as noted in Appendix 1, along with a commentary on the main differences between the budget and true expenditure presented for information, in accordance with the 'usual' arrangement in the form of an out-turn report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented and the decision noted. The main differences were highlighted between the report in February and that presented to the meeting. It was noted that there was a change of (£217,253) to what was reported in quarter 3, namely an estimated overspend of £27,635. The main reasons for this were outlined namely that grant funded staff secondments and time contributions of core staff to new initiatives and projects had led to an underspend. Because of Covid-19, it was stated that a large number of meetings had not taken place in March, resulting in less income. It was noted that the impact of this change is that the net underspend increases the reserves to £480,204 at the end of 2019/20. It was added that a report will be made at a subsequent meeting to consider possible use of the reserves following the current crisis.

GwE's Managing Director thanked the finance team for their work.

6. WELSH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19 : CUTS TO THE REGIONAL GRANTS

DECISION

The report was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented for information purposes. As a result of the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19, it was noted that GwE has been asked to find 3% savings from the total School Improvement Grant allocations for 2020/21.

It was noted that realising these savings would be challenging, however that GwE and local authority officers are working closely to manage these savings.

Comments arising from the discussion

- GwE was thanked for their work and a question was raised regarding GwE's recovery arrangements. It was noted that GwE needs to adapt during this period.
- It was noted that GwE had kept in daily contact with schools during the initial period. It was added that remote learning would have a prominent role in this period and that the provision will need to be reviewed to see how it can be used in future.
- It was emphasised that the 3% savings would come from GwE itself and from the local authorities in an attempt to minimise impact on schools.
- It was added that GwE would send information once a confirmation letter arrived from the Government. The Host Authority's Head of Finance added that the 3% would need to come from somewhere, and that this crisis would have a knock-on effect on other grants, therefore to prepare for more cuts before long. It was added that there would be a budget announcement next week that could provide a better indication of the cuts facing us in moving forwards.

7. QUALIFICATIONS

DECISION

The report was accepted and it was agreed to organise a meeting with WJEC to further discuss the matter.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented and the proposed process was outlined. It was noted that the Joint Committee needed to consider the implications of the Minister's decision to close schools and the subsequent decision not to go ahead with the 2020 examination series for awarding grades for GCSE, A Level, Skills Challenge Certificate and other vocational qualifications; and to consider implications for 2021 summer examinations.

It was expressed that the process outlined was unfair for pupils, particularly if the school is on an improvement journey. It was noted that consultation will take place however will not be released until mid-June.

It was added that schools want to know whether there is a change in the syllabus in order to start preparations for next year.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was emphasised that the statistics model was utterly unfair on pupils, as well as schools. It was added that there were concerns for next year too as this year's situation will have an impact on pupils and will therefore affect their results next year.
- It was noted that this period had been very difficult for pupils and it had become evident that pupils need fairness and support.
- Concern was expressed about year 10 and 12 in particular.
- The need to organise a meeting with WJEC to discuss the matter further was noted.
- In terms of examination costs, it was asked whether schools could obtain a portion of the money back. It was noted that this needs to be discussed at the meeting with WJEC.

8. TRANSITION BACK INTO SCHOOL

DECISION

It was decided to approve a regional approach, whereby GwE, local authorities and schools work in partnership for the next step in adapting education in Wales.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and it was noted that the intention is to seek approval for the Local Authorities, GwE and schools to work together to create a framework of risk assessments and policies/draft guidance, focusing on various areas which schools need to consider and develop, once schools are instructed by the Government to reopen to more pupils.

It was noted that the British Prime Minister had noted that many English schools were reopening early June however that Wales had not set a date yet. It was emphasised that GwE's Management Board had discussed the matter and had noted the need for schools, GwE and the local authorities to be collaborating and supporting one another in moving forwards.

Remote learning, it was stressed, will continue for a long time therefore forward planning is needed for this difficult period. The framework would look at issues such as human resources, remote learning etc. Although the framework is at a regional level, it was added that it would be adapted locally. The information would be kept in one place; however, schools could add and edit documents due to the ever-changing nature of the situation.

Comments arising from the discussion

- It was emphasised that communication is crucial, and with the next period bound to pose enormous challenges, it is vital that everybody works together.
- It was noted that this would be a partnership. The need to work together and achieve one voice and consistency across the region was noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.15 pm

CHAIRMAN