
GwE JOINT COMMITTEE - 22 September 2021

Present:

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

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

Officers present: Sion Huws (Senior Lawyer - Corporate, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council), Arwyn Thomas (GwE Managing Director), Karen Evans (Denbighshire County Council), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director, GwE), Hywyn Jones (Group Accountant, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager, GwE), Marc Hughes, Elfyn Jones and Catrin Roberts (GwE Officers) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Team Officer, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority).

Others who were invited: Gareth Williams (Chair of GwE Advisory Board)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from the following: Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive, Anglesey County Council), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declaration of personal interest was received.

3. URGENT MATTERS

A member referred to the worrying situation in our schools, noting this as the most uncertain time schools have faced during the pandemic due to the very high number of Covid-19 cases in schools.

It was decided that it would be more appropriate to hold further discussion outside the meeting of the Joint Committee, at a mutually convenient time.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the record presented appropriately reflected the meeting held on 14 July, 2021.

5. GWE BUDGET 2021-2022 - QUARTER 1 REVIEW

DECISION

To accept the report.

DISCUSSION:

It was reported that this is an initial review, and a net underspend of (£48,805) is foreseen by the end of the 2021/22 financial year. It was added there are no matters arising to cause concern during the Quarter 1 monitoring process.

This is the first monitoring report of the year, which looks at true costs through to the end of June along with an expenditure forecast through to the end of the financial year, hoping there will be more clarity as regards the situation by the next quarterly review.

A general fund worth £612,335 is estimated by the end of the financial year, which is a positive situation to be in.

An internal income shortfall in rents was noted, as GwE buildings cannot be used to run schemes that are paid out of grants. In addition, it was noted transport use has resumed, albeit not back to normal levels, and an underspend is expected due to this.

6. GWE REGIONAL BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022 - QUARTER 1 MONITORING REPORT

DECISION

To accept the monitoring report for Quarter 1.

DISCUSSION:

GwE Managing Director presented the paper and noted that circumstances will slow down or accelerate some of the actions noted. Members' attention was drawn to the data to support the main objectives, and reference was made to what engagement has taken place with different proposals. He noted this is relevant for members to report back in their Education Scrutiny Committees.

It was noted that transport is starting to increase in comparison with the last financial year. Reference was made to items such as curriculum and additional learning needs, and a need for sensitivity to schools' circumstances during this challenging time was emphasized.

It was noted that Estyn has resumed inspections as of the start of this term, mainly in schools causing concern.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- Headteachers are facing engagement challenges due to current circumstances.
- There are instances in schools where the Headteacher is teaching due to staff shortages.
- Reference was also made to staff shortages in special schools where there are children with more profound needs. This is creating significant difficulties.
- It was noted that further pressure with Estyn resuming inspections is causing concern in several schools.

7. SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS

DECISION

- a) To accept and approve the content of the report along with the high-level regional priorities.
- b) To acknowledge the commitment GwE officers have shown to educational organisations across the north during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION:

GwE Assistant Director presented the report and an overview was given of how schools and PRUs in north Wales have responded to COVID-19.

It was noted that GwE staff have been supporting schools to evaluate the quality and impact of their provision during lockdown as part of their work programme.

The report is an overview of the discussions with schools, along with the areas that require further development and support.

It was added that schools have learned a lot from the first lockdown, and that provision in the second lockdown has built on this.

Members' attention was drawn to the regional priorities that have derived from the report and an overview was given.

Reference was made to the words of the Minister for Education on page 63 of the programme:

'all schools and post-16 providers will continue to be required to undertake effective self-evaluation to support continuous improvement. Our evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements require consideration of a broad range of information, relevant to a school's own context, when undertaking self-evaluation and identifying improvement priorities. This will involve schools, with support from local authorities and regional consortia, using the learner level information they have to reflect on and improve their existing arrangements.'

It was noted that GwE will support schools to achieve this.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- GwE officers were thanked for their work with Local Authorities and Heads of Education to promote collaboration.
- The feedback in the report is excellent, and reference was made to all the support given on all levels.
- Reference was made to the concerns of some members regarding the inconsistency and variance in school provision. There is reference to this in the report, and it was added that sharing good practice illustrates that this is being addressed.
- One member added there is a need for good and timely communication so that Headteachers can respond to any challenges.

Response of GwE Managing Director to the comments:

- The importance of schools knowing what the assessment model is, whether it be teacher assessment, centre or examination.
- The main message is that schools are aware of the mechanisms that are required to be in place to ensure that all learners are achieving their potential.

8. REGIONAL PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES FOR SUPPORTING AND CHALLENGING SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN.

DECISION

To note and accept the content of the report.

DISCUSSION:

The report was presented, which concisely captures the work undertaken during the Spring and Summer terms to further strengthen the guidance and support available to schools causing concern.

It was noted the paper is relevant to a percentage of schools, so that they ensure more ownership and accountability for their improvement journey within a framework of collaboration in clusters and alliances.

It was acknowledged that some schools require more comprehensive and intense support, especially those in a statutory category or identified as at risk of falling into a statutory category.

An early warning system will enable GwE and authorities to intervene early. It was explained that regular contact with officers is useful for sharing information and collaborating on plans. At this point, it was noted that these schools will have an entire team to lead them, rather than a Supporting Improvement Adviser.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- Thanks were expressed for the timely report, outlining the process for giving support to schools causing concern.
- The importance of supporting schools was recognised, but also the work that needs to be done for them to be self-sufficient.
- One member asked about the data from the graph, and it was asked will consideration be given to the status of a school when noting pupils' attainment.

Response of GwE Managing Director to the comments:

- The days of core data regarding attainment have been adapted, as the new curriculum requires a qualitative and more holistic framework. He added that this will be a means to note learner achievement from a more bespoke baseline.

9. REGIONAL STRATEGY - RENEW AND REFORM: SUPPORTING LEARNERS' WELLBEING AND PROGRESSION

DECISION

To accept and approve the Regional Strategy.

DISCUSSION:

Joint Committee members were presented with the report on the strategic direction of GwE during the next stage due to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reference was made to the regional strategy, and it was noted that themes have been identified so as to ensure high quality provision for learners.

Reference was made to the innovative work undertaken as staff re-purpose, and the changes as a result of this.

There was discussion on how the role of the Supporting Improvement Adviser has evolved in order to meet the different requirements within schools. The internal evaluation process was referred to, so that schools can focus on improvement.

10.Y GYMRAEG - CLUSTER PLANS AND 'EIN LLAIS NI' ORACY PROJECT

DECISION

To approve the content of the report and plans to develop the project in line with targets set by Welsh Government.

DISCUSSION:

The report on arrangements and plans regarding the two main work streams in the Welsh language business plan this year was presented - arrangements for the Cluster Plans and 'Ein Llais Ni' Oracy Project.

There was discussion on the first work stream, namely the cluster plans, noting the objectives: to promote cluster meetings, develop Welsh language skills and encourage collaboration between the Primary and Secondary sectors. It was noted there will be three Advisers in each area, who will be working closely with the Local Authorities to ensure support.

In terms of the second work stream, the 'Ein Llais Ni' Project, it was explained the project is funded following an application to Welsh Government, with the aim of promoting Welsh oracy and refining learners' speaking skills.

It was noted the project has been designed in close collaboration with Professor Enlli Thomas, Bangor University and there will be a Research Officer for the project. The planning process has taken place, and schools have been informed. It was added that a steering group is about to be established to oversee the project and report back to Welsh Government.

There will be a launch conference on 20 October, to inspire schools and share strategies.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- Authorities are busy planning their WESP reports; all support to promote the Welsh language is appreciated.
- It was asked whether it is intended to report back in the future on the impact of activities undertaken to promote the Welsh language in our schools.
- Thanks were expressed for the timely report in the wake of a deterioration in the use of the language in schools due to lockdown, and this in Welsh language strongholds.

Response of GwE Managing Director to the comments:

- There are ongoing discussions on the possible usefulness of presenting a report to the Joint Committee for members to see the existing work streams to promote the Welsh language in schools.

11. **DIGITAL LEARNING**

Joint Committee members were presented with the report.

There was no further discussion or comments.

12. **GWE CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE**

Joint Committee members were presented with the report.

There was no further discussion or comments.

The meeting commenced at 13:30 and concluded at 15:00.

CHAIR