
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE
22/05/2024

Present:

Councillors: Julie Fallon (Chair) (Conwy County Borough Council), Dafydd Roberts (Anglesey County Council), Mared Eastwood (Flintshire County Council) and Phil Wynn (Wrexham County Borough Council).

Co-opted non-voting Members: Manon Williams (Primary Schools' Representative) and Noel Fitzgerald (Special Schools' Representative).

Non-voting Officers: Clare Scanlon (Conwy County Borough Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council), Dafydd Ifans (Wrexham County Borough Council), Geraint Davies (Denbighshire County Council) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Cyngor Gwynedd).

Officers present:

GwE - Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director), Bethan Roberts (Performance Management Manager), Rhys Williams (Partnerships Senior Strategic Lead) and Meleri H Roberts (Translator).

Cyngor Gwynedd (Host Authority) - Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Gwion Jones (Senior Accountant) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Euros Davies (GwE Regional Senior Lead - Primary and Special Schools) was wished a speedy recovery following his recent surgery.

1. CHAIRPERSON

IT WAS RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Julie Fallon as Chair for 2024/25.

2. VICE CHAIR

IT WAS RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Gill German as Vice Chair for 2024/25.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Gill German (Denbighshire County Council), Councillor Beca Brown (Cyngor Gwynedd), Paul Smith (Secondary Schools' Representative), Marc Berw Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Dr Lowri Brown (Conwy County Borough Council) and Karen Evans (Wrexham County Borough Council).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

5. URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters were raised.

6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 20 March 2024 were correct.

Matter arising from the minutes

Item 7 - Future of School Improvement in North Wales.

GwE Managing Director alluded to the decision to present a report to this meeting of the Joint Committee on the way forward, addressing timeline and governance matters, as well as budgetary implications, noting that:

- An early draft of a paper had been prepared to be discussed with the Management Board, which had already been shared with Cyngor Gwynedd Chief Executive as the Lead Chief Executive.
- The draft paper included some of the questions raised by Joint Committee members, such as the closing down costs of the service, whether any savings can be made in the year, the new models in re-shaping the service and the exact role of the Joint Committee and Management Board in moving forwards.
- The hope was to share the paper with the Management Board for comments and present to the Joint Committee at the July meeting, or possibly an urgent meeting may need to be called in the meantime if the situation was to change quickly.
- It was quite clear from the new Minister for Education's initial statement that the reorganisation of school improvement services would go ahead and that Isos, led by Simon Day, had secured a 6-month agreement from the Government to press ahead with the second stage of the work.
- It is understood that civil servants expect local authorities to declare their partnerships to the Government early after half-term to early July, and that they are adhering to the timeline up until 31 March 2025. Obviously, nothing had been announced or put in writing in this regard, however as far as giving hope and peace of mind for GwE staff, the sooner the better that models and exact roles within those models are shared.
- Announcing the models would also inform Joint Committee members in their individual authorities and as joint authorities regarding the closing down costs of the service and local costs in terms of working with partners to set up a new service.
- Therefore, there were factors that needed to be decided upon sooner rather than later, if the Government is to realise the date of 31 March 2025.

In response, it was noted that the Chief Officers are fully aware of the challenges and uncertainties facing GwE staff, and that the Joint Committee can be rest assured that everybody is working as quickly as possible, individually and collectively, to reach a situation of certainty for future arrangements. However, it was emphasised that this was an enormous and extremely complex task for the local authorities, especially given the current financial challenges. It was further noted:

- That one of the civil servants had stated that they were listening to local authorities telling them that the Government's original timeline in terms of declaring partnerships was highly likely to be unrealistic.
- That more time is needed to work through the models. Once there is more certainty in this regard, the intention is to develop partnerships locally and regionally to support that model.
- Certainly, the local authorities will not be in a position to declare their intentions immediately after half term.

Concern was expressed that GwE staff have already been through 4 months of uncertainty since the Minister's announcement at the end of January, and it was asked whether discussions could take place outside of the formal meeting regarding the appropriateness of releasing some staff before March 2025.

In response, GwE Managing Director noted:

- That the final details of the individual commissions by the local authorities were currently being prepared, before being signed by the Education Portfolio Holder, the Director and himself on behalf of GwE.
- That there is a risk that seconded staff would be returning to their schools, some staff retiring and others not being able or willing to take the risk and applying for other posts in the meantime.
- The longer the timetable before models are determined, the higher the risk of being in a position of being unable to fulfil all commissions across the region, depending on the sector, geography and medium.
- The workforce will have to be reorganised every time a member of staff leaves, which could render a situation where it would be difficult to meet the commission brief.

The need to keep in touch over the next few days and work out the next steps was noted.

7. GWE FINAL ACCOUNTS 2023-24 - REVENUE OUTTURN

Gwynedd Council Head of Finance presented a report to update Joint Committee members on the final financial review of GwE's budget for the 2023/24 financial year.

The Head of Finance and the Team were thanked for the report.

GwE Managing Director noted:

- Given the substantial change in the way grants have been shifted from the region to individual local authorities, that GwE would be sure to keep within the budget set for the current financial year.
- That the use of reserves is a discussion to be had with the Chief Executives before presenting recommendations to the Joint Committee on the best use of that budget and reserves, including the budget for newly qualified teachers.

IT WAS RESOLVED TO

- 1. Note and accept GwE Joint Committee Revenue Income and Expenditure Account for 2023/24.**
- 2. Approve a transfer from GwE reserves to finance the overspend of £77,323 in 2023/24, after considering the main variances between the budget and actual expenditure.**
- 3. Approve the final financial position for 23/24 which will be the basis for GwE statutory financial statements for the year, to be produced, certified and published by the host authority's Finance Department within the statutory timescale.**

8. GWE 2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT

GwE Assistant Director reported on the GwE Annual Report 2023-24 to the Joint Committee.

The Assistant Director thanked the Performance Management Manager for compiling the report, and all members of the Team for their contributions to the report.

It was explained:

- That this would probably be the last report of this kind that the Joint Committee would receive as the service is changing from being a joint service to a commissioned service by individual authorities.
- Given the difference between the six authorities in terms of what is being commissioned, that the individual LAs would be reporting on the school improvement service in their own democratic processes over the current financial year.
- That the discussion would take place with the Management Board/individual LAs rather than being presented as one comprehensive report.

It was noted that there was agreement with the foreword to the report that GwE knows its schools well and provides a firm and appropriate challenge together with effective support and intervention for them. Staff were thanked for their hard work, support and collaboration at a difficult time.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve and accept the Annual Report for 2023-2024.

9. GWE RISK REGISTER

Presented - GwE Managing Director's report presenting GwE's latest Risk Register to the Joint Committee.

Before elaborating on the various risks, the Managing Director explained:

- That the individual LAs would need to look at the old risks operational for GwE, and to consider how many applied to them.
- Given this time of change, that the risk register would have to be revisited on a regular basis to add and remove as appropriate, as the risks are bound to change more often than in the past.

It was noted that the Joint Committee has a duty towards GwE staff to give immediate consideration to the way forward, and it was suggested that the Management Board should invite the Joint Committee to one of its meetings. This would enable members to be briefed on the report that is being drafted, and in sufficient time prior to the July meeting of the Joint Committee, so that members can reflect on this and have an open discussion in a workshop before coming to an agreement on the way forward in the Joint Committee meeting in July.

IT WAS RESOLVED

- 1. To approve the content of the register.**
- 2. That GwE Management Board should invite the Joint Committee to one of its meetings so that members may be briefed on the report that is being drafted, and in sufficient time prior to the July meeting of the Joint Committee, so that members can reflect on this and have an open discussion in a workshop before coming to an agreement on the way forward in the Joint Committee meeting in July.**

10. GWE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT 04-2024 – 03-2025

The Partnerships Senior Strategic Lead presented a report sharing information with Joint Committee members regarding the Professional Learning Offer for the current financial year.

Everybody was thanked for their work.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the content of the report and the new Professional Learning Plan.

The meeting started at 10.30am and concluded at 11:15am.

CHAIR