

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	Terminating the GwE Partnership Agreement
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Dewi Jones
Relevant Officer:	Geraint Owen, Corporate Director
Date of meeting:	21 January 2025

1. Decision sought:

The Cabinet is asked to approve the recommendation to terminate the current collaboration agreement and thereby confirm that GwE, including the GwE Joint-Committee, will cease on the 31 May 2025.

2. The reason why the Cabinet must make the decision:

Following a review of the responsibilities of Education partners in Wales, a recommendation has been made to move to a wider regional model of working.

To that end, the Transitional Board has been established to oversee the arrangements for transferring GwE services back to the local authorities in North Wales.

In order to formalise the change to the partnership arrangement, all six authorities need to agree to end the current agreement (GwE Services) as well as abolish the GwE Joint-Committee.

3. Introduction and Rationale

3.1 Background / Introduction

GwE was established by agreement between the six Local Authorities in North Wales dated 18 February 2013.

It was agreed to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service which would be accountable to the six Councils and which would fulfil the statutory functions of the Councils in relation to the effectiveness and improvement of schools i.e. monitoring duties, challenge, provide supportive services for continuous professional development through the curriculum and manage schools as well as provide services that can be commissioned by schools and local authorities.

The councils agreed to appoint Gwynedd Council as the Accommodation Authority for implementing and maintaining the Service by forming a Joint Committee, to keep an overview and give guidance as required, in accordance with Section 101(5) and 102(1) Local Government Act 1972 and Section 20 of the Local Government Act 2000.

3.2 The rationale and justification for recommending the decision

On 31 January 2024, the then Minister for Education and the Welsh Language published a written statement referring to a review of the roles and responsibilities of Education partners in Wales as well as current school improvement arrangements. The statement made it clear that there was an intention to move away from the wider regional model for supporting school improvement with a view to establishing partnerships between more than one authority at a more local level. This led to confirmation that GwE would cease to exist as a regional consortium.

As a result of that statement, a Transitional Board has been established to oversee the arrangements for transferring GwE services back to the local authorities in North Wales and structures have been developed to provide support to schools at individual local authority level.

However, the agreement, to work together in partnership in this context, needs to be formally concluded. In order to do that, all six Councils need to agree in writing to terminate the current agreement. The Cabinet is therefore asked to approve the recommendation to terminate this collaboration agreement and thereby confirm that GwE will end on 31 May 2025.

It should be noted that terminating the agreement does not affect cumulative rights or the commitments that have already been agreed upon. Those commitments are detailed in the agreement made between the six Authorities in 2013 (see Appendix 1).

3.3 Next steps

Recommendations:

1. That this Council approves the termination of the agreement to work in partnership with other North Wales local authorities in the context of the regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE) on the 31 May 2025 and subsequently dissolve the requirement for the GwE Joint-Committee.
2. That this Council confirms its contractual commitment in relation to ending the arrangement.

4. Views of the statutory officers

4.1 Chief Finance Officer

The decision sought is the next step in the process of responding to the Minister's statement in January 2024, which will lead to fundamental changes in the way support for schools will be provided. It is now clear that there is no reason not to wind up the joint committee. It is

inevitable that there will be costs involved, particularly in terms of the potential redundancy costs. Every effort will be made to keep these costs – which will fall on the six authorities in the north if GwE funds are not sufficient – to a minimum; they will therefore be under ongoing review but in order to move forward and establish the new arrangements there is no choice but to face them.

4.2 Monitoring Officer

Amongst its responsibilities as the host authority, Cyngor Gwynedd is the employer of GwE staff. The agreement contains provisions to indemnify the Council from costs, such as redundancy payments, which it may incur by reason of or arising out of the carrying out its obligations in its role as host authority. As with the decision to establish it, a decision to dissolve the Joint Committee is an executive function and therefore the responsibility of the Cabinet. This provides an appropriate and reasonable route to complete the process of bringing the GwE arrangements to an end.