
GWE JOINT COMMITTEE

27/11/2024

Attendance:

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

Co-opted non-voting Members: Manon Williams (Primary Schools' Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Marc Berw Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council) and Gwern ap Rhisiart (Cyngor Gwynedd).

GwE Officers: Rhys Williams (GwE Head of Service - Professional Learning), Euros Davies (GwE Head of Service - School Improvement) and Bethan Roberts (GwE Performance Management Manager).

Host Authority Officers:

Ffion Madog Evans (Statutory Finance Officer - Gwynedd), Hywyn Lewis Jones (Education and Economy Accountant - Gwynedd), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager - Gwynedd) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

Others invited:

Siwan Glyn and Osian Roberts (Audit Wales)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Paul Smith (Secondary Schools' Representative)

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 2 October 2024.

5. JOINT COMMITTEE FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2024 AND RELEVANT AUDIT

A report from the Head of Finance, Cyngor Gwynedd, was presented asking the Joint Committee to consider and approve the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 (post-audit), the Audit Wales 'ISA260' report and the Letter of Representation before authorising the Chair and Head of Finance to endorse the letter electronically.

The Assistant Head of Finance - Accounting and Pensions (Cyngor Gwynedd), guided Members through the Statement reminding them that conditional accounts had been presented to the Joint Committee in October 2024 when the main issues and relevant notes were highlighted. It was reported that there had not been any changes to the main financial statements of that report (Balance Sheet, Income and Expenditure Statement, Cash Flow and Statement of Movement in Reserves) however that there had been a few amendments to the notes supporting the Statement;

- Note 17b 'Officers Remuneration - there has been no change in the number appearing in the table for 2023/24 (43 officers), but rather a change in which salary band three officers appeared. It was noted that Soulbury 2022/23 pay inflation had not been confirmed until 2023/24 which complicated matters. The note now reflects the picture about salaries in the 2023/24 financial year only.
- Note 20 Related Parties/Members - it had been possible to remove the disclosure as there was no requirement for it to be included to comply with CIPFA requirements.

In addition to this, there were a small number of minor narrative amendments.

The Committee was asked to consider and approve the Statement of Accounts and ISA260 by Audit Wales for the accounts in 2023/24.

On behalf of Audit Wales, Osian Roberts noted that Audit Wales proposed to give an unqualified audit opinion on the 2023/24 accounts adding that the accounts give a true and fair view of the financial position, comply with proper practices and that Audit Wales work to a materiality level. It was reported that the materiality level is set to try and identify and correct misstatements that might otherwise cause the user of the accounts to be misled. A materiality level of £356,000 was set for the 2023/24 audit and the reporting threshold for misstatements was £17,000 (calculated as 5% materiality). He added that the procedure steps had now been completed and that there were no additional issues to report.

In terms of ethical compliance, it was noted that Audit Wales had remained independent and the Finance Team at Cyngor Gwynedd were thanked for their support.

The report was welcomed and everybody thanked for their work.

A motion to accept the report was seconded.

IT WAS RESOLVED:

- **To accept and note the ISA260 report by the Auditor General for Wales**
- **To approve the Statement of Accounts 2023/24**
- **To authorise the Chair and Cyngor Gwynedd Head of Finance (as the GwE Statutory Finance Officer) to sign the letter of representation**

6. GwE BUDGET 2024/2025 - REVIEW UP TO THE END OF OCTOBER 2024

A report by Cyngor Gwynedd Head of Finance was presented updating members on the latest financial review of GwE revenue budget for the 2024/25 financial year and the forecasts towards the end of the financial year. The Assistant Head of Finance - Accounting and Pensions (Cyngor Gwynedd) explained that the report focuses on the significant financial variances along with full financial information and that the review was conducted based on information up to the end of October 2024. Reference was made to a summary of the closing position with forecasts suggesting that there will be

an underspend of £78 thousand by the end of the financial year. Attention was drawn to the main issues:

- Employees - underspend of £18 thousand. GwE's budget for the current year was set based on the number of staff back in February 2024. A saving has been made with some members of GwE staff leaving their posts, and a grant allocation being received and used to finance posts. It was added that these figures have also incorporated the decision of the Joint Committee on the 1st of August, including the restructuring of the Senior Management Team.
- Rent - overspend of almost £10 thousand. This is in accordance with the historical trend, and it is foreseen that GwE will overspend on this heading again this year as a result of GwE renting a bigger space at the Caernarfon office.
- Transport - the picture is still consistent with previous reviews, with an underspend of £50 thousand in the transport heading, as travel costs have reduced as a result of new ways of working over the last few years.
- Supplies and Services - An underspend of almost £20 thousand is foreseen on this heading.

As regards reserves, it was noted that the sum of the opening fund was £221 thousand and that the fund will increase to £300 thousand after adding the anticipated underspend.

The report was appreciated and staff were thanked for completing the work in a difficult period.

A motion to approve the report was seconded.

IT WAS RESOLVED:

To accept and approve the report.

7. SIX MONTH PROGRESS REPORT ON THE 'REFORM' ELEMENT OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION GRANT (LAEG).

GwE Head of Service - Professional Learning presented a report. He explained the decision of Welsh Government to combine the main education grants under one heading, namely the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) from 2024-25 onwards. The grant will be paid directly to the Local Authorities/Schools with requirements, risks, terms and conditions of grant now being the responsibility of the individual Local Authority.

It was explained that, in order to ensure continuity of support for schools during the middle tier review of the Welsh education system, Welsh Government noted the expectation for any current regional working arrangements to continue during this period and be facilitated through the specific grant funding to support the curriculum and professional learning in schools. It was added that 'Curriculum for Wales' and 'Professional Learning and Leadership' have been fully transferred from the 'Reform' LAEG to GwE by all Local Authorities in the region to deliver support on these aspects whilst meeting the terms and conditions of the grant.

As agreed in GwE and Local Authority business plans for 2024-25, GwE will report to the Joint Committee on the Reform element - 'Curriculum for Wales' and 'Professional Learning and Leadership'. In addition, and in accordance with LAEG monitoring

requirements, GwE will report biannually on these elements in order for Local Authorities to present monitoring reports against set aims and objectives to Welsh Government.

Reference was made to the progress report for the period 01/04/2024 - 30/09/2024 included with the report, noting no service curtailment and no risks to support at present. Attention was drawn also to the high levels of staff attending training sessions despite the limitations of the service.

Thanks were expressed for the report.

The Chair noted that the data is remarkable given all the changes within GwE and staff were thanked for ensuring continuity of service and support for schools, despite the situation. She added that she very much appreciated their commitment to the work.

In response to a question about regional data and availability at an individual Local Authority level, it was confirmed that the information is shared with the region's individual Local Authorities.

A motion to approve the report was seconded.

IT WAS RESOLVED:

To accept and approve the report.

The meeting started at 10:00 and concluded at 10:25

CHAIR