
GwE JOINT COMMITTEE
09.07.14

Present:

Councillors Chris Bithell, Eryl Williams, Ieuan Williams, Michael Williams, Siân Gwenllian (alternate member), D. Miles (alternate member).

Co-opted Non-voting Members: Mrs Annwen Morgan (Secondary Schools' Representative), Ms Alison Fisher (Governor Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Mr John Davies (Wrexham County Borough Council), Mr Dewi R Jones (Gwynedd Council), Dr Gwynne Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Mr Geraint James (Conwy County Borough Council), Karen Evans (Denbighshire Council), Ian Budd (Flintshire Council)

Also present: Mr Geraint Rees (Welsh Government representative), Mrs Susan Owen Jones (GwE Business and Finance Manager), Mr Iwan Evans (Host Authority Legal Service Manager - Gwynedd Council), Mr Dafydd Edwards (Host Authority Head of Finance – Gwynedd Council), and Glynda O'Brien (Host Authority Members Support Officer – Gwynedd Council).

Apologies: Mr Huw Foster Evans (GwE Chief Officer), Mr Elfyn Vaughan Jones (GwE Acting Chief Officer), Mr Jonathan Morgan (Special Schools' Representative)

1. **ELECTING A CHAIRPERSON**

It was resolved to re-elect Councillor Eryl Williams as Chairperson of the Joint Committee for 2014/15.

2. **ELECTING A VICE- CHAIR**

It was resolved to elect Councillor Michael Williams as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee for 2014/15.

3. **DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No Member in attendance declared a personal interest.

4. **MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of this meeting, held on 30 April 2014 as a true record.

4.1 **MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

Item 4 (vi) – Foundation Phase Educational Curriculum Review

In response to an enquiry about the timetable for a review of the educational curriculum from the Foundation Phase to the Secondary by Professor Graham Donaldson, Mr Geraint Rees reported that the Minister for Education and Skills would be reporting in the New Year and that comments would be welcomed. It was added that the requirements of assessments in Key Stage 2 and 3 would be addressed as part of the review.

It was decided to: Accept and note the above.

5. **FINAL ACCOUNTS OF JOINT COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2014**

- (a) A report by Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance was presented which outlines the "outturn" position of the Income and Revenue Expenditure accounts 2013/14 together with a statement of the accounts, in a statutory and certified, but pre-audit form.
- (b) The Head of Finance referred to a breakdown of expenditure and the main differences and highlighted an underspend of £776,662 of which £706,000 could be allocated for commissioning purposes in order to realise the business plan, the national model, and schools' requirements in 2014/15 and beyond.
- (c) In response to enquiries, the Head of Finance noted that there were several reasons for the underspend on the salary element i.e.:
- Salary scales of posts within GwE were set lower than stated in the full business case.
 - When the budget was set, some posts were pitched at top scale, with some appointments actually being lower.
 - Some appointments have been completed over the year.
 - Gradual progress has been made to get System Leaders in place.
- (d) During the subsequent discussion, the following points were highlighted:
- (i) Concern regarding underspend given the financial climate facing local government and which could be allocated for commissioning purposes.
 - (ii) Savings to be made in future and requirement to increase GwE's capacity with regard to the National Model.
 - (iii) Whilst accepting that there is an underspend, the importance was noted of holding transparent discussions in order to enable the Education Directors to report back to their authorities given their responsibility of representing authorities on GwE's Joint Committee. It was added that there is a need to understand the brokerage and recruitment budget and whether or not there are any barriers to recruitment so that the Directors can help.

- (iv) The need for the Education Directors to be able to discuss and share any concerns with the Authorities' Finance Officers in order to safeguard the service in future.
 - (v) It would be helpful to obtain information about GwE's capacity along with the workforce's age profile to ensure balance and fill gaps.
 - (vi) That the Finance Officers need to discuss concerns regarding the underspend.
- (d) In response to the above concerns, the following were noted:
- That the budget is part of the original agreement and assigned to GwE for three years and in managerial terms that permanent savings must be found however in the above instance, this is a one-off saving.
 - That there is a need to permanently increase GwE's capacity rather than offering secondments. During initial discussions of the business case, it was decided at the time that 30 System Leaders would be needed to cover the region with 3 of those being Senior System Leaders; however no consideration was given to the fact that they would have comprehensive timetables.
 - It is assumed that there is lack of capacity centrally to develop programmes for improving performance on the classroom floor therefore consideration must be given to what's needed and that GwE can act on behalf of the authorities to respond to the requirements.

It was decided to: Accept and note the content of the report and approve the accounts and revenue expenditure 2013/14 as outlined in Appendix A together with the Statement of Accounts 2013/14 (pre-audit) – Appendix B.

6. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

- (a) Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance presented an Annual Governance Statement, for approval by the Joint Committee.
- (b) The Head of Finance reported that the statement consisted of many principles including effectiveness, accountability, performance management together with user needs and complaints.

It was decided to: Approve the Annual Governance Statement and the Chairperson and Education Director of Wrexham Borough County Council certified the statement at the meeting.

7. PROGRESS REPORT ON GwE DEVELOPMENTS

- (a) A report was presented by Mr Elfyn Vaughan Jones, who will be temporarily standing in as Acting Chief Officer for Mr Huw Foster Evans, GwE Chief Officer, until Mr Evans returns to work following ill-health. The Joint Committee was grateful of the arrangement and the opportunity was also taken to thank Mr Geraint Rees for his additional support and helpfulness over the past month.

- (b) Mr John Davies guided the Members through the content of the report and referred to:
- The appointments made over the past few months
 - Temporary secondments and appointments in order to release officers to undertake developmental work
 - System Leaders' programme of work
 - Feedback by schools on termly visits
 - Update on Literacy and Numeracy – GwE was responsible for monitoring the administration and marking of the National Reading and Number tests and a report will be presented at the next Joint Committee meeting on the performance of the region's schools
 - PISA Project – as a region, schools are invited to take the lead in one or more of 4 specific subjects (Welsh First Language, English, Mathematics and Science)
 - Schools Challenge Cymru – advisers have been appointed to work with 5 schools. A secondment has been advertised for the purpose of coordinating work to ensure consistency and quality.
 - GwE structure – that the structure refers to an additional permanent position i.e. Head of Standards for increasing capacity within the SMT and on a regional basis.
- (c) In response to an enquiry, it was noted that the school categorisation system would operate alongside the banding model.

It was decided to: (a) Approve and note the content of the report on GwE's current developments, and thank Mr Elfyn Vaughan Jones for providing the report.

(b) Approve:

- (i) That the Chief Officer continues to work with the Education Directors of the 6 authorities to implement the requirements of the National Model Business Plan and report back to the Joint Committee on developments;**
- (ii) To adapt the title of GwE Chief Officer to GwE Managing Director (in line with the National Model and other regional consortia in Wales);**
- (iii) In principle, add the post of Head of Standards to the core structure of the service and recognise the need to increase capacity, temporarily, until an appointment is made.**

8. GwE BUDGET 2014/15 – 1st QUARTER REVIEW

- (a) A joint report by GwE's Chief Officer and Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance was presented outlining the initial position of GwE's budget for the 2014/15 financial year.
- (b) The Head of Finance reported on the basis of the final situation 2013/14 with an estimated net underspend of £230,000 this year. He elaborated on the details of the most significant budget variances i.e. employee costs, pension commitments, brokerage and reserves.

(c) Members highlighted the following points:

- It was suggested for the Heads of Finance and Education Directors to meet to discuss the budget in order to ensure clarity with regard to GwE's vision and business plan following the 3 year period. A report to the Joint Committee in the autumn term would be welcomed.
- Concern that the underspend money will be lost and that a robust business plan should be ensured to safeguard the budget.
- Importance for Elected Members to be given an explanation of any underspend and the need to note plans in future of what services are commissioned and any barriers faced so that there is no slippage in the budget.

It was decided to: (a) Approve the commitment of any underspend for commissioning purposes in order to achieve the business plan, national model and school requirements in 2014/15 and beyond.

(b) Ask GwE's Chief Officer and Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance to present the Joint Committee with a follow-up report on proposed steps to create a senior managerial capacity (with non-contact time) within GwE using the flexibility within the budget, without approaching the 6 Councils for additional contributions, given the current financial climate where authorities could face unprecedented grant cuts by 2015/16.

9. THE NATIONAL MODEL

(a) For information purposes, the response by the Minister of Education and Skills to the GwE consortium business plan was presented, in line with the national model for improving regional school services, together with GwE's response to the additional matters raised as part of the Welsh Government's feedback on the business plan.

(b) In light of the national model, Mr Geraint Rees, Welsh Government, highlighted the following points:

- That GwE is a separate body and larger than anticipated and that the next few months will be spent discussing the definition of the role of the Education Directors and GwE officers.
- Discussion needed on GwE's accommodation arrangements in terms of offices.
- A Project Officer will lead and present a report in the autumn on an element of human resources work.
- ESTYN and Wales Audit Office intend to conduct a thematic survey to look at a range of matters such as scrutiny role and how effectively this is carried out.
- School related matters and specifically Challenge Advisers – importance for the region to agree on appointments was noted.
- School-to-school development programme – (need for a model to be prioritised which could perhaps be funded from the underspend).
- Schools Challenge Cymru – it was noted that a bid had been submitted for a sum of £1m for school support.

(c) In response to the above, Members highlighted the following points:

- Within the national model, that there is an expectation to establish an Executive Board that will be accountable to GwE's Joint Committee. It is understood that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has obtained legal advice challenging the decision.
- Within the agreement between GwE and the local authorities, that GwE is expected to provide a report to each of the 6 authorities and that it is important to consider the type of information presented in the report to ensure effective scrutiny by authorities.

10. DATES OF MEETINGS 2014/15

A report by the Business and Finance Manager outlining dates for the Joint Committee's meetings in 2014/15 was presented for agreement and approval.

It was decided to: (a) **Accept and note the content of the report.**

(b) **Approve the following dates:**

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
29 September 2014	Afternoon	Conwy
6 November 2014	Afternoon	Conwy
25 February 2015	Morning	Conwy
11 June 2015	Morning	Conwy

The meeting started at 1.30 a.m. and ended at 3.15 p.m.

CHAIRPERSON