

ERW Joint Committee
Monday, 20th February, 2017
Y Llwyfan, College Road, Carmarthen
10.00 - 11.45 am

PRESENT: Councillor Alun Thomas [Chair]

Councillor James Adams	Pembrokeshire County Council
Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn	Ceredigion County Council
Councillor Barry Thomas	Powys County Council
Councillor Jennifer Raynor	City and County of Swansea
Mr Mark James	Lead Chief Executive – ERW
Mr Aled Evans	Lead Director – ERW
Ms Betsan O’Connor	Managing Director - ERW
Ms Bronwen Morgan	Ceredigion County Council
Mr Jonathan Haswell	Pembrokeshire County Council (ERW S151 Officer)
Ms Elin Prysor	Ceredigion County Council (ERW Monitoring Officer)
Mr Chris Llewellyn	W.L.G.A.
Ms Chris Sivers	City and County of Swansea
Ms Tanya Wigfall	Welsh Government
Ms Catherine Gadd	Carmarthenshire County Council (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emlyn Dole (Carmarthenshire County Council), Councillor Rob Stewart (City and County of Swansea), Mr Jeremy Patterson (Powys County Council) and Mr Ian Westley (Pembrokeshire County Council).

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

There were no declarations of personal interests.



3. MINUTES - 2ND NOVEMBER 2016

It was requested that the attendance list be amended for Ms Jo Hendy to be listed as from Pembrokeshire County Council and not ERW.

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2016 be signed as a correct record, subject to the above-mentioned amendment.

4. RISK REGISTER

The Joint Committee was provided with a copy of the Risk Register which highlighted the main risks within the Corporate, Financial and School Improvement areas which enabled ERW to mitigate potential risks wherever possible.

The Lead Director of ERW highlighted that work had been undertaken in regard to inspection of the Region and individual Directors had assumed responsibility for overseeing specific recommendations. Progress against recommendations was monitored on a regular basis.

It was highlighted that the risk of insufficient capacity of the Central Team and Challenge Adviser Team to deliver the Business Plan to a high standard had been targeted.

It was noted that at the last meeting held on 2nd November 2016, it had been agreed to remove item 1 from the risk register – failure to comply or act on Internal Audit recommendation. The Managing Director of ERW confirmed that it would be removed.

AGREED that the report be noted.

5. LEAD DIRECTOR AND MANAGING DIRECTOR UPDATE

A verbal update on activities was provided to the Committee by the Lead Director and Managing Director of ERW.

It was explained that an independent person, who had been a Director of Education in Caerphilly Council, had been commissioned to review the structure and capacity of ERW. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the right model was in place going forward, especially with the development of the new Successful Futures curriculum. It was noted that there could be some changes to the employment and number of Challenge Advisers and support staff in the area.

It was reported that there had been some productive meetings with Estyn regarding changes to the inspection processes so that they fitted better with the visits to schools that already took place. It was also noted that Estyn were willing to have discussions around accountability measures.

Concern was expressed regarding Level 2+ being the national educational focus and the impact this had on the more able and talented pupils. It was asked how ERW was planning to address this. It was agreed that this was the case as the threshold had been set at grade C and schools would focus on pupils achieving



this grade. In addition, the early indicators of the PISA outcomes were indicating that few youngsters in Wales were achieving the higher (level 7) outcomes. It was recognised that it was important to maximise the potential of every child and a piece of work was going to be undertaken with the aim of utilising target setting more dynamically rather than it being a retrospective exercise. It was also explained that it had to be ensured that tracking systems within schools worked well to identify what support pupils required. It was pointed out that Welsh Government had to be clear on what was the national expectation. For example, in order for schools to address pupils achieving the higher end results additional resources would be required to ensure that it was not at the detriment of other pupils.

It was queried how the different skills sets for PISA and GCSEs could be reconciled. The Lead Director for ERW explained that the new curriculum should be more aligned to meet both skills sets and ensure there were transferrable skills for the workplace. The Managing Director of ERW highlighted that the new curriculum was an exciting opportunity to change education in Wales. It was noted that there was some good work being trialled within pioneer schools. Reassurance had been given to non-pioneer schools that they would not fall behind. Some concern was expressed that teacher training colleges were not up to speed with the requirements of the new curriculum. It was agreed that that a progress update on the development of the new curriculum would be provided at a future meeting.

It was suggested that gaming by schools took place to try to maximise points for a child rather than considering the quality of the qualifications being undertaken. The Managing Director of ERW highlighted that that they were aware of some concerns, which were taken into consideration as ERW made judgements on the categorisation process.

Feedback was provided from the Improvement Conference and the Peer Review that were undertaken in Pembrokeshire. It was felt that the Peer Review had been very beneficial and other local authorities were interested in undertaking similar exercises. Members that had attended the Improvement Conference had found it useful and recognised that a lot of work was involved in holding the conference. It was noted the Estyn would be reviewing the benefits of the conferences once all three pilots had taken place.

It was noted that the Estyn's Annual Report had been misinterpreted by the press and the four regions had completed a piece of work to explain the information behind the headlines. This information was available on the ERW website and it was agreed that it would be circulated to the Committee.

AGREED that the report be received and accepted.

6. FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received an update on the financial position of ERW. This included the Revised 2016-17 Central Team Revenue Budget, Draft 2017-18 Central Team Revenue Budget, Reserves, Grants and 2016-17 Statement of Accounts & Annual Governance Statement.



The ERW S151 Officer highlighted that the reduction in the projected overrun for 2016-17 was due to salaries being lower than anticipated, an element of salaries being applied against grant funding and the HR secondee being funded wholly from grant. It was noted that there was a reduction in the anticipated use of the local authority reserve.

In regards to the 2017-18 Draft Revenue Budget the increase in expenditure was primarily due to additional salary costs, which were an increase in the cost of living, increments and an additional post as part of the Central Team. The increase in facilitation costs were due to a new Communications Service Level Agreement (SLA). It was explained that a prudent approach was being taken to grant funding administration until the grant amounts and details had been received. It was confirmed that if there was more grant allocation then there could be an increase in the grant administration which would reduce the funding expectation from Local Authorities. It was highlighted that no formal grant letters had been received and the projected grant funding was based on officer discussions with Welsh Government.

It was explained that the contribution from the six partner local authorities was pro-rated according to pupil numbers taken from Stats Wales. It was noted that the working reserve of 100k must be kept to deal with any future funding gaps and unexpected expenditure.

The timetable for the production and approval of ERW Statement of Accounts 2016-17 and the ERW Annual Governance Statement for 2016-17 was outlined, with approval to take place at the meeting of the Joint Committee in July 2017.

It was asked if the figures for grants identified for 2017-18 included any grants that had to be spent by March 2017. The ERW S151 Officer explained that the majority of the grant allocations had been allocated by financial year, however, there was some funding that had to be spent by March and had been received late on in the financial year.

UNANIMOUSLY AGREED

- 6.1 that the report be received;**
- 6.2 that the Projected Outrun Budget for 2016-17 and the use of 60k from the local authority reserve be approved;**
- 6.3 that the Draft Budget for 2017-18, which includes a total contribution of £250k from the six local authorities and the utilisation of £194k from the local authority reserve be approved;**
- 6.4 that the funding of the Central Team Revenue Budget for 2018-19 onwards will be via increased contributions from the six local authorities as there will be a limited balance remaining in the local authority reserved be noted;**
- 6.5 that the grants awarded to ERW for 2016-17 and indicative grants for ERW in 2017-18 be noted.**
- 6.6 that the proposed timescale for the production, audit and approval of the ERW Statement of Accounts and ERW Annual Governance Statement for 2016-17 be approved.**



7. CATEGORISATION

The Joint Committee received the findings from the categorisation process and they were informed that it was an improving picture overall. It was noted that the second judgement was important as it assessed the capacity of schools to improve.

The Managing Director of ERW highlighted that there was concern for schools that had been in the red or amber category for over three years, especially at secondary level. Analysis of these schools seemed to indicate that there was some commonality in compounding factors, which included: the impact of school reorganisation and a new or acting headteacher being in place, especially as there had been difficulties in recruiting qualified and suitable candidates. It was noted that the decisions made by local authorities on school reorganisation had a direct impact. It was highlighted that in the ERW consortium there were eight schools that fell into this category and an additional two schools had demonstrated a similar pattern over a two year period. Another issue was the deployment of Challenge Advisers that had the experience to meet the requirements of the school.

Members highlighted that it was important that local authorities and ERW maintained the challenge at all levels of categorisation, including those schools in the green category and especially those in the yellow category. It was noted that there had been a shortage of Challenge Advisers and it was important to match the right skills and experience with the right schools. The Managing Director of ERW agreed the points raised and commented that this message had to be made clear across the Hubs.

AGREED that the report be received and accepted.

8. BUSINESS PLAN

The Joint Committee received the draft ERW Business Plan 2017-2020. The Managing Director of ERW outlined that the new model of the Business Plan was more streamlined than previous versions and had been strengthened in accordance with Estyn recommendations and ERW's improvement objectives. The aim of the model was to create a structure that was easier to update and allowed for tighter monitoring of actions. It was highlighted that the previous business plan had tried to be both strategic and operational. The new model was stronger on accountability and there was better reflection of where there was effective practice in local authorities.

It was highlighted that reviewing the current Local Authority SEN systems, processes and provisions was an important action. The Committee also felt that accuracy of teacher assessment was important. The Managing Director of ERW explained that this year they would be more confident in the moderation of teacher assessment due to the progress that had been made in addressing this area.

The Committee expressed concerns over the skills of school governors and the level of challenge given to schools. This was particularly of concern with potential proposals from Welsh Government to increase the amount of parent governors. It



was highlighted that there needed to be a more serious debate about governors and more discipline in the work of governing bodies. It was pointed out that there was a need to impress on the Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Education the importance of the right skills and review of governing bodies. It was noted that as part of the consultation on the 'consolidation and revision of the school governance regulatory framework in Wales' the WLGA and headteachers had responded with these concerns.

It was requested that future Business Plans were developed in conjunction with the financial model. The Managing Director of ERW agreed that this would be preferable provided ERW received the grants from Welsh Government in sufficient time.

AGREED that the report be received.

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF BUSINESS

It was highlighted that it was the last meeting for the Chairperson, Cllr Alun Thomas, and Members of the Committee thanked him for his contribution and the important role he had played in the development of ERW.

CHAIR

DATE

