

ERW Joint Committee
Thursday 21st September 2017
Y Llwyfan, College Road, Carmarthen
2.30 - 4.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn [Chair]	Ceredigion County Council
Councillor Emlyn Dole	Carmarthenshire County Council
Councillor David Simpson	Pembrokeshire County Council
Councillor Jennifer Raynor	City and County of Swansea
Councillor Peter Rees	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Mr Mark James	Lead Chief Executive – ERW
Mr. Eifion Evans	Ceredigion County Council
Mr Ian Westley	Pembrokeshire County Council
Mr. Steven Phillips	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Ms Betsan O'Connor	Managing Director - ERW
Mr Jonathan Haswell	Pembrokeshire County Council (ERW S151 Officer)
Ms Elin Prysor	Ceredigion County Council (ERW Monitoring Officer)
Mr Ian Budd	Powys County Council
Mr. Barry Rees	Ceredigion County Council
Mr. Nick Williams	City and County of Swansea
Ms Jo Hendy	Pembrokeshire County Council (ERW Head of Internal Audit)
Mr Ian Eynon	Pembrokeshire County Council (ERW Deputy S151 Officer)
Mr Chris Llewellyn	WLGA
Mr. R. Harries	WAO
Ms. Lucy Herman	WAO
Mr Martin S. Davies	Carmarthenshire County Council (Democratic Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rob Stewart (City and County of Swansea), Councillor Rosemarie Harris (Powys County Council), Mr.



Jeremy Patterson (Powys County Council), Mr Aled Evans (Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council) and Ms. Chris Sivers (City and County of Swansea).

2. **DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of personal interests.

3. **MINUTES - 17TH JULY 2017**

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2017 be signed as a correct record.

4. **ERW STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2016-17**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Mr. Richard Harries and Ms. Lucy Herman (Wales Audit Office) who had been invited to attend the Joint Committee to present the WAO Audit of Financial Statements and Opinion Report [ISA 260] for ERW's consideration alongside its review of the Statement of Accounts for 2016-17.

The Deputy S151 Officer advised that the Statement of Accounts had been prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting and largely mirrored the outturn report to the Joint Committee in February 2017. Whilst there was still uncertainty regarding future local authority funding there were no significant concerns in terms of internal controls.

Mr Richard Harries presented the WAO Audit of Financial Statements and Opinion Report [ISA 260] and advised that it was the Auditor General for Wales' intention to issue an unqualified audit report on ERW's financial statements following ERW providing the Wales Audit Office with a Letter of Representation based on that set out in Appendix 1 to the report. He also advised that Appendix 4 to the report set out five recommendations for ERW's consideration. With regard to the recommendation emanating from the Accounts closure process in particular the WAO had noted that the lateness of receiving Welsh Government grants was affecting the timelines, and ability, of ERW to spend and allocate funding. This consequently impacted on the region's capacity to respond to queries by the WAO on accounts.

AGREED

4.1 to approve ERW's 2016-17 Statement of Accounts for signing by the ERW s151 Officer and Chair of the Joint Committee;

4.2 to receive the WAO Audit of Financial Statements and Opinion Report [ISA 260].

5. **ERW CONSORTIUM ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2016-17**

The Head of Internal Audit presented the Annual Governance Statement 2016-17 for the ERW Consortium. She reported that no Significant Governance Issues had been identified though the statement had identified five Priorities for Improvement.

AGREED that the 2016-17 Annual Governance Statement for the ERW Consortium be approved.



6. REGIONAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Managing Director presented a report on the Regional Code of Corporate Governance. Concerns were expressed over some of the wording e.g. the term 'trade-off' where the word 'balance' may be more appropriate, and also how the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 would be addressed. The issue of Performance Management consistency across the 6 local authorities was also raised. It was suggested that further discussions between the Managing Director and six Directors of Education were needed on the report prior to any further consideration by the Joint Committee.

AGREED that consideration of the report be deferred until the next meeting pending further discussion and analysis by the six Directors of Education.

7. REVIEW OF ERW FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS / CAPACITY OF CHALLENGE ADVISERS

The Lead Chief Executive presented, following requests at previous meetings, reports on a proposed review of ERW Financial arrangements and the capacity of the region's Challenge Adviser to enable the region to develop and evolve further and build on its strengths. He also circulated draft recommendations for the Joint Committee to consider which involved the establishment of a Programme Team to take the aforementioned matters forward on the basis that the time was now opportune to review how ERW was financed and how it functioned. The Programme Team would submit its findings back to the Joint Committee with a view to consultation then taking place with the constituent local authorities. Any final decision would be a matter for the Joint Committee.

Members reiterated previously expressed views that a review was necessary and reference was made to the fact that some schools had sought support from outside the ERW region. Barry Rees commented that the Directors of Education were keen to be involved with the review which would hopefully lead to a model fit for each of the local authorities. He added that ERW should not be viewed as being exempt from austerity cuts. Steven Phillips stated that proposals would need to be formulated by November at the latest if they were to tie-in with the budget processes of the local authorities. Responding to Barry Rees's comments the Lead Chief Executive advised the Joint Committee that efficiencies would need to be considered as part of the review. He added that Welsh Government wished to co-construct a new model with ERW and this was therefore an opportunity to help shape that model. He anticipated that the Directors of Education would lead on this and present a model they all supported. It was also possible that funding from Welsh Government would be forthcoming to undertake the review. Chris Llewelyn stated that what was being proposed was in alignment with what was happening nationally.

AGREED:

- 7.1 To instruct the Lead Chief Executive, Section 151 officer and Managing Director to establish a Programme Team with suitable governance structures and with access to the appropriate financial and HR information to:**



- clarify, agree and document the respective roles and accountabilities of the LAs and region in relation to all School Improvement functions and services;
- manage the project of clarifying, scoping and shaping the accountability arrangements for the employment and deployment of school improvement staff including Challenge Advisers to enable the consortium to deliver a single effective school improvement service and to comply fully with WG requirements;
- review financial arrangements to enable the consortium to deliver a single effective school improvement service and to comply fully with WG requirements;
- develop and cost an organisational delivery model to meet identified priorities, supported by a comprehensive and costed implementation plan with timescales;
- identify the ERW central team with sufficient strategic and operating capacity.
- establish clear plans to secure and maintain effective communication with and engagement of the six Directors of Education, Head teachers throughout the process and secure consistent implementation of the Business Plan.
- bringing together the work of evolving the region with all grants by April 2018 and other resources, including staff from September 2018;
- review Hub arrangements;

7.2 That the Programme Team should include

- Lead Chief Executive (Chair and Programme Lead);
- Section 151 officer;
- Monitoring officer;
- Managing Director;
- Director Representatives x6;
- HR representative;

7.3 That the Programme Team be instructed to report back to the Joint Committee with a set of proposals which can then be considered and agreed in order to consult with constituent Councils, before any final decision is made by the Joint Committee.

8 G.C.S.E. RESULTS

The Joint Committee considered a report which gave an update on changes to performance measures and provided information on pupil performance in ERW and across Wales. It also detailed key headline information with regard to changes to qualifications and performance measures. Performance in ERW, whilst better than in other regions, had declined in all key indicators and in the Level 2 inclusive threshold it had declined by 8 percentage points and was lower than performance in 2014. Barry Rees stated that the results were still being analysed and a further report would be forthcoming in due course. In response to concerns expressed by



Cllr. Peter Rees he acknowledged that talks with Welsh Government were needed on the issue of early entries. Chris Llewelyn stated that the WLGA and representatives of the 22 Welsh local authorities were scheduled to meet with Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education, in November to discuss such matters. Mark James emphasised that this year's results would be the base-line for next year.

AGREED that the report be received.

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF BUSINESS

The Lead Chief Executive commented that he and Chris Llewelyn had recently attended a positive meeting with Welsh Government officials regarding the funding of the Band B of the 21st Century Schools Programme and it was likely that local authorities would be able to plan on the basis of their submissions.

CHAIR

DATE

