



To:
Cllr. Ellen ap Gwynn
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee
Mr Phil Roberts
Lead Director for ERW

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**
Scrutiny Office Line: **01792 637256**
e-mail: scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk
Date: **04 October 2018**

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn and Mr Roberts,

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 10 September 2018

The Chairs and Vice Chairs of all six local authorities' Education Scrutiny Bodies came together on 10th September in Port Talbot for their bi-annual Scrutiny Councillor Group. I am writing to you to reflect the views from that meeting. I would like to emphasise that the concerns we raise, and the requests we make, in this letter are intended in a positive spirit. Our collective aim is to support ERW to make the improvements we believe are urgently needed.

We discussed the ability of ERW to meet the requirements of the National Mission (as outlined in the *Welsh Government Action Plan 2017-21 Education in Wales: Our National Mission*). There was unanimous agreement that improvements are necessary to achieve the goals stated in the National Mission. We are particularly concerned that, in a number of areas, the regional school improvement structures essential to the successful implementation of the new curriculum appear to be either inadequate or absent. The timetable for the roll-out of the curriculum moves on apace and we cannot allow our region to be left behind. We, therefore, feel that addressing this issue should be an immediate priority of the Joint Committee.

Concern was also expressed, by all members present, about the lack of progress made with reforms to ERW that have previously been discussed at length. Whilst we recognise there have been capacity issues within the organisation, we would have expected to see, as a minimum, the beginnings of a roadmap for improvement. A clear timetable and action plan for change needs to be in place as a matter of urgency. This should provide clarity on the future structure, operation and funding direction of ERW, and also address the current lack of transparency regarding the budget and other operational decisions. It is, we believe, time to refocus on the core school improvement functions of the organisation and ensure that these are discharged effectively.

I regret that I must convey to you our disappointment with your response, dated 16 July 2018, to our letter to the Joint Committee, dated 16 March 2018. This appeared to us to be more holding letter than substantive reply; it did not make the situation any clearer and

did not fully respond our concerns. This would have been acceptable had it been followed by a further correspondence that addressed the issues we raised. Unfortunately, we are now six months on and feel we are no further forward.

In this context, and in place of a longer letter itemising the numerous issues raised by the various members, the Scrutiny Councillor Group resolved to invite you both to meet with us before the end of January to discuss our concerns. I should note that we do not intend this meeting to be a forum for recrimination. We have no wish to assign blame for the lack of progress, but simply to ensure that the situation is rectified. We feel strongly that this is essential if we are to adequately discharge our duties as your Scrutiny Group: as one member commented, "One cannot scrutinise inaction." Our Scrutiny Support will contact you about dates shortly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. I. Thomas". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Cllr Alex Thomas
Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group
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