



To:
Cllr. Ellen ap Gwynn
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**

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Date: 13 February 2020

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 27 January 2020

The Scrutiny Councillor Group would like to thank you, Andi Morgan, Yan James, Sally Llewellyn and Ian Altman for attending our meeting, for presenting the information we requested and answering our questions. I am writing to you to reflect on the views from that meeting.

We heard the new ERW staffing structure has been put into place but that it is not possible to fill all the posts at present due to lack of funding. Those vacancies filled are a mixture of permanent posts and secondments. You told us we must have our feet on the ground and can only do what we can afford to do.

We understand that there has been a delay in agreeing the ERW Governance Structure and it is hoped that it will be agreed soon. We would like to see this once it is available.

We heard about the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill and how it would impact on how local authorities collaborate. You told us the Welsh Government Minister Julie James has said that this paper will make local authorities work together around education matters, and that the Minister is open to us telling her how we want this to work. You also told us that the footprint of regional bodies is under discussion and the Minister has given local councils and ERW a year to decide, requiring a decision by April 2021. We understand the other issue that is imminent and could influence the ERW footprint is the possible departure of Neath Port Talbot from the partnership. We were concerned to hear about more change again that will add uncertainty to the ERW model. It makes it hard to build a solid foundation when the ground is constantly moving. We were particularly concerned about how, if one local authority pulls out, it will affect the financial model of ERW. You told us that ERW is awaiting a view from the Welsh Government Minister on this but, in the meantime, ERW continue to focus on what is important and that is supporting schools, teachers and children to get what they need.

We were pleased to hear about the wide variety of activities that have (and are) taking place across the region, with schools and other partners, in order to prepare for the

new curriculum. We were interested to hear about the different types of engagement events being held, including the 14 engagement meetings with 600 attendees, the roadshows undertaken across the 6 local authorities and the regional Headteacher conferences.

We were also interested in Estyn's role in relation to inspection within the new curriculum model. We heard that they are adapting how they work with schools in readiness for the introduction of the new curriculum and will spend the coming year having contact visits rather than inspections. These will be designed to support schools as they move forward.

Thank you for providing us with a copy of the costed Business Plan, this has given us a good understanding of how money is planned to be spent and what the impacts will hopefully be. We will keep a watching brief on its progress.

We received a detailed and informative report and presentation from the ERW Lead for Research and ITE Partnerships. We heard about the cross regional professional learning offer, schools as learning organisations, classroom based research inquiry and initial teacher education partnerships.

We had an interesting session with the Lead for Secondary Curriculum and examinations. In his report and presentation he outlined the work undertaken in relation to the analysis of core data, bespoke and targeted support for schools, prioritised bespoke support for schools or departments causing concern, role of the subject specialists and brokering of school to school support.

We explored the future of examinations and the formation of new qualifications that will follow the introduction of the new curriculum, including for example, how they will reflect and foster creative and innovative skills. We agreed that whatever the final outcome, the new qualifications must be credible and full of integrity so that pupils can truly compete on a world stage. We understand that Qualification Wales has a key role in the ultimate outcomes of the curriculum reform journey. We will therefore invite Qualification Wales to attend one of our future meetings to discuss the issues.

We welcome your thoughts on any of the issues raised in our letter but would ask for you to:

1. Provide us with information on the Governance Structure once it is available.
2. Update on discussions had around the ERW footprint as things progress including the possible withdrawal of Neath Port Talbot Council from the partnership.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Davies
Vice Chair and Co-opted Member of Education Scrutiny Group in Powys
Council and Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group Scrutiny Support provided by Swansea Council

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