



To: Cllr A Thomas
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee

Please ask for: Scrutiny

Scrutiny Office Line: 01792 637256

e-mail scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

Date 18 October 2016

Dear Councillor Thomas,

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group on 27 September 2016

The Chairs and Vice Chairs of all six local authorities' Education Scrutiny Committees came together in Pembrokeshire on 27 September 2016 for their bi-annual Scrutiny Councillor Group. I am writing to you with the conclusions and recommendations from that meeting.

First, I should like to thank you for your letter of 1 July 2016. On consideration, we felt that the letter was a little sparse and request that future responses are fuller. This will help us to feedback and provide assurance to our individual authorities. I appreciate that this is only the beginning of a new process and it will take a little time for us all to find our feet.

On this point may I also ask that you provide further detail on the Challenge Advisors working across the region?

- Are all local authorities working to full capacity in relation to their numbers of Challenge Advisors? Are we, as a region, at full capacity of Challenge Advisors?
- If not what are the gaps in the region? What is being done to fill these? Are some authorities at fuller capacity than others?

I should also be grateful if you would also provide further information on the steps being taken to inform parents about the colour categorisation of schools? The Group is concerned that the current presentation in the media causes unnecessary worries for parents when their schools have been placed in a lower category. The Group would therefore like some more information on what is being done in this area currently and whether this message is being discussed nationally.

The following are the other topics we covered during the meeting

Elective Home Education

This issue has been raised and discussed consistently by local authorities in the region over recent years with some making representations in individual letters to Welsh Government Ministers. Members of the Group have strong feelings about this issue and believe that stronger leadership is required at the national level. Our main concern relates to the safeguarding of children who may be unknown in our areas. As a Group we plan to write to the Minister and, while we appreciate that this is outside the scope of ERW, wanted to share this concern with you.

Estyn Inspection of ERW

At the meeting we heard from Betsan O Connor who shared with us the recent report from Estyn. Overall, we were very pleased to hear about the positive outcome although two issues were raised in our discussion:

1. The Group were disappointed that the aspect of 'raising educational standards' did not form part of the inspection and that this was not referenced in the report even though the main function of ERW is to raise standards. We plan to write to Estyn on this point.
2. The report says that '*Local authority portfolio holders do not have a clear enough input to the management or oversight of the work of ERW despite their key responsibility in their local authority for the oversight of education services*'.

The Group supports the view that there should be a greater role for portfolio holders within ERW. This is not only because they have local responsibility, but they are also the individuals being held to account by scrutiny.

We have therefore asked the Chief Executive of ERW to bring the following information to our next meeting of the Scrutiny Group:

- What ERW have done and plan to do to address this issue i.e. whether this statement is being addressed; and
- A survey of portfolio holders on their views

ERW Business Plan

The Chief Executive outlined the business plan and explained that it is similar to last year but that a 'bridging report' is currently being written that will address the Estyn Inspection recommendations. Changes will then be included in the plan mid-year. The Group will be provided with a copy of the bridging report for discussion at the next meeting.

We were pleased to see scrutiny and ERW highlighted positively in the Estyn report particularly the statement that '*Members of scrutiny committees engage well with each other and share ERW's vision*'.

We would like to thank Chris Millis and Gareth Morgan for the informative presentations and background information on vulnerable learners and the framework for what works

and the ALN transformation. We found both sessions very useful and plan to share our findings and the good practice from these across the regions scrutiny bodies.

Please do respond to any of the points in this letter but we would particularly like to receive your response to the following points:

- Further clarification about the capacity of Challenge Advisors across the region (as detailed above); and
- Further information about how the results of categorisation are provided to parents (as detailed above)

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Guy Woodham
Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group and
Chair of Schools and Learning Scrutiny Committee, Pembrokeshire Council