



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

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**

Scrutiny Office Line: **01792 637256**

e-mail scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

Date **18 April 2019**

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 25 March 2019

The Scrutiny Councillor Group would like to thank Geraint Rees and Aneirin Thomas for attending our meeting and for presenting the information we requested and answering our questions. I am writing to you to reflect the views from that meeting.

We were disappointed not to have received a written response to our letter to you dated 28 January 2019. We had highlighted a number of recommendations and concerns that we would like you to address. We would be grateful for an early response.

After discussing the issues around the ERW reform programme with you in January, we felt more reassured that progress was being made and in a timelier manner. Unfortunately we heard today that the ERW Joint Committee met on February but only partially agreed the way forward. We understand that there are a number of sticking points around the budget and financial aspects of the new way forward that not all Councils were ready to sign up to. We understand that one Council is considering giving one year's notice to leave ERW. We heard that their leaving will be contingent on whether they feel the reform programme has moved forward effectively and if they believe it has, they may then rescind that notice to leave. However, this in itself causes problems and we had concerns about the impact this would have on the overall budget of ERW. We also recognise this uncertainty may cause a number of challenges.

We heard that the uncertainty in the ongoing delay to the reform programme has been difficult for staff working for ERW. We do recognise this and wish to express our appreciation for their commitment to ERW and education improvement through this difficult time.

Geraint outlined the position and progress made with the programme of reform, which included the developing of phases/milestones for schools including a package of learning and moving forward with the appointment of permanent primary and secondary leads and other key staff at ERW. We were also pleased to hear about the developing work with the university around research and teacher training and note that professional learning will

now be seen as a career long process. We were pleased to hear that key staff appointments will be made towards the end of May.

We received a presentation on the categorisation of schools across the region. We had previously discussed concerns the group had about the time that some schools are spending in the red category and the churn of these out and in of that category. We looked at what is being done to intervene in this process and assist those schools to improve, especially how we progress when a school is consistently underperforming. The link between Estyn outcomes and our assessment and categorisation was raised, particularly when the assessment of the Education Improvement Service and the Estyn Inspection outcome are vastly different.

As a part of this discussion the issue of consistency, robustness and standardisation of the support system across the region was considered and we felt that we wanted more information on this and how it is being improved. We will invite the Lead Director and Geraint to provide further information to our next meeting in June.

We also discussed how we would like the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group to progress in the future and are currently updating our Terms of Reference to reflect what we believe is our role moving forward. We have agreed to meet four times a year, with three of these meetings preceding the ERW Joint Committee and one being a wider information sharing good practice session. We will write to you following each meeting and would request that you respond to us in writing within 28 days of receipt of that letter. We will share our updated terms of reference and agreed ways of working once agreed in due course.

We welcome your thoughts on any of the issues raised in our letter and would be grateful if you could respond in writing addressing the following issues by 9 May 2019.

- 1) We have concerns about the impact of the financial deficit if one Council leaves ERW on the overall budget. Can you update us on how this will be addressed moving forward?
- 2) We would like to ensure that the scrutiny and the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group are clearly reflected in the Governance procedures of ERW, including the two way communication process and that expectations are agreed. I would be grateful if you would consider our request and let us know how you might address this?

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Lyndon Jones
Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group
Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk