

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Gofynner am / Please ask for:

Fy nghyf / My ref:

Llinell Uniongyrchol / Direct Line:

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Dyddiad / Date:

E-bost / E-mail:

20th April 2021

EDole@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Cllr. Lyndon Jones

Chair of the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group and Swansea Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

(by email only:- cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk)

Dear Cllr. Lyndon Jones,

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd March on behalf of ERW's Scrutiny Councillor Group. I'm pleased to hear that officers were able to attend your recent meeting to present the information requested and respond to your questions.

In my last letter, I provided you with the information I had at hand at that point in time. As you note in your letter, ERW is at a crossroads or probably better described at a dead end at this point in time and the way forward from September is not yet resolved.

I will, if I can, respond to each of the issues you raise in your letter however I would advise that some of your questions are best answered by individual Councils, especially those who have left the current partnership. Just to clarify, ERW's approach to school improvement is markedly different to the other regional consortia. Whilst GWE, EAS and the Central South Consortia provide all aspects of school improvement, in ERW the pure school improvement function i.e. employment and deployment of school improvement officers (Challenge Advisers/Education Support Advisers) has remained, from ERW's conception, with each constituent partner. In respect to school performance and value for money the Local Authority is therefore the lead responsible body with ERW contributing to this work.

In response to your specific enquiries, I would like to make the following comments: -

1. In respect to 'value for money' I believe that working in partnership can realise added value for each partner. For example, as a partnership you might only need to employ one of two officers to deliver a particular function whilst working alone could necessitate each partner employing their own staff. Another example would be the need to develop a specific strategy- this can be done at a regional basis rather than asking each Local Authority to develop individual strategies- this saves time and ensures best value for money.

We have seen these approaches being implemented effectively in some areas of ERW's work with an ERW officer representing all the partners and being that key link with Welsh Government and Local Authorities. However, I accept that the size, geography and different context of ERW's constituent

Cynghorydd | Councillor - **Emlyn Dole**

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Mae croeso i chi gysylltu â mi yn y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg

You are welcome to contact me in Welsh or English

partners has not ensured value for money for all partners at all times as funding, as agreed by the Joint Committee, has in some instances been directed to the areas of highest need.

In respect to the new partnership, which is being developed, partners plan to work together on some functions to ensure value for money but provide other functions locally. However, I have been advised that those local leads will work collaboratively across the new partnership if this adds value to the work.

It is unclear as yet if the new partnership will provide services to other Local Authorities.

2. As I noted above the new partners will work together on some service provision and ensure local leads work together when it will add value. As you're aware ERW has agreed to continue to provide some services to Neath Port Talbot and Ceredigion schools for this term, however, in respect to providing services to other Local Authorities from September onwards that will be a decision for the new partnership's Joint Committee. I agree that this should not be at the detriment of the partners.
3. For this financial year, as two partners have already left ERW, Welsh Government have disaggregated ERW's funding and plan to directly fund each Local Authority individually. All Local Authorities will therefore have access to funding to support new partnerships and to fund the locally provided services.

Officers are currently agreeing the functions of new partnerships and the structure of the teams required to deliver those functions for the partnership's schools. Once the staffing structures have been agreed the funding required will be calculated and the level of contribution from each partner.

As I noted above, the option to provide services to others outside the formal partnerships, will be a decision for the new Joint Committees operational from 1st September 2021. I would advise that if that's to be part of the offer, we will need to ensure that providing for another Local Authority will need to be viable, both operationally and financially, and not impact negatively on services to the partnership's schools.

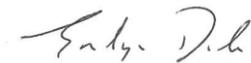
4. In respect to the remaining partners I believe they realise the value of collaboration and wish to work in partnership. Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Swansea wish to work in partnership as do Ceredigion and Powys. It is unclear what Neath Port Talbot's intentions are at present. In respect to what each partner wants from the new model, once agreed, I would be happy, with their agreement, to share their respective requirements. In respect to Ceredigion and Neath Port Talbot I would not have access to that information apart from the services they want to commission from ERW and were agreed by Joint Committee on the 30th March 2021.

In relation to 'problematic areas' I would suggest that the functions currently being discussed for local delivery would be the ones where partners feel that their schools are not getting the best possible support and value for money.

I agree that the new collaboratives will need to be stable and solid and provide schools with high quality support. They will be Local Authority led partnerships working to the direction of the Directors of Education. We will need clear communication in regard to the agreed functions of the partnership and regular interaction with school leaders and local authority officers.

I would like to reiterate your praise for ERW's workforce who have complemented Local Authority work during the last year. Officers have used their expertise to support the region's schools and provide high quality professional development opportunities, advice and guidance.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr. Emlyn Dole
Chair of ERW Joint Committee