

Special Educational Needs Joint Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2013

PRESENT: Councillor G.O.Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council) (Chair)

Gwynedd Council

Councillors Beth Lawton, Gareth Thomas, Eirwyn Williams

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Councillors Jeffrey M.Evans, T LI Hughes, D R Hughes, R LI Jones, G O Jones, R.Meirion Jones and Llinos Medi Huws

Councillor Ieuan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council Portfolio Member for Education) (Non-Voting Member)

The Church

Mr Rheinalt Thomas (Free Churches)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Gareth Payne, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr Dewi Jones (Gwynedd Council Head of Education)
Dr Gwynne Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council Director of Lifelong Learning)
Mr Dafydd Edwards (Gwynedd Council Head of Finance) (for item 6)
Mr William E.Jones (Gwynedd Council Senior Finance Manager) (for item 6)
Mrs Kathy Bell (Gwynedd Council Senior Education Accountant)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Annwen Hughes, Elin Walker Jones, Caerwyn Roberts (Vice-Chair), Mrs Mair Read (Anglesey SEN Officer), Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Gwynedd Council Schools and Inclusion Manager), Mr Gwilym Elis Jones (Cynnal Chief Executive)

1 CHAIRPERSON

It was noted that the Chairperson until May, 2013 had been elected for a period of two years [in accordance with the Joint-Committee's Constitution] from among the Isle of Anglesey County Council's elected representatives on the Joint-Committee. The Vice-Chairperson was elected at the same time from among the elected representatives of Gwynedd Council on the Joint-Committee. The Constitution states that a member of one authority shall be appointed Chairperson and a member of the other authority Vice-Chairperson and vice versa the following term.

Councillor Gwilym O. Jones was selected Chairman of the Joint Committee for the forthcoming year. Councillor Jones thanked his fellow members for their confidence in him and he extended a warm welcome to all members and officers present. He thanked his predecessor in the Chair, former Councillor Dylan Jones of Anglesey County Council for his service as Chair.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

3 THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS JOINT COMMITTEE – PRESENTATION FOR NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Gareth Payne, Principal Educational Psychologist gave a presentation to the Members and specifically to those Members who were new to the Joint Committee's work regarding its functions, the work of the Special Educational Needs Provider Unit and the role of Joint Committee's Members in holding the Provider Unit to account. In his presentation the Principal Educational Psychologist referred to the matters noted below –

- The background to establishing the Joint Committee in 1996 and how its administration has been shared between Gwynedd and Anglesey.
- The main duties of both Councils in the field of Special Educational Needs –
 - Developing and implementing an inclusive SEN strategy
 - Planning provision to meet the needs of pupils who have SEN in mainstream schools or where appropriate and when parents so wish, in special schools.
 - Having regard to the SEN Code of Practice for Wales 2002.
 - Ensuring that special educational needs are identified and assessed at an early stage so that the pupil receives suitable early intervention.
 - Managing the statutory assessment procedure, and producing and monitoring statements.
- The services of the Provider Unit including the Education Psychology Service, Specialist Teachers and the Administrative Department which manage the assessment procedure and provide data.
- That arrangements are implemented through a Service Level Agreement and the day to day operational contact with the two Councils is through the client officers.
- Termly reports are given on the work of the Provider Unit to the SEN Joint Committee for scrutiny purposes and to ensure the prudent use of resources.

It was resolved to note the information as presented and to thank the Officer for the report.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2012.

The minutes of the previous meetings of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee held on 16 October 2012 and 29 January 2013 (extraordinary meeting) were presented and they were confirmed as being correct.

Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting on 29 January 2013 –

The Head of Education of Gwynedd Council reminded the Committee that the extraordinary meeting held on 29 January, 2013 had been called to consider a summary of Gwynedd Council's Education Services Self-Evaluation in preparation for Estyn's inspection of those services during March 2013. He said that Estyn's inspection report has been published and that he wanted to inform the Members of the findings of the Inspectors regarding the support given for Additional Learning Needs through the services of the Joint Committee. He referred to some of Estyn's comments in connection with the Joint Committee's work as follows –

- The Authority is working effectively with partners to identify and assess the needs of children with additional learning needs at an early stage.
- That it has clear criteria [through the Joint Committee] for access to additional support, and schools understand their responsibilities as regards giving attention to the needs of pupils who have additional learning needs. (The Officer explained the procedure for access to additional support through the moderation panels in both counties).
- That schools are required to provide strong evidence of the interventions that they have put in place, and the effect of these on pupil results.

- That the percentage of the statements completed within the statutory time scales were consistently high. (The Officer explained that the Joint-Committee's scrutiny function in connection with monitoring assessment and statement statistics is a core part of the work).
- The number of appeals to Welsh SEN Tribunals has been low during the last 3 years.
- The Authority is working well with partners to provide effective specialist support to pupils with additional learning needs, including support for children with complex needs from the established outreach services.
- Schools and parents appreciate these services greatly.
- The Authority is working well with partners to provide a comprehensive training programme for schools. (The Officer reported that training is implemented through the work of the educational psychology service and the specialist teachers service).
- The authority is using ALN data effectively to track pupil progress, to monitor the effect of interventions on pupil results and to challenge schools.
- The authority satisfies its statutory requirements well in relation to pupils with additional learning needs.

The Gwynedd Head of Education reported that Estyn had said that the support given for Additional Learning Needs is good in general. The Officer spoke about the request by the Joint-Committee in its meeting on 29 January for information on Gwynedd Council's Strategic Review of ALN and Stage 1 of that progress. He explained that Stage 1 of the Review had now been completed and that it had entailed developing options for taking the discussion forward. Stage 2 of the review involves stakeholder engagement, including the Joint Committee, and in the Joint-Committee's case, this is likely to occur during the next term. The result of the engagement process will be to develop a specific option for consulting formally thereon. One of the possible models for moving the work forward is on the basis of commissioning and providing, and if this will be the final model and with the co-operation of Anglesey, the Joint Committee will need to be a critical part of the provision and as a result, strengthen and develop its function as a provider. The Officer mentioned the engagement with teachers and classroom assistants and said that the model of delivery would require a skilful workforce with a high level of understanding of dealing with disorders and the ability to implement it locally in the schools. The intention is to consult formally with the Joint Committee regarding this matter during the next term.

The Chairman thanked the Gwynedd Head of Education for the report and welcomed especially the information about Estyn's findings regarding the provision for additional learning needs. In the discussion that followed the Members asked questions regarding the following matters –

- The nature of the training given to parents. The Gwynedd Council Head of Education explained that arrangements are made to provide whatever type of training the parents require in order to understand their children's conditions and what they can do to contribute towards the welfare of their children.
- The nature of the criteria used to decide on access to additional support. The Head of Education Gwynedd Council said that the criteria used are those that the Joint-Committee has agreed on. These criteria were tightened recently partly in order to encourage schools to take more responsibility as regards dealing with the needs of pupils who have additional needs and intervene as is appropriate, and partly for consistency.
- It was noted, in the light of increasing emphasis on providing services through collaboration that the SEN Joint-Committee has provided a model of effective collaboration since it was established and that the two counties and the schools had benefited from it.

It was resolved to accept and note the information on Estyn's findings regarding the support for additional learning needs as part of the inspection of Gwynedd Education Services and to thank the Gwynedd Council Head of Education for the feedback.

5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVIDER UNIT

The Principal Educational Psychologist presented a report describing the work of the Joint Committee's Special Educational Needs Provider Unit during the Autumn Term 2012 and the Spring Term 2013. The Principal Educational Psychologist referred to the following –

- Administration of assessment and review processes and changes in arrangements and staffing of the administration team.
- The work of the Specialist Teachers Service and the consideration given by the Liaison Group to ways of extending and developing their service into the future. A plan was arrived at which entails increasing the present team as regards teachers and employing a number of assistants in addition. Although it will not be possible to fully implement the changes, it was possible to consider making some temporary additions within the budget of the Joint Committee, and it was decided in principle to do so.
- The work of the Educational Psychologist Service and the schemes and projects that psychologists had been concerned with during the period.
- The results of the school questionnaires. The response from schools to the services provided again this year was generally good. However, there was 4 indicators where the response from schools was not as good as last year and where no improvement was noted namely those in relation to the effectiveness of the service regarding pupils with behavioural difficulties; the effectiveness of the service as regards pupils who are emotionally vulnerable, children with complex difficulties and with pupils with low attainment.
- Statistics in relation to attainment against performance indicators regarding the number of final statements within 26 weeks in Gwynedd and Anglesey.
- Service delivery within the Administrative Service, the Specialist Teachers Service and the Educational Psychology Service during Spring Term 2013 as the results of absences and staff leaving for other posts. At the beginning of the Spring Term the Educational Psychology Service was working with 3 fewer psychologists and, as a result, the level of service for schools had to be adapted. Advertisements were placed for replacement psychologists and even though an appointment to the 0.4 post was made it was not possible to make an appointment to the other posts. Due to this and also due to the sickness absence of another psychologist, providing a sufficient level of service has been challenging. However, the service has succeeded in visiting every school where needed and it has responded to any problems that arose.
- Statistics regarding the statutory processes. The data showed that the number of final statements of SEN issued for the first time in Gwynedd from 2008 to 2012 were consistent other than an upward spike in 2010 with the data showing a downwards trend in Anglesey. On the other hand, the number of statutory assessments in progress has increased considerably in Gwynedd and Anglesey.

The Chairman thanked the Principal Educational Psychologist for the report and invited the members of the Joint-Committee to make observations on the information presented. The main subjects of discussion included the following –

- Whether the transfer to the GwE of the advisory service previously provided by Cynnal had impacted on the Joint Committee's work. The Principal Educational Psychologist said that the team of educational psychologists has begun to take on the duties of the previous additional learning needs advisor by providing a more general advisory service regarding special education to schools, including arranging training courses.
- What was to account for the response from schools regarding their satisfaction with the service against the 4 performance indicators mentioned above not being as good as the previous year, and what was being done to rectify the situation. The Principal Educational Psychologist said that the lack of progress with the 4 indicators would be the focus of work during the forthcoming weeks.
- There was some concern regarding the problems with recruiting staff, especially in the Educational Psychology Service and it was asked whether this created difficulties. The Principal Educational Psychologist said that the requirements in relation to educational psychologists posts are high, but efforts to recruit where necessary are continuing as regards the 3 services – the administrative service, the specialist teachers service and the educational psychology service. Employing psychologists as assistant psychologists and training them is another alternative arrangement.
- There was a desire to see more information in the report on the basis of numbers and totals so that members of the Joint-Committee could better understand and appreciate the demands on the services of the Joint-Committee.

- A question was asked whether there was an explanation for the reduction in the number of assessments that are on-going in both counties from 2010 to 2011 and then the jump in the statistics from 2012 to 2013.

The Gwynedd Council Head of Education referred to the 4 indicators in the school questionnaire where the provision was judged by the schools to be not as effective as the previous year and he reported that the cohort of children that the 4 indicators relate to were those with the most obvious difficulties – behavioural problems, complex difficulties; children who are emotionally fragile and children with the lowest attainments. These children are children that the authorities must be aware of and must deal appropriately with their needs. One needs to scrutinise the data to find out how to deal appropriately with these children with the most complex needs and this is a matter that has been addressed by the Liaison Group with a view to fostering collaboration between schools and specialists and what the specialists deem is necessary as a provision so that schools are clear about what is expected of them.

As regards statutory assessment data, the Head of Education Gwynedd Council said that it became apparent, as a result of enquiries, that the main reason for the significant increase in Gwynedd in the last two years is the number of very young children who come into the system with their needs being identified early and very often those needs are quite complex in nature. There has been an increase in the children whose needs are identified as autistic with the autism spectrum being very wide; an increase in the number of children with communication difficulties and children with behavioural problems. In addition an increase has been seen in the number of children with medical conditions who have to be assessed and appropriate provision made for them. These are some of the obvious factors in the increase in the number of statutory assessments that are on-going and which the Joint Committee must be aware of.

The Anglesey Council Director of Lifelong Learning agreed with the above comments. Regarding the situation in Anglesey he reported that there has been an increase in the number of young children with additional learning needs. Usually the service would see around 6 children coming into the education system with special needs but this year there are 15 and this reflects the patterns seen in Gwynedd regarding the nature of their needs, with communication difficulties including autism, medical conditions and behavioural difficulties. An increase on this scale creates a challenge for services.

A question was asked whether the increase was one that was indigenous to Anglesey or did inward migration contribute to it. The Director of Lifelong Learning Anglesey Council responded by saying that work is being done to collate information about the support to schools and the nature of the needs of individuals coming into the education system and that it was premature to report on any findings.

It was resolved to accept the report and note its contents.

6 JOINT COMMITTEE FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR THAT ENDED 31 MARCH 2013.

- The Special Educational Needs Joint Committee final accounts for the financial year 2012/13 were presented, including an income and revenue expenditure report for 2012/13 and a statement of accounts in statutory form certified but without having been audited.

The Gwynedd Council Head of Finance reported that there were new reporting requirements regarding accounting and auditing the Joint Committee's accounts. Section 12 of the Public Audit Act (Wales) 2004 declares that a Joint Committee of two or more (local) authorities is a local government body and Section 13 of the Act requires such bodies to keep accounts which must be audited by independent auditors approved by the Welsh Audit Office.

The Officer reported that the Joint Committee, despite not being an independent legal entity, for the purposes of keeping accounts, comes under the same regulations as other local authorities. The Accounting and Auditing Regulations (Wales) (Amended) 2010 states that all Joint Committees must prepare annual accounts i.e. income and expenditure accounts and where the turnover is more than £1m, a statement of accounts must be provided in

accordance with the CIPFA code for the Joint Committee. The Statement of Accounts will be audited separately by the Welsh Audit Office.

The Senior Education Accountant then referred to the Joint Committee's financial background and the division between the two authorities as regards maintaining the provision. Last year the budget of the Joint Committee was £1.2m with staff costs being the largest expenditure. Due to staff turnover in the last year there was an underspend of around £93k which suggests a healthy budgetary situation where the provision is being provided more cheaply. However, the situation has put pressure on the present staff and has influenced the provision that schools are receiving. The officer proceeded to elaborate on some of the key areas where an underspend was seen as follows -

- Psychologists - £ 56,813
- Teacher Support - £ 19,440
- Administrative - £ 18,682
- Travelling costs - £ 5033
- Resources / stationery - £ 7031
- Phone - £ 6237

The net underspend during financial year 2012/13 was £93,767 which, added to the reserve balance of the Joint Committee on 31 March, 2012 gave total balances on 31 March 2013 of £165,062. Although the situation appears to be quite healthy it reflects staffing difficulties over the past year.

The Gwynedd Council's Senior Finance Manager reported on the Statement of Accounts and referred to the following elements of the statement -

- Statement of Movement in reserves
- Comprehensive Statement of Income and Expenditure 2012/13
- The Balance Sheet
- Cash Flow Statement
- Notes on the Accounts

Members were given the opportunity to raise questions on the accounts. It was emphasised, that in light of the underspend for 2012/13 and the main reason for it being staff, it is important to make every effort to resolve any difficulties in recruitment and to ensure that posts are filled.

It was resolved to accept the Income Account and Revenue Expenditure Report 2012/13 together with the Joint Committee's Statement of Accounts for 2012/13 and note their contents.

- The Annual Governance Statement of the Joint Committee for 2012/13 was presented.

Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance reported that this Declaration describes the governance arrangements of the Joint Committee and that it meets the requirement to produce an Internal Control Statement in accordance with Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2005.

It was resolved to accept the Annual Governance Statement for 2012/13 and note its contents.

7 MEETINGS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE FOR THE COMING YEAR

It was noted that meetings of the Joint Committee for the coming year will be held on the following dates and times -

10:30 a.m. on 20 September in Llangefni
10:30 a.m. on 22 November in Llangefni
10:30 a.m. on March 14, 2014 in Caernarfon

Councillor G.O.Jones
Chair