

Special Educational Needs Joint Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Gwilym O.Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council) (Chairman)
Councillor Caerwyn Roberts (Gwynedd Council) (Vice-Chairman)

Gwynedd Council

Councillors Annwen Hughes, Elin Walker Jones, Beth Lawton, Peter Read,
Gareth Thomas, Eirwyn Williams

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Councillors Trefor Lloyd Hughes, Llinos Huws, R.Meirion Jones,
R.Llewelyn Jones

IN ATTENDANCE: Ffion Edwards Ellis (Senior Educational Psychologist)
Mrs Mair Read (Anglesey SEN Education Officer)
Mr Darren Jackson (Gwynedd Council Education Officer)
Kathy Bell (Senior Education Accountant – Gwynedd Council)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Derlwyn Hughes (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Mr Rheinallt Thomas (Free Churches), Mr Gareth Payne (Principal Education Psychologist), Mr Dewi Jones (Gwynedd Council Education Officer), Dr Gwynne Jones (Director of Learning, Isle of Anglesey County Council)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everybody present to this meeting of the Joint Committee and particularly Ffion Edwards Ellis, Senior Educational Psychologist and Mr Darren Jackson, Education Officer from Gwynedd Council. The Chairman referred to the appointment of Mrs Delyth Molyneux, formerly of Gwynedd Council, as the Head of Learning for the Isle of Anglesey County Council and congratulated her on being appointed to the post.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 10TH DECEMBER, 2013 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee held on 10 December 2013 were submitted and confirmed as correct.

3 THE SEN PROVIDER UNIT

A report was submitted on the work of the Special Educational Needs Provider Unit and related matters during the 2013 Autumn Term and the 2014 Spring Term.

The SEN Education Officer of the Isle of Anglesey County Council, Mrs Mair Read, reported on the main considerations arising from the report as follows –

- In relation to the administration of assessment and review processes, the administrative team is now at full capacity following the appointment of two clerical assistants for a period of 12

months up to the end of March 2015. It had been a challenging period for the administrative service and the efforts of staff who had taken on the additional workload during this period were appreciated.

- All the statutory assessments were completed within the deadline where there were no exceptions.
- A substantial number of annual reviews had been processed in a timely fashion in order to set devolved budgets for schools.
- Regional developments in relation to streamlining business plans linked to the Capita ONE records system are continuing. Adopting the proposed changes will ensure substantial time savings for the clerical assistants.
- A model of the new administrative service had been presented to the Client Officers with a view to addressing the need to restructure the administrative unit for 2015/16 to reflect changes to the operational requirements of the Provider Unit. The principle was approved in November.
- In relation to the Specialist Teachers Service, advertisements were placed for three posts – a full time post in language, communication and autism, where the greatest increase in caseload had occurred, and two 0.6 posts, one in the visual field and the other in the hearing field. Historically, there had been difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers that are also fluent in Welsh and therefore trainee teachers had been employed and arrangements made for them to attend courses whilst in employment. It was decided on this occasion to advertise for qualified teachers with an additional clause that applications from experienced teachers who wish to receive training would also be considered. An internal appointment was made to the full-time language and communication post but not to the two part-time posts, and they were therefore advertised externally.
- In relation to the Educational Psychology Service, the team continued to operate with substantially fewer psychologists during the term as a result of maternity absence and the departure of two part-time psychologists. A service had been provided for every school but each one received considerably fewer visits than usual. As a consequence, three assistant psychologists were employed to help fill the gap in the service. Although one of them could not start in post until Christmas they had made a contribution with a number of tasks and had presented two courses on specific issues.
- The Senior Educational Psychologist referred to the appendix to the report on the work of the Provider Unit outlining proposed arrangements for the Educational Psychology Service from September 2014 onwards. The plan proposed is based on a request for the Joint Committee to promote the training of psychologists and specifically to support two assistant psychologists to follow a professional training course that would enable the provision of an appropriate educational psychology service for schools in both counties in future. Following pressure from a number of services and authorities including the Joint Committee, the Officer observed that the professional training course for psychologists delivered by Cardiff University had been re-opened and that the assistant psychologists could apply to follow the course from September onwards. They have also applied to attend courses in England and in Dundee University in Scotland. It is proposed to advertise two trainee psychologist posts to begin in September 2014 after the three assistant psychologist posts have come to an end. The successful applicants will be attending a course either in Cardiff for three years or in Scotland for two years and would then work for the Joint Committee as 0.8 full-time psychologists. The appendix included details of costs that the Joint Committee would have to fund for maintaining two trainee psychologists either in Cardiff for three years or in Scotland for two years, or one in Cardiff and the other in Scotland. The costs are mainly lower than the funding that would otherwise be allocated to employ a full 1.4 psychologist and where the costs are higher, they are not significantly so. There will be a clause in the contracts of the trained psychologists to ensure that they will reimburse the funding if, for some reason, they do not continue to work for the Joint Committee in future.
- The Senior Educational Psychologist observed that the scheme equates to supporting only two trainee psychologists on a course, and then employing them as 0.8 full-time psychologists. This is due to insufficient funding to employ more than a total of 1.6 full-time psychologists. The appendix included an outline of the paths available to the third assistant psychologist, including continuing to be employed by the Joint Committee for an additional year as an assistant psychologist and applying for training course in a year's time. The Senior Educational Psychologist stated such a proposed investment would strengthen the service for the future.

The SEN Officer of the Isle of Anglesey County Council suggested that the Joint Committee should consider whether to use funding from balances to continue to employ the third psychologist as an assistant psychologist and for her to reapply for a training course in a year's time.

The Senior Education Accountant of Gwynedd Council stated that he wished to discuss the costs in greater detail with the Client Officers and the Principal Educational Psychologist, including taking the additional employments costs of the psychologists into account, before the Joint Committee receives the final figures

In the ensuing debate on the information presented the following matters were raised:

- The contribution of the administrators at a difficult time when the team was operating without full capacity was recognised and they were thanked for taking on the additional workload.
- Enquiries were made regarding devolving funds to schools, the arrangements for so doing and the degree to which that had happened in both counties. Anglesey's SEN Education Officer stated that both counties are looking at devolving funds to schools for additional learning needs but work to assess the level of need would have to be completed first. The primary schools in Anglesey had been visited before Christmas and it is felt that they are ready and equipped to accept the responsibility. They will continue to need support and it must be ensured that the Joint Committee is robust for that purpose. It is expected nationally that a high percentage of the education budget would be devolved to schools. The Senior Education Accountant of Gwynedd Council explained that the Authority in Gwynedd devolves funding to 14 secondary schools and 14 of the largest primary schools. A Service Level Agreement would be entered into with the remainder.
- The psychologists training scheme was welcomed by the Members of the Joint Committee as a proactive step in safeguarding and strengthening the service for the future. In light of the proposed investment it was observed that the Joint-Committee would wish to see the clause regarding the trained psychologists being reinforced so as to commit them to serve the Joint Committee beyond the two years suggested, subject to employment rules. It was also noted that consideration should be given to exerting pressure to broaden admission to the professional training course in Cardiff University so as to include a higher number of trainees in order to reduce the costs of the course. Further information on the training course in Cardiff was requested, particularly the admission arrangements.

The Chairman stated that he recognised the work done by politicians and others to resurrect the Professional Training course in Cardiff University and he expressed his appreciation of the support for the campaign.

It was resolved that the Joint Committee –

- **Accepts the report on the work of the Provider Unit and notes its contents.**
- **Supports advertising two trainee psychologist posts to start in September 2014 once the three assistant psychology posts have come to an end.**

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **The Senior Education Accountant to discuss the costs of the psychologists training scheme with Client Officers and the Principal Educational Psychologist and to present the final figures to the Joint Committee.**
- **The Principal Education Psychologist to provide information on the Professional Training course in Cardiff University.**

4 FINANCE MATTERS - 2014/15 BUDGET

A report was presented by the Head of Finance of Gwynedd Council incorporating the Joint Committee's budget for 2014/15.

The Senior Education Accountant of Gwynedd Council reported that the budget includes employment contracts, pay increments, changes to national insurance contributions and general inflation for 2014/15 – an increase of 0.99% to the contributions of Gwynedd and Anglesey Councils. The net cost of the budget is £1.2m and is funded by contribution of 61.37% from

Gwynedd which equates to £738,150 and 38.63% from Anglesey which amounts to £464,637. The Joint Committee is not facing a financial cut for 2014/15.

The SEN Officer of the Isle of Anglesey County Council stated that the possibility of asking the Joint Committee to implement a cut of 5% for 2014/15 and 2015/16 had been considered in discussing the financial plans.

The Senior Education Accountant stated that although it would be possible to absorb such a cut in the short term through the use of balances, a reduction of 5% equates to £60,000 which is equivalent to the cost of funding an educational psychologist and that implementing a further cut of 5% would equate to another psychologist post. As the bulk of the Joint Committee's expenditure is on staff salaries it is the staffing establishment that has to absorb the burden of any cuts. The SEN Officer of the Isle of Anglesey County Council added that a process of restructuring would have to be considered in order to cope with the financial cuts on such a scale. Any cuts would have to be incorporated within the changes occurring regionally across North Wales.

The Members of the Joint Committee emphasised the following points –

- That a different approach has to be taken to the budget setting process as opposed to salami slicing of services and the impact of cuts on individual services and their associated risks must be evaluated.
- If balances are to be used to maintain the Joint Committee's Services for two years, an analysis must be undertaken of the practical impact of cuts on service users i.e. how losing an educational psychology post would impact upon children with additional learning needs who need the service.

It was resolved to adopt the budget for 2014/15 as presented.

5 MEETINGS FOR 2014/15

It was noted that the meetings of the Joint Committee for 2014/15 would be held on the following dates:

Friday 4 July 2014 at 10:30am
Friday 19 September 2014 at 2pm
Friday 21 November 2014 at 10:30am
Friday 13 March 2015 at 10:30am.

**Councillor G.O.Jones
Chair**