

Special Educational Needs Joint Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2013

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

Gwynedd Council

Councillors Beth Lawton, Peter Read, Eirwyn Williams

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Councillors Jeff Evans, Derlwyn Hughes, R.Llewelyn Jones

The Church

Mr Rheinallt Thomas (Free Churches)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Gareth Payne (Principal Educational Psychologist)
Mr Dewi Jones (Head of Education, Gwynedd Council)
Dr Gwynne Jones (Director of Lifelong Learning – Isle of Anglesey County Council)
Mrs Mair Read (Anglesey SEN Education Officer)
Mrs Kathy Bell (Senior Education Accountant – Gwynedd Council)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Annwen Hughes, Elin Walker Jones, Gareth Thomas (Gwynedd Council), Trefor Lloyd Hughes, Llinos Huws, R.Meirion Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Gwynedd Council Senior Pupils and Inclusion Manager)

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES 20 SEPTEMBER, 2013 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Joint Committee held on 20 September 2013 were submitted and confirmed as correct.

3 SEN PROVIDER UNIT

3.1 The report of the Principal Educational Psychologist outlining the activities of the SEN Provider Unit during the 2013 Summer Term was submitted.

The Principal Educational Psychologist referred to the main considerations arising from the report as follows:

- Changes amongst members of staff responsible for the administration of assessment processes and reviewing arrangements made to undertake the work. It was noted that a

replacement had been appointed for the Senior Administration Officer for the duration of the secondment of the permanent holder of the post.

- With regard to the Specialist Teachers Service, discussions had been held at the beginning of the term to consider employing new teachers as it was apparent that it was not possible to meet the needs of all the children based on the size of the current team and because a number of the teachers were nearing retirement age. An exercise was held in May which demonstrated the difficulty experienced by teachers in meeting the educational needs of all the children. For example, the number of children known to the Language and Communication Service meant that a full time teacher would need to work with 376 children annually. Similarly a teacher for children with physical/medical difficulties would need to work with 202 children every year. Although the numbers are not as high in Hearing and Sight services there is an important minority of children who need weekly input from specialist teachers to develop Braille and sign language skills. Due to the difficulty in recruiting qualified Welsh speaking teachers it has been the practice to employ trainee teachers and subsequently arrange for them to attend training courses whilst in post.

- A similar trend is apparent in the Educational Psychology Service with a substantially reduced number of psychologists within the team during the Summer term. A service had been provided for every school but it had been necessary to reduce the number of visits to each school. As a result it was disappointing, although not surprising, that the response to the questions in the quality questionnaire usually circulated to the schools was not as favourable as last year. 78% stated that they were satisfied with the service provided compared to 85% last year and 83% in previous years. A number of the schools had scored the service lower as they had not seen the psychologist as frequently and not because of any dissatisfaction with the standard of the work. 46% of the schools were satisfied with the time allocated to them. In light of this feedback the new Psychologist post was advertised for a second time and, as with the previous advertisement, no application was received from a Welsh speaking qualified Psychologist. Over the years the service has employed trainee psychologists and has arranged for them to attend courses subsequently. Currently, 7 of the 9 psychologists in the service are trainee psychologists. Three assistant psychologists were employed at the end of the term in order to alleviate some of the strain on the service and with a view to them attending training courses from September 2014 onwards. Two of them have started to work for the Educational Psychology Service and it is expected that the third will start in January 2014.

3.2 Correspondence was presented which it is intended to send to the Assembly Member for Anglesey and the Member of Parliament for Anglesey to seek their support and assistance in addressing the difficulties of arranging training for Educational Psychologists in Wales and which has implications for the recruitment of Welsh speaking qualified educational psychologists and also for the provision of a bilingual educational psychology service in the schools.

The Members considered the information presented in the report and the correspondence and the following matters were raised in the ensuing discussion:

- Reference was made to the high numbers of children the specialist Language and Communication teacher is expected to visit every year and it was enquired how both counties compared to other counties throughout Wales in this respect. Information was also sought regarding the procedure for training parents whose signing skills need to be developed.

- Given the difficulties in relation to recruiting qualified Educational Psychologists who are also Welsh speakers, it was suggested that consideration could be given to employing Psychologists whose first language is English to be responsible for areas such as Holyhead where the Welsh language is not essential. As it appears that 54% of the schools are dissatisfied with the level of provision, it was stated that it was a concern that children perhaps do not receive the level of support they need and that it is therefore feasible to employ English speaking Psychologists and encourage them to learn Welsh.

- It was enquired whether young people in both counties are sufficiently aware of Educational Psychology as a career path and it was suggested that more could be done to promote the subject and to raise its profile in careers sessions and evenings in schools.

- Mention was made that a number of students follow a Psychology Course at Bangor University and that it is a popular subject. It was enquired whether there was any contact between them and the Educational Psychology Service in terms of the possibility of providing post-qualification work experience.

- It was suggested that an analysis be undertaken of the gap between the current Educational Psychology provision and the required provision and that the Service should attempt to enter into dialogue with colleges in England that provide the professional courses to relax the requirement that

prospective Psychologists trained in England should undertake work experience in Education Authorities or schools in England.

- It was asked whether it would be possible to seek alternative methods of resolving the training and recruitment issue through use of the balances.

In response to the points raised the Officers clarified the position as follows:

- That psychologists have their specific workloads and having examined the needs of the Holyhead area, it is felt that there is insufficient demand to justify a full time post for that area. It would also mean that the remaining psychologists would have to take on more of the workload.
- In terms of training parents in sign language, most parents have started the process before their children begin school and very few are totally reliant on sign language. Supporting a profoundly deaf child requires considerable resources outside the curriculum.
- Innovative collaborative work is taking place between these Specialist Speech and Language teachers and Language Therapists in terms of providing training for assistants to understand language difficulties and conditions in order to draw up a work programme. After a period of useful collaboration and investment in training, a position has now been reached where the Health Service does not have any further training resources and there is a struggle to preserve this way of working. The ideal was to increase collaboration but the risk in the current financial climate is that the reverse will happen.
- It was confirmed that 1.3 speech and language therapists work with primary schools in Anglesey at this time.
- With regard to the suggestion of using English Educational Psychologists where possible, it was stated that the Psychologists' work entails more than working with children and that it also means working with teachers principally within a school environment where the ethos is predominately Welsh. There are consequently strong Welsh Language requirements with the post. Every attempt is made to give non Welsh speaking psychologists the opportunity to develop and improve their Welsh.

It was resolved:

- **To accept the term report and to note its contents.**
- **That the correspondence with regard to the difficulties of arranging training for Educational Psychologists in Wales be sent to the Members of Parliament for Ynys Môn and Gwynedd together with the Assembly Members for Ynys Môn and Gwynedd.**

4 BUDGET REVIEW 2013/14

The Senior Education Accountant of Gwynedd Council outlined the position as follows:

- That the 2013/14 budget incorporates the costs of employment contracts, salary increments, adjustments for National Insurance and inflation in the budget for 2013/14. The contribution of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Authorities has increased by 1.2%.
- The current staffing structure of the Joint Committee is outlined below:

Number of full time equivalent posts:

- 8.1 psychologists
- 7.6 support teachers
- 6.4 administrative staff

A number of posts have been vacant during the year as well as staff being on maternity leave. It has been difficult to find supply staff. The situation led to a significant estimated underspend in the SEN Joint Committee's account for the year split between the three staff teams as follows:

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|------------------------|---------|
| • Psychologists | £99,950 |
| • Support Teachers | £24,200 |
| • Administrative Staff | £14,050 |

Total £138,200

Training costs are also estimated to be underspent by approximately £4,520 dependent on the availability of courses before the end of March 2014.

- An estimated overspend of about £1,700 is anticipated in postage costs and a reduction of approximately £5,890 in the income generated by the Joint Committee through the provision of training and the sale of publications to schools and the Authorities.
- This amounts to a total estimated underspend of approximately £135,000 in this year's accounts. Having added this figure to the revised carry forward balance from 2012/13 it is estimated that the Joint Committee's balances will be approximately £300,000 by the end of the 2013/14 financial year which equates to nearly 30% of its budget.
- The Joint Committee's staff and the Education Officers from both Authorities have made temporary arrangements to reinforce staffing levels and continue to consider the best use of the remaining balances for the benefit of children and schools in Gwynedd and Anglesey.

The Senior Accountant stated that filling the vacant post would bring with it additional costs and it is not therefore possible for the Joint Committee to commit itself to expenditure that would have to be funded from the balances.

The Members of the Joint Committee considered the information on the financial position. A suggestion was made that some of the underspend could be reimbursed to both Authorities and included in the budget for next year.

The Head of Education of Gwynedd Council stated that it would be useful for the Joint Committee to receive a further analysis of the financial position, including the balances, to highlight permanent funding, the requirements to fill posts and the balances remaining after so doing. If it subsequently transpires that there would be a considerable surplus there may be an opportunity to enter into dialogue with the Psychology Department of Bangor University on the possibility of supporting young people in their courses with a view to them considering committing to the area. He emphasised that there is an opportunity here for the Joint Committee to be proactive particularly in relation to Educational Psychologists and the specialist teachers and to look at alternative recruitment methods and to take a different approach rather than just advertising. The Officer said that it is essential as a first step that the Joint Committee better understands what it has to offer. Options have to be explored to attract young people to the profession in order to maintain the service and in order to do so the service has to be in a position to clarify the kind of support available based on a firm understanding of financial practicalities.

The Director of Lifelong Learning of the Isle of Anglesey County Council endorsed the above comments and stated that first of all the situation has to be resolved where prospective psychologists following psychology courses in England are required to work subsequently as Educational Psychologists in an Education Authority or a school in England. He also suggested that more could be done to strengthen the profile of Educational Psychology in the schools.

The Members suggested that careful planning is needed within the Joint Committee's budget so that a provision is built into the budget to avoid having to make use of balances. It was emphasised that the balances would not have increased to such a degree were it not for the vacant posts on the establishment. It was noted that it is important that specific provision be made in the budget if it is agreed that there is an alternative approach that can be followed in relation to supporting and recruiting prospective psychologists and specialist teachers.

The Senior Education Accountant reminded the Joint Committee that the balances are one-off funds.

It was resolved:

- **To approve adopting the 2013/14 budget and to note that a further update on the position with regard to use of balances will be provided at the next meeting.**

- That the Joint Committee receives an analysis of the balances to highlight the amount of funds available to promote alternative approaches to attract educational psychologists/specialist teachers to work in Gwynedd and Anglesey.

ACTION POINT: Joint Committee Officers to consult to draw up a further analysis of the financial position for the next meeting.

5 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Joint Committee would be held in Caernarfon at 10.30am on Friday, 14 March 2014.

**Councillor Gwilym O Jones
(Chair)**