

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS JOINT-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor E. Caerwyn Roberts (Gwynedd Council) (Chair)
Councillor Llinos M. Huws (Isle of Anglesey County Council (Vice-Chair)

Gwynedd Council

Councillor Beth Lawton

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Councillors Derlwyn Hughes, Trefor Lloyd Hughes, Gwilym O. Jones,
R. Meirion Jones, Ieuan Williams

The Church

Mr Rheinallt Thomas (Free Churches)

IN ATTENDANCE: Principal Educational Psychologist (Mr Gareth Payne)
Head of Education (Gwynedd Council) (Mr Arwyn Thomas)
Head of Lifelong Learning (IOACC) (Mrs Delyth Molyneux)
Senior Inclusion Manager (Gwynedd Council) (Mr Gwern ap Rhisiart)
Senior Schools Standards Manager (IOACC) (Bethan Morris Jones)
ALN Officer (IOACC) (Dr Einir Thomas)
Project Manager (Gwynedd Council) (Eleri Llewelyn Owen)
Senior Education Accountant (Gwynedd Council) (Mrs Kathy Bell)
Committee Officer (IOACC) (Ann Holmes)

APOLOGIES: Councillor J. Arwel Roberts (IOACC)

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting and he extended a particular welcome to Councillor Trefor Lloyd Hughes who was present after a period of ill health. The Chair informed the Joint-Committee that Councillor Peter Read remained indisposed and on behalf of his fellow Members he extended warmest regards to Councillor Read for his recovery. The Chair also referred to the absence of several of Gwynedd's representatives on the Joint-Committee and he explained that that was due to an extraordinary meeting of Gwynedd Council which had been convened for this morning.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE 20 NOVEMBER, 2015 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Special Educational Needs Joint-Committee held on 20 November, 2015 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 JOINT REVIEW OF THE PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

A joint statement by the Officers of Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey County Council outlining proposed collaborative arrangements between the two councils for the provision of a Joint Strategy for addressing the additional learning needs of the pupils and young people of Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey effectively and efficiently was presented for the Joint-Committee's information and consideration. The strategy would be based on re-modelling and strengthening the current

partnership between the two councils and would include the entire range of services and provisions.

The Joint-Committee was informed that officers from Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey County Councils have held regular meetings since early January, 2016 and that the statement was drawn up at the outset to confirm the collaboration. Agreement for joint working on the priorities listed in the statement has been reached. The statement refers also to the progress of proposals through both councils' respective democratic processes – in the case of Gwynedd the outcome of the meeting of the Cabinet on 19 January, 2016 to which the ALN and Inclusion Strategy was presented and in the case of Anglesey the paper presented to the Executive on 14 March seeking its approval for the collaboration and what it will entail. Officers from both counties have met on a weekly basis since January to collectively create a Joint-Strategy within a comprehensive document detailing the individual services. The document will provide clarity on roles and accountability as well as governance and engagement. In addition, a detailed exposition of the aims, objectives, measurements, access and staffing structure of every service will be provided. The service areas encompass those set out in the statement and are divided into Inclusion, Additional Learning Needs and Leadership and Co-ordination.

Gwynedd Council's Senior Inclusion Manager and the Isle of Anglesey County Council's ALN Officer elaborated on the proposals for collaboration by highlighting the following considerations -

- The broader context including significant legislative changes taking place in the field of ALN and continuing budgetary challenges which local authorities are facing; these were factors in instigating a review of how effectively the needs of children and young people with ALN are being addressed and met.
- Both authorities have agreed to review the current SEN Joint-Committee arrangement in two phases with a view to implementing Phase 1 (forming the core Integrated Team and remodelling the workforce to fit both counties' requirements within specific teams) by September, 2016 and Phase 2 (completion of the staff remodelling and review of the funding devolution arrangements and criteria) by September, 2017.
- Collaboration on the new reformed basis will be different from the arrangement which is in place currently and will entail the formation and availability of specialist teams; the expansion of the partnership to include wider inclusion areas such as welfare, attendance, EAL and LAC; the formulation of clearer criteria and expectations for schools and staff in terms of what to provide, how it will be provided and by whom, and the sharing of functions at officer level as well as in relation to specialist teams of teachers/teaching assistants.
- In setting out the new partnership's governance arrangements, consideration has to be given to how needs will be met at professional officer and elected member levels as well as in terms of scrutiny. A method for joint governance is proposed that will ensure both counties' strategic priorities in the ALN and Inclusion fields are achieved; clear accountability to both counties' corporate procedures and effective, efficient bilingual services.
- Dual governance will apply during the transitional period as arrangements transfer from the current SEN Joint-Committee model to the new Môn and Gwynedd ALN Partnership. A formal inter-authority agreement to establish the partnership and inter alia, its functions; resource and financial commitments, performance monitoring and governance methods will need to be formulated.
- The benefits of collaboration are manifold and are expected to include raising standards, access to specialism, increased effectiveness and efficiency, availability of a Welsh language provision as well as building resilience.
- Due regard will be given to the two counties' priorities for Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion.
- Re-defining the ALN service was inevitable as a result of the new legislation in the field and will now happen as one of the steps to be taken as part of the programme of implementation measures for ALN and Inclusion Services also.
- The next steps will involve collaboration in remodelling the workforce; planning the arrangements for the new reformed partnership and sharing information with all relevant stakeholders.

The Joint-Committee considered the information presented and made the following points –

- The Joint-Committee welcomed the commitment on the part of both counties to continue with the partnership albeit on a reformed basis, which was originally established in 1996 with the formation of the SEN Joint-Committee and which had yielded many benefits to Gwynedd and Anglesey in the area of special educational needs in the years since its inception.
- The Joint-Committee sought clarification of the timeline for the implementation of the changes as proposed. The Committee was informed that following approval by the IOACC's Executive at the 14 March meeting to collaborate with Gwynedd on agreeing the details of the new partnership arrangement it is the intention to bring a more detailed plan of the partnership's structure to the IOACC's Executive in June, 2016. Gwynedd Council is more advanced as regards the stage reached in the democratic process. It is proposed that the new staff structure be implemented in September 2016 and completed definitively during the 2016/17 academic year.
- The Joint-Committee sought clarification of the risks attached to the work of establishing the new partnership particularly in light of the stated objectives of expanding the remit of the partnership to cover other inclusion areas and to achieve savings of 10% or £500k over 2 years to be fully realised by 2018/19. The Committee was informed that at national level one of the risks to local authorities is that whilst young people up to the age of 25 years are covered by the new legislation (the Draft Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill) there is a lack of detail around the budget for this age group as well as the responsibility and to whom that falls. There are then local challenges in relation to planning budgets; the joint discussions that have taken place have led to a joint understanding of the nature and needs of pupils within the two counties and their specific geographical areas. Working in partnership is expected to create greater resilience in the areas of ALN and inclusion across the two authority areas. One of the most significant risks is in the context of monitoring performance which now takes into account the performance of all children across the system. The work which the two authorities are doing with regard to ALN will be essential therefore in terms of the authorities' national standing in relation to inclusion and the quality of the education provided to children of all abilities.
- The Joint-Committee sought clarification of its future role in the new partnership. The Committee was informed that both counties have come to the realisation that arrangements need to be modernised to reflect circumstances and requirements that have changed significantly since the establishment of the Joint-Committee in 1996 including reduced financial and staff resources. The intention therefore is that the new partnership should be more directly accountable through the democratic processes of both councils rather than through a separate arm's length entity and should report on the outcomes for children and young people with ALN and the progress they make because of the quality of the provisions made for them rather than on the processes for delivering those provisions. The partnership's governance arrangements are under discussion but it is foreseen that ultimately, the partnership's reporting process will become an integral part of the two counties' scrutiny arrangements and will thereby be more inclusive and accessible.

It was resolved to accept and to note the information presented along with the proposals for moving forwards with the establishment of the new ALN Partnership.

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

4 BUDGET 2016/17

The report of Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance Service incorporating the Joint-Committee's Budget for 2016/17 was presented for the Committee's consideration and endorsement.

The Senior Education Accountant reported on the various provisions made in the budget including changes to national insurance contributions entailing increased costs of £22k and general inflation as set out in the written report leading to an overall increase in costs of approximately £47k. Anglesey's 10% cut in 2015/16 remains to be implemented.

Comparison of the Joint-Committee's present staff establishment with actual staffing levels as at April, 2016 means there is a reduction of £40k in staffing costs.

The rent and services fee has increased due to the relocation of the Joint-Committee to the Penrallt building.

Gwynedd Council's contribution to the Joint-Committee increases from £752k to £777k and Anglesey Council's contribution increases from £418k to £432k in 2016/17. Anglesey's contribution is subject to delivering savings of £55,210 on services in Anglesey during 2016/17 meaning that if those savings are not delivered then Anglesey's contribution will increase by £55,210.

The Joint-Committee sought clarification of progress with regard to identifying the savings to be made by Anglesey.

The Senior Education Accountant referred to vacant posts within the establishment with £51k savings within the Education Psychology Service compared to the establishment budget and savings of £38k within the Administrative Service, although these are set against an overspend of £49k on teachers and higher teaching assistants.

Anglesey's Head of Lifelong Learning Service said that certain posts had come to end during the summer thereby leading to a reduction in costs. Notwithstanding Anglesey has not yet identified the required savings in 2015/16, the Officer cautioned against moving too swiftly to implement cuts at this point particularly in light of the ongoing work to establish a new partnership and the restructuring that will accompany that process. She said that it would be prudent to wait until the rudiments of the new structure are in place and the requirements are clearer before cuts are made especially in relation to areas where the specialism is very specific.

It was resolved to approve and to adopt the budget for 2016/17 and to ask the Officers to give consideration to potential cuts.

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

5 2015/16 FINANCIAL YEAR REVIEW

The Senior Education Accountant reported verbally that at its November, 2015 meeting the Joint-Committee was informed that it was likely to be overspent by £120k by the end of the financial year with approximately £55k of that accruing to Anglesey and the remainder attributable to increased costs. It is expected that that will still be the case when the 2015/16 accounts are closed down. With regard to the use of the combined balances in 2016/17 which stand at £150k, it is proposed that £65k of the joint overspend be cleared and the remainder of the balances allocated back to Anglesey and Gwynedd. Whilst Anglesey has decided to use its share of the balances to address the deficit, there still remains a residual sum to be found. The end result means that the Joint-Committee will not have any balances at the end of the 2015/16 financial year meaning that should there be any element of overspend in 2016/17, then the individual authorities will be billed for the sum.

Reference was made to the secondment of a psychologist to Gwynedd Council and clarification was sought of how the secondment fits in with the savings position.

Gwynedd's Head of Education said that whilst that formed part of the discussions, the view was that the secondment represented a joint benefit in as much as both counties will benefit from the input made to the Joint-Strategy.

It was resolved to accept and note the position.

6 PROVIDER UNIT – AUTUMN TERM

The report of the Principal Educational Psychologist setting out the work of the Provider Unit during the Autumn Term, 2015, was presented for the Joint-Committee's information.

With reference to performance in relation to the number of final statements produced within the statutory timetable, and in particular, the disparity between the performance of Anglesey in relation to PI 15a (from the total cases during the first 6 months of 2015/16, the percentage within the 26 weeks, exceptions or not) which stands at 8% and that of Gwynedd which stands at 36.8%, the Head of Lifelong Learning of Anglesey Council said that that was due to delayed response and input by the Health Service. Following discussions with the Health Service, an additional paediatrician has been engaged and the processes within the Joint-Committee itself have also been tightened to promote a more timely response by the Health Service. As performance against this indicator is also a corporate PI within Anglesey, it can affect the performance of the service at a corporate level.

Gwynedd's Head of Education said that the percentage of statements within both counties remains at too high a level; it is hoped that with the implementation of the proposed new model of working, intervention can take place sooner and to better effect.

The Joint-Committee noted that the equivalent of 4.9 psychologists are working directly with schools - 1.8 in Anglesey (37%) and 3.1 in Gwynedd (63%) and that this level compares unfavourably with the figure in February, 2011 when there were the equivalent of 8.1 psychologists. The Joint-Committee noted that the availability of more psychologists to work directly with schools would be likely to improve intervention thus reducing the number of statements issued.

It was resolved to accept and to note the report.

NO FURTHER ACTION ENSUING

7 PSYCHOLOGY POSTS – POST TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

The report of the Principal Educational Psychologist in respect of post-training arrangements for the two psychologists currently in training and the financial implications was presented for the Joint-Committee's information.

The Principal Educational Psychologist referred to the input which psychologists have the skills to make in a range of areas apart from working with children directly in schools including those specialised areas noted in the report e.g. conducting research, producing materials and providing training which could contribute to improving the situation of children with ALN. However, the current situation means that it is difficult for them to deliver services over and above the core provision.

The Joint-Committee considered the following –

- The position of the two trainee psychologists and particularly the terms of their post-training arrangements and whether those included a tie-in that would commit them to working within Gwynedd and Anglesey for a period after their qualification.
- The feasibility of making a request to Cardiff University to allow the two trainees to spend their final practice year of training either in Gwynedd or Anglesey to gain experience of working within Welsh medium schools.
- The staff requirements and roles in light of the incorporation within the new partnership model of other inclusion services. The Joint-Committee was informed that the initial focus is on the needs of children and schools and that the role of psychologists within the new model will become clearer once a draft structure is in place.

It was resolved to accept and to note the report.

ACTION ENSUING: Principal Education Officers of both counties to consider the feasibility of making a request to Cardiff University to allow the two trainee psychologists to spend their final practice year of training within Gwynedd or Anglesey.

8 MEETINGS OF THE JOINT-COMMITTEE FOR THE FORTHCOMING YEAR

The following arrangements for the meetings of the Joint-Committee for the forthcoming year were accepted and noted –

Friday, 24 June at 10:30 a.m. in Caernarfon

Friday, 23 September, 2016 at 2:00 p.m. in Llangefni

Friday, 18 November, 2016 at 10:30 a.m. in Caernarfon

Friday, 17 March, 2017 at 10:30 a.m. in Llangefni

**Councillor E. Caerwyn Roberts
Chair**