

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS JOINT-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (IOACC) (Chair)
Councillor Beth Lawton (Gwynedd Council) (Vice-Chair)

Gwynedd Council

Councillors Annwen Hughes, E. Caerwyn Roberts, Eirwyn Williams

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Councillors Gwilym O.Jones, R. Meirion Jones

IN ATTENDANCE: Principal Educational Psychologist (Mr Gareth Payne)
Senior Schools Standards Manager (IOACC) (Bethan Morris Jones)
Senior Inclusion Manager (Gwynedd Council) (Mr Gwern ap Rhisiart)
Senior Finance Manager (Gwynedd Council) (Mr William E. Jones)
Senior Education Accountant (Gwynedd Council) (Mrs Kathy Bell)
Committee Officer (IOACC) (Ann Holmes)

APOLOGIES: Isle of Anglesey County Council (IOACC) – Councillors Derlwyn Hughes, Trefor Lloyd Hughes, Ieuan Williams, Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Education); Gwynedd Council – Councillors Elin Walker Jones, Gareth Thomas (Portfolio Member for Education)

1. CHAIRPERSON

Councillor Llinos Medi Huws, Isle of Anglesey County Council was elected Chairperson of the Special Education Needs Joint-Committee.

Councillor E. Caerwyn Roberts, Gwynedd Council, the retiring Chair, thanked both Members and Officers for their valuable support during his tenure as Chair of the Joint-Committee.

2. VICE-CHAIRPERSON

Councillor Beth Lawton, Gwynedd Council was elected Vice-Chair of the Special Educational Needs Joint-Committee.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

4. MINUTES OF THE 19TH MARCH, 2016 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Joint-Committee held on 18 March, 2016 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

5. SEN PROVIDER UNIT

The report of the Principal Educational Psychologist which provided an overview of the work of the SEN Provider Unit during the Spring Term, 2016 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Principal Educational Psychologist highlighted the following considerations –

- That the team responsible for the administration of the assessment and review processes has been strengthened by the appointment of a new temporary member of staff and is thereby well placed to fulfil all expected administrative duties, and to meet the demands placed on it including the statutory assessment administrative work and the provision of a practical service to the specialist teacher and educational psychologist teams within the unit.
- The Specialist Teachers Service continues to operate in an environment of pressing demand especially with regard to the hearing and visual impairment services. There are new technical developments in the field of visual impairment which facilitate the use of Braille in schools and make access to the curriculum easier for pupils with visual impairment. The Service has met with a company which produces such technical equipment. The Language and Communication Service has begun to adjust the way it works in line with the two authorities' new Strategy for Inclusion and Additional Learning Needs.
- The Educational Psychology Service has continued to provide a service to support the two authorities' schools, including working with individual children, consulting on other matters involving additional learning needs and conducting training within individual schools at their request. Training delivered to Bangor University has brought in some income which has prompted a discussion on the kind of training the service can offer in future and what income it can reasonably expect to generate from it. The service was also approached by the University to be a part of its system for assessing students especially Welsh speaking students but following discussion, concluded that it was likely to involve a heavy workload and could possibly conflict with its work for the authorities.
- The information regarding the number of final statements issued within the statutory timescale shows that performance against performance Indicator 15a (from the total cases during the first 6 months of 2015/16, the percentage completed within 26 weeks exceptions or not) although an improvement on the previous term's report is still some way short of target; this is due to delays caused by late reports provided by external agencies which has been the subject of previous discussion by the Joint-Committee

The Joint-Committee noted the information provided and it sought clarification of the position with regard to the post-training arrangements for the two educational psychologists currently in training as regards the possibility of their being able to complete their final practice year of training within Gwynedd and/or Anglesey. The Joint-Committee was informed that Anglesey's ALN Officer would be meeting with Cardiff University on 28 June with a view to progressing this issue and to try to ensure that the Joint-Committee secures the service of the two trainee psychologists for their final practice year.

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

ACTIONS ENSUING: The Joint-Committee to be informed of the outcome of the Anglesey ALN Officer's meeting with Cardiff University with respect to the location of the two trainee psychologists' final year practice placements.

6. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Annual Governance Statement of the SEN Joint Committee for 2015/16 was presented for approval in accordance with the Accounts and Audit (Wales) 2014 Regulations Section 5 of which requires that Joint Committees review and approve annually a statement of internal control. To this end, the Annual Governance Statement has been prepared.

The Joint-Committee was informed that the Governance Statement for 2015/16 has not materially changed from that presented for 2014/15 and that both Gwynedd Council's Head of Education and Isle of Anglesey County Council's Head of Learning are satisfied with its contents.

It was resolved to accept and to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2015/16.

7. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS JOINT-COMMITTEES'S FINAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH, 2016

A report by Gwynedd Council's Senior Finance Manager incorporating the following documentation was presented for the Joint-Committee's approval:

- The Revenue Income and Expenditure Account for 2015/16 as at Appendix A to the report including the major variances between the budget and actual expenditure in a budget outturn format.
- The Statement of Accounts return for 2015/16 prior to audit as at Appendix B to the report duly certified by Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance as the Statutory Finance Officer for the Joint-Committee.

The Senior Finance Manager reported that the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 require all Joint-Committees to prepare year-end accounts. Where the turnover is less than £2.5m the joint-committee is deemed to be a "small joint-committee" and the accounts must be prepared on a statement of accounts return form provided by the Wales Audit Office. The accounts and return will be subject to an audit by Deloitte, Gwynedd Council's external auditors appointed by the Auditor General for Wales. Should any amendments be necessary, then a revised version will be presented to the meeting of the Joint-Committee scheduled for 23 September, 2016. Following audit and any required amendments, the Auditor General's representative will certify the return prior to 30 September, 2016.

The Senior Education Accountant said that the Joint-Committee's financial position had not changed greatly from that reported to the meeting in March, 2016 when it was projected that the Joint-Committee would have overspent its budget by £120k by the close of the 2015/16 financial year. That figure is now £144k (£89k joint overspend and £55k unidentified savings on behalf of Anglesey) including additional redundancy costs of approximately £22k. Having redistributed the reserves balance among Anglesey and Gwynedd, there is no financial capacity within the Joint-Committee to support overspend in 2016/17 and any overspend that may occur during the year will have to be met by the two authorities.

There followed a discussion regarding the Joint-Committee's financial position in the context of the move to establish a new ALN Partnership and whether a strategic decision has been made not to incur any overspend in the current financial year. Gwynedd Council's Senior Inclusion Manager said that the Liaison Group has scrutinised the budget on a line by line basis including all aspects of costs and has found that the Joint-Committee overspends in relation to its specialist teachers team with more teachers on the establishment than is necessary. Given that some members of the team are engaged on permanent contracts the Joint-Committee should it wish to make reductions, would have to address the issue on the basis of excess across the team with the subsequent risk that expertise could be lost. Consideration is being given to perhaps funding the additional cost in the current financial year in order to obtain the level of service that is required.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that any intention to overspend should be made known and should be planned and quantified otherwise the two authorities will not have budgeted for it and will be faced with an additional unplanned cost.

It was resolved –

- **To receive and approve the Income and Expenditure Account for 2015/16 as set out in Appendix A to the report.**
- **To receive and approve the 2015/16 Statement of Accounts return, subject to audit as set out in Appendix B to the report.**

8. JOINT-REVIEW OF THE PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

Gwynedd Council's Senior Inclusion Manager updated the joint-Committee on the position with regard to taking the new agreed ALN Partnership forwards.

The Officer reported as follows:

- That agreement has been reached between the two authorities as regards most of the services on which they would wish to work collaboratively and these have been set out in a comprehensive Strategy document and include aspects of inclusion such as the Education Welfare Service, Attendance, and Children in Care etc. The document will be modified and refined as the Partnership evolves.
- That both authorities have discussed staffing levels with a view to adopting a new staffing scheme by September, 2016. The Strategy document has been subject to consultation with staff and schools and presentations have been made to the two strategy groups with one also being planned for primary head teachers next month. Both Gwynedd and Anglesey's HR services will discuss the processes and time table for implementing the changes.
- That there have been joint discussions on the governance model and a number of possible models have been considered. The new service on behalf of the two authorities is to be domiciled in Gwynedd.
- That one of the next steps will be to consider how the Joint-Committee can be part of the change process; how it can support the transition and how the new Partnership and the services it encompasses will be incorporated within the two councils' democratic structures.
- That the objective subsequently once the governance arrangements have been agreed and are in place, is to move forwards on the basis of one service at a time commencing with those that are easier to address e.g. the Schools Counselling Service.
- That it is intended to commission a simplified version of the Strategy document which will distil within a summary paper, the main objectives of the Strategy and how these are to be achieved.

The Joint-Committee noted the information and was agreed that it should be provided with a copy of the draft Strategy document and given a presentation in order to help clarify and explain the services that will be delivered by the new Partnership, how they will be delivered and the processes for assessing their effectiveness.

The Officers confirmed that the Strategy document is very clear and detailed as to who is responsible for what thereby reducing the possibility of misinterpretation and improving accountability. Whilst both authorities have been working to improve inclusion and the quality of provision, there has been less clarity as regards evaluating the effectiveness of the provision in terms of the outcomes achieved for the children provided for. Under the new arrangements all the services will have a set of indicators and there will be a process for collating the information and feeding it through to scrutiny committees. A strategy on what is to be measured has been agreed with the model allowing for modification to reflect the priorities and needs of the two authorities. As regards scrutiny some of the services lend themselves to joint scrutiny better than others; there is a need to establish a model for scrutiny to reflect what services may be scrutinised on a joint basis and what services are best scrutinised separately.

It was resolved to note the update and the information presented.

ACTION ENSUING: the Joint Committee to be provided with a copy of the ALN and Inclusion Partnership draft Strategy document and that a presentation be made on the Strategy to the next meeting.

9. NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on Friday, 23 September, 2016 to consider the audited accounts if required.

**Councillor Llinos Medi Huws
Chair**