

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS JOINT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July, 2014

- PRESENT:** Councillor Caerwyn Roberts (Gwynedd Council) (Chair)
- Gwynedd Council**
- Councillors Elin Walker Jones, Beth Lawton, Eirwyn Williams
- Isle of Anglesey County Council**
- Councillors Derlwyn Hughes, Gwilym O.Jones, R.Meirion Jones
- ALSO PRESENT:** Mr Gareth Payne (Principal Educational Psychologist)
Mr Dewi Jones (Head of Education – Gwynedd Council)
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning – Isle of Anglesey County Council)
Mrs Mair Read (Special Educational Needs Officer - Anglesey)
Mr William E.Jones (Senior Finance Manager Gwynedd Council)
Mrs Kathy Bell (Senior Education Accountant Gwynedd Council)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors, Annwen Hughes, Peter Read (Gwynedd Council);
Councillors Trefor Ll.Hughes, Llinos M.Huws, J.Arwel Roberts, Ieuan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council) Mr Rheinallt Thomas (Free Churches)
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1. CHAIRMAN

Councillor Caerwyn Roberts, Gwynedd Council was elected Chairman of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee for the next two years.

2. VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Llinos M.Huws from the Isle of Anglesey County Council was elected Vice-Chair of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee for the next two years.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Joint Committee held on 14th March 2014 were submitted and confirmed as correct subject to the two references therein to Mr Darren Jackson being corrected to read Mr Garem Jackson.

5. THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVIDER UNIT

Submitted – The report of the Principal Educational Psychologist outlining the activities of the Provider Unit during the 2014 Spring term.

The Principal Educational Psychologist referred to the main considerations as follows –

- The arrangements for administering assessment and review processes during the period. At the beginning of the term, the administrative team had a full complement of staff and advantage was taken of that to respond well to new developments including the implementation of the new version of the ONE database. In March, the Senior Administrative Officer who had been

seconded to the post left, and returned to her previous post. The office duties were reorganised in the meantime and the process of advertising the post to be filled until March 2015 was initiated.

- With regard to the Specialist Teachers Service, advertisements were placed for specialist teachers in the area of language difficulties, communication and autism; vision impairment and hearing impairment. A new teacher was appointed to join the language difficulties, communication and autism team to begin on a training course in September but external advertisement had to be placed for the posts in the other two areas. The sickness absence of one of the two specialist vision impairment teachers had an effect on the service particularly on the other teacher who had to undertake the additional work. The situation was exacerbated by the high number of visually impaired children transferring to the secondary sector in need of regular intense input as they required access to the curriculum through Braille.
- With regard to the Educational Psychology Service, the report incorporated an analysis of the financial implications of the decision made in the previous meeting to arrange for the three assistant psychologists who work at present in the service to attend a training course in order to ensure a supply of qualified psychologists in the future. Two of the assistant psychologists have secured a place on the three-year training course in Cardiff from September onwards, one without funding and the other on a funded placement. The third assistant psychologist decided not to apply for a training placement and to continue to work in her present post with the Joint Committee for another year. The report includes the cost of supporting two psychologists as trainee psychologist for the three year period. The service will need to operate with 1.4 fewer psychologists for three years but it is felt that this is a valuable investment which will bear fruit in the future. Some of the fieldwork of the two students will be carried out locally.
- In relation to the training of the educational psychologists' team, most of the psychologists, during the term, attended a course on the Person Centred Planning method of arranging meetings.
- The data for Gwynedd suggests that fewer statements than normal were completed within the statutory period for this term.

The Isle of Anglesey County Council's Special Educational Needs Officer confirmed that Anglesey's figures with regard to the number of statements completed within the 26 week period were similar to Gwynedd in that they reflected an underperformance. These results are to be attributed in part to the difficulties faced by the Administrative Unit from the beginning of the year, i.e. staff turnover with new members of staff coming into the unit meaning that it was difficult to give guidance to the team. These problems have since been resolved. One of the longstanding problems with regard to the completion of assessments is the difficulty with accessing information in a timely fashion from other agencies. Therefore, it was agreed that decisions would be made on assessments based on the information available at the time. It is hoped that this step will improve performance against the key performance indicators for the term and the next reporting period. The officer reported that an appointment was made to the post of Senior Administrative Officer for the Provider Unit until March 2015 and she stated that the previous post holder had started working on the modernisation of the Unit's administrative systems and promoting the introduction of the ONE database system. In addition, the Unit will be dealing with statutory cases only with regard to the Isle of Anglesey since the arrangements for funding schools has changed and the budget for special educational needs has been devolved to schools of Anglesey.

The information presented was considered by the members of the Joint Committee and the following comments were made in the ensuing discussion—

- With the arrangements of devolving special educational needs funding to the schools, it was asked whether they would still continue to receive support. Anglesey's Education Officer stated that the support would continue on a statutory level and that the changes would relate to the administration only with the Joint Committee dealing with statutory arrangements only.
- Whilst welcoming the training which will be undertaken by the two assistant psychologists as an innovative step, it was emphasised that the trained psychologist should commit to work for the Joint Committee for a period following the training.
- It was enquired whether it would be practical to undertake further steps to attempt to attract individuals particularly Welsh speakers to the profession by attending careers sessions and / or offering a bursary as an incentive. The officers responded by saying that the training process for qualifying as an educational psychologist is lengthy. The Joint Committee has a tradition of ensuring that educational psychologist progress through training..

Gwynedd Council's Head of Education drew the Joint Committee's attention to the following matters:

- He said that the Principal Educational Psychologist should be thanked for his work with regard to the progress made on the training programme for psychologists and to Gwynedd Council's Finance Unit for the financial assurance in that the financial support will be available to implement the plan.
- He suggested that the Principal Educational Psychologist should circulate to the head teachers of schools in both counties, a short letter of introduction incorporating information in tabular form setting out the duties of the three teams in the Provider Unit along with the steps which have been taken to strengthen the teams and to attract suitable individuals.
- He suggested that the Principal Educational Psychologist should consider how best to introduce to the Joint Committee the contents of the Welsh Government White Paper on Additional Learning Needs which is open to consultation until 25 July with regard to the impact of the proposed changes in the area of special educational needs so that the Joint Committee understands the implications with regard to how it will act on behalf of the authorities and provide services in the future.

A Member asked whether the members of the Joint Committee would see the response to the consultation on the White Paper. The Isle of Anglesey County Council's Head of Learning suggested that the professional response to the consultation should be shared with the Joint Committee through the administration and that a formal report should be presented to the September meeting of the Joint Committee outlining the implications of the proposed legislative changes for the Joint Committee particularly any relevant financial implications. This was agreed as a way forward.

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

ACTIONS ARISING:

- **The Principal Educational Psychologist to circulate to the head teachers of schools in Gwynedd and Anglesey information regarding the constitution of the three teams in the Provider Unit and their duties along with the steps taken to strengthen the teams and to attract suitable individuals.**
- **The Principal Education Psychologist –**
 - **To send to the Committee Officer the professional response to the Welsh Government consultation on the white Paper regarding Additional Learning Needs to be shared with the members of the Joint Committee and**
 - **To prepare for the next meeting of the Joint Committee a report on the implications of the White paper for the Joint Committee with particular reference to any financial implications.**

6. THE FINAL ACCOUNTS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH, 2014

Submitted for the consideration of the Joint Committee – the Report by Gwynedd Council's Head of Finance incorporating a report on the income and revenue expenditure of the Joint Committee for 2013/14 along with the statement of the accounts in a statutory format which have been certified but not audited.

The Senior Finance Manager of Gwynedd Council noted that there were specific reporting requirements regarding the accounts and the audit of the accounts of joint committees as outlined in the body of the report. He said that the documents were split into two as follows–

- Income Accounts and Revenue Expenditure for 2013/14 along with a commentary on the main variances between the budget and the actual expenditure. The Officer reported that the Joint Committee's net underspend for 2013/14 was a £110,805. When this sum is added to the reserve balance of the Joint Committee on 31 March 2013, i.e. £166,351 the total reserve balance is £277,156 at the end of March 2014.

The Members of the Joint Committee considered the information presented and asked questions regarding the expenditure under some headings including the increase in postage costs. It was asked whether funding was available from the balances to improve office arrangements. The Officers responded that effort has been made to modernise the office systems and that reducing postage costs was a priority. On the other hand, confidentiality requirements must be borne in mind when circulating information and the medium used to do that along with the fact that some agencies conduct their business through paperwork. In addition, although a plan is in place to reduce the Joint Committee's balances, difficulties were experienced in the recruitment of individuals to specialists' posts. Therefore, efforts were made within the operational framework to relax the employment patterns to recruit staff when the need arises and to reduce the balances. On the other hand, the Joint Committee could face cuts to its annual budget in the future meaning that it will have to plan for the longer term on a reduced financial basis.

Gwynedd Council's Senior Finance Manager said that the joint Committee's balances were one-off funding and that any permanent commitments should be made against the permanent budget. The situation whereby the Joint Committee holds the equivalent of a quarter of its turnover of £1m in reserves is something to keep an eye upon although there could be specific reasons for that.

Gwynedd Council's Head of Education said that having reserves gave the Joint Committee flexibility and financial assurance that it can attract suitable individuals to its employ and also provide assistance in order to ensure that children have support as the need arises.

- A statement of the accounts in statutory format certified but not audited.

Gwynedd Council' Senior Finance Manager reported that the statement had been formulated and presented on the statutory standard format. The accounts will be audited by the Wales Audit Office and the Appointed Auditor will produce an ISA260 report outlining the main findings of the Wales Audit Office which will be presented to the meeting of the Joint Committee in September along with the audited accounts. There are several sections to the accounts including explanatory notes regarding the accounting policies.

It was resolved –

- **To accept the Income Accounts and Revenue Expenditure for 2013/14 and to note its contents.**
- **To accept the Statement of Accounts for 2013/14 (pre audit) and to note its contents.**

7. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Submitted – for the consideration and approval of the Joint Committee – The Annual Governance Statement for 2013/14 in accordance with the requirements of the Wales Accounting and Audit Regulation (Amended) 2012 which states that each Joint Committee must produce a Statement of Internal Control.

Gwynedd Council's Senior Finance Manager reported that the Annual Governance Statement would be combined with the audited account to be presented as one comprehensive document to the meeting of the Joint Committee in September.

Anglesey's Special Educational Needs Officer presented the statements formally to the Joint Committee and stated that it was based on the constitution of the Joint Committee which was last updated in 2014. She suggested that in light of the expected proposed changes with the introduction of the Wales Government White Paper regarding additional learning needs, the constitution would need to be reviewed to ensure that it is current and fit for purpose. In addition, the service level agreement with the two authorities needs to be revised in order to reflect any changes.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Governance Statement had been designed to respond to the formal requirement for a statement of internal control and that the External Auditor had not made any comments on its contents in his audit last year. It was suggested that any amendments to the

constitution and / or the agreement could impact on the format and contents of the statement in future.

It was agreed that members of the Joint Committee should receive a copy of the Joint Committee's current constitution as a reference for the imminent review.

It was resolved to approve the Annual Government Statement for 2013/14 as presented.

ACTION: Committee Officer to circulate a copy of the Joint Committee's current constitution to its members

**Councillor Caerwyn Roberts
Chairman**

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