

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS JOINT-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June, 2015

- PRESENT:** Councillor Llinos M.Huws (Vice-Chair) (In the Chair)
- Gwynedd Council**
- Councillors Caerwyn Roberts (Chair) (after item 3), Elin Walker Jones, Beth Lawton, Peter Read, Eirwyn Williams
- Isle of Anglesey County Council**
- Councillors Gwilym O.Jones, R.Meirion Jones
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr Gareth Payne (Principal Educational Psychologist)
Mrs Delyth Molyneux (Head of Learning) (IOACC)
Mr Gwern ap Rhisiart (Senior Inclusion Manager) (Gwynedd Council)
Mr William E.Jones (Senior Finance Manager)(Gwynedd Council)
Mrs Kathy Bell (Senior Education Accountant) (Gwynedd Council)
Ann Holmes (Committee Officer) (IOACC)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors Annwen Hughes (Gwynedd), Derlwyn Hughes, Ieuan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Kenneth Hughes (Portfolio Member for Education) (IOACC)
Councillor Gareth Thomas (Portfolio Member for Education) (Gwynedd Council)
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1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2. MINUTES OF THE 9TH JANUARY, 2015 MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the SEN Joint-Committee held on 9th January, 2015 were presented and confirmed as correct.

3. GWYNEDD COUNCIL STRATEGY FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND INCLUSION

The Portfolio Member for Education for Gwynedd Council informed the Committee that the consultation process on Gwynedd Council's strategy for ALN and Inclusion had now been completed and that there had emerged a broad agreement amongst respondents as regards the underlying principles of the Strategy. The next step will involve a service modelling phase which will be subject to further discussion and consultation including with the SEN Joint-Committee, prior to reporting to Gwynedd Council's Cabinet in the autumn.

Gwynedd Council's Inclusion Officer reported that the level of response to the consultation had been good; a number of responses had sought greater clarity and detail around the nature of the provision and had highlighted the importance of ensuring that models of provision are able to meet the needs. Work has already commenced on a Behaviour model.

The Head of Learning of IOACC said that there are some concerns from Anglesey's perspective regarding the potential effects of the review of ALN and Inclusion undertaken by Gwynedd Council on services for children in Anglesey. She emphasised that the proposed discussions need to be clear

regarding the models of provision and need also to address any impacts on the current partnership between Gwynedd and Anglesey before proposals are presented to the Cabinet in Gwynedd.

Those sentiments were echoed by Anglesey Council's representatives on the Joint-Committee who pointed out that the reporting timescale had slipped with the Joint-Committee not having met since January and they stressed that bilateral discussions on the shape of service provision for the future in both counties are essential.

The Portfolio Member for Education for Gwynedd Council agreed that it was important that all parties are kept informed and confirmed that that is the objective.

The Head of Learning of IOACC referred to ongoing discussions at officer level regarding initial models of service delivery and she suggested that any such future discussions should include an invitation to attend to elected representatives on the Joint-Committee from both Gwynedd and Anglesey.

Members of the Joint-Committee were agreed that being kept fully informed and up to date would assist them in better understanding and appreciating the case for review, the factors involved and the points at issue.

It was resolved –

- **To note the position with regard to progressing Gwynedd Council's Strategy for ALN and Inclusion.**
- **That elected representatives on the Joint-Committee from both Gwynedd and Anglesey be included in future discussions on developing models of service delivery as part of the strategy for ALN and Inclusion.**

ACTION ARISING: Gwynedd and Anglesey Officers to liaise to issue invitations to discussions to the Joint-Committee's members accordingly.

4. SEN PROVIDER UNIT

The report of the Principal Educational Psychologist on the work of the SEN Provider Unit during the spring term, 2015 was presented for the Joint-Committee's consideration.

The Principal Educational Psychologist reported on the following aspects -

- The administration of assessment and review processes.

The Officer referred to the staffing situation and to the departure of the Senior Administration Officer following the end of her period of secondment. The Officer also made reference to the conclusion of the Job Evaluation process in Anglesey as regards its implications for the Unit's administration and support staff.

- The Specialist Teachers' Service

The Principal Educational Psychologist reported that the Provider Unit has currently a strong team of specialist teachers covering all specialisms including experienced teachers; teachers who have been appointed to take over the duties of staff nearing retirement and specialist assistants who are able to undertake specific aspects of the work thereby releasing teachers to carry out other duties. The Joint-Committee is having to contend with a reduced budget as a result of a cut in Anglesey's allocation to the Joint-Committee for the 2015/16 financial year and the likely ramifications thereof. The Joint-Committee needs to be aware of potential effects on the delivery of services due to factors beyond its control.

- The Educational Psychology Service

The Principal Educational Psychologist said that the service is working with fewer staff than normal because two part-time psychologists have left the service and two trainee psychologists

are being supported on the professional course in Cardiff. One of the senior psychologists is also on secondment to Gwynedd Council to assist with the development of the Council's systems for arranging and providing special educational needs. The service continues to operate a system whereby each school has its allocated psychologist and an assistant psychologist has been taking part in training and working with schools with individual children.

- Performance Data

The Principal Educational Psychologist referred to the tables as at section 4 of the report which show the number of final statements produced within the statutory timetable of 26 weeks during the 2013/14 academic year. The figures show that the administration team produced considerable more statements in 2013/14 than it did in 2012/13 with a 75% increase for Gwynedd and a 64% increase for Anglesey.

The Joint-Committee considered the report and raised the following issues –

- The Joint-Committee noted that it would be helpful for it in understanding the staff situation to be provided with information in a tabular form showing the staffing requirements against the actual staff position. Anglesey's Head of Learning said that it is difficult to recruit suitably qualified bilingual staff so in order to overcome that hurdle and bridge any gaps in provision the Joint-Committee has appointed trainees on the basis of a planned and agreed use of the Joint-Committee's reserves. The Principal Educational Psychologist said that whilst the staffing position is currently satisfactory, sustaining that position means exceeding the Joint-Committee's budget particularly as Anglesey has reduced its contribution to the Joint-Committee with the result that cutbacks will have to be made.
- The Joint-Committee noted the loss of the service of a Senior Psychologist to Gwynedd because of a secondment.
- The Joint-Committee was concerned by the reduction in the Joint-Committee's budget and by the risk this might create in terms of not being able to meet the needs of a vulnerable cohort of children. Anglesey's Head of Learning said that the Joint-Committee had been informed at its meeting in September, 2014 that services across Anglesey Council had been asked to identify savings of 10% in preparation for consultation on the 2015/16 budget and that a reduction in the Joint-Committee's budget was one of the options being considered. The implementation of that option was confirmed at the last meeting in January, 2015 and came into effect on 1 April, 2015. Nevertheless every effort has been made to ensure that it does not interfere with the provision made for children with additional learning needs.
- The Joint-Committee noted the implementation of job evaluation by Anglesey Council as a potential risk in terms of the retention of staff negatively affected by the process. Anglesey's Head of Learning said that the Council in Anglesey in the same way as other local authorities in Wales has moved to implement the Single Status Agreement.
- The Joint-Committee noted that performance against the statutory performance indicators with regard to the percentage of cases completed within 26 weeks had declined noticeably for both Gwynedd and Anglesey. Anglesey's Head of learning suggested that this was reflective of the lack of paediatricians leading to a delay in Health input to cases within the Joint-Committee meaning that assessments are not completed to timescales. She said that the inability to work in a timely way is a matter for concern.
- The Joint-Committee noted that it would be helpful for it to know how many children the percentage represents so that it is better able to determine whether the decrease in performance levels is attributable to stricter criteria or to an increase in the number of children requiring assessment. Gwynedd Council's Inclusion Officer said that BCUHB has now offered the services of a paediatrician for the moderation panels to enable a more prompt input by the health service which should address the immediate concerns. However, the review of ALN and Inclusion carried out by Gwynedd Council as part of the development of a new strategy has sought to reassess the effectiveness of the whole system in its entirety including the number of statements generated rather than looking at specific issues within it such as the reasons why statements are not completed within timescales.

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

ACTION ARISING: Principal Educational Psychologist to provide information in relation to the number of children/cases which the performance percentage under PI 15a and PI 15b represents.

5. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The SEN Joint-Committee's Annual Governance Statement for 2014/15 was presented for the Committee's consideration and approval in line with the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales) 2014 which require that every Joint-Committee produce a Statement of Internal Control.

It was resolved to accept and approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2014/15.

6. THE JOINT-COMMITTEE'S FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2014/5

A report by Gwynedd Council's Senior Finance Manager incorporating the SEN Joint-Committee's Revenue Income and Expenditure Accounts for 2014/15 (Appendix A) along with the Official Annual return on the Accounts prior to audit but certified by the Responsible Financial Officer (Appendix B) was presented for the Committee's approval.

The Senior Finance Officer 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 an annual return must be prepared in accordance with proper practices as stipulated by legislation. The documentation will be subject to audit by the Wales Audit Office and should any amendments be necessary, then a revised version will be presented to the Joint-Committee's scheduled meeting in September ahead of certification by the Auditor prior to 30 September.

The Joint-Committee considered the information and sought clarification of certain matters within the Revenue Income and Expenditure Account for 2014/15 as follows –

- The variance between the allocated budget for training (£9,520) and the actual expenditure (£25,159). Anglesey's Head of Learning said that a decision was taken approximately two years ago to utilise an agreed sum from the Joint-Committee's reserves to fund training for educational psychologists and new specialist teachers to ensure that the Joint-Committee has a suitably qualified workforce.
- The justification for retaining a high level of reserves - £150,530 as at 31 March, 2015. The Senior Education Accountant said that there was a plan in place for 2014/15 to spend part of the reserves for the specific purpose of funding a training course for trainee educational psychologists.
- The increase in transport expenses and office supply costs. The Joint-Committee queried whether these increase could have been foreseen and the budget adjusted accordingly. The Senior Education Accountant said that the changes had occurred after the original budget was set. Should the Joint-Committee wish to fund certain activities at a cost that is higher than the allocated budget, then the difference must be found from elsewhere within the budget. As the Joint-Committee's main source of expenditure is its staff, it is likely the resources would have to be met from this budget heading with implications for the level of staffing. The Joint-Committee was advised that if it wishes to amend the budget to meet additional spending on specific headings e.g. travelling costs then it will have to re-allocate resources from other headings in order to do so, or rationalise travelling. The Joint-Committee had an agreed plan in place for 2014/15 to draw down from reserves in order to fund a training course for trainee psychologists; otherwise the Joint-Committee has to ensure spending remains within the allocated budget.

It was resolved to receive and approve the financial information presented comprising of the following –

- **The Revenue Income and Expenditure Account for 2014/15 and,**
- **The official Annual Return for 2014/15 (pre-audit)**

7. BUDGET 2015/16

The Senior Education Accountant said that she was not currently in a position to present a definitive budget for the Joint-Committee for 2015/16 due to uncertainty around a number of factors including the secondment to Gwynedd Council of a Senior Psychologist; the 10% reduction in Anglesey's contribution; the re-location of the Joint-Committee and attendant costs; application of the balances and the ongoing commitment to fund the two trainee educational psychologists. The Officer said that she hoped that these issues would be resolved by the Joint-Committee's next meeting in September. The budget setting process will also take account of the budget out-turn for 2014/15 including the overspend on a number of budget headings.

It was resolved to note the position.

8. MEETINGS FOR THE FORTHCOMING YEAR

It was noted that meetings of the Joint-Committee for 2015/16 would be held on the following dates and times –

- Friday, 18th September, 2015 at 2:00 p.m.
- Friday, 20th November, 2015 at 10:30 a.m.
- Friday, 18th March, 2016 at 10:30 a.m.

**Councillor Llinos Medi Huws
(Vice-Chair)**