



To:  
**Cllr. Ellen ap Gwynn**  
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee  
**Mr Phil Roberts**  
Lead Director for ERW

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**

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Date: **23 October 2018**

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn and Mr Roberts,

### **ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 10 September 2018**

The Chairs and Vice Chairs of all six local authorities' Education Scrutiny Bodies came together on 10<sup>th</sup> September in Port Talbot for their bi-annual Scrutiny Councillor Group. I am writing to you to reflect the views from that meeting. I would like to emphasise that the concerns we raise, and the requests we make, in this letter are intended in a positive spirit. Our collective aim is to support ERW to make the improvements we believe are urgently needed.

We discussed the ability of ERW to meet the requirements of the National Mission (as outlined in the *Welsh Government Action Plan 2017-21 Education in Wales: Our National Mission*). There was unanimous agreement that improvements are necessary to achieve the goals stated in the National Mission. We are particularly concerned that, in a number of areas, the regional school improvement structures essential to the successful implementation of the new curriculum appear to be either inadequate or absent. The timetable for the roll-out of the curriculum moves on apace and we cannot allow our region to be left behind. We, therefore, feel that addressing this issue should be an immediate priority of the Joint Committee.

Concern was also expressed, by all members present, about the lack of progress made with reforms to ERW that have previously been discussed at length. Whilst we recognise there have been capacity issues within the organisation, we would have expected to see, as a minimum, the beginnings of a roadmap for improvement. A clear timetable and action plan for change needs to be in place as a matter of urgency. This should provide clarity on the future structure, operation and funding direction of ERW, and also address the current lack of transparency regarding the budget and other operational decisions. It is, we believe, time to refocus on the core school improvement functions of the organisation and ensure that these are discharged effectively.

I regret that I must convey to you our disappointment with your response, dated 16 July 2018, to our letter to the Joint Committee, dated 16 March 2018. This appeared to us to be more holding letter than substantive reply; it did not make the situation any clearer and

did not fully respond our concerns. This would have been acceptable had it been followed by a further correspondence that addressed the issues we raised. Unfortunately, we are now six months on and feel we are no further forward.

In this context, and in place of a longer letter itemising the numerous issues raised by the various members, the Scrutiny Councillor Group resolved to invite you both to meet with us before the end of January to discuss our concerns. I should note that we do not intend this meeting to be a forum for recrimination. We have no wish to assign blame for the lack of progress, but simply to ensure that the situation is rectified. We feel strongly that this is essential if we are to adequately discharge our duties as your Scrutiny Group: as one member commented, "One cannot scrutinise inaction." Our Scrutiny Support will contact you about dates shortly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. L. Thomas', written in a cursive style.

**Cllr Alex Thomas**  
**Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group**  
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Heol y Coleg  
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SA31 3EQ

17 Hydref, 2018

**Cllr Alex Thomas**  
**Chair of ERW Joint Scrutiny Councillor Group**

Dear Alex and Members of ERW Joint Scrutiny

Thank you for your letter and its helpful tone. It sounds as if we might be in broad agreement across a range of issues.

There is no doubt that ERW has been through a very difficult time. It is clear that there have been a range of issues to resolve, including management, governance, finance and reputation. The difficulties have challenged a range of relationships, but we need to be confident that the work that is underway to reform ERW will help all six authorities to remain firmly committed to joint working. This needs to be secure, for the sake of our learners, but also to ensure that teachers and their support staff, as well as our school leaders, are well placed to lead the reform of our education system.

There has been extensive buy-in to the ambitions of the National Mission. It falls to us collectively to ensure that schools are able to deliver its noble aims for the sake of all of our pupils, in all of our settings.

We are confident that we will have made substantial progress by January on a whole range of challenges that are currently exercising us, and would be happy to attend scrutiny to provide an update.

We would be happy to attend a formal meeting of scrutiny or to join you for a workshop/seminar of the joint scrutiny and engage in whichever way you feel would be most useful. Ensuring that we have a shared understanding of the aims, values and practises of ERW is crucial to securing future buy-in to an effective and expert service.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn**  
**Chair of ERW**

