

Agenda Item 4



To:
Cllr. Ellen ap Gwynn
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**

Scrutiny Office Line: 01792 637256

e-mail scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

Date 28 January 2019

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 10 January 2019

The Scrutiny Councillor Group would like to thank you, the Lead Director and the Interim Managing Director for ERW for attending our meeting to discuss progress with the ERW Improvement Plan and the National Mission. I am writing to you to reflect the views from that meeting.

As you are aware, at our meeting in September 2018, we expressed our concerns about the lack of progress made in relation to the reform of ERW. After discussing this with you, we now feel more reassured that progress is being made and in a timelier manner.

We recognise the role that the Interim Managing Director has played in building relationships and in driving the improvements required. We understand the appointment of a permanent Managing Director will be made shortly and were pleased to hear that the Joint Committee will be involved in this appointment. We would encourage you to ensure that sufficient time is taken to get a person that is of the highest calibre and who will be committed to taking the organisation in a positive direction following the ethos and principles that have now been identified.

We are pleased to hear that a set of proposals on the way forward for ERW have been developed in conjunction with key representatives from all six local authorities, and that this will be discussed at the ERW Joint Committee on the 8 February. We heard that these proposals will outline:

- The purpose for the future of ERW
- Leadership structure of ERW moving forward
- The wider staffing structure of ERW, including primary and secondary specialists and an ad hoc team that can be deployed as required
- Changing Challenge Advisor roles
- Planning of and support for operational delivery
- Developing operational and strategic delivery review mechanisms

- A new look at financing ERW with a focus on releasing £1m from the budget to work with schools, and ensuring transparency in the budgeting, process in particular in relation grant allocation.
- Next steps including: agreeing HR process and engaging key stakeholders, agreeing financial model, and securing levels of governance.

Following our detailed discussion, we would like to share our conclusions and recommendations with you on the matters below:

1. ERW must have a continued focus on building relationships with schools and, in particular, subject/classroom teachers. For the purposes of implementing the new curriculum, the importance of 'buy in' from classroom practitioners cannot be overemphasised. Prioritising the improvement of relationships with the frontline teachers is also essential to building trust in the regional consortium.
2. We believe ERW has an important role to play in the development of employability skills in our region. We would advise that this function should be officially recognised by embedding it in the staffing structure of ERW. We would suggest this could be achieved by including in the job description of one of ERW's officers a responsibility to work with Regional Skills Partnerships, where they exist, and employers around the region, to ensure that employment skills and experiences are better incorporated into our young people's education.
3. We note, and accept, that the debate surrounding the employment arrangements of Challenge Advisors has moved on from earlier discussions. In this context, we would suggest that it is important that the regional responsibilities of locally employed Challenge Advisors are properly formalised and monitored.
4. We strongly recommend that ERW develops clear timescales and milestones for both its own improvement journey and for the implementation of the new curriculum. Those relating to the consortium's own development should be shared and made available for local scrutiny/monitoring, as well as regionally by the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group. Although we appreciate that further input is required from the Welsh Government regarding Donaldson, we feel it is important that schools and classroom teachers know in some detail, and well in advance, what resources and facilities will be provided by the consortium, and when they will become available. We believe this would go some way to achieving recommendation in paragraph 1.
5. We would appreciate it if ERW could provide greater clarity regarding the savings that the new model is expected to generate and the use to which they be put. Will these savings be passed on to the Local Authorities or schools, or will they be reinvested in the regional consortium? Whilst appreciating that the new model is still in its developmental phase, we would respectfully request that information be provided on this point at the next meeting of the Councillor Group.
6. We congratulate the Interim Director on his development of relationships with education stakeholders. We would recommend the focus on this continues both at officer and political level.

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group Scrutiny Support provided by Swansea Council

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7. We would like to see more proven and good-practice classroom resources made available on Hwb for sharing and use by all schools in the region. We would suggest that this should be a priority in the near future as it would, once again, be of benefit in achieving the outcome discussed in paragraph 1.
8. We believe that ERW must develop a consistent dialogue with the WJEC. We would hope that through this ERW could play a role in ensuring that schools receive essential information regarding changes to assessments at the earliest possible opportunity.
9. We would like to ask whether, as part of the work on the new model, the ERW Governance structures are still under review. If they are, the Councillor Group would request sight of any papers on this subject when they are available.

We thank you for your offer to attend our meetings as required in future. We will discuss this when we look at developing our future work programme at our next meeting in March.

Yours sincerely,



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Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group
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Cllr. Ellen ap Gwynn
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**

Scrutiny Office Line: 01792 637256

e-mail scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

Date 18 April 2019

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 25 March 2019

The Scrutiny Councillor Group would like to thank Geraint Rees and Aneirin Thomas for attending our meeting and for presenting the information we requested and answering our questions. I am writing to you to reflect the views from that meeting.

We were disappointed not to have received a written response to our letter to you dated 28 January 2019. We had highlighted a number of recommendations and concerns that we would like you to address. We would be grateful for an early response.

After discussing the issues around the ERW reform programme with you in January, we felt more reassured that progress was being made and in a timelier manner. Unfortunately we heard today that the ERW Joint Committee met on February but only partially agreed the way forward. We understand that there are a number of sticking points around the budget and financial aspects of the new way forward that not all Councils were ready to sign up to. We understand that one Council is considering giving one year's notice to leave ERW. We heard that their leaving will be contingent on whether they feel the reform programme has moved forward effectively and if they believe it has, they may then rescind that notice to leave. However, this in itself causes problems and we had concerns about the impact this would have on the overall budget of ERW. We also recognise this uncertainty may cause a number of challenges.

We heard that the uncertainty in the ongoing delay to the reform programme has been difficult for staff working for ERW. We do recognise this and wish to express our appreciation for their commitment to ERW and education improvement through this difficult time.

Geraint outlined the position and progress made with the programme of reform, which included the developing of phases/milestones for schools including a package of learning and moving forward with the appointment of permanent primary and secondary leads and other key staff at ERW. We were also pleased to hear about the developing work with the university around research and teacher training and note that professional learning will

now be seen as a career long process. We were pleased to hear that key staff appointments will be made towards the end of May.

We received a presentation on the categorisation of schools across the region. We had previously discussed concerns the group had about the time that some schools are spending in the red category and the churn of these out and in of that category. We looked at what is being done to intervene in this process and assist those schools to improve, especially how we progress when a school is consistently underperforming. The link between Estyn outcomes and our assessment and categorisation was raised, particularly when the assessment of the Education Improvement Service and the Estyn Inspection outcome are vastly different.

As a part of this discussion the issue of consistency, robustness and standardisation of the support system across the region was considered and we felt that we wanted more information on this and how it is being improved. We will invite the Lead Director and Geraint to provide further information to our next meeting in June.

We also discussed how we would like the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group to progress in the future and are currently updating our Terms of Reference to reflect what we believe is our role moving forward. We have agreed to meet four times a year, with three of these meetings preceding the ERW Joint Committee and one being a wider information sharing good practice session. We will write to you following each meeting and would request that you respond to us in writing within 28 days of receipt of that letter. We will share our updated terms of reference and agreed ways of working once agreed in due course.

We welcome your thoughts on any of the issues raised in our letter and would be grateful if you could respond in writing addressing the following issues by 9 May 2019.

- 1) We have concerns about the impact of the financial deficit if one Council leaves ERW on the overall budget. Can you update us on how this will be addressed moving forward?
- 2) We would like to ensure that the scrutiny and the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group are clearly reflected in the Governance procedures of ERW, including the two way communication process and that expectations are agreed. I would be grateful if you would consider our request and let us know how you might address this?

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Lyndon Jones
Chair ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group
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