



ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group

Date: 28 June 2021

Time: 2.00pm

(The meeting will be held remotely via Zoom)

Agenda

1	Apologies for Absence
2	Declarations of Interest
3	Letter and notes arising from the ERW Councillor Group on 1 March 21 a) Response Letter from ERW Joint Committee Chair b) ERW Councillor Group letter to the ERW Joint Committee c) Notes of the meeting
4	Updates from Lead Director – Gareth Morgans Changes to the Regional Body and future plans
5	Updates on service from Chief Officers of ERW – Ian Altman/Greg Morgan
6	Discuss how scrutiny will fit into the new regional partnership a) Information from Tracey Meredith (Swansea and ERW Monitoring Officer) b) Councillor Group to discuss thoughts to put in letter to Chair of JC including: what has gone well and not so well in scrutiny of ERW and what could be improved going into the new model.
7	Discuss points for the letter to Chair of ERW Joint Committee arising from this meeting

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Gofynner am / Please ask for:

Fy nghyf / My ref:

Llinell Uniongyrchol / Direct Line:

01267 224050

Dyddiad / Date:

E-bost / E-mail:

20th April 2021

EDole@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Cllr. Lyndon Jones

Chair of the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group and Swansea Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

(by email only:- cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk)

Dear Cllr. Lyndon Jones,

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd March on behalf of ERW's Scrutiny Councillor Group. I'm pleased to hear that officers were able to attend your recent meeting to present the information requested and respond to your questions.

In my last letter, I provided you with the information I had at hand at that point in time. As you note in your letter, ERW is at a crossroads or probably better described at a dead end at this point in time and the way forward from September is not yet resolved.

I will, if I can, respond to each of the issues you raise in your letter however I would advise that some of your questions are best answered by individual Councils, especially those who have left the current partnership. Just to clarify, ERW's approach to school improvement is markedly different to the other regional consortia. Whilst GWE, EAS and the Central South Consortia provide all aspects of school improvement, in ERW the pure school improvement function i.e. employment and deployment of school improvement officers (Challenge Advisers/Education Support Advisers) has remained, from ERW's conception, with each constituent partner. In respect to school performance and value for money the Local Authority is therefore the lead responsible body with ERW contributing to this work.

In response to your specific enquiries, I would like to make the following comments: -

1. In respect to 'value for money' I believe that working in partnership can realise added value for each partner. For example, as a partnership you might only need to employ one of two officers to deliver a particular function whilst working alone could necessitate each partner employing their own staff. Another example would be the need to develop a specific strategy- this can be done at a regional basis rather than asking each Local Authority to develop individual strategies- this saves time and ensures best value for money.

We have seen these approaches being implemented effectively in some areas of ERW's work with an ERW officer representing all the partners and being that key link with Welsh Government and Local Authorities. However, I accept that the size, geography and different context of ERW's constituent

partners has not ensured value for money for all partners at all times as funding, as agreed by the Joint Committee, has in some instances been directed to the areas of highest need.

In respect to the new partnership, which is being developed, partners plan to work together on some functions to ensure value for money but provide other functions locally. However, I have been advised that those local leads will work collaboratively across the new partnership if this adds value to the work.

It is unclear as yet if the new partnership will provide services to other Local Authorities.

2. As I noted above the new partners will work together on some service provision and ensure local leads work together when it will add value. As you're aware ERW has agreed to continue to provide some services to Neath Port Talbot and Ceredigion schools for this term, however, in respect to providing services to other Local Authorities from September onwards that will be a decision for the new partnership's Joint Committee. I agree that this should not be at the detriment of the partners.
3. For this financial year, as two partners have already left ERW, Welsh Government have disaggregated ERW's funding and plan to directly fund each Local Authority individually. All Local Authorities will therefore have access to funding to support new partnerships and to fund the locally provided services.

Officers are currently agreeing the functions of new partnerships and the structure of the teams required to deliver those functions for the partnership's schools. Once the staffing structures have been agreed the funding required will be calculated and the level of contribution from each partner.

As I noted above, the option to provide services to others outside the formal partnerships, will be a decision for the new Joint Committees operational from 1st September 2021. I would advise that if that's to be part of the offer, we will need to ensure that providing for another Local Authority will need to be viable, both operationally and financially, and not impact negatively on services to the partnership's schools.

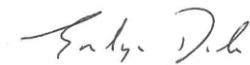
4. In respect to the remaining partners I believe they realise the value of collaboration and wish to work in partnership. Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Swansea wish to work in partnership as do Ceredigion and Powys. It is unclear what Neath Port Talbot's intentions are at present. In respect to what each partner wants from the new model, once agreed, I would be happy, with their agreement, to share their respective requirements. In respect to Ceredigion and Neath Port Talbot I would not have access to that information apart from the services they want to commission from ERW and were agreed by Joint Committee on the 30th March 2021.

In relation to 'problematic areas' I would suggest that the functions currently being discussed for local delivery would be the ones where partners feel that their schools are not getting the best possible support and value for money.

I agree that the new collaboratives will need to be stable and solid and provide schools with high quality support. They will be Local Authority led partnerships working to the direction of the Directors of Education. We will need clear communication in regard to the agreed functions of the partnership and regular interaction with school leaders and local authority officers.

I would like to reiterate your praise for ERW's workforce who have complemented Local Authority work during the last year. Officers have used their expertise to support the region's schools and provide high quality professional development opportunities, advice and guidance.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr. Emlyn Dole
Chair of ERW Joint Committee



To:
Cllr. Emlyn Dole
Chair of the ERW Joint Committee

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**
Scrutiny Office Line: **01792 637256**
e-mail: scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk
Date: **23 March 2021**

Dear Councillor Dole

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 1 March 2021

The Scrutiny Councillor Group would like to thank Gareth Morgans, Ian Altman and Greg Morgan for attending our meeting, for presenting the information we requested and answering our questions. I am writing to you to reflect on the views from that meeting.

We thank you for your letter, dated the 15 February, responding to the issues raised at our meeting on the 26 November. We felt that on this occasion your letter did not fully answer our questions because we were looking for some more clarity on a number of issues. We do recognise that it is a difficult time and that ERW are at a crossroads but we do need to understand how the new model will work for those who will be partners and those who are not. Can we therefore ask you to address the following points in your reply?

1. How will the new model deliver value for money for those who will be members of the partnership and for those who would commission work from it?
2. How will it add value for those councils that sign up? We still have concerns around the concept of Local Authorities (LA) commissioning activities. We asked why should LAs be part of a consortium when they can just 'buy in' the services they need and not have to commit to and pay for the costs of running a regional body.
3. Clarity on funding the new model is required. How will the commissioning aspect work financially in the new model? Also what will the likely financial burden be on those LAs who sign up compared to those who choose to commission services?
4. We were also still not clear where regional collaboration will go from here, especially how the evidence base has been interpreted because each LA in the region has come to a different conclusion about how it will progress and all based on that same evidence. Can we see the summary of what local authorities want from the new model, both those within the proposed partnership and those looking to commission

services? It would also be useful to see the areas that are proving to be problematic?

We wished to emphasise the need for the new model to commence with a stable and solid foundation but we feel for this to be the case, confidence needs to be built across LAs and Schools, while also obtaining good 'buy in'.

We would like to congratulate ERW staff on their achievements while working throughout this difficult period, not only working through the pandemic but through the uncertainty of the changing ERW model. We were particularly impressed with the work around remote and blended learning, which schools across the region will have benefitted from hugely.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Lyndon Jones
Chair of the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group & Swansea Education Scrutiny Performance Panel
Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk



ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group Notes – 1 March 2021

In attendance:

Cllr Lyndon Jones, Swansea (Chair)
 Cllr Peter Black, Swansea
 Cllr Darren Price, Carmarthenshire
 Cllr John Davies, Pembrokeshire
 Cllr Paul Rapi, Pembrokeshire
 Cllr Endaf Edwards, Ceredigion
 Cllr Wyn Thomas, Ceredigion
 Angela Davies, Powys
 Cllr Sandra Davies, Powys

Michelle Roberts (Scrutiny Officer supporting the meeting, Swansea)
 Lisa Evans (Scrutiny Officer, Ceredigion)
 Rhian Lloyd (Scrutiny Officer, Carmarthenshire)
 Lydia Evans (Scrutiny Officer, Pembrokeshire)

Invited to attend:

Gareth Morgans, Lead Director
 Greg Morgan, Chief Officer ERW
 Ian Altman, Chief Officer ERW

Apologies received:

No Councillor apologies received.

Item	
1.	Declarations of Interest None
2.	Notes of, Letter to and response from the Chair of the ERW Joint Committee arising from the ERW Councillor Group on 27 January 2020. Letter and notes accepted but it was felt that the response from the Chair of the Joint Committee did not fully address the issues raised at the last meeting. These issues will now be addressed in the letter to the Chair of the Joint Committee again following this meeting.
3.	Updates from Lead Director Gareth Morgans (Lead Director for ERW) attended the meeting and outlined the current position with regard to changes to ERW and future plans. The Lessons Learnt activity was a proposal by Internal Audit as part of the ERW Consortium Annual Governance Statement 2019/20: <i>Consideration should be given to undertaking a Lessons Learned review to establish the failings of ERW to ensure sustainability of the future consortia.</i> This has not progressed as a

discrete piece of work due to officer capacity and also additional costs however discussions between Leaders, Chief Executives and Directors of Education have articulated the challenges with the current model and which will be addressed as we develop our new approach. These include: ability to respond to local issues/priorities, geography/size of the region, governance of the consortium, clarity in regard to roles and responsibilities and communication. Some of these have been addressed e.g. Communication due to work of Greg/Ian and Welsh Government developing school improvement guidance which would address the roles and responsibilities issue.

Changes to ERW and future plans

- In the recent ERW Joint Committee on the 9 February 2021 it was agreed to extend current consortium arrangements until the end of August 2021 to enable a new partnership to be developed. Several comments were made welcoming the extension of the implementation date to 31 August 2021 to minimise financial risks and provide stability during the pandemic. ERW therefore will continue with 4 partners- Swansea, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Carmarthenshire.
- In the Joint Committee Members were advised that Directors had agreed a draft mission statement including key principles, core aims and values for the new partnership model.
- The meeting was advised that Ceredigion County Council would not be joining the new model but was looking to commission services in the future.
- Carmarthenshire County Council and Swansea Council would temporarily rescind their notice to leave the Consortium to facilitate an extension of the new implementation date to 31 August 2021.
- Legal officers were developing a draft legal agreement for the future arrangements.
- The Lead Director has requested all LAs to confirm what services would be required at a local level, whether the LA intended to join the new Consortium and what commissioned services would be required if they did not wish to join the new Consortium.
- Neath Port Talbot have now written to Chair of the Joint Committee noting their intentions (On 13th November 2020, the ERW Joint Committee approved proposed changes to the ERW Legal Agreement, allowing Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council to purchase a limited number of services, namely the national leadership programmes, from the consortium during 2020/21). They have said
 - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council wishes to extend the current arrangements until 31st March 2022 (or on the dissolution of the existing consortium, if earlier) on the current terms and subject to a formal contractual agreement.
 - NPT priority during 2021/22 will be on supporting learners to catch up following a significant loss of face to face learning during the last academic year and also on supporting schools with their recovery. As we work through these issues, we will clarify future collaborative arrangements from our perspective, in particular how these might shape/be shaped by the new collaboration vehicles being established by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
 - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is committed to working in partnership where such arrangements improve outcomes for our learners.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent legal advice was being sought from public procurement specialists in relation to commissioning and potential implications on statutory responsibilities for school improvements. • Three potential partners now having discussions in regard to a new partnership- Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Swansea.
	<p>Updates from Chief Officers of ERW – Ian Altman/Greg Morgan Ian Altman/Greg Morgan (Chief Officers ERW) attended the meeting and outlined the key issues using a presentation that was including in the Agenda pack, they covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ERW Activity Report Spring 2021 • Estyn Thematic Report and ERW letter - “LA and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19” • ERW Professional Learning Offer 2020/21 • Curriculum for Wales • Secondary Curriculum support • Online learning guidance • Equity and Wellbeing • Leadership • Digital skills • ERW Business Plan 2020/21 including Strategy Groups
5.	<p>Discussion on what should be contained in the letter to the Chair of the ERW Joint Committee The following issues will be included in the letter from the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group to the Chair of the Joint Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The letter did not fully answer our questions especially around clarity, we do recognise that it is a difficult time and we are at a crossroads. We do need to understand how it will work for those in and those out of ERW moving forward. Including <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How it will deliver VFM b. How will it add value to those in it c. Clarity on funding and the funding model including commissioning d. Confidence and political buy in in the new model 2. We were still not clear about where we go from here in the longer term, especially how the evidence base has been used because each LA in the consortium has come to a different conclusion and therefore a decision based on that same evidence. Can we see the summary of local authorities from both in and out of the new model want from the new model and also the areas that are proving to be problematic? 3. We still had concerns around concept of LA’s commissioning activities. Why should LAs be part of consortium if they can just buy the services they need and not have to commit to and pay for the costs of the running the regional body.

6.

Date and items for the next meeting

The next meeting of the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group is to be arranged after the next ERW Joint Committee on the 4 June. Items for the next meeting will include:

- Update on progress establishing the new model and the winding down of ERW in current form
- How scrutiny will be carried out and fit into the new model.
- Update on items outlined in ERW Joint Committee on 4 June.

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Membership List (2021)

Local Authority	Councillor/member representatives	Member email addresses	Scrutiny Officers and other support
Swansea	Cllr Lyndon Jones (Convener Education Performance Scrutiny Panel) Cllr Peter Black (Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee)	Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk cllr.peter.black@swansea.gov.uk	Michelle Roberts Michelle.roberts@swansea.gov.uk Brij Madahar Brij.madahar@swansea.gov.uk
Powys	Angela Davies (Vice Chair Education Scrutiny Group and Statutory Co-optee) Cllr Sandra Davies (Member of Education Scrutiny Group)	angela.davies@powys.gov.uk cllr.sandra.davies@powys.gov.uk	Wyn Richards Wyn.richards@powys.gov.uk
Pembrokeshire	Cllr John Davies (Chair of Schools and Learning Committee) Cllr Paul Rapi (Vice Chair of Schools and Learning Committee)	Cllr.johnt.davies@pembrokeshire.gov.uk Cllr.paul.rapi@pembrokeshire.gov.uk	Lydia Evans Lydia.evans@pembrokeshire.gov.uk
Carmarthenshire	Cllr Darren Price (Chair of Education and Children Scrutiny Committee) Cllr Edward Thomas (Vice Chair of Education and Children Scrutiny Committee)	DaPrice@carmarthenshire.gov.uk EGThomas@carmarthenshire.gov.uk	Michelle Evans Thomas MEEvansThomas@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
Other	ERW	Ian Altman – Chief Officer Greg Morgan – Chief Officer Ruth Lee - Business Support Manager Lead Director – Gareth Morgans	ian.altman@erw.org.uk greg.morgan@erw.org.uk ruth.lee@erw.org.uk edgmorgans@carmarthenshire.gov.uk