



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

Please ask for: **Scrutiny**

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Date **24 June 2019**

Dear Councillor ap Gwynn

ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group – 3 June 2019

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

Geraint outlined the current position and the progress made with the programme of reform. We heard things have moved on significantly with growing collaboration and improving consistency across the region. We were pleased to hear that there has also been closer working with Headteachers across the region.

We heard that Neath Port Talbot Council had given one year's notice to leave ERW. Hearing 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contingent on whether they feel the reform programme has moved forward effectively and if they believe it has, they may rescinded that notice to leave. We understand they have said they will take part fully in development of ERW over that time in order to drive improvement to where they would like it to be.

We were pleased to hear that some key staff appointments have been made and that a solution to filling the Head posts has been found. Although we were concerned that the Interim Managing Director will be finishing in July and a replacement has yet to be identified. We feel that ERW will be in a weaker position without this role in place. The Councillor Group would like to see this addressed as a matter of urgency. We also thanked Geraint Rees for his support and service over the past year and wish him well for the future.

We discussed the need for more 'fleetness of foot' in ERW activities and in particular with Governance matters. We understand that the Joint Committee only meets once a term so decisions have to wait for those meetings, which can slow down progress. We heard that there are proposals to speed up the Executive Function with more delegated activity. Including developing a 3:2:1 strategy, which will speed up the process for some decisions. We were also told that the emerging governance structure of ERW will develop alongside the new staffing model. We would like to see schemes of delegation put in

place to improve the speed of decision making. The Councillor Group has asked for more information on this at their next meeting.

The meeting discussed the difficulties highlighted by the categorisation system including how the public, parents and the press perceive it as a judgement on how well the school is doing rather than its true role as a support framework for schools. We would encourage the regions views on this to be expressed with Welsh Government.

We heard that currently there is a void in the region around leadership development, bringing on new leaders in schools, and we agreed that this needs to be a priority moving forward.

The ERW Business Plan 2019/2020 was circulated to the Group. We were pleased to hear that as it develops it will be more aligned with individual LA education plans. We also heard that all the actions associated with the plan are currently being costed and we would like to see this at our next meeting in September. We agreed with the Interim Managing Director when he said aligning grants monies to the business plan priorities will give more integrity to how it is shared across local authorities. We emphasised the importance of clearly demonstrating how the money is aligned across the region in order to provide confidence in the process.

We were disappointed in the lack of timeliness of correspondence from Joint Committee. We need to develop a system between the Joint Committee and Scrutiny that ensures effective and timely two-way dialogue. We suggest that we write to you following each meeting and would request that you respond to us in writing within 28 days of receipt of that letter. Can you please consider this request, whether this is possible and respond to us with your thoughts in your next letter.

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 points:

- 1) What is the current position and plans for appointing the ERW Managing Director role?
- 2) What are the plans for the ERW schemes of delegation and for improving the speed of decision making across the organisation?
- 3) Look at how to develop a system between the Joint Committee and Scrutiny that ensures effective and timely two-way dialogue based on our suggestion.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr John Davies
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