

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 18 th February 2025
Report Subject	Terminating the GwE Partnership Agreement
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Culture
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GwE was established by agreement between the six Local Authorities in North Wales dated 18 February 2013 in response to changes for school improvement activity directed by Welsh Government.

It was agreed to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service which would be accountable to the six Councils and which would deliver a significant proportion of the statutory functions of the Councils in relation to the effectiveness and improvement of schools i.e. monitoring school performance, challenging school performance, providing support services where improvement needs were identified, providing professional development for the school workforce in relation to curriculum design, teaching and learning, in addition to providing other services that could be commissioned by schools and local authorities.

On 31 January 2024, the then Minister for Education and the Welsh Language published a written statement referring to a review of the roles and responsibilities of Education partners in Wales as well as current school improvement arrangements. This is generally referred to as 'The Middle Tier Review'. The statement made it clear that there was an intention from Welsh Government to move away from the wider regional model for supporting school improvement with local authorities taking back full responsibility for school improvement activity. This led to confirmation that GwE would cease to exist as a regional consortium.

As a result of that statement, a Transitional Board has been established to oversee the arrangements for transferring GwE services back to the local authorities in North Wales and structures have been developed to provide support to schools at individual local authority level. This is a complex piece of work and is ongoing.

Therefore, the agreement to work together in a formal regional partnership needs to be formally concluded. In order to do that, all six Councils need to agree in

writing to terminate the current agreement. Cabinet is asked to approve the recommendation to terminate this collaboration agreement and thereby confirm that GwE will end on 31st May 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Cabinet approves the termination of the agreement to work in partnership with other North Wales local authorities in the context of the regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE) on 31 st May 2025 and subsequently dissolve the requirement for the Joint Committee.
2	That Cabinet confirms its contractual commitment in relation to ending the arrangement.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE GWE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT
1.01	<p>GwE was established by agreement between the six Local Authorities in North Wales dated 18 February 2013 in response to changes for school improvement activity directed by Welsh Government.</p> <p>It was agreed to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service which would be accountable to the six Councils and which would deliver a significant proportion of the statutory functions of the Councils in relation to the effectiveness and improvement of schools i.e. monitoring school performance, challenging school performance, providing support services where improvement needs were identified, providing professional development for the school workforce in relation to curriculum design, teaching and learning, in addition to providing other services that could be commissioned by schools and local authorities.</p>
1.02	The councils agreed to appoint Gwynedd Council as the Accommodation Authority for implementing and maintaining the Service by forming a Joint Committee, to keep an overview and give guidance as required, in accordance with Section 101(5) and 102(1) Local Government Act 1972 and Section 20 of the Local Government Act 2000.
1.03	On 31 January 2024, the then Minister for Education and the Welsh Language published a written statement referring to a review of the roles and responsibilities of Education partners in Wales as well as current school improvement arrangements. This is generally referred to as 'The Middle Tier Review'. The statement made it clear that there was an intention from Welsh Government to move away from the wider regional model for supporting school improvement with local authorities taking back full responsibility for school improvement activity. This led to confirmation that GwE would cease to exist as a regional consortium.

1.04	As a result of that statement, a Transitional Board has been established to oversee the arrangements for transferring GwE services back to the local authorities in North Wales and structures have been developed to provide support to schools at individual local authority level. This is a complex piece of work and is ongoing.
1.05	Since the Ministerial announcement, the Education Portfolio has developed a new school improvement model for Flintshire which has been endorsed by headteachers and by the Cabinet. This model has also been reviewed by Welsh Government who are content that our proposed model meets the principles and objectives of their national guidance on new school improvement arrangements.
1.06	The Chief Officer for Education and Youth is a member of the Transition Board overseeing the change process from a regional to a local service. As there are complex employment legislative requirements in relation to existing GwE staff, the Education Portfolio's Human Resources Business Partner is also a member of the Transition Board.
1.07	<p>The initial proposal was that all activity related to the transition of the regional service to individual local authorities would be completed by 31st March 2025 to align with the financial year.</p> <p>However, the complex nature of this activity and the requirements of employment legislation in relation to staff currently employed in the regional service has resulted in the cessation of the service being pushed back to 31st May 2025.</p>
1.08	<p>As the regional approach to school improvement has been ceased by Welsh Government, the GwE/North Wales Councils' Inter-Authority Agreement which established the original regional partnership needs to be formally concluded.</p> <p>In order to do that, all six Councils need to agree in writing to terminate the current agreement. Cabinet is asked to approve the recommendation to terminate this collaboration agreement and thereby confirm that GwE will end on 31st May 2025 and subsequently dissolve the requirement for the Joint Committee.</p> <p>It should be noted that terminating the agreement does not affect cumulative rights or the commitments that have already been agreed upon. Those commitments are detailed in the agreement made between the six Authorities in 2013 (see Appendix 1).</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The partnership agreement required each Council to provide funding for GwE on an annual basis based on an agreed formula linked to pupil numbers. The other main source of funding for GwE came directly from Welsh Government in the form of grants to support their policy priorities.

2.02	From April 2024, Welsh Government ceased funding regional consortia and redirected grant funding to Local Authorities via the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG). Noting that transition from regional to local arrangements would take time, the then Minister directed local authorities to return some elements of the LAEG back to regional consortia for the financial year 2024-25 to maintain school improvement activity. The Council complied fully with this directive and a revised commissioned plan for GwE involvement in Flintshire schools was put in place for the 2024-25 financial year. The amount of LAEG funding passed back to GwE for the 2024-25 financial year was £912,493.
2.03	Under the partnership agreement, the Council contribution to GwE for 2024-25 was maintained but was subject to a cost reduction of 10%. The total council contribution for 2024-25 was £801,988.
2.04	If the transition is successfully concluded by 31 st May 2025 then an agreement will need to be reached between the six North Wales authorities to set an interim proportional contribution from each council for the first two months of the new financial year in order to maintain the service until it formally ends.
2.05	<p>Amongst its responsibilities as the host authority, Cyngor Gwynedd is the employer of GwE staff. The Inter-Authority Agreement contains provisions to indemnify the Cyngor Gwynedd from costs, such as redundancy payments, which it may incur by reason of or arising out of the carrying out its obligations in its role as host authority.</p> <p>All efforts are being made to place as many GwE staff as possible into the new services hosted by each individual authority, but it is inevitable that there will be some redundancies. Every effort will be made to keep these costs to a minimum. The costs of redundancies will be met by residual GwE funds as much as possible and a transition grant from Welsh Government, but any remaining costs will have to be met by the six North Wales authorities, until that work is completed this cost cannot be quantified.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	The risk around the cessation of GwE is being managed via a Transition Board which is independently chaired and is comprised of the 6 North Wales Chief Education Officers, HR Business Partners from the 6 councils, senior managers from GwE and an independent HR consultant.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Flintshire County Council conducted a consultation meeting with all Trade Union and Professional Associations regarding its School Improvement Model and the implications for GwE staff on 28 th February 2025.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Inter-Authority Agreement 2013

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Welsh Government Review of the Roles and Responsibilities of Education Partners in Wales (Middle Tier Review)</p> <p>https://www.gov.wales/terms-reference-review-roles-and-responsibilities-education-partners-wales-and-delivery-school-html</p> <p>https://www.gov.wales/review-roles-and-responsibilities-education-partners-wales-and-delivery-school-improvement-html</p> <p>https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-next-stage-review-school-improvement-roles-and-responsibilities-education</p>

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Claire Homard, Chief Officer Education & Youth Telephone: 01352 704601 E-mail: claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>GwE – the regional school improvement service for North Wales</p> <p>LAEG – Local Authority Education Grant – grant funding from Welsh Government to deliver of their stated education improvement priorities</p> <p>Transition Board – a ‘task and finish’ group of Chief Education Officers and HR Lead Officers with an independent Chair and independent HR consultant to oversee the cessation of GwE and the management of GwE staff, assets and resources on behalf of the six North Wales Councils and the Host Authority (Gwynedd).</p>