



Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith  
Education through Regional Working  
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# Annual Governance Statement 2021-22

*‘Improving Learning Together’*

## **ERW Consortium**

ERW was formally established as a Joint Education Improvement Service with the first formal meeting of the Joint Committee held on 25 July 2014. From 2014 to March 2020, the consortium consisted of six Local Authorities:

- City and County of Swansea Council
- Neath and Port Talbot County and Borough Council
- Powys County Council
- Ceredigion County Council
- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Carmarthenshire County Council

Neath Port Talbot County and Borough Council withdrew from the consortium on 31 March 2020, with Ceredigion County Council withdrawing from the consortium on 31 March 2021 and Powys County Council withdrawing from the consortium on 31 August 2021. The City and County of Swansea Council and Carmarthenshire County Council temporarily rescinded their notices to withdraw, extending their membership through to 31 August 2021, until the creation of the new partnership arrangement.

A report to the Joint Committee in July 2020 regarding the future footprint of ERW highlighted that ERW has struggled to function effectively and identified a number of challenges faced and drivers for change. In 2021-22 further work was undertaken to the cessation of ERW in its current format, and the development of the South West Wales Education Partnership, known as Partneriaeth which consists of Carmarthenshire County Council, Pembrokeshire County Council and the City and County of Swansea County Council, with agreement from the Joint Committee to provide some services to both Neath Port-Talbot County Borough Council and Ceredigion County Council where providing services would then be at the approval of the new Joint Committee.

During 2021-22, Welsh Government disaggregated ERW's grant funding (for both Pupil Development Grant and Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant) and funded each Local Authority that remained within the ERW partnership individually. Each Local Authority were directed by Welsh Government to passport a proportion of funding to ERW in order that Business Plan aims and objectives could be achieved.

## **ERW Context and Provision**

ERW is one of four education consortia in Wales, with a purpose to deliver a single consistent and integrated professional school improvement services to the Local Authorities engaged. The National Model for School Improvement in Wales is based on a vision of regional school improvement consortia working on behalf of local authorities to lead and coordinate the improvement in the performance of schools and education of young people.

ERW Officers play a key role in a range of strategic groups with Welsh Government as well as cross-regional project groups. This allows centrally retained staff to contribute and collaborate on a national level and ensure that stakeholders are fully informed to deliver these priorities. Unlike the three other regional consortia, Challenge Advisers and School Improvement Officers are employed by the constituent partner authorities, however there is a close working relationship and a coordinated approach to school support through an agreed protocol between Senior Challenge Advisers and ERW Central Team is in place.

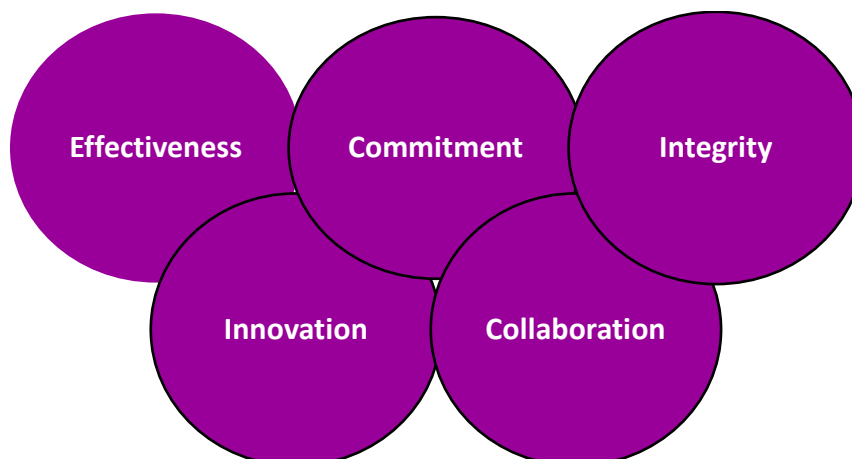
## **ERW's Aims**

ERW has six key aims:

- Improve the quality of leadership and its impact on outcomes.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning experiences and its impact on outcomes.
- Reduce the impact of poverty on attainment, support vulnerable learners and ensure all learners reach their potential.
- Deliver high quality and bespoke support, challenge and intervention to schools.
- Communicate effectively with all stakeholders.

## **ERW's Values**

To achieve ERW's vision of 'Improving Learning Together', a set of defined values were created to guide the work undertaken by ERW. These include:



# **Review of Governance Arrangements**

## **What is Governance?**

ERW is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with laws, regulations and its ethical standards. The governance framework is the process, culture, values and systems by which this is achieved.

To deliver good governance in local government, both ERW and its Officers must try to achieve ERW's priorities whilst acting in the public interest at all times. Acting in the public interest implies primary consideration of the benefits for society, which should result in positive outcomes for learners and other stakeholders.

## **Review of Effectiveness**

ERW has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness for 2021-22 was informed by the work undertaken during the Internal Audit review, which included a follow-up on the implementation of Significant Governance Issues and Priorities for Improvement identified in 2020-21. Additional assurance was provided by the Head of Internal Audit Assurance Opinion based on the work undertaken by Internal Audit in 2021-22, along with the minutes from the ERW Joint Committee.

The Internal Audit review for 2021-22 focused on:

- Follow-up of Previous Internal Audit Recommendations.
- Follow-up of Previous Annual Governance Statement Issues.
- Arrangements for ceasing the ERW Partnership.
- Governance Arrangements for the new Partneriaeth Partnership
- Debt Monitoring & Payment of Debts.

The Internal Audit review gave a 'moderate' assurance rating on the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, internal control, risk management and financial management arrangements in place. Areas requiring further improvement have been included within the Priorities for Improvement of the Annual Governance 2021-22 Action Plan.

In addition, Internal Audit undertook individual reviews of;

- Pupil Development Grant Funding 2021-22.
- Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant 2021-22.

For the Pupil Development Grant funding 2021-22, Internal Audit gave a 'moderate' assurance on the effectiveness of the governance, internal control, risk management and financial management arrangements in place.

For the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant funding 2021-22, Internal Audit gave a 'limited' assurance on the effectiveness of the governance, internal control, risk management and financial management arrangements in place.

Assurance has also been received on the effectiveness of key financial systems used by ERW from the work undertaken by Pembrokeshire County Council's Internal Audit Reviews.

The diagram on the pages 11 outlines what assurances were available under the current Governance Structure, the sources of assurance provided and the areas for improvement identified.

## **ERW Governance Framework**

The ERW Code of Corporate Governance was approved by the Joint Committee on 16 July 2018.

The ERW Business Plan for the period April 2021 to August 2021 was approved by the Joint Committee on 08 July 2021. The ERW Business Plan aligns and reflects the aspirations and enabling of objectives of the National Mission, whilst reflecting local and regional priorities. These priorities are:

- Developing and delivering a transformational curriculum;
- To develop a high-quality education profession;
- To develop inspirational leaders and to facilitate them working collaboratively to raise standards;
- To develop strong and inclusive schools that are committed to excellence and wellbeing;
- To develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability processes that support a self-improving system.

The ERW Business Plan (April 2021 to August 2021) continues not to detail the value for money framework in which it will operate, nor were milestones, key performance metrics or success criteria included by which outcomes could be measured. This has continued to be highlighted as a concern for several years with assurances provided in 2020-21 that a framework would be developed and monitored. This continues to be an area within the governance framework which needs to be strengthened and enhanced for accountability of the Consortium to deliver improved educational outcomes to the pupils of the ERW partner authorities.

### **Joint Committee**

The only meeting of the Joint Committee during the 2021-22 financial year comprised of the four Local Authority Leaders supported by the four Chief Executives, with the Joint Committee advised by Lead/Statutory Officers, the Executive Board and external school improvement experts. The Joint Committee received the ERW Statement of Accounts 2020-21 at its meeting of 29 April 2022.

Internal Audit and Audit Wales report independently to the Joint Committee, providing assurance on the Governance, Internal Control, Financial Management and Risk Management arrangements in place within ERW. Meetings of the Joint Committee continued to be held virtually during 2021-22 following the publication of The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020.

Following publication of The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020, the Joint Committee continued to hold virtual meetings during 2020-21. However, the absence of meetings on a regular basis throughout the year had an impact on the

timeliness of decision making (for example, the Business Plan for April 2021 to August 2021 was not formally approved until July 2021, whereas this should have been approved at the beginning of the financial year to ensure that the objectives of the Business Plan were aligned to the financial resources available).

### **Executive Board**

The Executive Board is made up of the Directors of Education from each of the Local Authorities, the Interim Chief Officers, the Section 151 Officer (or deputy), Headteacher representatives and external members.

The Executive Board met regularly during 2020-21, prior to each meeting of the Joint Committee. However, minutes of meetings have not been published since June 2017.

### **Scrutiny Councillor Group**

All work streams and activity both locally and regionally are led by the Joint Committee and are accountable locally. The Chairs and Vice Chairs of the four local authorities' Education Scrutiny Committee's met once during 2021-22 as a Scrutiny Councillor Group to consider scrutiny work plans and make requests directly to the Joint Committee.

### **Statutory/Lead Officers**

The following Lead and Statutory roles have been held by the same officers for a number of years, providing consistency and stability:

- Lead Chief Executive – Phil Roberts (Chief Executive, Swansea)
- Section 151 Officer – Jon Haswell (Director of Resources, Pembrokeshire)
- Monitoring Officer – Tracey Meredith (Monitoring Officer, Swansea)
- Lead Education Director – Gareth Morgans (Carmarthenshire)
- Chief Officer:
  - Interim Chief Officer – Ian Altman (Until 31 March 2022)
  - Interim Chief Officer – Greg Morgan (Until 31 March 2022)

### **ERW Team**

In February 2019, the Joint Committee approved a new central staffing structure. The structure for ERW is made up of the following:

- Senior Leadership Team
- Curriculum Team
- Secondary Specialists Team
- Central Team
- Business Support

## **Strategy Groups**

Joint Committee approved the Strategy Groups at their meeting on 9 December 2019. The ERW Strategy Groups are a critical aspect of ERW's governance arrangements. They are the primary driver for developing ERW's work in the key areas of:

- Curriculum (including qualifications)
- Professional Learning & Research
- Equity & Well-being
- Leadership
- Digital Skills
- Welsh

Each Strategy Group is responsible for co-constructing content and monitoring the progress of the aspect of Business Plan actions for which they are responsible. The Strategy Groups are also a conduit for communication between the region and peers within the constituent local authorities, and the wider profession, with group members being tasked with communicating their work externally, by using both local and regional communications channels.

## **Consultation, Communication & Engagement**

Since the onset of COVID-19 the ERW region has continued to work closely and collaboratively with its constituent local authorities, consortia partners, Welsh Government, Estyn and other stakeholders in support of the highest quality of blended learning and well-being provision for all learners.

COVID-19 impacted upon the delivery of face-to-face professional learning, network and team meetings. However, ERW have continued to implement a similar open and embracing approach to the delivery of services via a series of on-line learning events and virtual meetings, and by developing an online Professional Learning offer, detailing the full range of support and professional learning opportunities provided by the ERW team, enabling both synchronous and asynchronous training and provisional learning.

The Chief Officers termly update reports presented to the Joint Committee outlines further communication and engagement activities undertaken during 2020-21 both within the region and nationally.

## **Internal Audit**

Pembrokeshire County Council, as the Lead Authority for Finance, provides the Internal Audit Service to ERW. The role of Internal Audit is to provide independent assurance on the effectiveness of governance, internal control, financial management and risk management arrangements in place. To ensure that the Internal Audit plan is appropriately risk-based, it is agreed on academic year and undertaken in the latter quarters of the financial year. In



accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, a risk-based work plan was agreed with the Section 151 Officer and Interim Managing Director and due to timing, approval of the Internal Audit work plan was approved by the ERW Lead/Statutory Officers following an email sent on 07 February 2022.

The Head of Internal Audit's Annual Assurance Opinion concluded that overall, limited assurance is placed on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, internal control, financial management and risk management arrangements in place. Management have agreed to implement the recommendations made following the internal audit review. The implementation of recommendations in an effective and timely manner will assist in strengthening the governance, internal control, risk management and financial management arrangements in place.

In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Interim Head of Internal Audit undertook a self-assessment of compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The assessment concluded that the Internal Audit Service conforms to the Code of Ethics and the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

### **External Audit & Regulators**

Audit Wales are the appointed external auditor for ERW. Estyn provide an independent inspection and advice service on quality and standards in education and training in Wales. No reviews were undertaken during 2021-22.

## **Business Risk Management**

Members and Officers are responsible for ensuring that risk is considered in the decisions they take and suitable arrangements are put in place to manage risk. The Joint Committee has responsibility for overseeing ERW's Business Risk Management arrangements. The table below is a summary of movement of risks in ERW's Risk Register for 2021-22:

<b>Corporate Risk (Threat)</b>	<b>Residual Rating Jun 2021</b>	<b>Residual Rating Feb 2022</b>
ERW Governance	12	12
Powys – Estyn monitoring results in continued follow-up	8	8
Pembrokeshire – Estyn monitoring results in follow-up	8	8
Failure to comply with Estyn Action Plan	8	8
Funding current or future costs resulting from ERW partners leaving the consortium	8	
Data Protection	6	6
ERW found not to provide Value for Money	6	6
LA failure to comply with Grant Regulations	6	6
Failure to respond to qualifications 2021	6	6
Timeliness of Welsh Government Funding	6	6
Delivery of National Mission	6	6
Transparency of Governance	6	6
Failure to respond to impact of Covid-19	6	6
Carmarthenshire – Estyn monitoring results in follow-up	4	4
Swansea – Estyn monitoring results in follow-up	4	4
Failure to deliver Business Plan	4	4
Cost Savings required by Welsh Government	4	4
Lack of clarity on functions	4	4
Lack of communication	4	4
Cuts to School Budgets		12
Ceredigion Estyn Monitoring results in follow-up		4

*\*The Red and Amber highlights the difference in rating with red being high risks and amber medium risks*

## Review of ERW's Governance Arrangements for 2021-22



## Annual Governance Statement 2021-22 Action Plan

Significant Governance Issue			
Current Position	Planned Actions/Key Milestones	Owner	Key Milestone Completion Dates
<p><b>Lessons Learned review of failings of ERW</b>                      The Joint Committee previously endorsed the proposal to undertake a Lessons Learned review to establish the failings of ERW to ensure the future sustainability of Partneriaeth.</p> <p>This should be progressed as a matter of urgency so that learning can be incorporated into the new working arrangements. Internal Audit reviews have resulted in one moderate assurance opinion and four limited assurance opinion over the past 5 years. The findings and recommendations from these reviews should be incorporated into the Lessons Learned review and addressed for future working arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An independent Lessons Learned review to be undertaken and outcomes incorporated into the new working arrangements.</li> <li>• Implementation of all outstanding Internal Audit Recommendations.</li> <li>• Businesses Partnering Agreements to be put in place with Authorities who have exited the ERW partnership to ensure that there is clarity in the services provided and that the roles and expectations of each party are formally documented.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Joint Committee</b></p> <p><b>Partneriaeth Lead Officer</b></p> <p><b>Partneriaeth Lead Officer &amp; Monitoring Officer</b></p>	<p><b>March 2023</b></p> <p><b>December 2022</b></p> <p><b>March 2023</b></p>

<b>Priorities for Improvement</b>			
<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Actions/Key Milestones</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Key Milestone Completion Dates</b>
<p><b>Business Plan</b></p> <p>The Business Plan should include clear milestones, outcomes, supported by performance measures so that delivery and effectiveness can be monitored throughout the year. The Business Plan needs to be fully costed to ensure that it is deliverable within available resources and ensure for Value for Money.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SMART outcomes identified within the Business Plan, with clear milestones to facilitate monitoring and evidencing of delivery and effectiveness;</li> <li>• Business Plan aligned to the budget to ensure affordable and deliverable. Focus on value for money included within the Business Plan;</li> <li>• Regular, evidenced based progress reporting to the Joint Committee against the SMART outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Partneriaeth Lead Officer</b></p> <p><b>Partneriaeth Lead Officer &amp; ERW s151 Officer</b></p> <p><b>Partneriaeth Lead Officer</b></p>	<p><b>September 2022</b></p> <p><b>September 2022</b></p> <p><b>December 2022</b></p>
<p><b>Accountability, Performance Management &amp; Value for Money</b></p> <p>The Governance Structure &amp; Central Team should have clear roles and responsibilities with defined outcomes linked to the delivery of the National Mission. In order to ensure accountability and value for money can be evidenced, forward work plans for Committee's and Working Groups should be in place which include a structure for measuring performance and delivery across the Partnership. There should be clear reporting lines and mechanism's to enhance accountability while avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardised approach to Committee and Working Group establishment as part of the revised Governance Structure, to ensure that all have a unique purpose that is contributing to the delivery of the National Mission and the Partnership's Aims &amp; Objectives;</li> <li>• Review and define the role and responsibilities of the Central Team to support the sustainability and delivery of the Partnership's Aims &amp; Objectives whilst delivering value for money and accountability;</li> <li>• Develop a formal, evidence based reporting structure to demonstrate accountability and value for money from the Central Team &amp; Governance Structure.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lead Officer, Partneriaeth &amp; Monitoring Officer</b></p> <p><b>Lead Officer, Partneriaeth</b></p> <p><b>Lead Officer, Partneriaeth</b></p>	<p><b>September 2022</b></p> <p><b>December 2022</b></p> <p><b>December 2022</b></p>

<b>Priorities for Improvement</b>			
<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Actions/Key Milestones</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Key Milestone Completion Dates</b>
<p><b>Core Funding Agreement &amp; Medium Term Financial Plan</b></p> <p>The future consortia will need to be supported by a Medium Term Financial Plan to enable longer-term Business Planning.</p> <p>The revised Core Funding Agreement will need to ensure that core funded posts are sustainable and continue to deliver value for money.</p> <p>Commissioning arrangements with other Local Authorities should be clarified, so that a full cost recovery model can be adopted with an indication of required support to enable service and financial planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on decisions of the Joint Committee, identify the core contributions required from Partner Authorities over the course of the Medium Term Financial Plan;</li> <li>Based on indications of Welsh Government future funding and contributions from Partner Authorities, develop Medium Term Financial Plans aligned to the revised structure and future objectives of the new Partnership.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Principal Accountant &amp; ERW s151 Officer</b></p> <p><b>Principal Accountant &amp; ERW s151 Officer</b></p>	<p><b>March 2023</b></p> <p><b>March 2023</b></p>

We are committed to implementing the improvements outlined above to enhance the achievement of intended outcomes from the new Partnership. We are satisfied that these steps will address areas of improvement identified.

**Signed by Interim Chief Officer**

**Signed by Interim Chief Officer**

**Name:** Ian Altman  
**Date:** 17 May 2023

**Name:** Greg Morgan  
**Date:** 17 May 2023

**Signed by Lead Chief Executive**

**Signed by Chair of the Joint Committee**

**Name:** Martin Nicholls  
**Date:** 17 May 2023

**Name:** Cllr. Darren Price  
**Date:** 17 May 2023