

Please respond via e-mail to:
Ellen.apGwynn@ceredigion.llyw.cymru

11th February, 2019

Kirsty Williams CBE AM,
Minister for Education,
Welsh Government
5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel,
Cardiff Bay,
CARDIFF,
CF99 1NA.

Dear Minister,

Following a productive ERW Joint Committee meeting held on Friday, 8th February, 2019 I was asked to write on behalf of the Committee to share with you the unanimously agreed vision for a future structure and delivery model for the region.

The structure has been designed to deliver our shared National Mission and Welsh Government policies. It will enable appropriate support for schools in view of the significant curriculum reform agenda. Mr.Geraint Rees has worked diligently with Directors and Head Teachers from across the region to co-ordinate and construct a structure that will meet the needs and aspirations of all our learners and staff. Mr.Rees presented compelling evidence to show that, if ERW were to function within this new model, every stakeholder firmly believed the impact and outcomes for learners would be significantly improved.

The dilemma we face is specifically in relation to the funding deficit to implement the new structure. As you are aware Local Authorities (LAs) are facing significant budget pressures due to the teachers' pay increase, which was not fully funded, as well as increasing employer pension contributions from 16% - 23%, which as yet are unfunded. We understand that because the funding was devolved through the DfE in England the Barnett consequential does not automatically apply.

We, as Local Authorities, have done our utmost to manage budgets across all service areas through our medium term savings plans which have included prioritising education services. Even where individual Authorities have been able to top up schools and education budgets locally through higher Council Tax increases, schools will at best receive standstill budgets. In the majority of cases, schools are receiving real terms reductions to their budgets. Austerity is most definitely not over for our schools or local government services.



This is not intended as a letter to specifically ask for more money. Our message is that we now have a clear regional commitment to a joint vision for school improvement. Unfortunately, the proposed structure is financially undeliverable with all the above financial pressures compounding the problem. We welcome the decision that we are now able to use £500k to reduce LA contributions in the first year but feel, with the significant ongoing financial challenges facing LAs, as illustrated above, we would like to propose a more sustainable solution. If we were enabled to empower the Managing Director with the discretion to utilise a small percentage of the overall grant distributed to the regions in order to underpin the new structure. This would allow us to employ a permanent core complement of central staff to deliver elements of school improvement and curriculum reform. It would give stability to the structure and enable us to attract the best quality practitioners to deliver your national educational vision in a coherent and efficient manner. I emphasise that this is not a request for additional overall funding, but merely amending grant terms and conditions to provide the necessary flexibility.

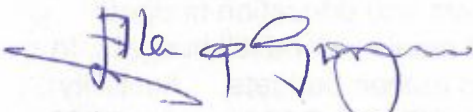
The commitment we give is that LAs will continue to contribute a total of £250k and we simply ask for a similar assurance from Welsh Government to a ring-fenced grant element for a minimum of five years to provide the stability to the central team required by Estyn and Welsh Government. Individual contributions of each LA will continue to be determined by an agreed formula.

From a pot in excess of £70million grant funding total to ERW, we would require a Welsh Government commitment through a ring-fenced sum of circa £790k per annum. (This is just over 1% of the overall grants allocated regionally). If this is acceptable to you, we would be able to agree to the appointment of a team identified by the Acting Managing Director, Directors of Education and Head Teachers Group as necessary to deliver the model, thus providing much needed stability and direction for the region.

I sincerely hope you will look favourably upon this request. A positive and decisive response would be welcomed by all six Authorities and provide our schools and, most importantly, our learners with the necessary expert resource to improve learner outcomes in schools in the ERW region.

ERW looks forward to an early response to enable us to appoint a permanent central team as soon as possible. If you require further clarification, I would be more than happy to attend a meeting at your earliest convenience and at a location of your choice.

Yn gywir,
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ellen ap Gwynn'.

Y Cynghorydd / Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn
Cadeirydd Cyd-Bwyllgor ERW
Chair of ERW Joint Committee

