

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM JOINT EDUCATION SERVICE JOINT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 7th November 2023 at 3.30 pm

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors - Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor R Birch (Vale of Glamorgan Council) (Chair)
Councillor R Lewis (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council) (Vice Chair)
Councillor J-P Blundell (Bridgend CBC)
Councillor M Jones (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council)
Councillor S Merry (Cardiff Council)

Officers in attendance:-

Mr L. Harvey Lead Director of Education, Bridgend Council)
Ms S Davies – Service Director, Finance Services, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Ms C Seery – Managing Director Central South Consortium
Ms L Blatchford Deputy Managing Director Central South Consortium
Ms N Gould Assistant Director for Curriculum and Professional Learning
Mr R Davies – Audit Wales

Apologies for Absence

Mr E Cooper - Lead Chief Executive, (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council)

11 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

12 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 23rd May 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

13 REPORT OF AUDIT WALES - AUDIT PLAN 2022/23

The Audit Wales Lead presented the Audit Plan 2022-23 and shared how the plan sets out the work that has been undertaken this year, the timeline for this work and fees. The Audit Wales Lead referenced in relation to Central South Consortium Joint Education Scrutiny Committee the work relates to the audit of the financial statements.

The Audit Wales Lead continued by referring Members to the significant financial statement risks as set out in the report highlighting to Members the two risks are standard. Members were also directed to the audit fees as referenced in the

report noting this has increased this year as a result of inflation and a result of a new auditing standard "ISA315".

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the Audit Plan 2022/23 Report, by Audit Wales.

14 REPORT OF AUDIT WALES - AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Audit Wales Lead presented the report and summarised the main findings from the audit of the 2022-2023 accounts. Members were drawn to page 4 of the report, and in particular the level of 'materiality' applied within the report, which had been set at £1.96 million for this year's audit, noting that there were some areas of the accounts, that had a much lower 'materiality' set. Members were informed that there were no misstatements identified in the accounts and no other significant issues arising from the Audit. The Audit Wales Lead praised the finance team on the quality of the accounts.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the Audit of Accounts Report, by Audit Wales.

15 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

The Service Director, Finance Services presented the report to Members as the representative of the lead Section 151(S151) officer of the host authority and placed on record her thanks for the efforts from the finance team at Central South Consortium for the very competently prepared and robust financial documents for review.

Members were advised, that in terms of the regulatory background, the Accounts & Audit regulations require draft unaudited accounts to be certified by 31st May after year end. Central South consortium met this requirement as draft accounts were presented to the Joint Committee on 23rd May and then certified by the Host Authority's S151 officer on 24th May. Members were also informed that the regulations require the publication of audited Statements of Account by 31st July after year end. As detailed in paragraph 4.3, the Auditor General for Wales has written to all local government audited bodies advising of an extension to audit certification deadlines, for 2022/23 Statement of Accounts, to 30th November 2023.

Members were reminded that the detail of the accounts at appendix 1 were presented in draft form at the May Joint Committee. Since that point, the audit has taken place and Members were informed that only a very few minor presentational adjustments were required as a result. The Service Director, Finance Services emphasised for Members this further supports the comments that the finance officers in Central South did an excellent job in ensuring the draft accounts were of very good quality.

Members were advised there has been no change to the outturn position as a result of the audit and general reserves remain as per the draft accounts at £174k. The consortium's accounts were also positively presented at the host

authority's Governance and Audit Committee on 4th September which provided an additional layer of assurance over the robustness of the documents presented.

In concluding, the Service Director, Finance Services, acknowledged it was standard practice for Audit Wales to request a Letter of Representation from audited bodies, which was presented at Appendix 2, and detailed the joint Committee's responsibilities and controls that were in place to ensure that the financial statements are not materially misstated, in particular in relation to fraud and related party transactions.

A Member queried whether the level of reserves was standard across other Consortia. The Service Director, Finance Services advised that the levels of reserves at other Consortia were unknown. The Managing Director, Central South Consortium also added that there were no expectations that consortia have a reserve and that a earmarked reserve was introduced to fund any service remodelling of the organisation and maintain good financial management moving forward.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

- Approve the audited Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 as set out at Appendix 1, together with the Letter of Representation incorporating responses to the Audit Enquiries letter at Appendix 2; and
- Note the final outturn position for the year and the level of General Reserves held.

16 BUDGET REPORT 2023-2024

The Service Director, Finance Services advised that the report provided Members with an updated position for the current financial year, a summary of the 23/24 grants allocations and an update on the progress of the 22/23 audit of the annual Statement of Accounts. Members were informed that as the report was written for the previously postponed meeting, the update on the Statement of Accounts has effectively been replaced by items 3, 4 and 5 on the agenda of this meeting.

In relation to the current financial year, Members were reminded that the core budget of the consortium was set in December 2022 based upon a 3% reduction in Local Authority contributions. In approving that budget, Members were also reminded of the use of a small proportion of the service re-modelling earmarked reserve providing one off transitional funding supporting the setting of a balanced budget. The value of the transitional funding was £33k.

The Service Director, Financial Services highlighted the outturn currently shows a nil over or underspend, with a reduced amount required to be drawn down from the earmarked reserve of £27k.

In terms of line-by-line variances, the Service Director, Financial Services highlighted to Members that Employees budgets are underspending by £16k resulting from changes in Improvement Partner (IP) salary costs – budgets are based upon staffing salary points when the budgets are set but are updated with actual salaries during the year. Different IP's will be at different salary progression points. In addition, there are underspends where there have been temporarily vacant posts. There are also savings on an administrative post

where additional support is being bought in from the host authority. Members were advised there is a small overspend on Premises which relates to one-off costs to enable the office accommodation to be fit for purpose for agile working. Supplies and services has one off underspend mainly due to savings on data analytics offset by general office expenses.

The Service Director, Finance Services continued to advise Members that Support services are overspending by just under £23k due to additional services being bought in from the host authority. Income is overachieving its target levels by just over £3k due to income received for inspection work undertaken.

Members were directed to Section 4 of the report which details the grants received for which further information is included within items 8,9 and 10 of this meeting. Members were advised that as this report was drafted for the postponed meeting, it doesn't include the variation at item 10.

Furthermore, Section 5 provided Members with an update on the progress with the audit of the consortium's Statement of Accounts, again written for the postponed meeting but now superseded by items 3, 4 and 5.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the current outturn position for 2023/24 including the approach to funding the cost implications of national pay award agreements should these be above budgeted levels set aside.
- Note the current grant position for 2023/24.
- Note the current position with the external audit of the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts

17 REGIONAL AUDIT REPORT

The Deputy Managing Director outlined the purpose of the report for Members to consider the Internal Audit report issued by the Regional Internal Audit Service to the Central South Consortium during 2022/23.

In relation to the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant (RCSIG) and Pupil Development Grant (PDG), based on the Internal Audits undertaken no recommendations were made and there were substantial assurances in the system of governance and risk management.

The Central South Consortium Joint Education Committee **RESOLVED** to note the Internal Audit report issued during 2022/23 and to raise no matters of governance requiring further actions.

18 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM RISK REGISTER

The Managing Director presented the report to Members to provide an update on the corporate risk register of Central South Consortium.

CSC are currently in the process of reviewing risk mitigations and actions put in place to manage risks with Directors of Education of the five local authorities. At

the next meeting of the Joint Committee in December 2023 there will be an updated version presented. There are currently no significant changes to the risk register to report.

The Managing Director continued by outlining to Members areas that are still being worked on and viewed as areas of concern by CSC drawing Members attention to each of the areas highlighted in red in the report.

A Member queried reference made to the risk outlined in relation to leadership and queried whether this picture remained the same for the future or whether there are expected to be an increase in numbers. The Assistant Director for Curriculum and Professional Learning clarified that the NPQH programme has been paused whilst it is redesigned. The Assistant Director confirmed there are a number of people who would like to participate. It is due for launch next September but due to the pause there is a risk that there is a year where individuals are unable to participate.

Another Member shared from their own experience that assistance and input from Improvement Partners during Estyn inspections was valuable and was concerned that the dilution of this provision would be a detriment. The Assistant Director clarified the role of Improvement Partners to support schools in all School Improvement activity, including going through inspection. There was clarity provided around the discussion from the report around the risk in relation to Improvement Partners acting as peer inspectors to other regions. The Assistant Director outlined that the risk relates to the removal of capacity from within the region for a temporary period and there is no recompense for this. In response to this, Members felt that it would be beneficial to acknowledge the impact of this activity on the consortia and to write a letter to Estyn outlining these concerns.

Following the update, Members of the Joint Committee noted the contents of the report and **RESOLVED** to: -

- Consider and approve the corporate risk register for Central South Consortium, which aligns to the updated Risk Management Policy and;
- To send a letter to Estyn outlining concerns regarding the practice of utilising Improvement Partners as peer inspectors with no financial contributions and the impact of the capacity of the Consortia.

19 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM GRANTS REPORT - REGIONAL CONSORTIA GRANT 2023-2024

The Deputy Managing Director outlined the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the grants to be received by the Consortium in 2023/24.

Members were informed that the report was due to be presented at the previously postponed meeting and as a result agreement was sought from Members via email due to time constraints.

Members were taken through the detail in the report relating to the Regional Consortia Grant 2023/24 – award dated 18th May 2023. Members were reminded that total of this award of funding is £48,083,989 over the period 1st

April 2023 – 31st March 2024 (£48,652,545 in 2022/23). Members were referred to Table 1 in the report which outlines the grant distribution.

The Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint Committee **RESOLVED** to:

Confirm the approval as given via email in relation to the distribution of grants as detailed in section 5 of the report.

20 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM GRANTS REPORT - SIATER IAITH 2023-2024

The Deputy Managing Director outlined the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the grants to be received by the Consortium in 2023/24.

Members were informed that the report was due to be presented at the previously postponed meeting and as a result agreement was sought from Members via email due to time constraints.

Members were taken through the detail in the report relating to the Siarter Iaith 2023/24 reminding Members the total grant in 2023/24 is £77,800.

The Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint Committee **RESOLVED** to:

Confirm the approval as given via email in relation to the distribution of grants as detailed in section 5 of the report.

21 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM GRANTS VARIATION REPORT - REGIONAL CONSORTIA GRANT 2023-2024

The Deputy Managing Director presented the report to provide Members with a further update on the grants received by the Consortium in 2023/24, for which notifications have been received, and the methods of allocation of each.

The Deputy Managing Director provided Members with an overview of the details of the grant which is a variation to the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant. Members were informed the revised award of funding is £185,425, taking the total award of grant funding for the financial year 2023/24 to £48,269,414. The aim of the additional funding is to further support the following: i) National Support for Curriculum Reform - £39,300 ii) Welsh-medium capacity grant - £146,125.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to: -

Approve the distribution of grants as detailed in section 4 of the report (and Annex A)

22 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM ANNUAL MONITORING AND REPORTING

CYCLE 2023-2024

The Deputy Managing Director presented the report to provide Members with the monitoring and reporting cycle for Central South Consortium (CSC) during 2023-2024.

The Deputy Managing Director outlined to Members that CSC started work to review the monitoring and reporting cycle to determine how it could be more effective adding that CSC produce a variety of reports for several different stakeholders and audiences throughout the year.

Members were informed of the background to the report with the Deputy Managing Director sharing workshops had been undertaken previously which resulted in some positive outcomes, however following further feedback from stakeholders and requirements of reporting from Welsh Government a further review was necessary.

Members were directed to sections 4 and 5 of the report which summarised current monitoring and reporting requirements and data sources. It was highlighted to Members that an increasing challenge faced is the sourcing of data.

Members were provided with an overview of the proposed changes to the reporting and monitoring cycle to take effect from September 2023 as outlined in section 6 of the report.

Members were informed that the proposed changes to the monitoring and reporting cycle would ensure stakeholders are receiving updates in a timely manner and processes will be embedded to ensure effective data capture is in place.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report in relation to the proposed monitoring cycle.

23 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM FINANCIAL YEAR REPORT

The Deputy Managing Director outlined the purpose of the report to provide Members with the financial year 2022-2023 report on the progress & impact of the Central South Consortium (CSC) Business Plan.

Members were advised that this report is being presented later than previously reported due to the timings of meetings.

The Deputy Managing Director took Members through the contents of report sharing how the report provides information from the Central South Consortium (CSC) Business Plan and how this links and determines priorities in business plan. Through robust self-evaluation CSC identify priorities for improvement.

Members were referred to section 3 which outlines progress made against priorities within the business plan. Members of the senior leadership team within CSC drive forward the work of each priority areas and are known as 'Drive Teams'. On a half yearly basis, the drive team are challenged on their performance by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) within CSC as well as Directors of Education from the LAs. A summary of the progress made against

the business plan for 2022/23 was referenced in Table 1 of the report. It was highlighted to Members that very Good or Strong Progress was made in 77% of elements within the business plan. The process of identifying risks within the business plans was also referenced for Members.

Members were also informed that progress with recommendations from published reports also provided within the report and attached appendices.

The Deputy Managing Director continued to outline section 5 and 6 of the report which provided information regarding funding and the approach to value for money and the next steps for self-evaluation. In relation to section 6 Members were assured that all areas for development into the business plan for 2023/24.

In concluding the presentation, Members were informed that there are examples of robust self-evaluation and evidence of progress against the priorities identified. Strong progress has been made against many of the regional recommendations in published reports also.

A Member raised a point around issues linked to behaviour and whether the report recognised the vulnerability of schools around behaviour / attendance issues. The Deputy Managing Director recognised the issues and advised that the matter has been discussed at length with Directors as to how CSC can best support Local Authorities (LA). The Deputy Managing Director welcomed the opportunity to have further discussions at a future meeting in relation to each LA's strategy around these issues and how CSC can best support with these.

Following consideration Members **RESOLVED** to:-

- Note the contents of the report and;
- To receive a further report detailing the Local Authorities strategies to deal with behaviour / attendance / exclusions and how CSC can support these.

24 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM REGIONAL CURRICULUM FOR WALES REPORT

The Deputy Managing Director provided an overview and background of the report to provide Members with the summer term 2023 report to Welsh Government (WG) on the preparations for and implementation of Curriculum for Wales (CfW) in all schools in the Central South Consortium (CSC) region.

The Assistant Director Curriculum & Professional Learning continued providing context of the report and the challenges of writing the report due to lack of information as a result of the impact of action short of strike (ASOS) and non-engagement. Therefore, Members were reminded that this report cannot be read as a full or accurate summary of progress of the majority of schools in the region. Members were informed that this has been raised with Welsh Government and a different structured report is being prepared for the next cycle which takes into account these challenges.

The Assistant Director Curriculum & Professional Learning provided a high level summary of the data as outlined in the Development and Implementation of Curriculum for Wales in CSC schools and CSC Professional Learning and Support for Curriculum for Wales sections of the report.

The impact of Curriculum for Wales was written aligned with the 8 contributing factors as outlined in the report. The Assistant Director shared that these are being revised and moving forward the report will be aligned to new key documents published to report on new criteria on what successful implementation of curriculum for Wales.

A Member queried whether all schools have felt able to cope with the demands of the additional work required to design and implementing the curriculum. The Assistant Director replied that it has been different in each school and cluster depending on a number of issues including number of staff, Welsh Medium schools and the resources available to these. The impact of covid also has had an effect on the pressures in the system. The Assistant Director outlined how CSC has supported with Professional Learning and documents created and shared but also added that schools are understandably reluctant to share work as this has not been tried and tested therefore confidence levels affected as a result. However, the Assistant Director shared this is improving and referenced a recent conference held in July where schools and clusters shared work. It was highlighted there are still pressures in the system to enable schools to engage with professional learning and clusters. The Assistant Director also shared that CSC support for schools on this area is ongoing although the Deputy Director highlighted that the funding for the Curriculum and Professional Learning team is from Welsh Government Grant and therefore the level of support is dependent on the levels of grants awarded in the upcoming years.

Following consideration Members **RESOLVED** to:-

- Note the contents of the report; and
- Request further updates on the progress and support available next term.

25 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 5.00 pm

**CLLR R BIRCH
CHAIR.**