ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

This statement meets the requirement to produce a Statement of Internal Control pursuant to Section 5 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 (as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018.

Part 1: SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

1.1 GwE was established as a Joint Committee to be a regional school effectiveness and improvement service by the 6 North Wales local authorities in 2013 by undertaking the functions that are detailed in an agreement between the Joint Committee and the authorities. In the agreement, the Councils agreed to work together in a partnering relationship to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service to be accountable to, and undertake the statutory functions of the Councils in respect of school improvement and effectiveness.

1.2 The vision was to establish a Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement service to be accountable to, and undertake the statutory responsibilities of the six local North Wales Authorities in respect of the duties to monitor, challenge, provide support services for curriculum, continued professional development and management of schools, and in addition provide services that can be commissioned by schools and local authorities.

1.3 GwE is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

1.4 In discharging this overall responsibility, GwE is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk and adequate and effective financial management.

1.5 On December 18th, 2023, Jeremy Miles, then Minister for Education and Welsh Language halted the Middle Tier Review accepting the interim findings as final. On December 19th, 2023, the Welsh Government rationalised pre-16 education grants that were allocated to Local Authorities and Regional Consortia into the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG). On January 31st, 2024, Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language published a written statement: *The next stage in the review of school improvement - the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales*. This statement outlined changes to school improvements arrangement in Wales with the regional consortia model being replaced by a partnership model between two or more Local Authorities.

1.6 Following the Welsh Government decision to amalgamate the main education grants under one heading, the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) from 2024-25 onwards, the grant has been paid to the Local Authorities to manage and delegate funding directly to schools. The requirements, risks, terms and conditions of the grant are now the sole responsibility of the individual Local Authorities. To ensure continuity of support to schools while the review progresses, Welsh Government noted that they expected any current regional working arrangements to continue during this time and be facilitated through the specific grant funding to support curriculum and professional learning in schools. The 'Curriculum for Wales' and 'Professional Learning and Leadership' elements of the 'Reform' LAEG were fully transferred to GwE by all 6 regional Authorities to deliver support on these aspects whilst meeting the terms and conditions of the grant. The GwE Budget for 2024-25 also reflects a decision by the six Local Authorities to reduce their contribution to the core service by 10%.

1.7 These decisions have had a significant impact on the service provided by GwE and school improvement arrangements in North Wales from April 1st, 2024. Specifically:

- GwE has changed from being a 'regional joint service' to a commissioned service.
- GwE is a client providing a differentiated commission to the Local Authority.

- The strategic direction for school improvement is provided by the Chief Education Officers who are held accountable by local scrutiny arrangements.
- GwE had to strictly adhere to the commission defined by the Local Authorities which is captured in the individual Commissioning Agreement for the Financial Year 2024-25.

1.8 This statement details the arrangements that have been in place for the financial year 2024-25 and in the context of the above changes.

Part 2: THE PURPOSE OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which GwE is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the authorities that are part of GwE to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

2.3 The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of GwE's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

2.4 The governance framework described above has been in place at GwE for the year ended 31 March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the 2024-25 statement of accounts.

Part 3: GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

3.1 The GwE Management Board monitors matters of governance, raising a wider awareness of these, and promoting a wider ownership of the Annual Governance Statement.

3.2 To demonstrate good governance, GwE must show that it is complying with the core (and supporting) principles contained within the Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (CIPFA / Solace, 2016). This statement has been prepared in accordance with those principles.

3.3 An outline is given of the Governance Areas and GwE's arrangements to deal with these, and the effectiveness of these arrangements, in the remainder of this section of the Annual Governance Statement.

3.4 This statement details the arrangements that have been in place for the financial year 2024-25 and in the context of the changes outlined in Part 1.

Principle A	Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- GwE follows the host authority (Gwynedd Council) operating rules, which details how decisions need to be made and the procedures to be followed to ensure they are efficient, transparent and available to local people.
- The GwE Inter Authority Agreement have agreed to the following principles of good governance:
    - Openness and Trust
    - Commitment and Drive
    - Skills and Creativity
    - Effective Relationships
    - Developing and Adaptive
    - Reputation and Standing
    - Reasonableness of Decision Making
    - Necessary Consents
    - Members and Officers' Commitments
- The voting members of the GwE Joint Committee are governed by the Code of Conduct of their relevant Council. The Codes of Conduct for Councillors and employees within the Constitution of the host authority are built upon the principles of openness, transparency and honesty
- The following service and personal values are embedded within the service and have been set to enable the service to achieve the vision and objectives for delivery. These include:
    - Respect;
    - Trust;
    - Wellbeing;
    - Innovate and inspire;
    - Support and collaborate;
    - Cymru a'r Gymraeg
- Staff are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of the service behaviors and values.

- GwE, supported by the host authority, has procedures in place to ensure the Joint Committee meetings are conducted effectively and decision making is effective.
- All meetings of the Joint Committee during 2024-25 have been held virtually via Zoom. Guidance has been produced for Members in relation to attending virtual meetings.

Principle B	Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- The Joint Committee meetings are open meetings, and all papers are published on the host authority (Gwynedd Council) website and the GwE website.
- The Joint Committee meetings have a forward calendar of meetings set out for the year ahead.
- GwE encourages stakeholder engagement and feedback via a broad range of communication and engagement methods. Examples include: attendance at Headteacher Federation meetings; cluster groups; weekly bulletin; networks, social media etc.
- Openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement is ensured through:
    - Joint working ensuring strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
    - Establishing clear lines of communication with key stakeholders.
    - Reports for the Joint Committee
    - Sharing regular updates and ensure contact and support.
    - Sharing information, key messages and work streams with LAs / Elected Members.
    - Updating key stakeholders on various GwE matters.
    - Sharing regional information and ensure consistent messages.
    - Ensuring consistency as regards national and regional information.
    - Ensuring effective communication.
    - Liaising with key stakeholders.
- Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. GwE has encouraged schools to collaborate through sharing practice and co-constructing areas that need improving. We have invested in various cluster models, alliances and networks, and encouraged schools to find a range of appropriate partners to deliver improvement and changes. All schools in the region are part of a cluster or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work.
- The region has also looked outward for good practice in terms of identifying effective peer review models as well as encouraging our schools to develop and evolve their own practice. GwE believe that peer engagement should closely complement the dimensions identified within the OECD publication 'What Makes a School a Learning Organisation'. The principles within sit within all Professional Learning and across GwE.
- Critical to the development of the learning organisation work, there are four transversal themes which run throughout to include Trust, Time, Technology and Thinking Together. These have been fundamental in developing GwE's approach to developing strong partnerships as trust underpins the relationships needed internally and externally for learning organisations to thrive.
- There has been agreement with Headteachers on a series of regional principles for peer engagement. A model of peer review and improvement planning was agreed (the Schools

Partnership Programme [SPP]), approved by the Management Board and Joint Committee. All GwE SIAs have received continuous training and support on peer review, facilitation, mentoring and coaching and a programmes is in place to offer SPP training to all 405 regional schools and the Referral Units.

Principle C	Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- Each Local Authority has a detailed Business Plan and a Commissioning Agreement agreed upon by the head of service and the core lead.
- GwE Business Plans with each Local Authority embrace the Terms and Conditions of the Reform grant. The plans outline how and when each priority will be met and set expectations in terms of the next steps. The plans note the support and provision available to all regional schools in terms of the 'Curriculum for Wales' and 'Professional Learning and Leadership' elements.
- The GwE Professional Learning Offer responded specifically to the terms and conditions of the grant, and offered a provision to support these aspects. The Offer was to all practitioners in north Wales in the form of a regularly updated catalogue GwE Professional Offer.
- GwE has reported to the Joint Committee and the Local Authorities on the Reform element of the grant in 2024-25.
- The clear and robust accountability framework in a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans address all aspects of the work of GwE. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.
- Staff on all levels fully understand their responsibility for continued improvement and accountability. Ongoing issues are referred to GwE Senior leaders in a timely manner.
- Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities.
- GwE have also developed an Evaluation and Impact Strategy so that it can clearly evaluate and capture impact of its work in line with its core school improvement function and to enable it to fully meet the expectations as outlined in the School Improvement Guidance. The purpose of the strategy is to articulate clearly how GwE will engage in ongoing evaluation processes in line with its commitment to developing a culture of continuous improvement as a learning organisation. The self-evaluation processes will draw upon a range of sources that are both qualitative and quantitative which support schools in working towards the national priorities.
- There are rigorous and comprehensive arrangements in place to identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document, which is kept under regular review to identify increasing risks or risks which are no longer deemed as high level. It is presented to the Joint Committee on an annual basis and when new risks are identified, of which the Joint Committee needs to be made aware.

Principle D	Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- GwE has procedures in place to ensure the Joint Committee meetings are conducted effectively and that decision making is effective. A series of reports have been produced and shared with the Management Board and the Joint Committee during the year.

- Visits by Estyn HMI through the Regional Consortia Link Inspector were held during the year.
- GwE has an agreed Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) that sets out clearly how the Joint Committee operates and how decisions are made and procedures need to be followed to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability.
- The Joint Committee is a joint committee constituted by the Councils under section 101(5) and 102(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 and section 20 of the Local Government Act 2000. Meetings of the Joint Committee are subject to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 including the provisions on access to information and meetings held in public.
- Members of the Joint Committee and the public have the full benefit of access to the Joint Committee papers and supporting information.
- The Joint Committee meets a minimum of three times a year.
- The IAA identifies the following two categories of decisions together with the means by which they will be taken:
    - 'Joint Committee Matter' – being a matter which is to be decided upon at a quorate (3 voting members) meetings of the Joint Committee by those present and entitled to vote and any such decision will be binding on all the Councils;
    - 'Matter Reserved To The Councils' – being a matter which will have to be referred to each Council for decision and, for the avoidance of doubt, any such matter will not be dealt with by the Joint Committee (as the case may be) until the matter has been determined by all of the Councils. If the Councils fail to reach the same decision in respect of such matter then the matter shall be referred under Dispute Resolution as a dispute for resolution.
- The terms of reference and delegated powers of the Joint Committee are to promote joint working in the delivery of the Service through:
    - facilitating constructive partnership working;
    - engaging with key interested bodies and stakeholders when appropriate;
    - carrying out such other activities calculated to facilitate, or which are conducive to the successful delivery of the Service;
    - to oversee the management of the Service and ensure that the Service is provided and performs in accordance with the expectations of the Partner Authorities as reflected in the Full Business Case, Inter Authority Agreement and agreed Annual Business and Commissioning Plans;
    - to approve the budget for the Service on an annual basis;
    - to approve the business plan for the Service on an annual basis;
    - to monitor and manage the risks associated with the Service;
    - to ratify requests from the Service for additional budget funding from individual Councils;
    - to approve the staff structure of the Service;
    - to appoint the Managing Director of the Service;
    - to decide on disciplinary action against the Managing Director;
    - where required, to determine or arrange for the determination of appeals in relation to Human Resources matters.
- The Joint Committee is supported by a Management Board with the following terms of reference:
    - Co-construct the annual Business Plan, including the individual appendices to identify specific requirements at individual LA Level;
    - Monitor progress against the priorities and outcomes identified in the Business Plan on a regular basis;

- Have arrangements in place to make sure that GwE financial controls and systems are robust;
- Provide professional advice to the Joint Committee with regard to the appointment of the Managing Director;
- Regularly report to the Joint Committee.

- Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities.

- The consortium has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation on financial arrangements is effective, and GwE staff, the host local authority and Joint Committee all review the core funding and grant expenditure on a regular basis.

- Through the self-evaluation process, the link between the business planning process and decisions regarding financial planning is strengthened as the work streams that underpin the business plan clearly note the resources to be used.

Principle E	Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- GwE staff have re-purposed their work appropriately over the last few years to continue to deliver effective services and support for all their communities of schools during and after the pandemic.
- Communication and engagement within the leadership structure of GwE has been regular and clear.
- GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning.
- The OECD's transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.
- The service in its entirety has re focused several times to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. The ability to be flexible and agile and to work effectively together in different teams, often cross sector, has had significant impact on organisational behaviour and external perception. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service.
- The consistency and quality of challenge and support to schools is good. Regular training, support and discussions ensure that Supporting Improvement Advisers' knowledge and understanding of national and local developments, and the implications of this on their roles, is good.
- Quality Assurance processes continue to develop and evolve in line with national developments and principles. The Professional Review process has continued during the year which take into account training or development needs.
- Members also of staff have access to appropriate induction tailored to their role with ongoing training and professional development.
- The health and well-being of children and the workforce continues to be a priority, and doing all we can to support the well-being of our school staff, children and young people across the region.
- Messages and information are communicated clearly and on a regular basis to all employees. Generic, purposeful and effective support programmes are offered.

Principle F	Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- The clear and robust accountability framework in a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans address all aspects of the work of GwE. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.
- Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities.
- Each Local Authority has a detailed Business Plan and a Commissioning Agreement agreed upon by the head of service and the core lead.
- GwE Business Plans with each Local Authority embrace the Terms and Conditions of the Reform grant. The plans outline how and when each priority will be met and set expectations in terms of the next steps. The plans note the support and provision available to all regional schools in terms of the 'Curriculum for Wales' and 'Professional Learning and Leadership' elements.
- The consortium has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation on financial arrangements is effective, and GwE staff, the host local authority and Joint Committee all review the core funding and grant expenditure on a regular basis.
- There are arrangements in place to identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document, which is kept under regular review to identify increasing risks or risks which are no longer deemed as high level. It is presented to the Joint Committee on an annual basis and when new risks are identified, of which the Joint Committee needs to be made aware.

Principle G	Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability
Assessment	Assured

How we do this:

- The regional service evaluates its work regularly and uses information effectively to ensure that areas for improvement are identified swiftly and are firmly addressed via detailed business planning.
- The Joint Committee meetings are open meetings and all papers are published on the host authority (Gwynedd Council) website and the GwE website.
- GwE is a 'relevant body' which must maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and system of internal control. In order to comply with these statutory requirements, the internal audit service of the host authority is provided to GwE in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (“PSIAS”). The Standards are relevant to every internal audit service provider for the public sector, whether internal, shared service or external.

Part 4: SIGNIFICANT GOVERNANCE ISSUES

4.1 The above assessment indicates that there are no issues which are a significant governance issue.

Part 5: GOVERNANCE MATTERS IDENTIFIED

5.1 No governance issues were identified in 2024/2025.

Part 6: OPINION

We are of the opinion that the governance arrangements described above offer strong assurance that our governance arrangements work well.





GwE Lead Officer

Date: 21/05/2025

EUROS DAVIES

GwE HEAD OF SERVICE

Vice-Chair of GwE Joint Committee

Date: 21/05/2025

COUNCILLOR PHIL WYNN

WREXHAM COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL