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27th October 2015

All Children and Young People's/Education Scrutiny Chairs in the Central South Region

Dear Colleagues,

A Common Scrutiny work programme and sharing of best practice

I wanted to write to follow up a number of discussions we have had concerning the need for a common consistent scrutiny work programme across the Central South region, as well as some joint work across your roles as Chair of Scrutiny.

You will be aware that the Estyn and WAO reviewed all consortia last year. In this region they gave cautiously positive feedback with a number of areas which we need to address. I attach our briefing paper on these reports which we recently presented to the Children and Young People's Select Committee in the Sennedd.

You will be aware from our recent visits that Central South Consortium works in partnership with the five authorities – providing the school improvement function for authorities, alongside the wider education functions of each authority. Therefore the Consortium is subject to Scrutiny in the same way as any Council's service.

One of the recommendations was the need to consider the best model through which elected Members can effectively scrutinise the work of the Consortia. A joint scrutiny model was suggested but has since been ruled out by Welsh Government in their latest iteration of the national model for consortia working.

It will be important both that high quality timely information is provided to all Scrutiny Committees and that sufficient time is allowed to scrutinise the work of the Consortium working with and on behalf of authorities. However it would also be useful if the Consortium was invited to attend a consistent number of scrutiny meetings in each authority presenting ideally similar information at the same point of the year, recognising that sometimes additional oversight is necessary.

It has therefore been agreed at the recent Joint Committee of Central South Consortium by all five authorities that a common programme would be put in place through which for Scrutiny Committees invite the lead officer from each authority together with the relevant lead from the Consortium to meet with Scrutiny Committees to present outcomes against targets and any further areas of questioning that may be relevant. We would like to propose that this should take place once a year in January ideally when published data is readily available the Consortium's own self evaluation report and draft business plan is available to be scrutinised. This often coincides well with the annual school performance reporting from officers in the Council.

Secondly, it has been proposed that it would be helpful if a termly meeting of Scrutiny Chairs were arranged to share developments and areas of concern from each Scrutiny Committee with a view to sharing best practice. Councillor Elmore and I would be very happy to attend this meeting to brief Members on the latest developments of Consortia working.

Finally, if it is ever helpful to provide wider briefings to more elected Members on the role and function of Consortia, either in writing or in person, we would be delighted to do so.

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I welcome your views on this proposal and if you are content we will seek to put the meeting of Scrutiny Chairs into the diary as soon as practicable.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hannah Woodhouse'.

Hannah Woodhouse
Managing Director

Encl.

Cc. All Directors & Lead Cabinet Members