
SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM
Minutes of a meeting held at the Former St Mary's Church, Tremadog
on 4 February 2013 from 2.00 pm until 5.15 pm

Present:

Cabinet Members: Councillor Siân Gwenllian (Education)
Councillor Peredur Jenkins (Resources)

Corporate Directors: Mr Dilwyn Williams

School Heads: Mr R Emyr Hughes (Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle), Mr Alun Llwyd (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Mr Gwyn Howells (Ysgol y Gelli), Mrs Sianelen Fleming (Ysgol Llanaelhaearn), Mrs Iona Jones (Ysgol Bro Cynfal/Edmwnd Prys), Mrs Esme Spencer (Ysgol Baladeulyn), Mr Dylan Roberts (Ysgol Cymerau).

Governors: Mr Walter Williams (Secondary Sector)
Mr Godfrey Northam (Primary Sector)
Mr Gwynne Pierce (Primary Sector)

Teachers' Unions Mr Neil Foden

The Diocese: Reverend Robert Townsend

Officers: Mr Dewi Jones (Head of Education)
Mr Hefin Owen (Development Finance Manager)
Mr Owen Owens (Senior Manager Education)
Mrs Glynda O'Brien (Members and Scrutiny Support Officer)

Apologies: Mr Harry Thomas (Chief Executive), Mr Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Mr Ieuan Roberts (Head of Ysgol Pendalar), Mr Eifion Jones (Ysgol Brynrefail), Mr Vaughan Williams (Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen), Mrs Menna W. Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn), Mr Garem Jackson (Chair of Gwynedd Primary Head teachers Federation).

1. WELCOME

The Chairman extended a welcome to Mrs Iona Wyn Jones, Head of Bro Cynfal / Edmwnd Prys Schools to her first meeting of the Forum as a successor to Mrs Gwenan Williams who had retired from her post as Head of the above schools at the end of the year. The Members' and Scrutiny Support Officer was requested to send a word of thanks to Mrs Williams for her contribution and support to the Forum and to wish her well in her retirement.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum held on 26 November 2012 as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(a) Item 6 (a) – Reviewing the Secondary Formula

The Development Finance Manager reported that the Secondary Formula Review Group had agreed to meet as required and issues would be referred to the Group via the Secondary Strategic Planning process.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

4. SCHOOLS BUDGET 2013/14

Submitted for information, the Corporate Director's report (DW) outlining a summary of research work undertaken by the Council's Research Unit on the comparative situation in terms of school expenditure in order to input the financial process.

It was noted that two factors could have an impact on expenditure per head on education, namely:

- (a) Density of population (schools in a rural area cost more because more are needed)
- (b) Deprivation (need to spend more on less privileged children if the same result is required)

In terms of population density in the primary sector, it was noted that Gwynedd was 3rd in Wales and 18th in terms of deprivation and therefore it was expected that expenditure per head should be between the 3rd and 18th rank in Wales.

In terms of the primary sector, as Gwynedd was in third position, bearing in mind the financial climate, it did not appear that there was an argument to adding to the investment at the moment.

Whilst recognising that the comparison in the secondary sector was not as good (as we were in 8th position), the need to keep an eye on the situation was noted considering the significant reduction forecast in demography from 2014/15 onwards. A sum of money was added for inclusion to the budget for 2013/14 yet it would be necessary to keep an eye on the situation and statistics next year and to come to further conclusions at the time regarding comparative investment.

In the context of special schools, it was noted that there were significant differences in the nature and scale of provision and the way that expenditure was recorded by authorities and therefore this made it more difficult to come to a specific conclusion.

Attention was drawn to recent data that indicated a difference of £605 per pupil between the expenditure in England and Wales on education and the conclusion was noted that the difference was not necessarily with schools. However, it would not be possible to make comparisons in future because of the changes in England and the establishment of academies outside the control of local authorities.

Resolved: To accept, note and thank the officer for the report.

5. FUNDING SPECIAL SCHOOLS

A report was presented that was commissioned from Mr John Roberts on funding special schools namely Ysgol Pendalar and Ysgol Hafod Lon.

(a) The Head of Education explained that the purpose of submitting the report was in order for the Cabinet Member for Education to receive the views of the Forum on the contents of the report prior to submitting a final report to the Cabinet regarding an additional financial allocation for the two schools in question.

The author of the report noted that there were dangers to compare the expenditure of Special Schools as it was not actually possible to compare like with like for various reasons such as arrangements to send pupils out of county, integration policies of pupils in mainstream schools, special residential schools in some authorities.

The author decided to focus on "Circular 58/90 published in 1990 by the Welsh Office at the time **"to propose guidance for Local Authorities and schools in addition to offering an illustrated staffing model ..."** i.e. offer a basis to identify the number of staff required for every pupil based on the pupil's learning difficulties.

Circular 58/90 stressed **"it follows that assessing staffing needs is a very complex matter. The attitude outlined in this circular should not be considered as a prepared plan but rather as a brief guidance for planning needs. The Secretary of State expects local authorities and schools to continue to form their own views regarding needs and this in light of local circumstances and priorities"**

The Head of Education added that no other guidance had been published since the above guidance and what is in the new arrival in terms of staffing since 1990 is;

- Requirements of Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA)
- Head teacher Time Management

To conclude, the Head of Education made reference to the suggestion of the report's author, namely that Gwynedd Council could consider increasing its financial investment to Special Schools mainly to increase a little of the staffing levels of schools and to calculate the impact of an illustrative staffing model as follows:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| • Additional cost to adopt a model for Ysgol Pendalar | £64,985 |
| • Additional cost to adopt a model for Ysgol Hafod Lon | £66,191 |

Total £131,176

(b) During the ensuing discussion the following responses were given to enquiries:

- (i) The Development Finance Manager confirmed that places in both schools were reviewed annually.
- (ii) In the context of the special units situated at Ysgol Cymerau and Bontnewydd, it was noted that the method of funding was a matter for discussion between the Special Schools and the local schools.
- (iii) It was disappointing that there was no representative present from the Special Schools on the Forum in order to receive the input of those schools
- (iv) It was trusted that it would be possible to proceed with the Council's aspiration to revise the current provision at Ysgol Hafod Lon and create an

excellence centre for Special Educational Needs centrally in the County in order to rationalise the provision for pupils currently located out of county.

(c) The Cabinet Member reported that they had received an apology from the Head teachers of the Special Schools for their absence and they had requested feedback of what the Forum resolved.

In response, the Head of Education confirmed that the officers would give feedback to the Head teachers in order that they may report back to the Governors.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the contents of the independent r report.

(b) To request that the Cabinet Member conveys to the Cabinet the Forum's unanimous approval of the recommendations by the report's author namely to invest:

- (i) an additional £64,985 for Ysgol Pendalar; and**
- (ii) an additional £66,191 for Ysgol Hafod Lon.**

6. CONSULTATION ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL ORGANISATION SAVINGS

A consultation letter was submitted that was sent to the Head teachers and Chairs of Governors of the County's Primary Schools based on the Council's resolutions to close schools in the Tywyn and Berwyn catchment areas and the possibility of releasing £200,000 of the savings operational from 1 September 2013 to the 98 Primary Schools that will exist in Gwynedd at that time.

The following two options were consulted upon:

Option 1

- A Distribute £98,000 by removing the line "KS2 Scheme to support large classes" that distributes £1,000 to every school in order to remove the contribution (this will not reduce the budget to support large classes)**
- B Distribute £102,000 on the basis of the number of pupils (via the heading services and supplies)**

Option 2

- A Distribute £98,000 by removing the line "KS2 Scheme to support large classes" that distributes £1,000 to every school in order to remove the contribution (this will not reduce the budget to support large classes)**
- B Distribute £102,000 on the grounds of the number of pupils who are entitled to free school meals (via the Additional Learning Needs and Deprivation heading)**

A response was received from 33 schools out of 102 with 14 in favour of Option 1, 18 in favour of Option 2 and 1 objection.

The Head of Bro Cynfal/Edmwnd Prys stated that she had returned the form expressing her support to Option 1, yet this had not been noted on the summary list submitted to Members during the meeting.

The Corporate Director stated that the response from the schools was disappointing and he was of the opinion that the children who did not get the same opportunities as children from more privileged backgrounds should be targeted. He supported Option 2, and at the same time suggested that research should be commissioned on how much money should be directed in order to ensure a due amount to the density of the children who need it, also bearing in mind that the Deprivation Grant is likely to end in the future.

The Cabinet Member stressed that she was anxious to see more resources directed to pupils from deprived backgrounds in order to close the gap that exists in terms of attainment in pupil performance. By distributing additional finance towards this it would be possible to see what plans would close the gap. Also, perhaps a more general term should be used such as 'children in need' as often those children who are designated as 'children who receive free school meals' are not necessarily in need of additional support.

Concerns were expressed by some Members to implement Option 2 on the grounds:

- (a) That the free school meals indicator was not dependable
- (b) That some schools had significant balances and would it not be possible to exempt those schools from receiving the additional allocation and direct the Heads to submit a report on the use of the additional funding.

In response, the Development Finance Manager explained that it was necessary to implement devolved funding in accordance with the relevant legislation and that it would not be possible to place a condition on the use of the additional funding or to refer to balances.

Following a vote it was:

Resolved: To approve Option 2 to distribute the £200,000 of the savings in the schools re-organisation field in the catchment areas of Tywyn and Berwyn which will be implemented on 1 September 2013 to the 98 primary schools that will exist in Gwynedd at the time as follows:

- (i) **Distribute £98,000 by removing the line "KS2 Scheme to support large classes" that distributes £1,000 to every school in order to remove the contribution. (This will not reduce the budget to support large classes)**
- (ii) **Distribute £102,000 on the grounds of the number of pupils who are entitled to free school meals (via the Additional Learning Needs and Deprivation heading)**

7. REVIEW OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS' ALLOCATION FORMULA

Submitted the report of the Head of Education stemming from a consultation on a review of the primary schools allocation formula and to receive the views of schools on the principles established by the Primary Formula Review Group to create a revised allocation formula.

The Head of Education reported that a response had been received from 40 individual schools and reference was made to the summary attached to the report as Appendix 1. The Forum was requested to consider the responses before reaching an opinion that would be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Education.

The Cabinet Member for Education added that the Working Group of Heads had discussed the formula with Mr John Roberts, external expert, and had reached a consensus of opinion that the principle to change the allocation formula was accepted. Unfortunately, the change in the formula meant that some schools would lose money whilst others would gain. Whilst accepting that some schools would lose money, the money distributed as a result of the savings to re-organise primary schools would alleviate some of the loss.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were highlighted by individual Head teachers:

- (a) disappointment that only 40 schools had responded to the consultation
- (b) whilst supporting the principle of reviewing the formula, an example was given of one school who had seen a financial reduction of nearly £20,000 which was an excessive reduction to face in one financial year. If the proposed formula was implemented then consideration should be given to revise it over a period of two years in order to alleviate any impact over a longer period.
- (c) The headings of Assistants and Teachers Allowances should be included separately
- (d) Whilst accepting that the proposed formula was fairer to larger schools, however, there was not enough finance in the pot and the expenditure on education would have to be increased.
- (e) The supervision time was insufficient to fund an hour a day throughout the year.
- (f) Lack of a heading for the requirements of the Foundation Phase

Regarding the comment about insufficient finance in the pot – the Corporate Director noted that this was not what the evidence referred to in the previous item suggested and it was a matter of the use made of the available resource that was the problem.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the contents of the report.

(b) Present to the Cabinet Member:

- (i) the approval of the Schools' Budget Forum to the principle of the primary schools allocation formula taking into consideration the observations noted above.**
- (ii) support to proceed to implement it over a period of two years.**

8. SCHOOL BALANCES

A letter was submitted that had been sent to Head teachers and the Chairs of Governors in all Gwynedd schools regarding the use of balances.

Members were reminded of the legislation where the Authority had the right to instruct the governing body regarding how to spend the surplus in the school balance-sheet for a financial period, if:

- (i) in the case of a primary school that the balance was £50,000 or more, and
- (ii) in the case of a secondary school or special school that the balance was £100,000 or more;

and that the Forum had resolved to include the following clause:

- (a) In the case of a primary school, where the balance was more than 8% of the proportion of the school's budget or £50,000 or more, whichever is the greatest. . . "

- (b) In the case of a secondary school, where the balance was more than 8% of the proportion of the school's budget or £100,000 or more, whichever is the greatest"

The Head of Education made reference to the discussion and the observations made at the last Forum meeting and stemming from the minute he had consulted regarding the Forum's wish to remove the 8% threshold.

A handout was submitted to members with some of the responses received from schools (14 primary and 4 secondary) and it was noted from those who responded that 8 schools were willing to remove the 8% and 7 schools wished to retain the 8% clause.

The Development Finance Manager guided Members through a list of all school balances and drew attention to a rough estimate by the Development Finance Unit for 31.03.13.

The Head noted that he supported the retention of the 8% or £50,000 clause (in the case of primary schools) and £100,000 (in the case of a secondary and special schools) whichever was the lowest,

Several Heads highlighted a concern regarding those schools that carry substantial balances and are part of a security scheme by the authority because of the low number of pupils. It was felt that it was not possible for small schools to be able to invest in staff and that it was a challenge for the Heads to be able to spend the rest of the balances. It was seen that the same schools carried balances year after year. It was added that the matter should be considered as part of the Head teachers self-evaluation process.

It was suggested if it was possible for officers to check the security policy in order to give serious consideration to remove the security element of those schools with substantial balances and that they were therefore self financing by using balances.

Resolved: To request the officers to consider if it was possible to change the security policy in order not to implement it in situations where a school has significant balances.

9. PROPERTY SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Submitted (i) Service Level Agreement - Maintenance of Primary School Buildings

(ii) To Members during the meeting, the Service Level Agreement – Maintenance of Secondary School Buildings 2013 – March 2016.

(A) Service Level Agreement – Maintenance of Primary School buildings

The Senior Education Manager guided Members through the report regarding the Service Level Agreement in the primary sector and noted that points 3, 4 and 5 addressed the discontent of schools with the previous Service Level Agreement. He was of the view that the Agreement was more straightforward with a page table instead of a very long list. Reference was made to the change in responsibilities namely that the Council now took responsibility for funding the removal of asbestos from floors when schools wish to install new floors.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

(a) there was astonishment that schools were responsible for fences, walls and gates and there was concern that if schools had no money for their repair what would happen in terms of the health and safety of the pupils.

In response, the Senior Education Manager explained that if it was an urgent and emergency matter then terms would have to be agreed. However, they should be maintained to an acceptable condition firstly in order that they do not deteriorate.

(b) It was asked what would happen in flooding situations when fences/walls would be destroyed and water went through the school.

The Corporate Director explained that insurance would address situations similar to the above.

Resolved: Accept the Service Level Agreement – Maintenance of Primary School Buildings April 2013 – March 2016.

(B) Service Level Agreement – Maintenance of Secondary School Buildings

The Senior Education Manager guided Members through the Agreement and drew attention to the attached list to the Agreement as Appendix B and noted that the schools were responsible for any matter that had not been noted on that list.

A Head teacher expressed his discontent to accept the Agreement as he had not had time to give deserving attention to the contents since he had just received it and it was suggested that consideration of the document should be deferred until the next meeting in June. A Sub Group of Head teachers had discussed the principles of the agreement, however, further discussion was required on issues such as work above the financial threshold and who was responsible for the cost. Did it mean that Head teachers would have to request three quotations from contractors which entailed a bureaucratic administrative burden?

The Corporate Director asked why a document was required and would not a system of devolving funding and trusting the authority to deal with maintenance responsibilities be more effective. He was of the view that the above system was a waste of the time of Head teachers and staff by having to discuss who was responsible for different aspects of the maintenance work.

Resolved: To defer making a resolution regarding the Service Level Agreement – Maintenance of Secondary School Buildings and submit further to the next meeting of the Forum on 25 June 2013 in order that the Head teachers could give deserving attention to the contents.

10. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT RSEIS (North Wales Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service)

The Head of Education made reference to the above Service Level Agreement which was an agreement for the 6 authorities (Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham) and a discussion was on-going and this was based on understanding what the school improvement service offered. However, the discussion had been rather frustrating as a Chief Officer had not been appointed for RSEIS.

It was noted that the Service Level Agreement between the Authority and RSEIS was based on a full business case submitted to the Cabinet of the six authorities.

The structure of RSEIS was explained namely a team of 30 System Leaders under the care of the Chief Officer and 3 Senior System Leaders, one responsible for Anglesey/Gwynedd, one for Denbighshire/Conwy and one for Flintshire/Wrexham. Under every 3 Senior System Leader there were 3 Sub-teams that achieve the main duties and the 6 days are allocated to schools that include 3 visits with visits and additional assistance as required.

The following 4 points were proposed for consideration as a way forward on the basis of the above situation:

1. To operate completely transparently with schools and offer the same service level agreement as discussed with RSEIS to schools.
2. That the Authority and the schools accept that this Service Level Agreement would be operational for 2013/14 and a request was made for a contribution from school budgets on the same basis as the principle of this year's Agreement and in the past with CYNNAL.
3. Establish a Sub-group of Primary, Secondary and Special Schools Head teachers to look in detail at the nature of the Service Level Agreement during 2013/14.
4. Information would be sent to the Heads of all the ancillary administrative arrangements that CYNNAL used to organise for schools. The Authority would have to supply these elements through grants.

A nervousness was highlighted amongst Head teachers regarding the establishment of the above and concern was noted regarding the right and entitlement arrangements, discussion on core subjects, continuous professional development and disparities across north Wales.

In response to alleviating the concerns of Head teachers, the Head of Education gave an assurance:

- (a) That the sub-group of Head teachers appointed would look in detail at the Service Level Agreement and could identify the appropriate levels to be purchased/or otherwise to form the 2014/15 Service Level Agreement.
- (b) Where a need was identified in schools, naturally more would have to be targeted.
- (c) In service training would continue and opportunities would be available but not to the scale of right and entitlement
- (ch) That the same pattern would be adhered to and on the basis of the same finance as implemented last year.

Resolved: To approve that the Head of Education proceeds as outlined in 1 – 4 above.

10. SCHOOLS EFFECTIVENESS GRANT AND THE PUPILS' DEPRIVATION GRANT

The Head of Education reported that the growth in the Schools Effectiveness Grant at a national level from £32.5m to £37.5m with a growth in the gross allocation for Gwynedd from £1.4m to £1.6m, meant an increase of £200,000. Further growth in the grant was anticipated for 2014/15. A request would be made for the grant on a regional basis as part of the application of the 6 authorities.

The Pupils' Deprivation Grant would be targeted directly.

Resolved: To accept and note the above information.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was reported that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 25 June 2013 at 9.00 until 12.00 at the Former St Mary's Church, Tremadog.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

CHAIRMAN