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**SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM**  
**Minutes of a meeting that took place at the**  
**Former St Mary's Church, Tremadog**  
**on 3 November 2014 from 1.30 pm until 3.00 pm**

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**Present:**

**Mr Godfrey Northam - Chairman**

**Cabinet Members:** Councillor Gareth Thomas (Education)  
Councillor Peredur Jenkins (Resources)

**School Heads:** Alun Llwyd (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Gareth T M Jones (Ysgol Botwnnog), Gwyn Howells (Ysgol y Gelli), Rhys Williams (Ysgol Cymerau), Iona Wyn Jones (Ysgol Bro Cynfal/Edmwnd Prys), Menna Wynne-Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn).

**Teachers' Unions:** Neil Foden (Ysgol Friars)

**The Diocese:** Canon Robert Townsend

**Governors:** Walter Williams (Secondary Sector)  
Gwynne Pierce (Primary Sector)

**Officers:** Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive)  
Owen Owens (Interim Head of Education)  
Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance)  
Hefin Owen (Development Finance Manager)  
Huw Ynyr (Senior Manager IT & Business Transformation)  
Mrs Glynda O'Brien (Members' and Scrutiny Support Officer)

**Observer:** Cai Larsen (Chair of Primary Schools Headteachers Federation)

**Apologies:** Eifion Jones (Ysgol Brynrefail), Sianelen Pleming (Ysgol Llanaelhaearn), Esme Spencer (Ysgol Baladeulyn).

**1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(a) A warm welcome was extended to the following to their first meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum:

- Mr Gareth Jones, Ysgol Botwnnog
- Mr Rhys Williams, Ysgol Cymerau
- Mr Cai Larsen, Chair of Primary Schools' Headteachers Federation
- Mr Huw Ynyr, Senior Manager – IT and Business Transformation

(b) Mr Dilwyn Williams was welcomed and congratulated on his new role as Chief Executive of Gwynedd Council and best wishes were extended to him in his post.

**2. MINUTES**

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum held on 18 June 2014.

**3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

**(a) Item 5 (c) - School Balances - financial training for schools**

The Finance Manager apologised that no progress had been made in relation to the above, however, they were continuing to consider establishing a Website that would enable individuals to gain access to interactive financial material.

**Resolved: To receive a further report at the next Forum meeting.**

**(b) Item 8 (c) – School Balances Plan**

The Interim Head of Education reported that a system had been agreed to deal with balances with six secondary schools over £100,000, and two primary schools with over £50,000. They would work with GwE to find ways of acting as there was more work to be undertaken and look in detail with schools to identify priorities and to ensure that the schools earmark the balances towards those priorities.

**Resolved: To accept and note the above.**

**(c) Item 9 (c) – Financial Resources available to schools 2014-15**

In response to a query, the Finance Manager confirmed that the spreadsheet of the main financial sources for schools had been circulated to schools on 27 June 2014.

**Resolved: To accept and note the above.**

**(ch) Item 12 – Service Level Agreements**

The Interim Head of Education reported on the current situation regarding Service Level Agreements as follows:

**Primary Sector**

- |                           |   |  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Grounds maintenance    | - | 5 schools had not entered into an agreement  |
| 2. Archives Service       | - | 3 schools had not entered into an agreement  |
| 3. Cognition and Learning | - | 11 schools had not entered into an agreement |

**Special Schools**

Grounds maintenance - 1 school had not entered into an agreement

**Secondary Sector**

6 schools had not entered into SLA for Grounds Maintenance and 4 schools had not entered into a Library SLA.

**Resolved: To accept and note the above.**

#### 4. SCHOOLS SAVINGS TARGET

(a) The Interim Head of Education presented a report in accordance with the resolution of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet to establish a Working Group to develop schemes to achieve the schools savings target of £4.3m over the next three years.

(b) It was explained that the Council had agreed with the Cabinet's proposal to plan for the need to find additional savings worth £34m over the next three years in response to the financial climate they faced. In order to achieve the original strategy it was anticipated that they should aim to achieve approximately £3.4m savings from the schools' budget (equivalent to approximately 6% over the next three years).

(c) The following constitution was suggested for the Working Group:

- Chair and Vice-chair of the Schools' Budget Forum
- A cross-section of members from the Schools' Budget Forum (heads and governors) and representation from amongst the special schools, large, medium and small secondary and primary schools.
- Corporate Director - Education
- Chair and Vice-chair of the Services Scrutiny Committee as observers.

(ch) The Working Group would be requested to undertake a piece of work and report back to the Cabinet at the end of January 2015, and it would be good practice to consider the impact prior to making any far-reaching resolutions.

(d) A Member asked could they not protest and object to the cuts from Welsh Government as he was very concerned that they would have far-reaching implications on schools and an impact on pupils' attainment levels. This entailed that schools would have to commence a process of redundancies due to overstaffing.

(dd) In response, the Chief Executive explained that it would be necessary for the Working Group's brief to reflect and reduce the impact on educational standards.

(e) The Cabinet's decision to include Heads and Governors on the Working Group was acknowledged and appreciated.

**Resolved: (a) To nominate the following members to the Working Group:**

**Godfrey Northam (Chair of the Schools' Budget Forum)**

**Cllr. Gareth Thomas (Vice-chair of the Schools Budget Forum)**

**Neil Foden (Large Secondary School)**

**Eifion Jones (Medium Secondary School)**

**Alun Llwyd (Small Secondary School)**

**Dewi Lake / Tudur Williams (Meirionnydd / Dwyfor area)**

**Canon Robert Townsend (Diocese)**

**(b) To request that the Chair of the Federation of Primary Headteachers circulate the members to nominate representatives from the**

**primary sector to represent schools based on large, medium and small schools.**

**(c) Specify the following dates for Forum meetings with the venue to be confirmed:**

**a.m. 18 November 2014**  
**p.m. 1 December 2014**  
**a.m. 18 December 2014**

## **5. WELSH GOVERNMENT'S SCHOOL GRANTS**

(a) A report was presented by the Interim Head of Education outlining the financial implications of the Welsh Government's latest announcements.

(b) The Finance Manager reported that a reduction of £136,056 was anticipated in school grants for 2014-15. Concern was expressed regarding the Government's decision to agree 11 education grants /schools under the name 'Education Improvement Grant for Schools'. The Minister referred specifically to "We have to continue to satisfy the outcomes and expectations of individual grants, for example maintaining the ratios for the Foundation Phase' and as the Foundation Phase Grant is £97.9m of the £156.7m total in 2014/15 it may be interpreted that the other grants that will be hit, corresponding to over 25%, with detrimental implications on several plans by Schools and the Education Department.

(c) It was noted that a representation of Welsh Government Civil Servants would be meeting the Finance Manager at 9.30 a.m. on Friday, 7 November 2014 and any member of the Forum was welcome to attend. In response, Mr Neil Foden volunteered to attend on behalf of the secondary sector.

(ch) There was discontent amongst Members that the Government had withdrawn funding that was linked to individuals and had been spent already. A Member suggested strongly that they should protest and send a letter on behalf of the Forum to convey their discontent.

**Resolved: To request that the Interim Head of Education conveys via a letter to the Welsh Government the Forum discontent to a retrospective reduction in school grants for 2014/15.**

## **6. STRENGTHENING THE IT CONNECTIVITY PROVISION**

(a) The report of the Senior IT Manager and Business Transformation was presented regarding strengthening IT connectivity for schools.

(b) It was reported that the Welsh Government had invested approximately £2.5m to strengthen the infrastructure to prepare for wireless connections in schools that would speed up connectivity to a minimum of 10mbps for primary schools and 100mbps for secondary schools and for primary schools with more than 300 pupils. From April 2015 onwards, there would be an additional cost of £270,000 per annum to maintain this service to:

- Increase the speed of connection to schools from the previous standard to a standard of 10/100mbps

- Strengthen the infrastructure to support the growth following increasing the speed
- Cost of licences for the wireless service including a content filter system for the web to safeguard users from inappropriate contents
- Additional staffing costs to support the provision

and would be a cost that would fall on the schools.

(c) Following a discussion on the various options, it was suggested that the costs would be implemented according to a model based on the following three elements and to model different weightings to these:

1. How far is the school from the exchange
2. Element of flat rate
3. Number of pupils

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

**(b) Approve the additional cost of £270,000 in accordance with the model placing emphasis on the three elements outlined in (c) above.**

## **7. SECONDARY SCHOOLS INCLUSION STRATEGY**

A report was presented by the Interim Education Head outlining the response to a consultation with schools regarding establishing a protocol to operate an Inclusion Strategy to prevent exclusions in schools.

The responses were reported as follows:

- 10 schools supported the proposal
- 2 schools objected to the proposal and proposed a different basis
- 1 school had responded late – without observations
- 1 school had not responded

Reference was made to the comments of the two schools who objected the proposal:

1. Concern that the promise that every school would receive at least the equivalent cost of a teacher's salary would be broken.
2. The model did not guarantee sufficient finance to continue to employ a teacher.
3. Concern that when the decision would be made on the grounds of allocation that the redundancy due to overstaffing process within the timetable will be difficult.
4. Which members of staff would implement the plan
5. Defer the devolvement of the inclusion strategy until April 2016.

It was suggested, based on the fact that the majority of schools agreed with implementing the strategy, that it should be implemented from September 2015 and it was up to schools to establish their own workforce.

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

**(b) To approve the allocation of the inclusion strategy finance to secondary schools, including the transfer of staff employment from the authority to schools, to be implemented from September 2015.**

**8. GWYNEDD SCHOOL BALANCES IN THE CONTEXT OF WALES**

Submitted, for information the Welsh Government's announcement on school balances on 31 March 2014 with an opportunity to compare the balances of Gwynedd schools with other Welsh authorities.

In the recent announcement it was seen that Gwynedd continued to be one of the highest and was cause for concern as **some schools** did not make the best use of finance available for pupils currently within the education system. Attention was drawn to the fact that a percentage of Gwynedd schools against the devolved budget was 4.4% compared with the Welsh average of 2.8%.

This concern was supported by several Forum members due to the fact that the money was not being spent on the pupils. There was a tendency for schools to commit balances for the following year towards emergency matters and not for a specific element and therefore the money increased year on year.

**Resolved: To accept and note the contents of the report.**

**CHAIRMAN**