
SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM
Minutes of a meeting that took place at the Former St Mary's Church,
Tremadog,
on 10 July 2017 from 2.30 p.m. until 4.20 p.m.

Present:

Cabinet Members: Councillor Gareth Thomas(Education)

Head of Finance Department: Dafydd Edwards

School Heads: Alun Llwyd (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog), Andrew Roberts (Ysgol y Berwyn), Dewi Lake (Ysgol y Moelwyn), Trystan Larsen (Ysgol Rhostryfan), Llion Williams (Ysgol y Garnedd), Iona Wyn Jones (Ysgol Bro Cynfal and Ysgol Edmwnd Prys), Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn).

Governors: Godfrey Northam (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen)
Llinos Lloyd (Bro Idris and Ysgol Brithdir Shadow Body)
Gwilym Jones (Ysgol Borth-y-gest)

Officers: Garem Jackson (Acting Head of Education Department)
Owen Owens (Senior Manager Education Resources Service)

Hefin Owen (Finance Manager)
Glynda O'Brien (Member Support Officer)

Others invited: Eifion Jones - External Advisor
Arwel Pierce - Chair of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn's Governing Body
David Thorp - Deputy Headteacher of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn

Apologies: Cllr. Peredur Jenkins (Cabinet Member – Resources), Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Kerry Parry (Ysgol y Ganllwyd), Rhys Williams (Ysgol Cymerau, Edward Bleddyn Jones (Ysgol Tregarth and Bodfeurig Governor), Neil Foden (Teacher's Unions).

It was noted that Mr Alun Llwyd, Head Teacher of Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, would be retiring from his post at the end of this summer term. He was thanked for his commitment and support to the Forum's work over the years he had served as Forum member and best wishes were extended to him on his retirement.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Resolved: To re-elect Mr Godfrey Northam as Chair of the Forum for the year 2017/18.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Resolved: To re-elect Councillor Gareth Thomas as Vice-chair of the Forum for the year 2017/18.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum that took place on 7 February 2017 as a true record.

4.1 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 4 - Consultation on changing the wording of the School's Funding Scheme in relation to the transfer of the balances of closing schools

The Schools' Senior Manager reported that the Cabinet, in its meeting on 7 March 2017, had approved to change the wording of clause 4.8 of the School's Funding Scheme in accordance with the following wording:

"The balance of a closing school(whether the balance is surplus or deficit) will be the authority's property; it cannot be transferred as a balance to any other school, apart from when that other school has been established as a result of the closure. In such a situation the balance will be transferred to the new school under the provisions of the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010."

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

5. YSGOL TYWYN'S BUDGET AND FINANCIAL DEFICIT

The following were welcomed to the meeting for this item:

Eifion Jones - Independent Advisor

Arwel Pierce - Chair of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn's Governing Body

David Thorp - Deputy Headteacher of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn

Submitted the report of the independent expert on research work undertaken on Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn's budget and financial deficit.

The Forum was reminded to keep in mind that the work was a start on achieving elements of the P1 project in the Council's Plan, namely:

- Analysing the financial and curricular situation of secondary schools with low pupil numbers
- Identify the minimum staffing needs required in order to maintain a curriculum within secondary schools with low pupil numbers
- Suggest and cost where the staffing protection line should be for the Secondary Sector in order for the Council to use this information when setting the budget for 2018/19

(a) The Independent Advisor took the opportunity to thank the school's Governors and staff for their cooperation whilst conducting the inspection and the fact that they were completely open and eager to move forward. The background and context of the school's financial situation, the actions already implemented and the school's forecasts for 2017/18 onwards was elaborated upon. It was discovered that there were many reasons for the school's inability to set a balanced budget, such as:

- A significant fall in pupil numbers over the years
- Losing half of the money due to the reduction of pupil numbers - however, forecasts suggested slightly more pupils
- The support level reducing
- Financial protection arrangements with low pupil numbers

In a period of attempting to protect and raise educational standards, the school had taken great steps to keep the balance of the staff and the community's credibility, and at the same time recognise that there were other steps to be achieved.

In terms of actions, it was noted that the school had:

- Reviewed the school's responsibilities and staffing level
- Reduced the school's learning groups in the core subjects, whilst continuing to meet the statutory requirements of the KS3 and KS4 curriculum
- Evaluated and restructured the TLR (Teaching and Learning Responsibilities) payments arrangements for the school's middle managers
- Restructured the Senior Management Team
- Reviewed and rationalised the level of funding in other areas of the budget

Alongside the above, the school had worked hard to maintain and raise standards whilst ensuring good progress. Attention was drawn to the fact that use of the Welsh language in the curriculum was prioritised, with 95% of the pupils following a First Language Welsh course in KS3 and KS4 although a significant majority of them spoke English in the household. It was further noted that the school had started to increase pupil numbers by ensuring that all Year 6 pupils in the catchment area would attend the school. If the school had taken more drastic action in terms of cutting staff to create financial savings and by that means, had been able to set a balanced budget over the past three years, it would have hampered the good progress in the standards and the increased pupil numbers.

However, further savings needed to be realised in order to consistently set and implement a balanced budget for the future, and the Independent Advisor listed the annual main real budgetary changes for the next three years. By doing this, it was anticipated that it would be possible to set and implement a tight and more realistic balanced budget for 2017/18 and more flexible balanced budgets over the following two years 2018-2020, that would be able to contribute towards the school's necessary development priorities. However, it was noted that it would be difficult for the school to contribute towards the £116,000 cumulative historical deficit at the end of 2016/17.

Therefore, there were two matters for the authority to further consider, namely:

- Historical lack of finance
- Level of protection for small schools

- (b) The Chair of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn's Governors reported that he would not want to see any other school in the same position as the past 4/5 years had been a nightmare. The Independent Advisor had summarised the Governor's feelings and they were thankful to him for the support received. It was further noted that the school was geographically isolated, however it was trusted that the situation would continue to improve in the future. In terms of teaching groups of around 29 pupils in Year 8, there had been difficulties in coping with the ability range within the class, in addition to the range of linguistic backgrounds. 65 pupils would be starting in Year 7 this year, with three of them being Welsh speakers, therefore it was important to maintain the good work carried out at the school in terms of the Welsh language. The Forum was asked for its support for a unique case and to share with the Cabinet that the situation was an exception.
- (c) The Acting Head of Education reiterated the support for the Welsh language and that it would be wrong to devalue the passion for the language in the area.
- (d) The Cabinet Member for Education thanked the Independent Advisor, the Governors and the school's staff for their ready cooperation, and that he was eager to hold further discussions with the Leadership Team in due course.
- (e) During the ensuring discussion, the following main points were expressed by Forum members:
- It was valuable to receive this type of report as many of the school leaders did not have any financial background, and more practical support was needed
 - Schools were being challenged and without the supporting budget, it was difficult to maintain educational standards
 - Reducing subjects in small schools was difficult, and pupils moved to other larger schools as a result
 - The importance of not cutting subjects was noted
 - Would it be possible for the authority to be proactive with other schools in regards to earlier long-term planning so that they did not get into financial difficulties?
 - Every school's situation was unique
- (f) In response to the above, it was noted that support was available to schools within the capacity and resources available in the Finance Unit. It was added that every Headteacher was free to contact the Finance Manager and attention was drawn to the fact that financial surgeries were available for Headteachers.

Resolved: (a) To accept, note and thank the Independent Advisor for the report.

(b) To ask the Cabinet Member for Education to further discuss support for the School with the Leadership Team.

(c) That the Independent Advisor's report was confidential and therefore it would not appear on the Council's public website.

6. FINAL SCHOOL ACCOUNTS 2016/17

Submitted - for information, details of schools' balances noting that the total of balances over 5% had reduced from £1,586,885 (66 schools) on 31 March 2016 to £1,285,447 on 31 March 2017.

The Finance Manager noted an intention to further discuss with around 17 schools and the need to cooperate with schools. It was intended to submit a progress report arising from the discussions with the specific schools to the Forum in November.

Headteachers were encouraged to discuss financial problems with the Finance Unit in order to be proactive. It was appreciated that the schools had quite good control in regards to endeavours by the Headteachers and Governors to keep the balance levels low.

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

7. SCHOOL GRANTS 2017/18

Submitted - the report of the Acting Head of Education, along with an appendix detailing the main grants which had been allocated to every school in Gwynedd for 2017/18, amounting to a total of £9.8 million in addition to the £71 million allocated by the Council.

It was noted that the Pupils Deprivation Grant (PDG) had been renamed as the Pupils Development Grant (PDG) with the money being allocated on the basis of pupil numbers eligible for free school meals (£1,150 per head for pupils of statutory school age and £600 per head for pupils under 5 years of age). £2,271,450 had been allocated this year, compared with £2,203,350 in 2016/17.

In terms of the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) for raising education standards, £4,167,438 had been allocated, compared with £4,171,818 in 2016/17).

It was explained that there were two main factors for the reduction in the funding received, namely:

- (a) Pupil numbers, and consideration for the proportion of pupils who stay on to Year 12 and that the rate was low in Gwynedd
- (b) The amount of money per head was allocated for pupils and that Gwynedd had suffered from a lower rate per pupil because many pupils in Gwynedd studied three subjects and the BAC (which does not count as a subject) and many pupils in Gwynedd studied three subjects and the BAC for the purposes of the grant.

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

8. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

Submitted - report by the Acting Head of Education on the Service Level Agreements for schools along with their responses and observations on the various agreements.

The Senior School Manager reminded everyone that the Schools' Budget Forum had approved to extend the following Service Level Agreements:

- Education Support Unit (primary)
- Personnel, Wages and Legal Support
- Grounds Maintenance

for an additional year.

It was noted that in terms of the Grounds Maintenance agreement, considerable work

needed to be undertaken in terms of mapping schools' sites, etc.

In response to questions in regards to the schools' network service, it was explained that the above was not included in the Service Level Agreement, and it was currently a national agreement by the government.

It was suggested by members of the Forum, for transparency, that it would be beneficial to receive a brief summary about the service received by the schools for the money.

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

(b) To ask the Finance Manager to provide a brief summary to the Forum's Members about what is received as part of the schools' service network.

9. ON-LINE PAYMENTS

The Forum was updated by the Schools' Senior Manager about the on-line payment service for school meals at primary and special schools within the County. It was noted that CYNNAL had recently installed software of the schools' systems and it would be providing training in due course, along with an official launch.

The programme would enable parents to gain access through the Council's self-service pages, and in this respect we trust they would be able to see other services available from the Council.

The above was greatly welcomed by a representative from the primary sector, noting that it would facilitate arrangements.

In terms of school meals debts, the education service wished for the system to be established before reporting further on its success, benefits and disadvantages, etc.

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

10. BREAKFAST CLUB CONSULTATION

The Schools' Senior Manager reported, for information, that the breakfast club provision was one of the elements to be considered as part of the Gwynedd Challenge consultation. The breakfast club was currently operated between 8am and 8:50am. Two options were considered for the future, namely:

- (a) Reduce the current hours of the breakfast club to start at 8:25am
- (b) Not to reduce the hours, but to charge parents a fee for the childcare element between 8am and 8:25am.

It was intended to send a letter to parents before the end of the term and it was possible to complete a questionnaire on-line and copies were available in the County's Libraries and Siopau Gwynedd. It was suggested that Headteachers should encourage parents to complete the questionnaire.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

11. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Resolved: (a) Confirm the date of the Forum's next meeting to take place at 2pm, Monday, 13 November 2017.

(b) To hold a meeting at the end of January 2018 - date to be determined by the Chair and the Forum's officers.

CHAIR