

MEETING	SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM
DATE	7 February 2017
TITLE	On-line payment system
PURPOSE	For your information
RECOMMENDATION	Approve the report
AUTHOR	Owen Owens
CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION	Councillor Gareth Thomas

1. Background

- 1.1 Following several requests, including from schools and parents, it is intended to implement a scheme that would introduce an on-line payment system to pay for school meals in the County's primary and special schools.
- 1.2 Correspondence was held with primary and special schools outlining the intentions of the scheme and inviting any school that had objections to the scheme to let that objection be known by 27 January, 2017 (see Item 7 – Appendix 1).
- 1.3 It was also noted that the Authority will meet the costs of establishing the software, but the annual running costs would fall on the schools. A spreadsheet was sent to schools noting the annual costs for individual schools based on pupil numbers in September 2016 (see Item 7 – Appendix 2).
- 1.4 It is intended to introduce the on-line payment system in September 2017.

2. Response from Schools

- 2.1 Responses were received from 8 schools. There were no objections to the scheme, but some concerns were raised regarding the effect on dinner money clerks.
- 2.2 Here are the comments received:
- i) Just one question – how will parents without the necessary equipment be able to pay?

- ii) We have no objections to this scheme. It is something that has been a matter for discussion with staff and governors frequently last year. I am glad that this is being established.
- iii) Thank you! Have been fervently awaiting such a system for some time.
- iv) I welcome the development with regards to paying on-line, but where, therefore, does this leave our dinner money clerks? Their jobs would have to go in order for schools to be able to finance the scheme. Redundancy arrangements across the county's schools?
- v) Only a few questions – what exactly would happen to the dinner money clerk's job from September 2017 onwards? How much administrative work would there be in school afterwards? We have just appointed a new clerk and are concerned what the implications of the new system would be for that post.
- vi) Thank you, a very good idea. What will be happening to the dinner money clerks who are in the schools? I take it that they will not be needed.
- vii) No objection in principle but that it is another amount to come out of the school budget would my only concern. Would there be extra staff training costs and who would be responsible for matters such as e-safety? I assume that not everyone would have to use it, e.g. homes without broadband. Also, is it a system that can be used on a phone/tablet? It is likely that the number of homes that have a traditional computer are diminishing.
- viii) Is there an intention, in the wake of this, to abolish the post of dinner money clerk? Who will check the on-line payments from parents and be responsible for collecting and corresponding with regards to debts? I can see myself in a small school having to check another Excel spreadsheet to check payments. I can see that it would be effective and easier to administer in larger schools. Having said that, collecting money, and getting time to bank money is also a challenge here, especially with so many banks closing and the times of rural post offices being inconsistent.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Schools have no objections to the scheme.

- 3.2 There was obvious concern regarding the effect on dinner money clerk posts. It can be foreseen that schools would wish to see the effect of the system on school procedures before coming to any conclusion regarding the work of their dinner money clerks. It would be extraordinary if the requirements to collect cash were to disappear completely from a school by the introduction of the system. Local staffing decisions would be a matter for individual schools.
- 3.3 There was also concern regarding the opportunity for families without computers to be able to make electronic payments. It will be possible to use methods such as PayPoint (i.e. to make payments in shops - similar to making top-ups for electricity and gas). It will be possible to use devices such as a phone/tablet.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Approve the above report.