
SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM
Minutes of a meeting that took place at Ystafell Dwryd,
Council Contact Centre, Penrhyndeudraeth
on 13 November 2017 from 2.00 p.m. until 3.25 p.m.

Present:

Mr Godfrey Northam - Chairman

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

Head of Finance Department: Dafydd Edwards

School Heads: Dylan Davies (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog), Trystan Larsen (Ysgol Rhostryfan), Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn).

Governors: Elen ap Gwilym (Ysgol Bro Tegid)
Gwilym Jones (Ysgol Borthygest)

Officers: Owen Owens (Senior Manager Education Resources Service)
Gwern ap Rhisiart (Senior Inclusion Manager)
Hefin Owen (Finance Manager)
Huw Ynyr (Senior IT and Transformation Manager)
Glynda O'Brien (Member Support Officer)

(a) The following members were welcomed to their first Forum meeting:

- **Elen ap Gwilym, Ysgol Bro Tegid Governor, representing Meirionnydd Primary School Governors**
- **Dylan Davies, Head of Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, as a successor to Alun Llwyd**

(b) The Cabinet Member for Education reported that Garem Jackson had recently been appointed to the post of Head of Education, and the Member Support Officer was requested to send a letter of congratulations to him on behalf of the Schools' Budget Forum.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received by Iona Jones (Ysgol Bro Cynfal and Ysgol Edmwnd Prys), Dewi Lake (Ysgol y Moelwyn), Andrew Roberts (Ysgol y Berwyn), Edward Bleddyn Jones (Primary School Governor), Anest Gray Frazer (Diocese), Neil Foden (Teachers' Union), Garem Jackson (Head of Education).

2. **DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

The following declared a personal interest:

- Head of Finance as his wife worked at Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen
- Senior IT and Transformation Manager as he was a school governor

They were of the opinion that it was not a prejudicial interest and did not withdraw from the meeting.

3. **MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum that took place on 10 July 2017 as a true record.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

(a) Item 5 - Ysgol Tywyn's Budget and Financial Deficit

The Senior Manager Education Resources Service reported that following a request from the Chair of Tywyn Secondary School's Board of Governors for assistance with the historical deficit, that discussions were on-going regarding the way forward. It was added, that thus far the matter had not been discussed with the Council's Leadership Team.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

(b) Item 8 (b) - Schools' Network Service

A presentation was received in the form of slides by the Senior IT and Business Transformation Manager, giving the history of the internet from its inception in 1969 and by today its use had increased and devices had moved forward considerably. Under the Learning in Digital Wales grant programme, a broadband connection at a speed of 10Mbps was provided to primary schools and 100Mbps to secondary schools.

The evolution of the network to schools was explained, as well as the improvements the PSBA network for the public sector in Wales had made and the increasing future benefits.

Regarding who is responsible for what, the following was explained:

- That CYNNAL provide support for the equipment that links to the network and the administration of the filter.
- The Council is responsible for providing network support, managing BT contracts, wireless, security, filtering and developing new services (such as phones)
- BT were responsible for the PSBA network infrastructure

In terms of cost allocations of £540,000, this was based on the following four elements:

- Direct contact
- Network

- Maintenance to include software
- Central staff support - responding to problems and developing the network

During the ensuing discussion, the Senior IT and Business Transformation Manager responded to the enquiries as follows:

- (i) that the Service Level Agreement was nearly in place, and by highlighting what was proposed it was trusted that schools would agree to a provision via the authority to access a dependable network, and it was possible to cooperate with the Welsh Government to facilitate the Successful Future programme.
- (ii) in terms of the equipment's age, it would be necessary to add to it after approximately 10 years (the equipment was already four years old)
- (iii) in the context of funding any addition to the equipment in approximately 2021-2023, it would be necessary for schools to plan before hand for the costs.

In response to (ii) and (iii) above, the Cabinet Member for Education stressed the need to put a plan together soon and also the need to warn schools beforehand of the likelihood of costs as technology was changing fast.

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

(c) Item 9 - On-line Payments

The Senior Manager Education Resources Services reported that an on-line service had now been introduced in primary schools and the majority of school staff had received training. The service was welcomed and only a very few comments had been received such as that parents could not see balances / credit. It had been decided to use the 'SIMS Dinner Money' system with the authority funding the module. There were implications of re-training Dinner Money Clerks, however, the module would be advantageous as it would reduce the work of accounting and balancing. It was noted that discussions were on-going with CYNNAL for training and it would be incorporated with the training organised to collect breakfast club money (see below).

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

(ch) Item 10 - Breakfast Club Consultation

The Senior Manager Education Resources Services reported that the Cabinet at its meeting on 3 October 2017, had decided to charge a fee of 80p for the childcare element prior to the breakfast club. It would be necessary to draft a specific letter for each school to outline the arrangements, times, payment method etc, with a letter to emphasise that there was a statutory duty to offer free breakfast and that the fee would be charged for the childcare time.

It was added that it would be necessary to offer training to school staff (Finance Clerks) to collect money and that this would be held at the same time as the SIMS Dinner Money training. The above elements would be discussed with ancillary staff Unions. In addition, the system would offer a permanent contract to the Breakfast Club Supervisors with the right to sickness pay.

In response to a query by a Headteacher regarding administrating the system and the need to ensure that the details were clear in a business plan, it was explained that the money would be collected on-line and it was acknowledged that there would be a change in procedure and schools were encouraged to contact the Education Department if they anticipated that there was any matter of concern to be resolved.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

5. 2018/19 SCHOOL GRANTS

(a) 6th Form Grant

The Finance Manager reported that a specific letter had not been received from the Welsh Government regarding the above grant of £9.8m for 2018/19, however, it was understood that there was a reduction equivalent to a reduction of 10% in cash terms but actually it would reduce by 12%. A letter would be sent to schools once information had been received from the Welsh Government.

(b) Pupil Development Grant (PDG - the former Pupil Deprivation Grant)

The Finance Manager reported that no specific information had been received from the Welsh Government regarding the above grant.

(c) Education Improvement Grant

Over the last two years £26m had been allocated for the above grant, £133m at a Wales level. It was understood that there was a reduction to the grant in question that meant 19.5% in cash terms that corresponded to 23% in actual real terms.

For 2018/19, £15m would be allocated which was equivalent to 11.4% in cash but 14.3% in real terms.

It was reported that there would be a reduction of 1% in the above grant in 2018/19 and a further 1% in 2019/20.

It was noted that 60% of the above grant related to the Foundation Phase for assistants etc.

(ch) School Uniform Grant

It was understood that the above grant would end, however, thus far no further explanation had been received.

Resolved: To urgently cascade the above minute to all schools in the County.

6. DRAFT SETTLEMENT - GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2018/19, 2019/10 AND 2020/2021

Welsh Government Settlement for Local Government 2018/19

The Head of Finance reported that approximately a year ago the Welsh Government mentioned that there was an 'additional' allocation of £58m, however, it was not additional as the grants to local authorities would significantly reduce.

This year it was noted that the Cabinet Secretary's statements mentioned £104m which was not really 'additional', as the Local Government allocation was down 0.5% in 'money' terms, without any addition towards inflation or inevitable higher requirements. £62m of the 'additional' allocation was for schools, but there was no 'money'. It was also said that some grants would transfer to the settlement but again there was no additional 'money'.

It was proposed to hold Partnership Council meetings and the Local Government Committee in Cardiff Bay last week but due to tragic circumstances the Welsh Government closed for a week. It was trusted that some clarity could be received about the grants as soon as possible.

It was understood that the Welsh Government had additional money but this had been prioritised for the health sector.

Gwynedd Council Settlement 2018/19

Welsh local authorities had received a cut of 0.5% on average, with Gwynedd Council receiving a cut of 0.1% in a range between 0 and 1%. It was noted that there was a difference between the 0.5% and the 0.1% that had already been committed by the Council in order to address expenditure requirements on social care in a rural area.

It was noted that this year's settlement was again difficult for Welsh local authorities, which was a continuation of the impact of the Westminster Government's 'austerity' policy that will have an impact on services and residents across Wales.

It was stressed that there would be more bad news in the future with inflation at around 2%, it was noted that the draft settlement of 0.1% (to be confirmed in December) was a real cut of 2%, with nothing to meet the additional pressures on social care services to a higher number of older residents etc.

Potential Situation 2019/20

By 2019/20 it was noted that the Welsh Government had announced an 'indicative' settlement of -1.5%. At the same time significant pay inflation was expected to address the 'living wage' target for Council staff and supplier staff. This could mean a real cut impact of approximately 5% by 2019/20.

(ch) Corporate Financial Requirements and the impact on school budgets by 2018/19

By 2018/19, it was noted that there would be no additional savings target for schools, like the rest of the Council's services, BUT:

- Historical savings plans had to be implemented, this included the remainder of the £4.3m, where there was approximately £200,000 to come from additional organisation of schools by 2018/19
- As this was not on track, no doubt the quantum would have to be reduced appropriately, this was equivalent to around 0.3%.

Departmental Financial Requirements and the impact on school budgets by 2018/19

It was reported that there was a significant overspend (£260,000) on transport for pupils, mainly taxis for children with additional learning needs. It was noted that the Head of Education had submitted a bid to the Council to fund this inevitable pressure in the future, and retrospectively, however it was unlikely that the Council would approve the application. As this had to be funded from somewhere, no doubt the quantum would have to be reduced for this as well. Therefore, this could mean that schools would face a reduction of half a million in their allocations, equivalent to around an extra 0.7%.

However, in accordance with the usual procedure in Gwynedd Council, inflation in school budgets would be funded, therefore there would be a net growth in real terms and any cut would be transparent.

(dd) Corporate Financial Requirements and the impact on school budgets by 2019/20 and beyond

It was reported that it would be a huge financial challenge for the Council to find up to £30m of savings over three years. Therefore, between now and October 2019 all Council services, including Education in terms of schools, would have to explain the likely impact of significant cuts in their budgets.

Having considered all the options, and having had confirmation of the settlement in a year's time, the Council will consult with the public on the options between October and November 2019. These options meant including reducing the schools quantum by 2019/20.

Requirements of Departmental Finance and the impact on schools' budgets by 2019/20

It was reported that the Education Department had established an administrative structure in the three areas at an additional cost of £275,000, conditional to introducing savings for a similar sum within three years from September 2016. It was noted that a portion of these savings would be required by 2019.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

7. REVIEW OF ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND INCLUSION

A presentation was received from the Senior Inclusion Manager on the options to allocate the devolved additional learning needs and inclusion budget. It was explained that the integrated budget for 2017-18 was £5.9m and was under pressure due to two elements, namely, funding the provision of Ysgol Hafod Lon and the increasing demand for support. Of the £5.8m, £4.4m had been allocated for pupils with statements or the Authority's Individual Development leaving the balance (£1.5m) to be distributed via the 'general additional learning needs' allocation on the basis of 80% number of pupils and 20% pupils eligible for free school meals.

A budget will be devolved to 14 primary schools and 14 secondary schools with the rest receiving a budget via a service level agreement.

It was noted that the budget would be reduced in order to introduce savings of £400,000. It was reported that Gwynedd and Anglesey Project Board were investigating alternative ways of devolving finance and offered the following option as a first step:

1. Using data to identify statutory provision pupils (statements and ILP) based on actual cost. Referral would be made via the Forums and the Moderation Panel (ILP authority and higher level) based on the requirements of their Action Plans and receiving provision from the Integrated Team (centrally) and assistants (school).
2. It was proposed to identify and have a sum in reserve for ILP Statements that will come in during the year based on % of the devolved budget. If the money is not used then it can be shared with schools following this period.
3. The rest of the money (namely the devolved Budget less statements/ILP % in reserve less savings) will be distributed based on the number of free school meals pupils.
4. Schools to consider a cluster arrangement to appoint assistants.

During the ensuing discussion, the Senior Inclusion Manager responded to questions as follows:

- (a) In the context of the time-schedule, it was noted that it was proposed to implement this from September 2018.
- (b) It was agreed that it was not necessary to consult on the allocation as an arrangement for allocation had already been agreed based on numbers and number of children who are eligible for free school meals.
- (c) In terms of feedback in the implementation of the Cluster Coordinator pilot scheme, it was explained that it was currently premature, however, any feedback would be considered in due course. This scheme would not have an impact on the devolved procedure.

It was confirmed that it was necessary to consider responsibility regarding costs when an additional learning needs child moves from school to school.

It was added that the budget had been increased, despite this the number of children with additional needs were increasing and the needs were more profound.

The allocation arrangements would continue based on free school meals and also to continue with the PLASC work.

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

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: To approve that the next Forum Meeting takes place at 9.30 a.m. on 11 January 2018.

CHAIRMAN