

SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 18/11/15

Present:

Mr Godfrey Northam - Chairman

Cabinet Members: Councillor Gareth Thomas (Education) – Vice-Chairman

Head Teachers: Andrew Roberts (Ysgol y Berwyn), Eifion Jones (Ysgol Brynrefail), Alun Llwyd (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog), Iona Wyn Jones (Ysgol Bro Cynfal/Ysgol Edmwnd Prys), Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn), Gwyn Howells (Ysgol y Gelli), Esme Spencer (Ysgol Baladeulyn), Rhys Williams (Ysgol Cymerau), Geraint Evans (Ysgol Eder)

Governors: Mr Dafydd Meirion Roberts (Ysgol Brynrefail)
Mr Gwilym Jones (Ysgol Borthyges)

Teachers' Union: Neil Foden

Also in attendance:

Schools Savings Target Working Group Members: Owain Lemin Roberts (Ysgol Maesincla), Dewi Lake (Ysgol y Moelwyn)

Officers: Arwyn Thomas (Head of Education)
Owen Owens (Schools' Senior Manager)
Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance)
Hefin Owen (Finance Manager)
Mrs Glynda O'Brien (Members' and Scrutiny Support Officer)

Observers: Cai Larsen (Chair of the Federation of Primary Headteachers)

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr. Peredur Jenkins (Cabinet Member, Resources), Peter Read (Chair of Services Scrutiny Committee), Bethan Lawton (Vice-chair Services Scrutiny Committee), Llinos Lloyd (Representative of the Gader Catchment Area Shadow Body), Cllr. Michael Sol Owen (Secondary Governors Representative), Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director)

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum held on 30 June 2015 as a true record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(a) Item 6 – Budgetary Training for Schools

The Finance Unit Manager apologised that the above training had not been organised, however, it would be arranged early in the New Year and would be of interest to School Heads as well as Governors.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

(b) Item 7 – Request from the Teachers Unions Forum for representation on the Education Finance Working Group.

Resolved: To invite one representative to represent the Teaching Unions on the Education Finance Working Group.

(c) Item 12 - Resignation

It was reported that the following had been nominated to serve on the Schools' Budgetary Forum and those present and attending their first meeting of the Forum were welcomed:

- (i) Mr Geraint Evans, Head of Ysgol Edern, to succeed Mrs Sianelen Fleming, Head of Ysgol Llanaelhaearn, following her retirement
 - (ii) Mr Dafydd Meirion Roberts, Representative for Arfon Secondary Governors,
 - (iii) Mr Gwilym Jones, Representative for Dwyfor Primary Governors
 - (iv) Cllr. Michael Sol Owen, Representative for Dwyfor Secondary Governors
- Mrs Llinos Lloyd, representative of the Gader Catchment Area Shadow Body

5. EDUCATION FINANCE WORKING GROUP - MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON 17TH SEPTEMBER 2015

(i) The Senior Manager - Education Resources Service referred to the comment made at a meeting of the above Working Group regarding if it would be possible to include savings stemming from the schools re-organisation as part of the savings target of £4.3m.

The Head of Education reported that they would seek to find savings as part of the Challenge Gwynedd consultation process. In the context of the Gwynedd Challenge, several roadshows had taken place and many had attended and the meetings were varied in terms of the quality of the discussion. It was noted that many of the questionnaires had been completed in the form of a paper booklet as well as on-line. The consultation would finish at the end of the month and then the intention was to undertake a process of grading the priorities with a comprehensive report submitted to the Cabinet in January and to the full Council for a final decision on 3 March 2016.

It was further noted that the time-schedule was tight, however, they had to try to come to a decision on the savings target of £4.3m soon.

The Head of Finance noted that the settlement for Wales would not be known until 10 December 2015.

SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 18/11/15

In response to a comment made that the Welsh Government had defended education in the past, it was noted that there was currently no statement from the Welsh Government. In terms of defending education, in presuming and planning new commitments, it was stressed that they should continue to seek the target of £4.3m.

The schools recognised that the Council was transparent and this was appreciated.

Resolved: To note the above.

(ii) The Senior Manager - Education Resources Service reported on the number of jobs that had been lost as a result of the cuts as follows:

Teaching posts	25.4 (full time)
Assistants	8.04
Ancillary Staff	2.16

(iii) In response to the above, a Head noted that approximately 50 posts had been lost from the secondary sector alone. It was further noted that the figures masked the actual impact on schools, be that as full time and/or part time, and it was suggested that more detailed figures should be submitted.

Resolved: To request that the Senior Manager - Education Resources Service submits more detailed figures of the number of posts lost as part of the cuts process.

6. PROPOSED POLICY OF ADDITIONAL PROTECTION ALLOCATION FOR SCHOOLS

A report was presented by the Head of Education regarding the proposed policy for additional protection allocation to schools.

The Forum was guided through the report by the Senior Manager -Education Resources Service, and it was noted that full consultation had taken place with all the county's schools on the proposed additional minimum protection policy for staff to reduce the additional minimum protection with a matching sum to the balances element of over 5% at the end of the latest financial year as announced.

Reference was made to the consultation results and it was noted that a response had been received from 45 schools out of 109. It was further noted that 36 (80%) were in favour of the proposal and 9 (20%) schools were against. Consequently, there was a clear indication that the schools who responded supported the policy and it was stressed that it was possible for schools to discuss any concerns highlighted with the authority.

It was noted that if the policy was accepted, as some of the £4.3m savings plans fell outside the 3 year period 2015/16 to 2017/18, one off savings would be used to contribute to funding the required bridging period.

Resolved: To approve the amendment to the additional protection allocation policy for schools to include a clause to reduce the protection allocation to match the balances element that is over 5% using the

balances sum at the end of the latest financial year when it was published.

7. UPDATE ON REVIEW OF ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND INCLUSION

Resolved: To defer the above item.

8. SCHOOLS SAVINGS TARGET - £4.3M

A report was submitted by the Head of Education outlining the options to share the remaining savings target of £3,348,000.

- (a) The Chairman expressed to the Forum, whilst accepting that schools lost money via grants, demographic impact etc, that it was necessary to come to a specific decision bearing in mind that other services within the Council had already agreed on their targets.
- (b) The Head of Education summarised the previous arguments and the report before them took into consideration the context of the Gwynedd Challenge, the discussion and the options to share the remaining savings target between the primary and secondary sectors, Estyn feed-back and comparative national statistics. They were reminded that in the past the Cabinet had protected educational interests and the authority had been extremely transparent and totally open regarding the contents of the options within the report. It had to be remembered that the department was being challenged corporately.
- (c) The Education Finance Working Group was thanked for determining the agreed plans in the sum of £1,028,000 with the remaining savings of £2,320,00 to be found.
- (d) That the recommendation before for preferred Option C was based on educational arguments and options A and CH were not under consideration.
- (e) In response to a comment made regarding long term plans for school organisation, it was explained that the Cabinet's direction was a target savings of £4.3m to schools and that no saving was based on school organisation to be included within the £4.3m. It was stressed that the infrastructure was not sustainable within the available budget.
- (f) During the discussion regarding achieving the remainder of the savings target, the following observations were highlighted:
 - That it was very difficult to consider the matter with no satisfaction to any of the two sectors (primary and secondary) having to implement the cuts.
 - There was a consensus of opinion that any savings stemming from schools organisation should be recycled for the pupil : teacher ratio (PTR).
 - That the context of the discussion set primary against secondary and the opinion was that the Education Finance Working Party had further work to be achieved.
 - It was felt that accepting the recommendation of Option C would indicate a strong preference in favour of the secondary sector at the expense of primary and was therefore against every principle and educational logic of investing as soon as possible in a child's School career. Implementing Option C would entail a cut of £300,000 to the secondary sector with primary facing a cut of £2m.
 - An explanation was received regarding the impact of the Option C cut on large, medium and small schools and the primary sector did not accept that there was any valid reasoning for implementing the Option C cut.

SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 18/11/15

- It was felt that using the impact of demography on the secondary sector as a reason behind the recommendation of Option C on primary was a totally unjust argument. It was noted that primary already faced this problem and were therefore being penalised twice by taking money from their budgets to reduce the impact on the secondary sector.
- Having to suffer a further cut in budgets the recommendation of the primary sector was that Option A only, namely an equal cut between both sectors, was acceptable. However, the wish of the primary sector was to receive a better explanation of how the recommendation of Option C was reached.
- If it was decided to cut budgets with a tendency in favour of one sector rather than another the Council was requested to clearly outline what aspects of the current provision would have to be cut.
- It was added with discontent that the difference between the two sectors was incredible
- On behalf of the secondary sector it was noted that whilst agreeing that investment should be made early in a child's career, that the investment in primary schools was still much better than in secondary schools.
- It was suggested that consideration should be given to the additional learning needs budget at the next Forum meeting.

In response to some of the above observations, the Head of Education noted -

- That the consultation with additional learning needs was on-going and was based on the authority, schools and the relationship with the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee.
- Looking at the national picture, it appeared that the level of expenditure in the primary sector was higher than the expected range and the comparative position had reduced in secondary since last year but continued to be towards the higher end of the expected range.
- That the size of the protection budget was approximately £600,000.

(g) Following a discussion, it was proposed and seconded to compromise by recommending option B to split the £2,320,000 remaining of the savings target for both sectors subject to the following conditions:

- (i) To retain the savings of £4.3m fixed over the next three years up to 2018.
- (ii) That any further schools organisation savings would contribute to the savings after 2018.

An amendment was proposed to the above, namely to offer another option between the option of cut B and C that would take into consideration the cut to large primary schools and that more work was undertaken to address the above.

In response, the Head of Education noted his appreciation of the compromise by implementing option B and this would be a challenge for the Cabinet Member for Education to press on the Cabinet to approve recycling the money stemming from the schools organisation to alleviate the schools cut in 2018/19.

Following the Head of Education's response, the amendment was withdrawn.

The meeting was deferred for 10 minutes in order to give both sectors an opportunity to discuss the proposal as outlined in (g) above.

The meeting was reconvened and a vote was taken on the proposal and was

carried with three members abstaining.

Resolved: (a) To convey to the Council's Cabinet that the Schools' Budget Forum approve implementing the remainder of the savings target of £3,348,000 as follows by:

- (i) Confirming the agreed plans of the Education Finance Working Group in the sum of £1,028,000;
- (ii) Sharing the remainder of the savings target of £2,320,000 in accordance with the option B cut (£1,642,151 – primary sector and £680,363 – secondary sector) subject to the following conditions:
 - Retaining the savings of £4.3m fixed for the next 3 years until 2018.
- (iii) That any further schools organisation savings would contribute to the savings after 2018.

(b) That the Schools' Budget Forum discusses the budget of the special learning needs budget at its next meeting on 20 January 2016.

9. AMEND THE CLERK OF GOVERNORS SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Changes to the Governors Clerking Service Level Agreement were submitted.

The Forum was guided through the report by the Senior Manager Education Resources Service, who noted that sufficient recognition was not given for the time taken to fully undertake clerking work to a good standard. The Administrative Officers of the Authority's Secondary Schools and school clerks were consulted to ascertain the average hours they took to undertake their duties as well as the need to give an element of advisory service to governing bodies.

The Forum was requested to approve the amendment in the Service Level Agreement and to agree on the following payments:

£1500 Primary Schools
£2500 Secondary Schools

Enquiries/questions were received from Forum Members and the Senior Manager Education Resources responded as follows:

- There was no certainty how many schools used the service as Administrative Officers dealt with the work in the majority of schools.
- The authority had a list of persons who were willing to undertake the work, however, it was difficult to get Clerks in some areas.
- The figure was based on £15 per hour for every additional hour
- Schools did not have to commit to the SLA and they could continue with their current arrangements if they wished.
- Some schools were unable to get the service of a Clerk and therefore the above arrangements would be available to them
- That there was no awareness of any concern regarding the quality of the minutes.

SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 18/11/15

It was proposed, seconded and voted to approve the change in the SLA.

Resolved: To approve the amendment in the Service Level Agreement and allow the following payments:

£1500 Primary Schools
£2500 Secondary Schools

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am and concluded at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN