
SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 4/03/19

Present:

Mr Godfrey Northam - Chairman

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

Head of Finance Department: Dafydd Edwards

School Headteachers: Mr Dewi Lake (Ysgol y Moelwyn), Mrs Iona Jones (Ysgol Edmwnd Prys/Bro Cynfal), Mr Trystan Larsen (Ysgol Rhosgadfan), Mrs Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn), Mr Llion Williams (Ysgol y Garnedd), Mr Alan Wynn Jones (Ysgol Nefyn), Mr Owain Lemin Roberts (Ysgol Maesincla)

Teachers' Unions: Neil Foden

Governors: Mr Edward Bleddyn Jones (Ysgol Tregarth and Bodfeurig), Mr Gwilym Jones (Ysgol Borthygest)

Officers: Owen Owens (Senior Manager Education Resources Services), Hefin Owen (Finance Manager), Annes Siôn (Member Support Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Anest Gray Frazer (The Diocese), Dylan Davies (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog) and Andrew Roberts (Ysgol y Berwyn).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest

3. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools Budget Forum held on 19 November 2018 as a true record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 7 - Review of Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion

It was stated that the work was continuing with the external expert who was investigating the over expenditure.

Item 8 - Forecasts 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22

It was noted that the minutes stated that costs were increasing and it was explained that these costs were the increase in the teachers' pay agreement and in teachers' pension costs equivalent to an increase of 5% in costs.

It was stated that the Learning Pathways had by now been sent to schools.

An update was given on the situation regarding Language Centres and it was noted that a consultation had been conducted with staff and unions and that options were under consideration. It was added that this would be the decision of the Council's Cabinet and that re-organisation stemmed from a lack of budget as a result of a cut in grants by the Government. The member representing the Unions stated that he did not feel that the summary of the Unions' response, submitted to the Cabinet, did not fully sum up the views of the unions.

Resolved: To accept and note the above

5. GWYNEDD COUNCIL BUDGET 2019/20 - SCHOOLS

The Head of the Finance Department presented the report and noted there had not been much change in the budget since the previous meeting. He stated that the Council had avoided transferring the schools savings target to Gwynedd schools once again this year. It was added that the schools' budget would increase this year due to the usual demographic adjustments, that derive from changes in pupil numbers. Attention was drawn to the Council's bids and it was noted that there was a recommendation for the Council to agree to fund bids to the value of £593k for the Education Department, towards the transport and integration budget.

It was stated that the budget was fair, and with inflation of over £4m to consider, the schools' budget would be considerably higher in 2019/20 than the level in 2018/19. It was stated that several grants were available to Education from the Welsh Government and it appeared that there would be no 'cash' cut, however, the Government would not add inflation to the grants. Therefore costs, including teachers' wages and pension inflation will increase by 5%, and as a result schools will be in a situation where some of the grants will be cuts in 'real' terms. However, it was added that there would be a new grant from the Government towards teacher training.

Teachers' pensions was discussed and it was noted that a presumption continued that the Government will fund the increase in 2019/20 teachers' pensions via a specific grant. It was added that consultation had taken place with the education sector in England and there was mention of full funding for schools in England. It was stated that there was also an expectation for this to occur in Wales as well. It was added that if no money was forthcoming from the Welsh Government to fund the increase in pension contributions, or if the grant was insufficient, there would be a need to re-visit this and discuss with school how they can deal with the one-off pressure in 2019/20.

It was noted that there had been discussions in the Cabinet on savings required in 2019/20, and it was added that the Cabinet had resolved to recommend to the Full Council in March not to cut the Schools Library Service.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was asked if draft budgets include the presumption that a contribution to the increase in Teachers' pension contributions would be funded by a grant by the Government. It was noted that this was included in the budgets, as the Finance Department believed that it was irresponsible for schools to feel that they were needlessly facing cuts, it was added that the department will seek

to get the full money from Welsh Government. It was added that pension contributions were on the risk radar, however, it would be necessary to deal fully with this matter when there is more information.

Resolved: To accept the report

6. 2019/20 SCHOOL GRANTS

The report was submitted, noting that it was proposed to release a summary of the Schools' Devolved Grants to them with their school's allocation. The allocations spreadsheet was explained and it was noted that 'other' in column 3 included money for teacher training. The grants on the spreadsheet were discussed.

6th Form Grant - it was noted that information had been received from the Government about this grant that confirmed it was £3,284,887, which was £55,516 higher than the forecast. It was stated that this was a grant increase of 3.9% compared with 2018/19, although the number of pupils had decreased. It was added that in future it was expected that the figure would rise with an increase in the contributions to teachers' pensions.

Education Improvement Grant - it was noted that the department was still awaiting further information. It was stated that it appeared to be the same sum as 2018/19, although costs had increased and this would correspond to a cut of approximately 5% in real terms. It was stated that the department continued to await answers, however, it was added that the national total continued to be the same sum and therefore the department was confident that the estimate was correct.

Pupil Development Grant - it was stated that this grant was based on the January 2016 PLASC and it was expected that the grant would continue on the same basis for 2019/20. It was noted that wage inflation for classroom assistants would increase by 5% and therefore in real terms the figure was a substantial cut.

National Model Grant for Professional Learning - It was noted that the Council was expecting a share of the national £15m, which would be approximately £580,000 for Gwynedd schools. It was added that the department was still awaiting further information.

Teachers' Pay Grant - it was stated that information for this grant had been received. It was added that the grant was not in the settlement but was a separate grant. It was noted that the grant was dependent on the Welsh Government approving the Gwynedd scheme namely the intention of using the grant as a contribution towards the cost of funding the whole year impact of the September 2018 teachers' pay agreement and the September 2019 teachers' pay agreement.

Attention was also drawn to additional grants that had been/would be received late for 2018/19. It was noted that this money would be sent directly to schools. In addition, it was noted there was a need to keep an eye on teachers' pensions, as this could be a problem for schools.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was asked if there was a need to share this information with schools - it was determined that this should be left until the allocation was received in the hope that all grants would have been confirmed by the Government by then.

Resolved: To accept the report and send the information to schools when sending the budgets.

7. GROUND MAINTENANCE ALLOCATION AND SCHOOLS NETWORK ALLOCATION

The report was submitted noting that it had not been possible to have an analysis of school needs in terms of core hours and optional hours in time to be able to consult with schools on the proposed new method of allocating funding. As a result, it was noted that there would be no change to the method of allocating funding for grounds maintenance in 2019/20. It was hoped that it would be possible to consult this year in order to allocate money via the new method in 2020/21. It was stated that there would be no change to the allocation method this year, except for adding inflation, to the cost of grounds maintenance.

In the same manner, it was noted that it had not been possible to consult on the new method of allocating school network funding, and therefore the allocation basis for this year was the same as it was for 2018/19.

Resolved: To accept and note the above.

8. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS - GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

It was noted that it was not possible to undertake a process to change the funding allocation basis for schools' grounds maintenance, there will be no change, except for adding inflation, to the costs of the Service Level Agreements for 2019/20.

Resolved: To accept the report.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that this would be the last meeting of Councillor Peredur Jenkins as Cabinet Member for Finance, he was thanked for his hard work over the years and best wishes were extended to him.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The dates for next year would be circulated.

CHAIRMAN