
SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 2/03/20

Present: Godfrey Northam (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen Governor) (Chairman).

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Finance)

School Headteachers:

Secondary: Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog) and Dewi Lake (Ysgol y Moelwyn).

Primary: Iona Jones (Ysgol Edmwnd Prys / Bro Cynfal), Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn) and Llion Williams (Ysgol y Garnedd).

Teachers' Unions: David Healey (Ysgol Friars) (deputising on behalf of Neil Foden).

Governors: Gwilym Jones (Ysgol Borth y Gest).

Officers: Owen Owens (Schools Senior Manager), Kathy Bell (Senior Development Accountant), Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor / Meirion Area Education Officer), Huw Ynyr (Assistant Head - Information Technology), Gwyn Owen (Senior Accountant) and Eirian Roberts (Democratic Services Officer).

The Chairman noted that this would have been the last Forum meeting for Hefin Owen (Group Accountant - Development), but unfortunately he could not attend today due to illness. Therefore, he suggested that a card should be sent to thank him for his service over the years and to wish him well in the future.

The Chairman noted that a letter should be sent to those who were absent from this meeting to ask why they were absent, and to confirm if they wished to continue as members of the Forum or otherwise. Bodies who nominate members for the Forum should also be contacted and this opportunity should be taken to remind everyone of the delegation procedure. It was also suggested that a record of attendance should be made at Forum meetings from the Summer onwards.

1. APOLOGIES

Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance), Arwyn Williams (Ysgol Tryfan), Alan Wyn Jones (Ysgol Nefyn), Richard Derwyn Jones (Ysgol Garndolbenmaen), Eleri Morgan Davies (Ysgol y Gorlan), Neil Foden (Ysgol Friars), Anest Gray Frazer (Diocese), Gwenan Davies Jones (Chair of Primary Headteachers' Federation), Ellen Williams (Chair of Secondary Headteachers' Federation), Hefin Owen (Group Accountant – Development) and Ffion Edwards Ellis (Assistant Head of Special Education Needs and Inclusion).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3 URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on 23 January, 2020 as a true record.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 5 - School Balances 31/03/2020 over £50,000 (Primary) or £100,00 (Secondary)

In response to an enquiry, it was noted that no confirmation had been received thus far regarding the legal position in terms of an all-through school. It was further asked if it would be possible to place primary and secondary together for now. It was noted that this was not possible as it was a legal matter rather than the authority's choice.

It was noted that all Forum members had received a copy of the first statistical statement regarding schools' reserve funds at 31 March 2019. Attention was drawn to some of the main points, namely:-

- That the total level of reserve funds in Welsh schools was £46m on 31 March 2019, equivalent to £102 per pupil.
- Swansea had the highest level of reserve funds per pupil, namely £251, and Monmouthshire was the lowest, with a deficit of £22 per pupil.
- That 151 primary schools, 77 secondary schools, 8 special schools, 1 nursery school and 10 middle schools in Wales had negative reserve funds equivalent to £29m. The other 1,287 schools had reserve funds greater than 10% of the total expenditure earmarked for them.

It was further noted that Gwynedd was fairly close to the highest in terms of the level of reserve funds per pupil.

In response to a query, it was noted that the main concerns of officers was that schools would go into deficit, and it was very difficult to come out of that position.

Item 7 - School Grants 2020/21

In response to an enquiry, it was noted that no information had been received from GwE regarding use of the Professional Development Grant.

Item 8 - Draft Settlement - Gwynedd Council's Financial Strategy

In response to an enquiry, it was noted that an element of the Transport bid had been funded and it was confirmed that this did not impact school funding anyhow.

It was noted that it was understood that Gwynedd Council Cabinet had decided not to harvest the general savings scheme for schools this year, and it was emphasised that if it was proposed to change this in future, the Forum should be part of that discussion.

In response, it was noted that the situation depended on the Welsh Government settlement to councils. This year's settlement was better than expected, however, nobody could give any promise for the future and factors such as Brexit, recent floods and Coronavirws would obviously be part of the future discussion. It was agreed that the Forum should be part of the discussion if the situation changed in the future.

6. INTEGRATION ALLOCATION

Submitted for information – the report of the Group Accountant – Development giving an analysis of the Integration Allocation since establishing the current funding system in 2015/16.

The Dwyfor / Meirion Area Education Officer noted that the Assistant Head of Special Needs and Inclusion had asked him to report on some points as a result of this item. He explained:-

- That an external survey had been commissioned regarding use of integration funding as part of Phase 2 of the strategic review in the area of Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion (ALN&I).
- The intention at the time was to establish a sub-group that would look at the different methods of devolving integration funding, however, there was a request from the Management Board to undertake a full review of the ALN&I Service across Gwynedd and Anglesey.
- This work had proceeded during the last few weeks. This had already been reported and would be shared with the Strategic Boards.
- That the Assistant Head of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion wished to stress that it was proposed to discuss different options with devolvement, and the sub-group would look at this over the next few weeks.

RESOLVED that the sub-group would look at the different methods of devolvement and would feed back to the next Forum. It was also agreed to share a summary of the independent review of ALN&I across Gwynedd and Anglesey to the primary and secondary consultative groups.

7. SCHOOLS' DIGITAL STRATEGY

It was noted that all Forum members had received a copy of a report prepared jointly by the Assistant Head of Information Technology and the Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer on the Hwb In-Schools Infrastructure Grant. It had not been possible to include the report on the Forum's agenda, as no final figures had been received from the Welsh Government until the eleventh hour.

Details on the contents of the report were received. It was noted:-

- In July 2019, the Minister for Education announced a funding programme to transform Education Technology in Wales.
- The £50m venture would use the new 'All-Wales ICT catalogue' as a medium to assist local authorities to purchase the essential compatible equipment on behalf of their schools.
- In accordance with the scheme's conditions, it would be local authorities who would serve as the strategic supply partner for the programme and it would be necessary to use finance appropriately to ensure that every school is upgraded in accordance with national standards.
- That Gwynedd has committed to be a link for schools in the county and had agreed to the core principles of standardisation, consistency and most importantly sustainability.
- The grant enabled the Gwynedd schools network to be renewed in order to reach the national standard, by upgrading the wifi network points and cabinets and to install new cables where needed.
- Hardware to upgrade the network had been ordered and installation work would occur over the next two terms.

- As the Council had committed to the sustainability of this equipment, there would be no cost implications to schools when the installed equipment via a grant would come to the end of its lifespan.
- That close to £1.4m of the grant this year had been invested in hardware to upgrade the network.
- That an assessment of the number and condition of existing devices across Gwynedd schools indicated that a wide range of devices were available in schools, however, many had dated.
- That the Education Department's Digital Education Strategy had set an ambition in terms of the ration of devices to children of 1:4 in foundation phase and 1:1 in key stages 2, 3 and 4, together with a device for each teacher and for many support staff.
- If the ratio of 1:1 in the secondary sector was not maintained then elements of the old system would have to be retained with a significant increase in equipment maintenance costs.
- It was estimated that 13,676 devices were required at a cost of £2,908,205.02. The grant would enable us to purchase these devices.
- Based on the renewal cycle of five years, it will be necessary to find 20% of the cost of these devices each year for the next five years. At the end of the five years a new set of devices would be presented. The costs will be as noted in the following tables:-

	Number of Pupils	Number of computers (on a ratio basis)	Cost (on a ratio basis)	Renewal Contribution	Cost per pupil
FP	3,530	883	£293,431.25	£58,686.00	£16.62
KS2	5,150	5,150	£916,242.16	£183,248.43	£35.58
KS3 & 4	6,455	6,455	£1,017,759.85	£203,551.97	£31.53
Total	15,135	12,488	£2,227,433.26	£445,486.65	£29.43

Teachers

	Number of Teachers	Number of computers (on a ratio basis)	Cost (on a ratio basis)	Renewal Contribution	Cost per Teacher
Every school*	1,188	1,188	£462,452.76	£92,490.55	£6.11

*£218,319 was needed for Docking Station, Monitor, Keyboard and Mouse – these had not been included in the renewal costs as they should survive the renewal period.

- Therefore, the sustainability costs of the scheme would be £537,976 for both sectors with £280,939 from primary and £257,038 from secondary.
- For primary schools, a school with 100 children will be expected to contribute approximately £3,250, a school with 200 children £5,900, and a school with 300 children £9,500.
- The estimated sustainability cost for secondary is as noted in the following table:-

School	
Ardudwy	£12,723.13
Botwnnog	£17,022.62
Bro Idris (3-16 School)	£11,612.64
Brynrefail	£24,428.27
Dyffryn Nantlle	£14,186.52
Dyffryn Ogwen	£16,213.59
Eifionydd	£15,052.72
Friars	£44,842.83
Glan y Môr	£19,266.51

Syr Hugh Owen	£28,662.73
Tryfan	£13,058.23
Tywyn	£13,418.84
Godre'r Berwyn (3-19 School)	£13,234.61
Y Moelwyn	£13,314.43

- It was not anticipated that there would be any requirement for schools to contribute towards the sustainability of the scheme in the next financial year.
- That up to £800,000 was available for devices this year, and the grant cannot be spent without a commitment to the sustainability of this investment.
- As a sign of the Council's commitment to the Digital Education Strategy and the commitment to the learners' digital skills, the Education Department wished to invest in the sustainability of this scheme. Any investment by the Department would reduce the schools' sustainability cost.

Further to the contents of the report, it was noted:-

- Although the final figures had not been received regarding the grant until the eleventh hour, an order had to be submitted by mid-day on the 4th of March for equipment to the value of £798,000.
- That a number of discussions had taken place with the Head of Education regarding how the Department can support investment in the sustainability of the provision. It was intended to look at every budget within the Department and to also hold discussions with the Council's Cabinet. It was confirmed that the Department would support the investment, however, it could not currently be confirmed what the exact sum would be.
- The Department would immediately commit 20% of the £800,00, or it would not be possible to spend the grant.

The Department's intention to invest in the sustainability of the provision was welcomed.

It was emphasised that schools needed to know when the new equipment would arrive, in order to plan for this. In response, it was explained that rather than running two systems that may not be compatible, it was proposed to bring in one system. Therefore the timing was very important.

It was noted that schools needed information about these decisions during the next few weeks. In response, it was explained that it was difficult for the Council in terms of planning, as it was not yet known the exact amount of money in the pot for next year. Therefore, it was likely that the new equipment would not be available until early after Christmas, however, the preparation work would have to be undertaken prior to this and all that would be required then would be to distribute to schools.

It was noted, although it was Cynnal that prepared the annual report on quality, it was the Council who made the decision that the equipment was standard. It was expressed that this was a grey area, and it was suggested that it would be beneficial to provide a Service Level Agreement to schools.

It was suggested that it would be an idea to provide some form of newsletter every fortnight for those schools without a seat on the Forum. In response, it was explained that two newsletters were sent to schools monthly. It was also suggested that the representatives on the strategic/technical groups should report back to the headteachers.

8. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND INCLUSION SERVICE

It was noted that the Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer had already given his presentation under item 6 above.

9. SCHOOL GRANTS 2020/21 - UPDATE

It was noted that more information was awaited before an update could be provided to the Forum.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed to hold the next Forum meeting in June, on a Monday afternoon if possible, with a further meeting to take place following the summer holidays.

It was requested that the Secondary Schools Absences Plan be included as an item on the agenda of the next meeting as the current provision was coming to an end. It was also suggested that the matter should be discussed at the Headteachers' meeting prior to coming to the Forum in June.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.00 pm

CHAIRMAN