
SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM 28/09/20

Present: Mr Godfrey Northam (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen Governor) (Chair).

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Finance).

School Headteachers:

Secondary: Dylan Davies (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog) and Arwyn Williams (Ysgol Tryfan).

Primary: Iona Jones (Ysgol Edmwnd Prys / Bro Cynfal), Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn), Alan Wynn Jones (Ysgol Cymerau), Richard Derwyn Hughes (Ysgol Garndolbenmaen) and Eleri Morgan Davies (Ysgol y Gorlan).

Teachers' Unions: Neil Foden (Ysgol Friars)

Governors: Edward Bleddyn Jones (Ysgol Tregarth).

Church Schools: Elfed Morgan Morris (Ysgol Llandygai)

Special Schools: Donna Roberts (Ysgol Hafod Lon)

Observer: Gwenan Davies Jones (Chair of the Gwynedd Federation of Primary Headteachers)

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to re-elect Mr Godfrey Northam as Chairman of the Forum for 2020/21.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Cemlyn Williams as Vice-chair of the Forum for 2020/21.

3. APOLOGIES

Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education), Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive), Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department), Gwilym Jones (Governor - Ysgol Borthygest), Anest Gray Frazer (The Diocese) and Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on 2 March, 2020 as a true record, subject to the following correction:-

The Chair noted that although he had asked for a letter to be sent to those not present at the meeting, he did not believe that he had stated that it was necessary to ask for the reason behind those absences.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In response to questions from the Chair regarding forum membership, it was noted:-

- That no one had stated that they did not wish to continue to be a member of the forum.
- That gaps in the membership had been discussed with the Governors' Unit and that it was intended to ask the Governors' Association to make appointments to the empty seats by the next meeting of the forum.

7. FINAL SCHOOL ACCOUNTS FOR 2019-20 FINANCIAL YEAR

Submitted, for information - a report by the Schools Group Accountant detailing the schools' final accounts for the 2019/20 financial year.

The Chair noted that Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn's situation had changed immensely from a deficit of -£49,045 on 31 March 2018 to balances of £115,668 on 31 March of the current year, and that action on the part of governors, the headteacher and the officers was evident.

It was noted that this situation was not consistent across the sector and that the increase of £450,000 in secondary schools' balances could be attributed almost completely to two schools.

The Schools Group Accountant noted that Welsh schools accountants had undertaken an exercise on school balances, which differentiated between the balances and deficits, and that it was surprising to see that so many schools carried such substantial deficits in their accounts from year to year. There was annual criticism of schools for carrying balances, but taking the deficits they carried into account brought their net position down.

The Schools Senior Manager noted that there was a story behind almost every case of high balances, and that it was not individual cases of the kind that were a cause for concern for him, but rather consistently high balances.

RESOLVED

- (a) **That the Education Department and the Finance Department should cooperate closely with the schools carrying a financial deficit, in order to ensure that the cleared the deficit as soon as possible.**
- (b) **That the Education Department and the Finance Department should continue to monitor school budgets.**

8. SCHOOL GRANTS 2020-21

Submitted, for information - a report by the Schools Group Accountant detailing the school grants situation for 2020/21.

The Chair asked whether the introduction of the Accelerating Learning Programme Grant had led to reducing some other grants. In response, the Schools Group Accountant

explained that the Professional Development Grant was the only one that had been reduced.

RESOLVED to accept the information.

9. COVID-19 FINANCIAL MATTERS

Submitted - a verbal update on the following matters because of Covid-19:-

- Additional expenditure
- Reduced income
- Other

The Schools Group Accountant noted:-

- That Welsh Government had shared the funds authorities were able to claim, namely additional costs and reduced income due to being unable to operate as usual.
- That the type of additional expenditure claimed on schools level was around £50,000, and that the Education Department had also been submitting applications.
- That the main costs were the costs of preparing free school meals, along with a certain amount of transportation costs.
- That schools had also faced additional cleaning costs, as well as over £20,000 for signs encouraging people to maintain a distance of 2 metres, etc.
- That the main income claimed from Welsh Government was the school meals. The Council had been unable to serve meals for five months, but was still required to employ the staff.
- That the Head of Finance Department would report to the Council's Cabinet on 13 October regarding the latest monitoring and Gwynedd's situation by that time.
- In terms of the furlough scheme, only those services that were losing income could claim, and so this was not relevant to the situation of schools, apart from two schools that prepared their own food or provided sports activities. A furlough grant had been received for some staff, and more information would be available following the Cabinet meeting.

It was noted that schools were facing new costs since the summer, e.g. screens and refitting the canteen. In response, the Schools Group Accountant explained that there was an intention for schools to be able to claim for this until 30 September.

An enquiry was made as to how the schools were likely to be able to claim school meals income. In response, the Schools Group Accountant explained that this happened at authority level, and would be included in the Head of Finance Department's report to the Cabinet on 13 October. An enquiry was made as to whether the funding would come into school budgets, and the Schools Group Accountant said that she greatly hoped so.

10. GWYNEDD SCHOOLS DIGITAL STRATEGY

Submitted - a report by Gwern ap Rhisiart (Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer) and Huw Ynyr (Assistant Head, Information Technology) providing Forum members with an update on the Gwynedd Schools Digital Strategy since the previous meeting on 2 March 2020.

The Assistant Head of Information Technology noted that as yet, not everyone had responded to the letter requesting a comprehensive picture of schools' intentions and the ability of their budgets for investment in equipment. It was intended to ask school headteachers and governor chairs to respond by the end of the week, so that it would be

possible to report to the Cabinet, which would then finally adopt the strategy. No specific questions had arisen with regard to the digital strategy, other than the big question of how it would be funded.

The Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer reiterated the observations made by the Assistant Head of Information Technology, also noting that it had been necessary to place the order for devices in September, although the discussion continued.

Some headteachers noted:-

- That the questionnaire put headteachers in a difficult situation. It meant that they had to provide a definite answer to the question of full contribution, but although there was no wish to endanger the strategy, many schools would find it difficult to commit to contributing fully towards the costs of replacing equipment.
- Although the investment was generally welcomed, that schools had concerns, e.g., interactive whiteboards had not been included, and they were expected to reach the end of their lives at the same time as the devices. In response, the Assistant Head of Information Technology noted that equipment such as screens could be a matter to revisit.

RESOLVED to accept the information.

11. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS & INCLUSION

Submitted, for information - a report by Ffion E. Ellis (Assistant Head of Additional Learning Needs) providing details of the work of the Additional Learning Needs Funding Working Group in relation to the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Strategic Review.

The Dwyfor/Meirion Area Education Officer noted that the working group had been established and had met; however, due to the pandemic, the discussion had not proceeded as everyone would have liked, and the timetable for action had been reviewed.

RESOLVED to accept the information.

12. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2020-21 ACADEMIC YEAR

Several members noted that meeting at 3.30pm on a Monday was convenient for them. It was therefore agreed that dates would be planned on this basis for the academic year, with the next meeting to be held during November.

The Cabinet Member for Finance noted that 2020/21 had been a challenging financial year, and that it was now time to start looking at the 2021/22 budget. He added, although he was unable to guarantee this, that he greatly hoped that there would be no need for further cuts to education in the following year's budget.

The meeting commenced at 3.30 pm and concluded at 4.10 pm

CHAIR