
SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM

17.07.2023

Present: Richard Jones (Ysgol Chwilog) (Chair)

Cabinet Members: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Finance)

Head of Finance Department: Dewi A Morgan

School Headteachers:

Secondary: Neil Foden (Ysgol Friars), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog) and Aled Williams (Ysgol Ardudwy), Arwyn Williams (Ysgol Brynrefail)

Primary: Richard Jones (Ysgol Chwilog)

Governors: Councillor Gwynfor Owen (Dwyfor), Councillor Gwilym Jones (Dwyfor) and Carys Fowles (Meirionnydd)

Church Schools: Joanna Thomas (Ysgol y Faenol)

Special Schools: Nobody was present

Diocese: Nobody was present

Union Representative: Nobody was present

Observer: Nobody was present

Officers: Garem P Jackson (Head of Education Department)
Kathy W Bell (Schools Group Accountant)
Dr Diane Pritchard Jones (Assistant Head, Education Services)
Einir Davies (Democratic Services Officer)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Mr Richard Jones, Headteacher of Ysgol Chwilog, as Chair of the Forum for 2023/24.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Mr Dylan Minnice, Ysgol Botwnnog, as Vice-chair of the Forum for 2023/24.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive), Brian Jones (Arfon Governors), Edward Bleddyn Jones (Arfon Governors), Ms Eleri Moss, Mrs Donna Roberts (Special Schools), Mr Eifion Roberts (Meirionnydd Governors), Debbie Anne Williams Jones (Assistant Head – Corporate Services) and Menna Wynne-Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn, Tywyn)

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on 6 February, 2023 as a true record, and received an update as noted below.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 7 - Language Centres - it was confirmed that no update was available at present. The historical arrangement of receiving the grant and the intention to re-discuss the arrangement with GwE was outlined.

Item 9 - Integration and School Allocation Method - it was confirmed that no update was available at present. It was confirmed that arrangements would be too late to implement by September 2023, therefore the following term needed to be considered. It was confirmed that the integration budget and the method of sharing based on children's hours, needed further attention.

8. SCHOOL BALANCES 31 MARCH 2023

The Schools' Group Accountant referred to the paper that detailed individual school balances on 31 March 2023. He confirmed that the situation was now more similar to the norm, with a reduction of £4.8 million. It was noted that three schools were in a deficit and that work to review the balances was now being undertaken, although a further reduction was expected by the end of the year.

Concern was raised regarding the situation of the late grants, confirming that five late grants had been received by schools which equated to £96,000 and that the situation was not to be welcomed. Reference was made to situations of carrying over more than £700,000 but planning had to be undertaken with a figure of £230,000 under consideration. The Head of Finance confirmed that large balances were carried over.

It was questioned how many schools were likely to be in a fiscal hole at the end of 2024 and it was confirmed that many schools had appointed on a temporary basis using this year's balances and, as a result, the levels would have reduced substantially by September.

With the temporary posts coming to an end, concern was noted that children would still need support and that it was very difficult to support them.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

9. SCHOOL GRANTS 2023/2024

It was confirmed that a paper would be submitted at the next meeting as it would then be possible to confirm the learning acceleration grants, pupil development grants (PDG) and child development grants. It was confirmed that the GwE Board would meet to consider the Consortia Grant in due course, and confirmation would be shared at the end of the term.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to receive an update at the next meeting.

10. TEACHERS' SALARY 2022/2023 AND 2023/2024

The Schools' Group Accountant apologised that the paper had been distributed late, but it was hoped that the message, about a very complex matter, had come across in a straightforward manner. Forum Members were guided through the paper which had been produced in response to a request from the Secondary Group, asking for clarification on how funding reached the Council and was then shared.

The background that led to the situation was outlined, noting that the Welsh Government had announced a 5% increase. At the end of March, 3% had been offered by the Welsh Government, with a further rise of 1.5% and a non-consolidated 1.5% as the teachers' salaries proposal.

In terms of Cyngor Gwynedd, it was confirmed that 3% had been earmarked in the original budget for teachers' pay rise, but there was a clear gap as the pay rise was 5%. In response, Cyngor Gwynedd released 1% and, following discussions with the WLGA, Cyngor Gwynedd dealt with the other 1%.

In terms of the 3%, the Welsh Government announced that it would provide a grant - i.e., 1.5% for seven months and a non-consolidated 1.5% for a whole academic year, namely £1.1 million.

In order to close the accounts, it was confirmed that the amount had to be estimated but there was a sense that it had not been sufficient to fill the gap.

It was further confirmed that the settlement was based on data, and funding had reached Cyngor Gwynedd and then the Cyngor would determine the allocation for individual schools based on a formula. It was noted that every penny had been targeted and reached schools. The grant was £480,000, namely a permanent 1.5% and one-off £638,000, which was a full grant. It was noted that there was also an element of a Sixth Form grant. It was reported that the game changed at each stage and that it was very complex. Attention was drawn to the side effects, noting that although everyone accepted that a form of allocation was required, that the situation affected staff who were employed by Schools, and not the teaching staff.

It was confirmed that the Authority had allocated the grant based on the 'FTE' staffing level in the formula but there were situations where there was a difference between the number of staff in this formula and how many were employed. This was elaborated upon noting that the substantial gap was due to the methodology. It was further enquired about the figure for teaching staff costs and what the Welsh Government had released. Forum Members were in agreement that it was a very unfair situation.

The Chair noted that the pay rise in the salaries of ancillary staff had not been met in 2022/23 and that a decision had not yet been made on pay rises. The Finance Manager noted that a higher percentage had been earmarked for 2023/24 but there was no assurance that it would be sufficient.

Concern was raised that some schools had balances to be able to absorb the situation and it was questioned whether or not match funding would come to Wales? It was confirmed that this was a matter for the Welsh Government but there was no obligation for them to do anything.

One Member noted that the Westminster Government had confirmed the pay rise in England, but no funding had been allocated for it, which was again a concern that no consequential funding would reach Wales.

It was questioned how some Organisations received assurance about the level of their budget over 2 to 3 years. It was noted that no organisation now received assurance - these would only be predictions. This was elaborated upon confirming that it was not possible to give assurance to organisations as this figure depended on the settlement.

The Cabinet Member for Finance confirmed that the financial forecast for the coming financial year did not look good in terms of Welsh Government.

RESOLVED : to accept the report and to receive an update at the next meeting.

11. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

The item was presented by the Assistant Head - Education Services. It was confirmed that a few schemes had been reviewed and that observations had been received on some schemes and, as a result, they had been reconsidered. It was confirmed that the situation was similar to the norm, but some schools had not got in touch to inform one way or the other.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Format of future meetings - the option to hold a hybrid meeting had been proposed to Forum Members for this meeting, and there was only one member in the Meeting Room. A question was asked about the wishes of Forum Members for future meetings.

The Head of Service noted that there were advantages and disadvantages to the options - sometimes a face-to-face meeting was better but some individuals needed considerable time to travel to reach a meeting in Caernarfon.

It was agreed to offer a hybrid option for future meetings, reinforcing the message that the hybrid option was available and that space was available.

Estyn Inspection - it was confirmed that the Estyn Report would be published on 20 September 2023 and it would be addressed at the next meeting, which would be programmed towards the end of term.

Everyone was thanked for their contributions.

The meeting commenced at 3:35pm and concluded at 4:30pm.