
SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM

01.07.2024

Present:

Cabinet Members: Councillors Beca Brown (Education) and Paul Rowlinson (Finance)

School Headteachers:

Secondary: Arwyn Williams (Ysgol Brynrefail)

Primary: Eleri Morgan Davies (Ysgol y Gorlan)

Governors: Eifion Roberts (Meirionnydd - Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn)
Councillor Gwilym Jones (Dwyfor - Ysgol Borthygest)
Councillor Gwynfor Owen (Dwyfor - Ysgol Hafod Lon)

Church Schools: Joanna Thomas (Ysgol y Faenol)

Special Schools:

Diocese:

Teachers' Unions: Clive Thomas (Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen)

Observers: Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education Department)
Debbie Anne Williams Jones (Assistant Head: Corporate Services)
Kathy Bell (Schools Group Accountant)
Geraint Jones (Ysgol Tryfan)

Officers: Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer)
Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Mr Richard Derwyn Jones, Headteacher of Ysgol Chwillog, as Chair of the Forum for 2024/2025 as only one meeting was held during the 2023/24 year.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Members were reminded of the arrangement that the Chairpersonship and Vice-chairpersonship rotated between the primary and secondary sector. It was noted as a point of order that it was imperative to elect an individual from the secondary sector as Vice-chair for 2024/25 as the Chair was an individual from the primary sector.

RESOLVED to hold a discussion in the Secondary Headteachers' Strategic Group meeting to elect a Vice-chair, and report back at the next meeting of this Forum.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive) and Dewi Morgan (Head of

Finance).

Councillor Ioan Thomas, Iona Jones (Ysgol Edmwnd Prys), Menna Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog) and Bleddyn Jones (Ysgol Tregarth Governor) were thanked for their work and contribution to the Forum. It was confirmed that these individuals had all moved on from their posts since the previous meeting of the Forum and they were no longer Members.

The Head of Education Department was formally welcomed to his first meeting of the Forum as well as the new Cabinet Member for Finance.

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 17 July 2023 as a true record, and received an update as noted below.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 3 – Apologies – the record was amended to state that Eleri Morgan Davies (Ysgol y Gorlan) had submitted her apologies for the meeting.

8. FORUM MEMBERSHIP

The Forum membership of each representation group was reported on, drawing attention to the following points:

- **Secondary Headteachers** - it was confirmed that there were four seats within the membership group. It was noted that one empty seat currently needed to be filled. Attention was drawn to the fact that this was likely to change in the near future as the current seat of the Ysgol Botwnnog representative would become an empty seat. The need to fill two empty seats within this membership group was emphasised.
- **Primary Headteachers** - it was confirmed that there were six seats within the membership group. It was noted that three empty seats currently needed to be filled.
- **Teachers' Unions** - it was confirmed that Clive Thomas (Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen) represented the unions within the Forum and that there were no empty seats within the membership group.
- **Governors** - it was confirmed that there were six seats within the membership group - two members for each region of the County. It was explained that the representation for Meirionnydd and Dwyfor was full but there was one empty seat to be filled by a representative from the Arfon area.
- **Diocese** - it was confirmed that this seat was currently empty.
- **Church Schools and Special Schools** - It was confirmed that there were no empty seats in these membership groups.

It was explained that the Forum membership had been discussed at a meeting of the Arfon catchment area headteachers group recently and astonishment was expressed regarding the lack of members. Officers were asked to ensure that opportunities to join the Forum were shared with headteachers to ensure that empty seats were filled in a timely manner.

RESOLVED to prepare documentation for the benefit of the strategic groups, confirming the requirements of Forum membership and asking for new members to join by the next meeting in September 2024. Permission was granted for the current representatives of primary and secondary headteachers to raise the matter at appropriate catchment area headteachers meetings.

9. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

A verbal presentation was received from the Assistant Head: Corporate Services, drawing attention to the following main points:

It was reported that there was a need to confirm current service level agreements and consider any possible modifications for the future.

It was considered that 12 service level agreements existed, 10 of which were current. It was explained that 8 of the service level agreements had been updated for 2023-26 and that they provided details regarding Human Resources, Archives, Museums, Salaries and Contracts, Grounds Maintenance, Property Maintenance and Libraries arrangements. It was confirmed that an agreement for an Education Business Centre (Primary) had been confirmed for 2024-29.

Assurance was given that a Catering service agreement had currently been updated for a period of three years for primary schools, and for a period of one year for secondary schools. It was elaborated that the same arrangements were in place for cleaning agreements in the primary and secondary sectors as per the catering agreements above.

It was acknowledged that two service level agreements were out-of-date, drawing attention to the need to revisit them. It was detailed that these agreements related to the field of Finance and bank, payments, income and receipt of money Regulations.

The Forum's permission was sought to extend the out-of-date service level agreements, to be able to ensure that arrangements were in place by April 2025 to allow the agreements to be reviewed thoroughly for the next period. It was emphasised that services continued to be provided to every school.

RESOLVED to extend service level agreements until April 2025, to ensure arrangements to draw up more recent agreements from April 2025 for the next few years.

10. SECONDARY SCHOOLS FUNDING FORMULA - REVIEWING CATERING AND CLEANING

A verbal report was presented by the Schools Group Accountant, drawing attention to the following main points:

It was explained that the secondary headteachers group had met to consider reviewing the current school catering and cleaning arrangements and consider arrangements for the future. It was reiterated that Geraint Williams led on the work, by looking at the costs of the services for all schools. It was also reported that a funding formula was in place for catering and cleaning, detailing that £1.2million had been earmarked for catering and £1million for cleaning arrangements.

It was explained that the current arrangements for secondary education was that the allocation for the services reached the schools in accordance with the size of the school, but it was acknowledged that this did not reflect the service that was provided. It was therefore noted that modifications were likely in order to ensure that the services were funded correctly across the county. It was noted that this could lead to an increase or a reduction for the catering and

cleaning allocation on an individual school level. Attention was drawn to the fact that the amount of expenditure on a county level was not being adapted.

It was noted that headteachers were eager to hold further discussions on these formulas to ensure that everyone understood their nature and complexity and to consider whether the formulas continued to be suitable for schools. It was confirmed that the Department was eager to hold this discussion. They committed to hold these discussions at meetings of the strategic forums before reporting back on the headteachers' views, comments and recommendations, at a meeting of this Forum.

RESOLVED: To hold further discussions on catering and cleaning formulas after receiving comments and recommendations from the headteachers after a meeting of the strategic forums.

11. FINANCIAL CUTS DISCUSSIONS

The item was presented by the Head of Department, drawing attention to the following main points:

Members were reminded of the need to develop savings and cuts plans across the Council as a result of the current financial situation. It was explained that the Council had made cuts that were equivalent to 3% over the last two years across its services but the need for more cuts in the future was emphasised.

It was detailed that the Council was looking to achieve cuts equivalent to a further 3% over the next three years (approximately £36million). It was emphasised that robust decisions had not been made to date and that the Head of Department would submit the Department's plans for savings and cuts to the Cabinet Members and Council Leader over the coming weeks, highlighting the cost of services and listing statutory services.

It was reiterated that it was considered that this would be a cut of £2.7million to schools over the next three years. It was emphasised that there was no decision on the size of the impact of these cuts on schools, and it was noted that they hoped that a proportion of the cuts could be achieved internally. It was considered that the cuts on schools would be divided as follows:

- £1.3 million of cuts in the primary sector
- £1.2 million of cuts in the secondary sector
- £178,000 of cuts in the special sector.

The Forum was asked for their input on the best methods to go about trying to achieve these cuts and savings. The comments below were noted by the Forum members:

- It was agreed that the size of the cuts for the future was alarming.
- It was felt that it was important that schools received confirmation of the minimum service level that was acceptable during this difficult period, by clearly setting out the schools' specific requirements to the headteachers.
- Reference was made to the fact that it was important that no cuts impacted those schools which were already being protected.
- It was considered that medium sized schools often suffered during challenging periods of this type. It was explained that the cuts would likely lead to losing practical experiences because schools would not have sufficient staff numbers to supervise such activities.
- The importance of updating the Education Strategy was emphasised.
- It was considered that the education system was not efficient in Gwynedd at present due to the need to serve so many schools when pupil numbers were reducing.

- A general feeling was shared that individuals accepted that closing the county's smallest schools was inevitable.

In response to the comments, it was confirmed that arrangements were in place to update the education strategy and it was expected that it would highlight service expectations and school pressures in the future.

It was reiterated that it was likely that more schools would be categorised as being protected as this period continued. Unfortunately, it was confirmed that it was likely that holding discussions about the possibility of closing schools would be inevitable due to the financial squeeze. It was explained if schools had to close, the financial savings from maintaining those schools would be transferred to reduce the financial savings expected from other schools in the county.

It was considered that the Department's delay to modernise education also contributed to the situation which schools faced in the next few years. Reassurance was given that the Department would communicate any decisions and changes with the schools with transparency when moving forward.

12. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the items below would be discussed during the next meeting:

- Financial cuts
- Reporting back on schools funding formulas discussion - catering and cleaning.
- School balances and balances profile over the last few years.
- Information technology support - to fund for the future.

Members were welcomed to send any additional recommendations about items to the Democracy Services Officer.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None to note.

14. DATE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The intention was to hold the next meeting before the Autumn half term. It was confirmed that officers would send a meeting request when the data was confirmed.

It was agreed to commence the meeting at 3:45 to give Members sufficient time to join.

The meeting commenced at 3.30 p.m. and concluded at 4.10 p.m.