
SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM
Minutes of a meeting held at Ystafell Dwryd, Penrhyndeudraeth,
on 23 January from 14.00 until 15.50

Present:

Mr Godfrey Northam - Chairman

Cabinet Members: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Finance)

Head of Finance Department: Dafydd Edwards

School Headteachers: Secondary: Dylan Davies (Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen), Dylan Minnice (Ysgol Botwnnog), Dewi Lake (Ysgol y Moelwyn) and Arwyn Williams (Ysgol Tryfan).

Primary: Iona Jones (Ysgol Edmwnd Prys/Bro Cynfal), Richard Jones (Ysgol Garndolbenmaen), Menna Wynne Pugh (Ysgol Penybryn), Llion Williams (Ysgol y Garnedd), Alan Jones (Ysgol Nefyn) and Eleri Morgan Davies (Ysgol y Gorlan).

Church School: Elfed Morris (Ysgol Llandygai)

Teachers' Unions: Neil Foden (Ysgol Friars)

Governors: Gwilym Jones (Ysgol Borth y Gest)

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Cemlyn Williams, Elen Williams (Ysgol Brynrefail) and Annet Gray Frazer (Diocese). New members to the Forum were welcomed to their first meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of the Schools' Budget Forum that took place on 24 June as a true record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In terms of the national statistics of school balances, it was stated that Gwynedd was not the highest, and Swansea had reached the top. It was noted that Gwynedd was on 4.5% and on average was lower than the required 5%. It was added that when looking at secondary school balances 12 of the 22 authorities in Wales were in minus.

5. SCHOOL BALANCES 31/03/2020 OVER £50,000 (PRIMARY) OR £100,00 (SECONDARY)

Attention was drawn to the minute of the previous meeting where it was noted that a questionnaire would be sent out to schools with balances of over £50,000 (primary) or £100,000 (secondary).

It was noted that 20 schools fell into this category and the questionnaires had been received and noted what the schools would do with the money. It was necessary to go back to three schools to get more details on what they had presented in their original questionnaires.

It was further reported that:

- Financial planning at the schools was appropriate based on the forecasts available to the schools at when they completed the questionnaire. Therefore, the Authority would not refer the schools to any specific expenditure.
- A number of schools noted the need to use the balances to set a budget for this year or following years.
- A minority of schools noted a specific one-off expenditure. This was fine as long as the expenditure was undertaken.
- It was noted that it was necessary to confirm the legal position in terms of the status of an all-through school. Does an all-through school count as a primary school (entitled to balances of >£50k) or as a secondary school (entitled to balances of >£100k)?
- The need to question the whole education system, immediately when the final school balances were available (i.e May/June) was identified, if a school should invest in a specific matter to improve the school.

Resolved:

To accept the oral report.

6. SCHOOL FORECASTS 2019/20, 2021/22 AND 2022/23

It was explained that this year was unique as the Budget Forum had not been held in October as the Welsh Government's settlement was late. It was highlighted that the Council had requested all departments to find savings of up to £2 million across the Council. In order to discuss and scrutinise these savings, it was explained that discussions had taken place to look at the savings of all departments. It was explained that the Education Department had highlighted various cuts to schools as one of the options to find their savings target, however, the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee had refused this option. Following the receipt of the draft settlement, it was

highlighted that the Cabinet had resolved not to implement the cuts this year.

In terms of the Digital Strategy, it was noted that there was nothing to note and this cut would not now be implemented. It was expressed that there were no financial commitments to schools in 2020/21. It was added that some had thought that Cynnal finance would be available for the digital strategy but it was stated that it was additional finance. It was emphasised that further discussions were required and to forward plan for the next year. It was therefore noted that the Head of Information Technology would attend the next meeting.

It was stated that Governors had received the forecasts for this year and the adjustments seen were explained. It was expressed that 'Other Integration' would be moved to the centre in case there will be more need for statement integration. The department will consult on the options regarding what to do with the money. In terms of permanent expenditure, it was noted that the responses would be received back by 2 March and then there would be a discussion at the Cabinet. It was added, that this year the £392,000 at the centre and the spring term had not yet been calculated. It was stated that a letter would be sent to explain the situation.

The new line in the forecasts for ALN was highlighted as a result of the developments that are occurring. However, it was emphasised that it was necessary to see it before its meaning could be made clear.

Observations arising from the discussion

It was stated that it was necessary to send the forecast letter to Schools earlier, as it had arrived on the afternoon before the strategic meeting, therefore receiving it earlier would enable a higher standard of discussion.

ALN were discussed and it was noted that some Headteachers received more information than others as some were randomly invited to meetings. The importance that everyone received the information in plenty of time was stressed.

It was asked if the department intended to discuss ALN with all the headteachers and Forum Members as children were highlighted in the statement but funding was being taken from schools for 1:1. It was noted that a joint presentation with finance and area leaders would be given to give an understanding and input on how the money will be used.

Resolved:

To accept the report and a further report was requested with a paper analysis to give a wider picture of ALN work.

7. SCHOOL GRANTS 2020/21

It was noted that in terms of the Sixth Form Grant, the forecasts indicated there would be an increase of 8-9% to cope with the increase in costs. However, it was highlighted that more would be required to deal with costs in 2020/21. It was added that the accountants' report would be published on 5 February and the department was confident that money would be available.

Regarding the Education Improvement Grant, it was noted that there was no threat to the grant but the department had not received any formal information.

It was noted that the ALN Additional Grant was £280,000.

Regarding the Professional Development Grant, it was expressed that the money was received centrally by GwE. It was added that GwE will note how to use the money dependent on the Government's expectations.

8. DRAFT SETTLEMENT - GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/21

The Cabinet Member emphasised that the decision on the Council's Budget would be made by the full Council, not Cabinet Members.

The Head of the Finance Department noted that during last summer they had projected that £2 million savings would be required across the Council. The main points were outlined, such as that a high sum of over a 2% increase was in inflation. It was noted that there was pressure and the demand was high in the care field.

Despite this, it was stated that the budget was fairly positive as a result of a higher than expected settlement, however, the Government grant settlement did not address the additional demand on care services. Of the £2 million savings it was noted that £1m of them would be efficiency savings, to be harvested, but the other £1m would have an impact on the people of Gwynedd, and should be avoided. Consequently the remaining gap of £3m would be addressed by raising Council tax by 3.9%. It was stressed that discussions were continuing regarding the budget.

It was explained that a transport bid had been made by the department to fund the current expenditure level. The Government settlement grant was better than the Council had expected, and met with inflation, if not with the growth in the demand for services and consequently the Cabinet had determined not to harvest the general savings plan for Schools. Therefore, these savings will not impair the pupil: teacher ratio in the allocation formula between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

It was explained that the situation for 2020/21 was not clear yet, and the decision of the full Council on the 2020/21 Budget would be sought on 5 March 2020.

Observations arising from the discussion

Regarding teachers pension contributions, it was explained that there was an increase from September 2019 onwards and no further change was expected from September 2020.

In terms of savings plans for schools, it was noted that the Cabinet would not harvest the plan for Teaching Staff Resources. It was added that Members had supported the viewpoint of schools and the latest financial position had enabled the Council to avoid undertaking these savings.

9. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

The Forum was guided through the tables of the proposals for the next three years. It was noted that a consultation had taken place and the adjustments between the new versions and the old agreements were highlighted. It was expressed that the report requested a seal of approval to the agreements.

Observations arising from the discussion

It was highlighted that there was a different spreadsheet in the Authority /Schools Responsibilities in the Property agreement. It was stated that this was because it was different in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Resolved

A seal of approval was given to the Service Level Agreements proposal in appendices to this report to schools.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting will take place on 2nd March, and it was added that the agenda would include the following:

1. Digital Strategy
2. ALN Service
3. Integration Allocation

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm and concluded at 3.50pm.

CHAIR