

**TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
EDUCATION SERVICE**

TORFAEN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL GOVERNORS

**Summary of the meeting held on Tuesday, 9 February 2010 at 6.30 p.m. at
County Hall, Cwmbran**

Present: Mr G. Barnett (Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw), chairman
Messrs D. Phillips (Llantarnam Prim) P. Squire (Henllys)
R. Marchant (Abersychan) K. Jones (Greenmeadow) G. White (Ysgol
Gymraeg Cwmbran) M. Osborne (New Inn) A. Tait (Pontnewydd /
Hollybush)
Mesdames S. Norton (Ponthir) A. Parry (Pontymoile) Y. Balakrishnan
(Ysgol Bryn Onnen)

Also present: Mr M. Provis, Chief Education Officer
Mr D. James, Deputy head of Education Resources
Miss A. Jenkins, clerk to the Association

Apologies for absence: Cllr M. Barnett, Executive Member for Children and Young
People

Cllrs P. Seabourne (Blenheim Rd), B. Whitcombe (Hillside)
Rev P. Pearson (Ysgol Bryn Onnen), Mesdames E. Wilks
(Brookfield) M. Small (Cwmffrwdroer) P. Whitcombe (Hillside
Nursery) S. Smith (Llantarnam) J. Phillips (Greenmeadow) D.
Weaver (Garnteg) G. Caron (Llanyrafon) N. Jones (Woodlands)
M. Barker (Governors Wales)

1. Chairman's report

1.1 GB gave a report on his past year in office highlighting funding issues and the various new projects in Torfaen. He thanked the Executive Member and Chief Education Officer for attending the Association meetings and those officers who have given presentations. He also wished to record his thanks to the clerk for her support.

2. Officers/representatives

2.1 GB was appointed chairman for a further year and RM was appointed vice chairman. The post of Reserve Member was deferred to the next meeting.

2.2 GB was appointed as TASG representative on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. Budget update

- 3.1 DJ explained the budget uplift was slightly better than expected. However, this was still a bad year and future years would be even more difficult.
- 3.2 The funding gap in education had been closed with no impact on schools. Falling rolls savings had been used to offset school budgets. There will be an impact centrally of cuts but there is still a commitment from the authority to education. MP stressed this was not the case in all neighbouring authorities but it would be difficult to protect education in the future.
- 3.3 Compact funding will continue for 2010/11 although there is concern over how this is being used at present. Schools will be having in-depth profiles compiled resulting in a joint LEA/school action plan with Compact funding being used to address the action points identified. Secondary school profiles are being completed this year, primary profiles will commence next year.
- 3.4 The WAG element of the Better Schools Fund has been reduced by a third but central funding has remained at the same level in support of staff training. The areas where BSF can be used are likely to be reduced to three, WAG have not yet notified LEAs, schools will be informed as soon as possible.
- 3.5 DJ explained the use of grant funding can be audited at any time and needs to be monitored. Any funding not spent by 31 March will be lost. Some grants are now included in the Revenue Support Grant with those such as energy being earmarked for schools. Post 16 funding is higher than expected but still does not meet needs. The LEA is in discussion with headteachers.
- 3.6 Funding regulations will be changing with School Budget Forums having the power to approve and change budgets. Schools with a surplus of over 8% could be directed to spend or it could be clawed back into the education budget. MP stressed that when schools are holding a significant surplus it is difficult to put a case to members for additional funding.
- 3.7 Governors and governing bodies have thanked the authority for their commitment to schools.

4. Funding Formula

- 4.1 Following recent consultations on proposed changes to the formula some adjustments have been made. They will hopefully be approved by Cabinet next week with schools being notified of their budgets by early March. It was acknowledged there would be losers as well as winners and transitional

arrangements would be in place for those schools. The system will be reviewed each year with necessary adjustments being made in consultation with heads.

- 4.2 DJ reminded governors that 5% of budgets should be spent on SEN and the schools outcomes for pupils with special educational needs should be reported to governing bodies annually. A review of the bidding process for additional funding is to be carried out. MP was concerned at schools dependence on external officers to identify a pupils special needs. Staff need to be trained to make some diagnosis before involving the Education Psychologist.
- 4.3 There was concern that schools do not receive their budgets by mid – February as indicated in WAG guidance. MP explained that Torfaen does not receive its information from WAG to meet this timescale and it would be inappropriate to issue budgets on provisional figures. He reminded governors that the Minister has announced a review of bureaucracy as not enough money is going to schools. LEAs have to comply with many statutory duties and regulations, cuts in local government staffing and funding would inevitably impact on schools. If the funding were passed onto schools so could the responsibilities.

5. Minutes and matters arising

- 5.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2009 were confirmed subject to two minor amendments.
- 5.2 Some queries and comments had been received on the Partnership Agreement but most schools/governing bodies have already adopted the Agreement.
- 5.3 A number of changes have now been made to the Vetting and Barring Scheme. It was agreed that Granville Hern be invited to a future meeting to provide an update.

6. CEO items

6.1 Systemic Change Update

- 6.1.1 MP distributed the document ‘ Developing Systemic Change – Improvement in the Education Service’ (a copy will be available on the Torfaen website). New professional support teams will be interacting with schools after half term. All schools will still receive support from the LEA but the level of support will be based on need.

6.1.2 MP has discussed the document with headteachers as he considers it important to have face to face discussion rather than documents just being sent to schools. Any headteacher who is unable to attend the regular LEA/Heads meetings is offered an alternative appointment with MP. Heads are asked to contact MP if any difficulties arise with the new system.

6.2 Literacy strategy

6.2.1 Eight schools are to be involved in a First Steps pilot scheme to raise levels of literacy. Staff in those schools will be been trained and will be available to assist other schools.

6.3 Transformation

6.3.1 The report to Cabinet on the three options for post 16 learning was well received. Further evaluation is being undertaken in preparation for a members seminar. MP will be discussing options with secondary heads and chairs of governors. Any proposal must consider the needs of all post 16 learners and very difficult and challenging decisions will have to be made. No public consultation can be held until WAG has approved a final option. The forthcoming election could halt any process and the outcome could have an impact on the availability of future funding.

6.3.4 Governors raised a number of issues concerning interim arrangements for year 11 pupils, pupils being unable to follow courses at different schools because of the use of various exam boards and possible links with neighbouring authorities in the heads of the valley area. MP is following up discussions with WAG regarding a digital A-level course run from Abersychan. Discussions have also taken place on a collegiate approach and schools being asked to work together through Learning Pathways. MP stated that WAG funding is crucial for any post 16 option to proceed.

6.4 Working together

6.4.1 The LEA will be working together with Health and Social Care to support groups such as vulnerable parents and children in need.

6.5 Policy review

6.5.1 The LEA is currently reviewing a number of policies including personnel matters such as redundancy.

7. Governors Wales

- 7.1 GW news update included:
Application for funding 2010/11 has been made to WAG
GW is completing a 5 year strategic plan
Consultations have included: Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Teachers/ Transport LCO (safety standards of vehicles used for transporting learners) / Behaviour in schools – safe and effective intervention
- 7.2 The SE Wales School Governor Conference will be on 14 May 2010. Details will be in the Torfaen Governor Newsletter.
- 7.3 It was agreed that information on TASG could be included on the GW website section on local associations.

8 Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 8.1 In addition to issues addressed by MP, issues under discussion by Scrutiny Committee include schools modernisation, revenue budget 2010/11 and a review of co-optees to the committee.
- 8.2 Funding arrangements have been made with WAG to enable the Crownbridge development at Croesyceiliog to be completed within a reasonable timescale.

9. Referrals from governing bodies

9.1 Abersychan- RARELY cover

- 9.1.1 Governors reluctantly agreed to join the scheme but were concerned the agreement was too rigid and did not allow for local agreements. They also expected there to be a considerable cost in providing cover. It was felt a lighter approach could be used without imposing on staff. DJ was aware cost would be an issue and would welcome any feedback from schools.

9.2 Pontnewydd – school closures due to snow

- 9.2.1 During recent debates on schools opening or closing during periods of bad weather there had been no guarantee of supplies for school meals if schools opened. The LEA was asked to review this situation for the future. MP explained a working group is being set up, which will include the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, to look at all issues regarding closure. Decisions to close needed to be based on local circumstances and heads were conscious of

possible litigation. RM pointed out that the availability of transport also had to be considered by some schools even if the site was cleared.

9.2.2 Some schools had been upset at e-mails sent from the authority regarding decisions to close or open, especially when staff had made great efforts to clear sites but surrounding roads were not treated. MP explained the council did have to prioritise access routes.

9.3 Kemys Fawr – Inspection of bilingualism

9.3.1 Concern had been expressed at the difference in inspection arrangements for Welsh in an English medium school and English in a Welsh medium school. It was explained that the legal status of the school was a consideration as Welsh was not a statutory requirement under 7 years of age. MP also informed governors that bilingualism means any two languages not only Welsh and English.

10. Next meeting

10.1 The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 23 March 2010 at 6.30 p.m. at County Hall.

Anne Jenkins
Clerk to the Association