Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM
Tuesday, 8th July 2025
(Civic Centre)

NOTES

PRESENT:

Abby Sharpe (Abercanaid Community)
Jeff Beard (Cyfarthfa High)
Paul Phillips (Pen-Y-Dre High)
James Voros (Gellifaelog Primary)
Rhiannon Stephen Davies (Greenfield Special) Late
Anna Morris (Heolgerrig Community)
Keith Maher (Pen-Y-Dre High) (Chair)
Mike O'Neill (Pen-Y-Dre High)
Simone Roden (Ynysowen Primary)
Sarah Townsin (Ysgol Coed Y Dderwen)
Sue Walker (Director of Education)
Craig Flynn (Director of Finance)
Anthony Lewis (Head of School Planning, Support & Resources)
Garhard Williams (Union Representative)
Stuart James

IN ATTENDANCE:

Joanna Lewis (LMS Manager)
Louise Ballinger (Group Accountant)
Emma France (Clerk to the Forum)
Phil Strand
Alun Teagle

No	Discussion/Action
1.	**Apologies** Apologies AB, GL, OM, SH RSD late (item 5) The Chair opened the meeting and thanked all for their attendance. All parties introduced themselves.
2.	**Minutes of meetings** The below minutes were agreed as true record:

No	Discussion/Action
	• ***18th March 2025 SBF***
3.	**Matters arising from the minutes** Action Agenda item 5 not taken forward but will share good practice across eco committees

4.	Cleaning contract
	
	AL – Report is late apologies oversite on AL part, fell off work programme. Will be part of work programme moving forward
	
	Members received a report outlining the cleaning contract
	
	AT gave outline of programme
	
	Background
	• The Local Authority is required to consult with the Schools Forum on contracts exceeding the procurement threshold of approximately £75,000.
	• The current Schools Cleaning Contract, valued at £2.85 million over three years, necessitates Forum consultation.
	• The contract, managed by the Local Authority on behalf of 17 schools, is currently held by Solo Service Group and expires on **31 August 2025**.
	• Schools not included in the contract manage their own cleaning staff.
	• The Learning Department collaborates with Corporate Procurement to manage the contract, ensuring quality assurance and compliance.
	
	Current Position
	• A procurement retendering process has been completed to secure a new contract starting **September 2025**.
	• The new contract is for **3 years**, with an optional **1-year extension**, consistent with previous arrangements.
	
	Summary of Evaluation Process
	• **Four companies** were invited to tender.
	• Evaluation criteria included quality, decarbonisation, and social value.
	• **Pre-interview rankings:**
	  ◦ 1st – Tenderer 4 (43 points)
	  ◦ 2nd – Tenderer 3 (37.7 points)
	  ◦ 3rd – Tenderer 1 (34.35 points)
	  ◦ 4th – Tenderer 2 (31.1 points)
	• **Post-interview rankings:**
	  ◦ 1st – Tenderer 4 (65.92 points)
	  ◦ 2nd – Tenderer 3 (57.68 points)
	  ◦ 3rd – Tenderer 1 (55.44 points)
	  ◦ 4th – Tenderer 2 (48.51 points)
	• Tenderer 4 was the **highest scoring** and **lowest cost** bidder, offering a price **13% lower** than the next cheapest tender.
	• Tenderer 4 also achieved the **highest quality score**.

No	Discussion/Action
	Contract Award • The contract award recommendation is for **Tenderer 4**. • Approval is required from the **Directors of Education and Finance**. • **Notice of award** is scheduled for the **week commencing 7 July 2025**. **Contract Value** • **Annual Value:** £960,000+ • **Total (3 years):** £2.88 million • **Optional 1-year extension:** £960,000 • The new contract reflects a **0.9% increase** (£9k per annum) over the current contract, equating to approximately **£5k** for the current financial year. • Future pricing (from April 2026) will be subject to inflationary pressures such as living wage, NI, and pension contributions. **<u>Questions/ Comment</u>** PP – Thank you for apologies for not bringing this to forum sooner, this is in essence not a consultation. PP this is a 2.88 Million pound contract, there is a clause which means the unit price can be increased in line with changes to minimum wage, changes to the tax rates. What caveats are in place to limit those changes? AT – some are out of our control for example living wage, there is flexibility around the charges and they can go up or down based on requirements. PP this is 9K more AT Yes equates to a 0.9% increase. AM – when will school be informed of the successful tender? AT – aim to get the information to schools before the end of term. AM – are there assurance that all recruitment checks for example DBS will be in place AT – Yes all compliant PP – it this is a consultation surly we can be told who the preferred tender is? AL – agree but the information must remain confidential until announced officially AT – the current contractor is the preferred tender – SOLO Members thanked AT for the paper AT left the meeting RSD joined the meeting

No	Discussion/Action
5.	<u>**SIMS re-Procurement**</u> Members received a report outlining the SIMS re-procurement **Background** • The Welsh schools MIS market has evolved significantly since 2021/22, following changes to the SIMS contract model. • Merthyr schools are currently 18 months into their existing MIS contract, which is outdated and non-compliant with procurement regulations. • MTCBC is advised to use this opportunity to assess the current MIS landscape and ensure future compliance, value for money, and alignment with school needs. **Project Overview and Timeline** **Phase 1: Awareness & Strategy (by July 2025)** • Headteachers are being briefed on MIS market options. • Feedback is being gathered to shape Merthyr's MIS strategy. • Schools are identifying representatives for a MIS Review Group. **Phase 2: Define MIS Approach (July 2025)** • Schools use various third-party systems linked to SIMS. • A data collection exercise is underway to identify these systems and explore consolidation opportunities. **Phase 3: Governance & Review Group (July 2025)** • A MIS Review Group will be formed, including subject specialists. • The group will attend product demos and help define the MIS specification. **Phase 4: Product Demonstrations (by December 2025)** • Key MIS providers will demo their systems to school staff. • Deep-dive reviews and trial systems will be used to assess functionality. **Phase 5: Specification & Procurement Prep (by Easter 2026)** • A final MIS specification will be created and approved by the Commercial Governance Group (CGG). • Schools Forum approval will be sought to allow the LA to procure on behalf of schools. **Phase 6: Tendering & Contract Award (by Early Summer 2026)** • A competitive procurement process will be launched. • A panel including school representatives will evaluate bids. **Phase 7: Migration Preparation (by September 2026)** • If the incumbent wins, training will be needed for SIMS Next Gen. • If a new provider is selected, data migration and third-party app integration will be required. **Phase 8: Migration & App Reconnection (by Feb 2027)** • A 12–18 week migration programme will be implemented. • Training will be provided to ensure readiness for the January PLASC return. **Phase 9: Contract Termination (by Christmas 2026)** • 90-day notice must be served to ESS SIMS by each school if a new provider is selected. **Phase 10: Contingency (by March 30, 2027)** • A 6–12 week contingency period is built in to ensure successful migration and data access. **Key Considerations** • **Governance:** A structured governance model and MIS Review Group will guide the process.

No	Discussion/Action
	• **Costs:** Migration, training, and third-party app reconnections may incur costs, which will be specified in the procurement. • **Support:** The SIMS Support Team will require retraining if a new MIS is adopted.

Summary Timeline

Phase	Target Completion
Awareness & Strategy	July 2025
Governance & Demos	December 2025
Procurement Preparation	Easter 2026
Tendering & Contract Award	Early Summer 2026
Migration Preparation	September 2026
Migration Completion	February 2027
Contingency & Final Wrap-Up	March 30, 2027

Recommendations for Consideration

The School Budget Forum is asked to consider the following recommendations:

1. Merthyr schools engage with a single main MIS provider to provide all core MIS functions, and enable the school to complete all statutory reporting obligations.
2. The LA should seek agreement from each school Governing Body, for the LA to act on school's behalf to procure and select a MIS product, make judgements on functionality and design a requirements specification.
3. The LA will form an MIS Review Group, made up of school and LA delegates, to conduct demonstrations with potential MIS providers and design the school's MIS requirements specification.
4. A selection of representatives from the MIS Review Group will sit on the eventual selection panel as we move forward into the competitive procurement process.
5. To consider future recommendations on the preferred approach for procuring a MIS for schools. The MIS Review Group, following demonstrations and the requirements design, will make a recommendation to the SBF
6. Review and approve the project's governance structure (See report fig.a)
7. Review and approve the project's timeline (see report fig.b)
8. The SBF working group to receive project updates, throughout the Autumn term, and as necessary thereafter.

Questions / Comments

Members thanked PS for the comprehensive report

KM – can you outline the reason for this?

No	Discussion/Action
	PS – Dual motive – Capita SIM has had the monopoly in this area for several years. From a procurement perspective we have a duty to carry out exercise to ensure current provider is best value for money and provides the best system for schools. Secondly many schools but third party add ons, which can prove costly, we need to ensure that there are not systems out there that can provide a holistic package that better meets the needs. KM – the scope of the paper and timeline is very well constructed. What are the costs relating to the programme for schools, there will also be migration of data and training implications we need to take into account. We need to ensure that the work required does not outweigh a small financial gain. PS – costings to schools is currently circa £100,000 per annum. I am not sure of the costs relating to the third party systems, I am currently carrying out a scoping exercise to see what all the additional systems costs and what functions they carry out to enable me to get a full picture of the current costs and the requirements of schools. I have currently set up a working group with key school staff included. KM – I am very happy that the working group has the key staff members sitting on there, business managers, ALNCO. PP – what will the specifications for the system be? PS – work in progress, currently looking at what schools currently have and why JB – the current system the schools are very reliant on you PS for support, your support is excellent, but can we consider how this system will be supported form an IT perspective to ensure should PS be on leave or not available there are other team members to support. PS – there is a very small team and they are all fully deployed to schools. The new generation systems make it more user friendly and there are 'how to …' videos. I will train different members of the team on different aspects so should I be unavailable there will be support. No further questions all members thanked PS and agreed to proceed with the timeline as outlined in the report
6.	**<u>School finding Consultation</u>** Members noted the content of **The School Funding, Budget Statements and Outturn Statements (Wales) Regulations 2026** School Funding Regulations 2026 (Wales) The Welsh Government is consulting on proposed changes to school funding regulations, aiming to merge and update three key sets of regulations: the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010, the Education Budget Statements (Wales) Regulations 2002, and the Education Outturn Statements (Wales) Regulations 2003. These changes seek to improve transparency, consistency, and fairness in

No	Discussion/Action
	school funding across Wales. Key proposals include: • Federated Schools: Federations may opt to receive a single, merged budget share, reducing administrative burden and enabling strategic financial planning. **Agree** • Pupil Numbers: Local authorities use the latest January PLASC data to calculate pupil numbers, ensuring consistency and comparability. ***AL we currently have three count dates with and additional count for Pre nursery in April. With a retrospective adjustment in the following year. We would need to consider the impact on schools*** KM – regarding the potential change to count dates, we would move away from estimates within the FA and reduce the retrospective adjustments. SR – more sensible that current model CF – we would have the situation where there would be no in year changes for changes in numbers in September. AL – there may be some flexibility PP – if there is the ability to be flexible, I think it would be a positive move as a school who has been greatly impacted by retrospective adjustments and the clawback for EOTUS pupils. RSD – slightly different in SS due to the nature of admissions into SS and the banding of pupils the FA is often considerably out this year I received and in year adjustment rather that wait for retrospective adjustment due to he large significant change. SR – we would need flexibility to account for a large swing in pupil number in September CF – the point of this consultation is to get consistency across Wales, before the consultation has closed we are discussing how we can build in flexibility to meet our needs. AL – I sense we welcome the proposals but would need some flexibility to account for pupil changes in September? ***Agree AL statement*** • Deprivation Funding: Authorities must include deprivation factors in their funding formulae, based on eligibility for free school meals or residency in areas of high deprivation. ***AL we currently use WIMD data could revisit in the future*** PP – With regard to the deprivation funding, I have looked at the data published monthly by ward by the DWP and I can see we currently have 7,027 families that are entitled to FSM based on their benefits. Do we use this date to target marketing or schools where the uptake of FSM does not

No	Discussion/Action
	match the DWP data? I know in several schools the uptake of FSM is far lower than the eligibility **Agree** AL – we have several marketing campaigns both at school and LA level, if you could show us how best to use that data PP it would be appreciated • Surplus Budgets: The current fixed monetary thresholds for surplus intervention will be replaced with a 5% threshold, applicable to all school types, to reflect varying school sizes. ***AL – current thresholds*** ***Primary £50,000 or 5% whatever the highest*** ***Secondary £100,000 or 4% whatever the highest*** ***Would change to a flat 5%*** **Agree** • Deficit Recovery Plans: Governing bodies must submit deficit recovery plans for approval, with clear processes and timelines outlined in local authority financial schemes. ***AL – we have systems within the LA, with PLD application process, monitoring of PLD and a focus on schools the indicators show they are moving towards a deficit budget*** ***Agree*** • Transparency and Publication: Local authorities must publish their financial schemes and funding formulae online and provide electronic copies to schools. Budget statements will be standardised using Welsh Government templates. **Agree** • Delegation Clarity: Authorities must clearly identify which parts of the Schools Budget are retained centrally versus delegated to schools, enhancing comparability. ***AL we need to consider what is currently delegated to see if it is still appropriate*** ***SR – I agree as a school the cuts we have faced in percentage terms (7%) do not accurate reflect the cuts. Due to the delegation much of the budget we have no control over the spend for example Breakfast club SLA Frees school meal SLA, council tax etc. in real terms the cut to our budget is significantly higher.*** ***AL we will carry out an exercise to calculate the percentage cut in terms of actual spends the school can affect.*** **Agree** • Schedule Revisions: Minor updates to Schedules 1–3 include reclassifying non-domestic rates and removing outdated expenditure limits. Schedule 3 will be removed, with key provisions retained elsewhere. **Agree**

No	Discussion/Action
	• Outturn Statements: Submission deadlines will be moved to 31 July to align with financial reporting practices and ensure timely data for settlements. **Agree** These changes aim to modernise school funding processes, support equitable resource distribution, and align with current legislation and educational needs. **Additional questions / comments** JB Appendix A and B mentioned in the consultation are not attached AL they are technical items I will circulate **Way forward** AL/ JL/ LB will draft response and circulate to all members. Please note the consultation ends on the 2md September, draft response will be circulated over the summer break
7.	**Membership update** KM, OM and MON terms end on 31st August 2025 KM – Appointed for a two-year period – due to HT vacancy in CHS OM – Appointed for a two-year period due to HT vacancy in TPS and HT in CPS not wishing to fulfil role Governors' association put forward MON as governor member Due to long term vacancy for a governor in the SS or BCA, governor association put forward PL as a reserve should an additional member be required.
8.	**Provisional dates 25/26 academic year**

Group	2025 - 2026	Time
Schools Budget Forum	**23.09.2025**	11:00 - 1:00

No	
	<table><tr><td rowspan="5"></td><td>**04.11.2025**</td><td>11:00 - 1:00</td></tr><tr><td>**09.12.2025**</td><td>11:00 - 1:00</td></tr><tr><td>**20.01.2026**</td><td>11:00 - 1:00</td></tr><tr><td>**24.03.2026**</td><td>11:00 - 1:00</td></tr><tr><td>**14.07.2026**</td><td>11:00 - 1:00</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td rowspan="7">Schools Budget Forum Working Group</td><td>**09.09.2025**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td>**07.10.2025**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td>**02.12.2025**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td>**13.01.2026**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td>**10.03.2026**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td>**05.05.2026**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td>**16.06.2026**</td><td>10:30 - 12:00</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> **Approved**
9.	**Any other business as directed by the chairperson** **Enhanced Support funding** SR -Schools are still waiting for the names of the pupils who have been included in the enhanced support funding JV – in the previous forum we were assured there would be transparency, and we would receive this information JL – I am currently reviewing the information, and it will be sent out before the end of term KM – it is disappointing that this information was not provided at the same time as the allocation **Impact of cuts to school funding** SR /KM raised concerns over the funding of the PA, 3% has been included in the FA and budget estimates. The actual PA is 4%. There are concerns from colleagues across the LA and amongst unions that there will be and expectation that schools will need to fund the 1%. This will amount to a cut across the education sector in 25/26 which we were assured there would not be any cuts to the school budget in 25/26. Due to changes in the FA of teaching staff many school have already received a ‘cut’ this additional 1% on teaching staff would be hugely impactful to school budgets. It was noted in a recent scrutiny report that schools across the LA in the last two years had lost 150 positions. There needs to be a recognition that this is impacting young peoples education, it is impacting schools ability to meet statutory obligations and is impact the safeguarding and H&S of pupils and staff alike.

No	Discussion/Action
	Schools are facing a tipping point there are already schools that are unable to recover the deficit over a three / four-year period. If there are further cuts in 26/27 it will leave several more schools in a position where they are unable to balance in the medium term. CF – PA in FA is currently as stated 3%, we have also included full funding for the NI increase, due to the Barnett formula Wales is only receiving 70% of the NI increase for public sector employees. The LA MTFP currently shows a deficit of 9 million in 26/27 raising to 20 million in 27/28 I am unable to give assurances around further cuts we are facing a difficult challenging financial situation. KM – I accept what you are saying, but it must be understood, the impact of loosing 150 jobs across the sector in a two year period will impact ALN, Speech and Language, mental health and emotional therapies, behaviour and ultimately the attainment of pupils across the LA. Due to these cuts we will see significant increases in the number of exclusions and mainstream schools not being able to meet the increasing complex needs of ALN pupils. This will increase the LA costs to provide education to these pupils. MON – we need to ensure that WG are fully aware of the potential impact of not funding schools appropriately SR – we need to be clear further cuts will mean we are not able to keep our pupils and staff safe and the education and attainment of pupils across the LA will be impacted. there will be more NEET pupils which will have significant cost implications for the LA. GW – the union executive met on the 23rd June, there is real concern in the NEU of the impact of the cuts on pupils and staff. Unions are considering industrial action. KM – we understand the political picture but there needs to be an understanding that schools need to be safe, schools need to provide education, we have 150 less colleagues that we did 2 years ago that has had significant impact on the pupils of MT. As a forum we need to keep articulating the message so all parties are aware of the impact of the decisions they are making. Chair closed meeting and thanked all for attendance.