



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM
Working Group
Wednesday, 18th March 2026
(Unit 5)

NOTES

PRESENT:

Stuart James (Afon Taf)
Owen Morgan (Cyfarthfa Park Primary)
Simone Roden (Ynysowen Community Primary) - Chair
James Voros (Gellifaelog Primary)
Sarah Hopkins (Blessed Carlo Acutis)
Alwen Bowen (Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Joanna Lewis (LMS Manager)
Stacey Green (LMS Resources Senior Officer)
Louise Ballinger (Education Accountant)
Phillip Strand (Schools ICT Manager)
Chris Jones (Building & Property Services Group Manager)
Fairyal Pabani (School Catering Manager)

No	Discussion/Action
1.	<u>Apologies</u> Apologies for absence were received from Rhiannon Stephens-Davies, Anthony Lewis and Emma France.
2.	<u>Minutes</u> Minutes of the meeting held on 20 th January 2026 were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising.
3.	<u>MIS update</u> Phillip Strand attended the meeting to give an update on the new MIS contract timeline. PS gave an overview of the MIS systems on offer and how each package has been scored. Overall view was that the quality of the system is more important than the price. If we do move from SIMS, other LA's that have done this have now been on their new system for a year, we can learn from this. We have 3 providers that are available/suitable. Tender Timeline & Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Target go live date: 29 April.• 25-30 days for tenderers to respond• 25-30 days for panel to independently evaluate• 1 day moderation

No	Discussion/Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 day award • 10-day stand-off – aim to get to this stage, this side of the summer holidays • Evaluation panel will include LA representatives and selected school staff. • Some school staff may be asked to score only specific specialist sections rather than all questions. • We are mindful of availability and will work the timeline around examination timetable. <p>SR: will your team have capacity to deal with the extra workload? PS: this has not been fully explored yet. There will be pressure points, we will be adjusting our planned work to cope with this. There will be support from the vendor to help with coordination, migration and planning.</p> <p>SR: will there be a cost implication to schools? PS: We anticipate the pricing to be there or thereabouts the current MIS costs, with the additional third-party costs from School Budget to consider as future savings. There are costs for the LA to consider, such as overlapping contract costs (new contract will start before the old one expires) and one-off the implementation cost.</p> <p>SH: could training be incorporated into INSET days? PS: There will be a structured online training programme, staff will need in-time training to attempt tasks as they crop up throughout the year. This process will likely go on for a whole school year. The Schools ICT Team will need training and to be accredited before we can support the MIS ourselves. The company will provide support in the meantime.</p> <p>The group thanked PS for the update.</p> <p>PS left the meeting</p>
4.	<p><u>Property Services SLA</u></p> <p>Chris Jones joined the meeting.</p> <p>SR passed over to CJ to provide an update on the outstanding actions.</p> <p>CJ: Invoice trial – this will be rolled out to all schools soon. This has been slightly delayed to only recently receiving the first batch of invoice from Cardo.</p> <p>SR: will the satisfaction survey be rolled out with the invoice trial? CJ: currently working through getting this set up – trying to get this embedded in the email that gets sent out. We want it to be a simple format, e.g. score and comment. There will be a baseline score and if the contractor is not meeting this, a member of the property services team will liaise with schools and the contractor to investigate and rectify.</p> <p>SR: what are the timescales on this? CJ: hopefully within a couple of months – meeting with Sian Thomas being arranged soon to move forward with this.</p> <p>CJ: Responsive repairs – we now have Cardo as the new contractor; we would appreciate any feedback based on work completed so far.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>OM: seems pretty efficient so far, no complaints. But early days in the contract to fully assess.</p> <p>CJ: Servicing costs – work has been completed on this, just needs to be double checked that all works have been included.</p> <p>SR: how far away are we from this being completed? This information is important for schools.</p> <p>CJ: approximately a month. This list will include what plant each building has and the servicing costs associated with this plant.</p> <p>SR: (Question to JL) once we have this data, how does this look in terms of school funding?</p> <p>JL: this would be the next stage – does it need to be incorporated now or built into the formula for 2027.28. The outcome of this exercise will need to be compared to the figures currently used to fund schools.</p> <p>SR: with things like rainwater harvest systems, it would be interesting to know how much this saves schools on their annual water costs</p> <p>CJ: we should have this information. This is currently being looked into for another school.</p> <p>CJ: with the servicing charges it needs to be right – hopefully won't take longer than a month.</p> <p>JL: Property services have shared their login for the schedule of rates website. We can share this with schools so that you can have access to cross reference charges with invoices.</p> <p>SR: is there an update on RAMIS training?</p> <p>CJ: there is a new system (Civica) that could potentially replace RAMIS, at the moment the two systems are being run simultaneously. It hasn't been decided yet whether Civica will replace RAMIS or not. If staff need training, please send a list over.</p> <p>SG: a list has been sent to Carrie Thomas.</p> <p>CJ: send to me instead – it's looking likely that RAMIS will stay so staff will need training.</p> <p>CJ: feedback from 10% inspections – waiting on SB to share his workings on this. Once this is received this will be shared with schools.</p> <p>Summary:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invoice trial and satisfaction survey to be rolled out within a few months. 2. Servicing costs analysis to be finalised and shared with JL/AL within 1 month if possible. 3. JL/AL to compare costs with formula. 4. Analysis of financial benefit of rainwater harvest systems. 5. JL to share schedule of works login. 6. SG to provide CJ with list of staff that require RAMIS training. 7. CJ/JL to share 10% inspection results <p>SR: thanked CJ for the update.</p> <p>CJ left the meeting.</p>
5.	<p><u>School meals SLA</u></p> <p>Fairyal Pabani joined the meeting.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>FP apologised for not being able to attend the previous meeting and provided an update on the progress of the Catering SLA evaluation.</p> <p>FP: an evaluation form has been sent out to all primary schools, this was slightly delayed due to staff absence. Responses are due in end of this week (W.E. 20.3.26). Any changes to the menus needed based on this feedback can be incorporated into the new menu in the Autumn Term. This will coincide with new healthy eating regulations that are due to be published soon and implemented in October 2026. This will include recommendations on portion size. There will be no change to the current menu in the Summer Term. If there are any urgent changes needed to be made following the results of the evaluation form then these will be considered.</p> <p>One of the main concerns following the SLA evaluation was how the side salad/vegetables is currently served, in particular with food that contains a sauce, i.e. curry, beans. FB shared a copy of the menu with the group and highlighted the meals she thinks this would relate to. Going forward all veg will be served in a separate receptacle for these meals.</p> <p>SR: even though the veg will now be served separately, it will still be wasted by most pupils and end up as waste. Does it have to be served to all pupils?</p> <p>FB: the guidelines state that a portion of vegetables must be provided and in the new guidelines this has been increased to two portions.</p> <p>SR: do you have to provide it or offer it?</p> <p>FP: even if we have to just offer it, kitchen staff will still have to prepare this, the wastage won't be reduced.</p> <p>SR: that's understandable but some children will refuse to eat anything on the plate just because something they don't like has been included. If they were able to choose what goes on their plate, they would at least be eating something.</p> <p>FB: the concern here would be that the child is not receiving a healthy balanced meal.</p> <p>SR: we would deal with any concerns over child's diet with the parents but at least the child wouldn't be going hungry.</p> <p>JV: within the curriculum we do a lot of work with pupils regarding making healthier choices – having them choose what goes on their plate would coincide with this.</p> <p>FP: we'll have to wait for the new guidelines to be published and see if this is possible. At the moment we have to provide a healthy balanced meal.</p> <p>SR: some other elements of the guidelines are not fully being adhered too, e.g. bread being offered.</p> <p>FP: the bread is just a recommendation – at the moment this based on school preference. This is one of the questions in the evaluation form.</p> <p>SR: why can't this be the same for how meals are served regarding what gets put on the plates?</p> <p>FP: the bread is an addition for hungrier pupils but the vegetables are part of the required balanced meal. Hopefully serving the vegetables in a separate receptacle will solve the issue.</p> <p>SH: is there a reason why a wrap is offered instead of a sandwich?</p> <p>FP: Yes, we don't have the capacity to make sandwiches – we previously had sandwiches on the menu but this company went into administration and ceased trading. The new supplier is extremely expensive and doesn't provide shelf life in line with deliveries.</p> <p>Fairyal provided an update on salad bars – all LA's have been contacted to enquire if they have salad bars and if so how do they manage them, regarding wastage and hygiene etc. Not all have replied yet but by the next meeting there should be an update. Edwardsville have trialled using separates for salad, waiting on feedback from school.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>SR: any questions for FP? OM: can schools now offer seconds to hungry pupils if there is food leftover? FP: this needs to be agreed before rolling out. This may be only for years 5 & 6 and only if there are leftovers. SR: it states in the previous meetings that this has already been agreed? Can this be shared with cooks to action ASAP? FB: this will be done ready to be actioned after the Easter break and in line with the new regulations. It would be better to have changes all made at once. I will liaise with the school kitchens to make these changes.</p> <p>SJ: any update on the pre-ordering in Bluerunner? FP: a meeting has been held with Bluerunner and this issue has been escalated to the regional manager. There is a new account manager for Wales, I will email her again and copy you all in on the email for transparency (Comp Heads)</p> <p>Summary:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All headteachers to respond to evaluation. 2. All side veg to be served in separate receptacle when accompanied by 'wet' food. Crudites should always in served in separate receptacle. 3. Leftover food to be offered to hungry pupils – FP to agree with Heads first and then notify all cooks. <p>SR thanked FP for the update.</p> <p>FP left the meeting.</p>
6.	<p><u>Any other business</u></p> <p>None</p>