



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

SCHOOLS BUDGET FORUM
Tuesday, 27th January 2026
Civic Centre

NOTES

PRESENT: Keith Maher (Pen-Y-Dre High) - Chair
Abby Sharpe (Abercanaid Community)
Stuart James (Afon Taf High)
Sarah Hopkins (Blessed Carlo Acutis)
Owen Morgan (Cyfarthfa Park Primary)
James Voros (Gellifaelog Primary)
Paul Phillips (Gellifaelog Primary)
Rhiannon Stephens-Davies (Greenfield Special)
Anna Morris (Heolgerrig Community)
Mike O'Neill (Pen Y Dre High)
Simone Roden (Ynysowen Community Primary)
Sarah Townsin (Ysgol Coed Y Dderwen)
Alwen Bowen (Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug)
Sue Walker (Director of Education)
Craig Flynn (Director of Finance)
Anthony Lewis (Head of School Planning, Support & Resources)
Councillor Gareth Lewis (Cabinet Portfolio for Education)

IN ATTENDANCE: Joanna Lewis (LMS Manager)
Emma France (Clerk to the Forum)
Louise Ballinger (Education Accountant)
Phil Strand (Schools ICT Manager)

No	Discussion/Action
1.	<u>Apologies / Welcome</u> Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Jeff Beard and Garhard Williams.
2.	<u>Minutes of Meetings</u> The minutes of the meeting held on the below were agreed as a true record. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2nd December 2025 - Forum Working Group• 9th December 2025 - School Budget Forum• 20th January 2026 - Forum Working Group
3.	<u>Matters arising from the minutes.</u> Nil.

No	Discussion/Action
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4. MIS Update
 Overview:

An update was provided on progress relating to the re-procurement of the Schools Management Information System (MIS). Work continues through the MIS Review Group, involving schools and LA representatives.

Activities completed since the last update:

- The MIS Review Group has been established to lead on requirements gathering, evaluation and procurement recommendations.
- System demonstrations have been delivered for the most commonly used MIS products in Wales, including the incumbent provider. Sessions were open to all schools.
- Engagement with other Local Authorities has taken place to learn from their procurement and migration experiences.
- A school survey has been completed to capture key priorities and requirements.
- A full mapping and analysis of 3rd-party/bolt-on systems has been undertaken, including annual costs and compatibility considerations. Opportunities for consolidation have been identified.

Costs

- SIMS & hosting (excl. secondary hardware): £77k per annum.
- LA-funded systems (ParentPay & Cypad): £30k per annum.
- School-funded 3rd-party systems: £110k per annum.

Numbers

- Schools currently use 16 system categories in addition to SIMS.
- There are 125 individual 3rd-party system instances across schools.
- The largest spend area is Parental Engagement & Safeguarding, totalling £77k of the £110k school-funded spend.

Draft Procurement Timeline

Phase	Start Date	Duration
Tender Go Live	1 April 2026	30 days
Evaluation (Written & Demos)	1 May 2026	30–40 days
Moderation & Panel Scoring	June 2025*	1 day
Award	June 2026	1 day
Standstill	June 2026	10 days
Approval	June 2026	1 day
Contingency	July 2026 (term time)	20 days
Contract	August 2026	30 days

*Note: “June 2025” appears inconsistent in the source timeline and may require correction.

Ongoing Activities (December–January)

- Developing a compliant procurement framework with procurement colleagues.
- Refining user needs and the MIS specification.

No	Discussion/Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LA officers engaging with systems for hands-on testing. • Arranging deep-dive follow-up demo sessions. <p><u>Work Remaining</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise procurement question set. • Establish the procurement evaluation panel. • Engage with additional framework suppliers who are not yet widely adopted in Wales. • Arrange site visits to schools already operating new MIS platforms. • Report to the Commercial Governance Board. • Provide a further report to the SBF in January. <p><u>Questions / Comments</u></p> <p>PP: What will the critical success factors for the project be? PS: Through engagement with schools, we would want to consolidate the number of systems with schools into one standardised system, with ease of support and training. Safeguarding 3rd party will remain, as currently schools happy with providers they have, and they hold a lot of information, and there is an ease of reporting which we do not want to disrupt. But there will be a safeguarding model available on the new system.</p> <p>PP: Migration of information - will there be auto-migration, will there be an opportunity to test the migration of data? PS: One of the requirements of the new system will be that it needs to be compatible with current system to allow for auto-migration. We will be testing the migration capabilities as part of the procurement testing process. We have the anecdotal evidence of third-party migration.</p> <p>KM: I believe one of the tenders will be a current provider? PS: Yes, that is correct we currently believe that there will be three providers who will be able to meet our needs.</p> <p>PP: Will there be school involvement in the tendering process? PS: Yes, we have a working group set up, we will also bring the findings back to this group.</p> <p>MON: Who will be part of the demonstrations? PS: Evaluation will be a pre-selected participation group; it will be 3/4 questions and 1/4 demonstration. Where there will be set tasks, each task will be evaluated by an expert in that area for example examination or timetabling officer. Then there will be an overall evaluation.</p> <p>SR: Will you be taking feedback from other LAs where these systems have been rolled out. We have received both positive and negative feedback. We are not able to use feedback as part of tests; we need to ensure all tests are equal and transparent. We will ensure the tests are rigorous and the systems are able to meet our needs.</p> <p>AL: Next steps, can we ask for the tender specifications to be shared with either the School Forum Working Group or the whole School Forum? PS: Yes, we can provide feedback on tender specifications and regarding the route to market.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>KM: We need to be aware of the challenges schools may face for example the number of training hours allocated for the new system does not match with the training needs / requirements. We need to ensure the staff using the system, should we have a new provider, receive all the training time they require to fulfil the role.</p> <p>The Chair thanked PS for his presentation and update and all the work being carried out on behalf of the schools.</p>
5.	<p><u>Revenue Settlement & ISB Efficiency Savings 2026/2027</u></p> <p>Overview:</p> <p>The Forum received a presentation from CF outlining the 2026/2027 Local Government Settlement, the Council’s overall revenue budget position, and the specific implications for Education and Schools. The overall LA budget shortfall is now estimated to be £509,000 which is a significant decrease on previous estimates.</p> <p><u>Final Settlement 2026/2027</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Local Authorities received a 4.5% revenue increase (£282m). • Merthyr Tydfil received a 4.7% increase (£6.446m), rising from £135.780m to £142.226m. • Merthyr’s settlement ranked 5th best of the 22 Welsh LAs. • Former specific grants totalling £134.263m (Wales-wide) were transferred into the settlement; Merthyr’s share is £2.654m. • No new responsibilities were included in the settlement. • Welsh Government did not provide an indicative settlement for 2027/2028. <p><u>Revenue Budget 2026/2027 - Assumptions & Pressures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 2.5% pay award has been assumed for 2026/2027, and 2% thereafter. • No additional funding is available if the pay award exceeds 2.5%. • Pension Fund revaluation (March 2025) indicates a 5.4% reduction in employer contributions. • Transformation priorities highlighted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital & Customer - Culture & Workforce - Financial Resilience - Governance - Data - Partnership & Collaboration <p><u>Schools - Budget Position</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No additional efficiency savings required for schools in 2026/2027. • Efficiency requirements for 2027/2028 and 2028/2029 are yet to be determined. <p><u>Education Directorate - Cost Pressures & Additional Demands</u></p> <p>Provided further detail on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency within the department. • Cost pressures and additional demands, including ALNco funding and increased demand for ALN support.

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>Closing statement:</p> <p>CF - I am fully aware of the ongoing impact of the previous cuts and the ongoing financial challenges facing schools, but at this time we are not in a position to reverse any previous cuts.</p> <p><u>Questions / Comments</u></p> <p>KM thanked CF for clear presentation and opened the meeting to questions.</p> <p>SR: SPF funding coming to an end and LGF (local growth fund) will take over what are the implication for the LA staff?</p> <p>CF: Work is currently ongoing, to give background the SFP replaced the EU funding the LGF is replacing SPF. Our plans for LGF need to be submitted by today.</p> <p>To give a brief overview there is a substantial cut from SPF to LGF. There is also a flip in the eligibility of spending.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPF 70% resources (salaries) and 30% capital. • LGF 30 % resources and 70% capital. • There will be significant reduction in salaried staff due to a cut in the funding and the eligibility and priorities of the grant. <p>SR: Significant reduction in costs related to SPF programmes for example CFS?</p> <p>CF: I am unable to give details at the moment as the staff are not currently aware of the outcome so it would not be appropriate to share impact on individual projects.</p> <p>SRL Total agree – thankyou.</p> <p>KM: We are happy that schools are not facing further cuts for 2026/2027 financial year. All present need to be aware, due to ongoing cuts, schools are in deficit budget or facing deficit budgets over the MTFP and many schools have a PLD and plan to reduce costs over the medium term. Many of these reductions are in staffing and will impact teaching and learning and curriculum delivery and design.</p>
6.	<p><u>Formula Funding Review 3-16</u></p> <p>The School Forum Working Group recommended the School Forum consider the formula funding review 3-16 as outlined below.</p> <p><u>Purpose</u></p> <p>To consider a funding model to support a 3–16 school formula and review approaches used by other Local Authorities (LAs).</p> <p><u>Background</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice was gathered from other LAs via ADEW on how 3–16 schools are funded. • Responses indicate that most LAs fund 3–16 schools as separate Primary and Secondary schools, including funding for both Headteachers.

No	Discussion/Action
	<p><u>Proposed 3–16 Allowance</u> The LA proposes introducing a 3–16 Allowance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect the Primary Headteacher lump sum allocation. • Recognise additional responsibilities for teachers working across the full 3–16 age range. <p>Allowances Included:</p> <p><u>Head of School Allocation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding equivalent to an additional Primary Headteacher (Group 3). • Ensures funding for two Headteacher equivalents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Executive Head (via HT lump sum) - Head of School (via Primary HT lump sum) <p><u>Non-Teaching Teacher Allocation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for an additional leadership-scale non-teaching teacher. • Replaces the former federation allowance arrangement. • Recognises whole-school operational needs and increased leadership non-contact time (e.g., Heads of Family with 40% non-contact). <p><u>Teacher Workload Funding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional funding to support increased whole-school responsibilities across subject areas. • Value: £10,372 (5% uplift) • Acknowledges that some teachers (e.g., whole-school subject leads) require extra non-contact time. <p><u>Funding Model</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All other indicators will remain consistent with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Previous 2020 Formula Funding Review - Average School Teacher Salary model (from April 2025) • Funding will continue to differentiate between Primary and Secondary elements where applicable. <p><u>Implementation Timeline</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 3–16 formula will apply from 1 September 2026, when the school moves to a single site. • Funding transitions from 1 April 2026, with an aggregated formula. <p><u>Funding Periods</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 April 2026-31 August 2026: Current formula across four sites. • 1 September 2026-31 March 2027: New 3–16 single-site formula. <p>No questions / comments</p> <p><i>SH left the meeting.</i></p> <p>The Chair called a vote on the motion – School Forum agreed to recommend the proposed review and proceed to consultation on the 3-16 formula funding review.</p>

No	Discussion/Action															
	<p>Agreed – unanimous to agree recommendation and move to consultation.</p> <p><i>SH rejoined the meeting.</i></p>															
7.	<p><u>Date and agenda for next meetings.</u></p> <p>Schools Budget Forum</p> <table data-bbox="156 465 694 548"> <tr> <td>24th March 2026</td> <td>11.00am</td> <td>TBC</td> </tr> <tr> <td>14th July 2026</td> <td>11.00am</td> <td>TBC</td> </tr> </table> <p>Schools Budget Forum Working Group</p> <table data-bbox="156 622 694 741"> <tr> <td>10th March 2026</td> <td>10.30am</td> <td>TBC</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5th May 2026</td> <td>10.30am</td> <td>TBC</td> </tr> <tr> <td>16th June 2026</td> <td>10.30am</td> <td>TBC</td> </tr> </table>	24 th March 2026	11.00am	TBC	14 th July 2026	11.00am	TBC	10 th March 2026	10.30am	TBC	5 th May 2026	10.30am	TBC	16 th June 2026	10.30am	TBC
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8.	<p><u>AOB</u></p> <p>Nil.</p> <p>The Chair closed the meeting and thanked all for their attendance.</p>															