



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM
Tuesday, 15th November 2022
(Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School)

NOTES

- PRESENT:**
- Keith Maher (Pen Y Dre High) - Chair
 - Stuart James (Afon Taf High)
 - Sarah Hopkins (Blessed Carlo Acutis)
 - Owen Morgan (Cyfarthfa Park Primary)
 - Rhiannon Stephens-Davies (Greenfield Special)
 - Simone Roden (Ynysowen Community Primary School)
 - Sarah Townsin (Ysgol Coed Y Dderwen)
 - Gwyndaf Jones (Ysgol Santes Tudful)
 - Laurence Matuszczyk (Edwardsville Primary)
 - Paul Phillips (Pen-Y-Dre High)
 - Sue Walker (Director of Education)
 - Garhard Williams (Trade Union Representative)
 - Anthony Lewis (Head of School Planning & Improvement)
 - Steve Jones (Chief Officer Finance)
 - Ian Kent (School Accountant)
 - Councillor A Barry (Cabinet Portfolio for Governance and Resources)
- IN ATTENDANCE:**
- Paul Davies (Procurement)
 - Adam Richards (Procurement)
 - Joanna Lewis (LMS Manager)
 - Gary Winston (Clerk to the Forum)
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**
- Councillor Michelle Jones (Portfolio Lead for Education)
 - Mike O'Neill (Pen Y Dre High)
 - Ryan Morgan (Taff Bargoed Learning Partnership)
 - David Anstee (Ysgol Y Graig Primary)

No	Discussion/Action
1.	<u>Welcome</u> The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. Introductions were made.
2.	<u>Minutes</u> The minutes of the School Forum Meeting held on 28 th September 2022, were agreed as a true record.
3.	<u>Matters arising from the minutes</u> 3.01 <u>(4.0) Terms of Reference</u> AL stated that an updated Terms of Reference has been circulated which reflects the

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>changes agreed at the last meeting.</p> <p>3.02 <u>(6.0) Membership</u> Noted that a vacancy remained for the BCA/Greenfield Group. If there was no interest, it was agreed to consider further at the next meeting.</p>
4.	<p><u>Procurement Spend Analysis</u> Paul Davies and Adam Richards made a presentation on procurement data for the Local Authority which covered the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and procedural change. • Procurement data across the Local Authority. • School analysis. <p>The key feature was that schools had a very high number of goods/service providers and this number was increasing.</p> <p>PP: Can I question, the comparison periods that have been used - one set of data is for January-December 2021 and the other July 2021-June 2022. Is it reasonable to make comparison over difference and overlapping periods?</p> <p>AR: It's a fair point, we needed data to start making comparisons, it may not be ideal, but it gives us a starting point. Going forward we will be collecting data every 6 months and, if necessary, we will report back then.</p> <p>LM: I find it strange that the comparison periods overlap for 6 months, and it doesn't really allow us to make accurate comparisons.</p> <p>AR: There is an overlap, but it does show that the number of suppliers used by schools is increasing and this may be something we need to address.</p> <p>The figures show that where there is high spend, we have a relatively low number of suppliers as these are for our main contractors - supply agencies, cleaning contracts, energy. But we have a high number of low spend supplies, much higher than anywhere else in the Council and this is something we could maybe help with.</p> <p>PP: I think we need clear evidence to support this.</p> <p>LM: My experience is that schools are mostly concerned with unrealistic quotes that they get from building companies, who are the professional contractor. It seems we don't get value for money on this type of work.</p> <p>AB: That is the main challenge, we have the same issue within the Council, and we need to ensure that we get value for money.</p> <p>SW: We need to make sure that suppliers who are on the procurement framework are providing value for money.</p> <p>GW: The graph shows that £1.6 million was spent with Valley Education, which is a profit-making private company, surely this should be a concern?</p>

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	<p>SW: This is an issue for Welsh Government.</p> <p>SR: Will we be looking at Property Services? The current set up doesn't work, costs are too high, but schools are afraid to go elsewhere. We don't want to go down the same road for other services. IT is another area where we have to go through the preferred suppliers but there are cheaper options elsewhere.</p> <p>KM: We need to ensure that the preferred supplier list is also the most cost-effective provider.</p> <p>AR: We are getting feedback from schools about the cost of suppliers.</p> <p>RSD: I agree but the main concern is about the repairs and maintenance charges.</p> <p>PD thanked the Forum for the comments and that he would look to build on these discussions and work together to address these issues.</p>
5.	<p><u>School Balances across Wales 2021/2022</u></p> <p>JL presented the above report and highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over the last two financial years, school reserves have increased significantly due to the effect of the covid pandemic and extra core funding announced late in the year. • In Merthyr Tydfil, additional late grants totalled £2-6 million which resulted in school balances increasing to £2.1 million year on year. If the grants had not been received, the balances would be reduced by £518,000. • Reserves in Merthyr Tydfil schools are now 11.4% of delegated schools expenditure which is higher than the All-Wales average of 10.9% and ranks 8th highest. • Merthyr Tydfil is one of 13 LAs where no schools were holding a negative balance. Overall, Merthyr had 4% of schools with balances between 0-5%, 37% with balances between 5-10% and 59% with balances over 10%. <p>We have the highest proportion of schools with balances between 5-10% and a small proportion with balances over 10%.</p> <p>Members noted the report and briefing paper.</p>
6.	<p><u>LRB Funding</u></p> <p>AL explained that this had been identified as an area for work and following discussion with ALN colleagues it is suggested that an ALN Working Group be established to consider and that they would feedback to this group with the aim to implement any changes in April 2024.</p> <p>PP: Have any alternative models of funding been prepared?</p> <p>AL: We hope that most schools who have LRB classes will be represented on the Working Group. We could share some information, but I don't think that is appropriate today.</p> <p>SJ: My school is the only secondary with a LRB, would all schools have the same funding model?</p> <p>AL: Yes.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>SR: I can't see why we can't just pay actual salaries, and no-one can argue. If we have a different model, there will probably be winners and losers.</p> <p>AL: That's' correct.</p> <p>SR: Some schools must be winning at the moment, with the average salary model. That can't be fair.</p> <p>SJ: An actual salary model would be easier to sell to other schools.</p> <p>LM: Will the review of the funding model also look at issues such as resources?</p> <p>AL: It will probably form part of the overall review, if we get involvement from LRB staff this will help.</p>
7.	<p><u>Efficiency Savings</u></p> <p>SJ stated that it had already been agreed to hold a Special School Budget Forum Meeting on 16th December to receive feedback on the Local Authority Settlement for 2023/2024. I wanted to give a further update and based on the latest figures we estimate that the funding gap may now have increased from £11 million to £14.8 million. This is a result of the latest pay settlements, energy estimates and inflation.</p> <p>This is based on our previous indicative settlement of +3.5% plus a 1% council tax increase. We previously indicated that we would have three options of savings for schools of between £500,000 and £1.5 million. We now need to advise you that the figure is now a saving of up to £3 million from schools.</p> <p>We await further information, but it is a serious situation, and the Council is looking to save up to £11.8 million.</p> <p>GW: There is also a threat of industrial action, it is a bit more complicated in Wales but is likely to take place in the new year.</p> <p>SR: Do we have any indicative assessment of the impact of £3 million cuts?</p> <p>SW: Not yet, but we are working on it.</p> <p>AB: I think that is the darkest position and a lot will happen before the announcement, and we are hoping that it will not be as bad as Steve has indicated.</p> <p>Members thanked SJ for the update.</p>
8.	<p><u>Any other business</u></p> <p>8.01 <u>Motional Wellbeing</u></p> <p>SR: Why have schools been charged for this project, when they have not taken part in it?</p> <p>AL: We gave the schools additional funding in 2021/2022 but were not charged until 2022/2023. I will write to schools to clarify the position.</p> <p>SR: In future can we discuss this at Headteacher level before it happens, we didn't</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p data-bbox="357 239 632 271">want to be involved.</p> <p data-bbox="282 277 895 309">SW: The Wellbeing Group could consider this.</p> <p data-bbox="161 356 225 387">8.02</p> <p data-bbox="282 356 480 387"><u>Gwyndaf Jones</u></p> <p data-bbox="282 394 1477 468">The Chair explained that this would be Gwyndaf's last meeting before he moved to his new school and took the opportunity to thank him and pass on their best wishes for the future.</p>