



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**MERTHYR TUDFUL**  
**MERTHYR TYDFIL**  
County Borough Council

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## SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM

Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023

(Civic Centre)

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### NOTES

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Keith Maher (Pen Y Dre High) - Chair Stuart James (Afon Taf) Owen Morgan (Cyfarthfa Park Primary) Laurence Matuszczyk (Edwardsville Primary) Paul Phillips (Gellifaelog Primary) Rhiannon Stephens-Davies (Greenfield Special) Ryan Morgan (Taff Bargoed Learning Partnership) David Anstee (Ysgol Y Graig Primary) Sue Walker (Director of Education) Councillor Andrew Barry (Cabinet Portfolio for Governance and Resources) Steve Jones (Chief Officer Finance) Anthony Lewis (Head of School Planning, Support & Resources) Ian Kent (Education Accountant) Garhard Williams (Trade Union Representative)
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Phil Strand (Schools ICT) Joanna Lewis (LMS Manager) Gary Winston (Clerk to the Forum)
<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:</b>	Sarah Hopkins (Blessed Carlo Acutis) Mike O'Neill (Pen Y Dre High) Sarah Townsin (Ysgol Coed Y Dderwen)

No	Discussion/Action
1.	<b><u>Welcome</u></b> The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2.	<b><u>Minutes</u></b> The minutes of the following meetings were agreed as a true record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>School Budget Forum Working Group - 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023</li><li>School Budget Forum - 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023</li></ul>
3.	<b><u>Matters arising from the minutes</u></b> <b><u>27<sup>th</sup> March 2023 (6.01) Procurement</u></b> Anthony Lewis provided an update and explained that meetings had been held with the Procurement Team and further meetings were to take place. Further information would be reported to the working group next term.

No	Discussion/Action
4.	<p><b><u>MIS/SIMS in Schools and Wales (redacted)</u></b> Phil Strand provided updates on the following:</p> <p><u>Changes to contracts and SIMS hosting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESS SIMS have issued notice to LA/Schools on permitted SIMS database hosting arrangements.</li> <li>• The LA has two options for approved hosting arrangements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-hosting (on premise) in schools - option A.</li> <li>- SIMS connected service, provided by ESS Cloud - option B.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Approved hosting arrangements need to be in place by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023.</li> <li>• The change of hosting arrangements will lead to a new Saas contract for three years.</li> <li>• There are annual service charges associated with the SIMS Connected Service.</li> <li>• There are other LAs and schools across Wales/England who are in a similar position.</li> </ul> <p><u>Potential for future procurement around MIS for schools in Wales</u> MIS contracts for schools in Wales changed from 12 to 36 months, an opportunity has been identified to consider the available MIS in Wales and the opportunity to secure the best commercial terms to support our working arrangements with a potential MIS provider.</p> <p>To support this work, two work programmes have been initiated. A discovery project (now concluded by the CDPS) and a procurement project (ongoing by WLGA).</p> <p>The discovery project resulted in three options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do nothing - we could stay with ESS and the existing contract arrangement will allow the product to migrate to 'Next Gen' naturally.</li> <li>2. Develop a public sector owned MIS for schools based on the Teacher Centre product from Ceredigion Council. However, this may not be a viable option for councils in the short to medium term. The Teacher Centre system is currently primary only and would not scale to all Wales without significant investment.</li> <li>3. Plan now for an open market procurement exercise to provide the best commercial terms and to meet the needs of the school sector. Existing ESS contracts are set to expire (2025/2026). In addition to SIMS EES, two further products were identified from potential vendors: Arbor and Bromcom.</li> </ol>
5.	<p><b><u>Special Tuition and EOTAs Clawbacks</u></b> Sue Walker explained that current arrangements for students who are provided with Special Tuition or EOTAs see that funding for these students are clawed-back for the time they are not in school. The only funding re-claimed is the funding provided through the formula allocation.</p> <p>Other local authorities also claw-back an element of the PDG funding and I will be asking Joanna to prepare papers to bring proposals forward to how this could be applied here. A paper will be brought to the working group.</p> <p>KM: Whilst I tend to support such an arrangement, we would be grateful if we can be provided with further information and details of the implications for schools.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
6.	<p><b><u>School Balances</u></b></p> <p>Joanna Lewis presented a report on school balances as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 and highlighted the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cumulative school balances as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, stand at £3,878,968. Unlike in the previous two years, there were no late grants received and so the balance does not require adjustment.</li> <li>• This compares to the previous year balance of £6,339,355 or £3,646,167 when excluding late grants.</li> <li>• The aggregated overall school balances decreased from 14.93% of formula funding to 9.1% but remains above the LA benchmark target of 3%.</li> <li>• The decreasing level of school balances appears to be replicated across Wales and is expected to worsen during 2023/2024 and over the following financial years.</li> <li>• Schools in an Amber (7) and Red (1) risk category were identified; however, no schools were in a deficit position as at 31/03/23.</li> <li>• As at 31/03/23, 16 schools had surplus balances that exceeded the thresholds identified in the Excess Balances Clawback Policy.</li> <li>• 15 schools are projected to be at risk of deficit budgets over the period for the MTFP and work is being undertaken to ensure that a balanced budget can be set over the medium term.</li> </ul> <p>Members noted the report and thanked Joanna and the Governor Support Team for their work in supporting schools with their budgets over a very difficult period.</p> <p>Sue Walker informed members that a detailed budget report would be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.</p>
7.	<p><b><u>Education Budget Profile</u></b></p> <p>Anthony Lewis presented the Learning Departments Budget 2023-2024 and explained each budget line.</p> <p>KM: Thank you, it is interesting to see the breakdown in detail.</p> <p><b>LM: Why is LRB Provision at Afon Taf presented as a separate budget line?</b></p> <p>AL: Historically the provision was a Partial Hearing Unit which was fully centrally funded. It has now become a LRB, and we need to revise the budget sheet to reflect this as this could now be shown within the overall ISB.</p> <p><b>LM: Where is the provision for the Director of Education's salary?</b></p> <p>SJ: This is included in the Corporate Budget Plan.</p> <p><b>RM: Speech therapy is a budget line but provided externally, how do we ensure value for money in this area as many schools have concerns over the service.</b></p> <p>AL: Our ALN Team monitor this and have regular discussions with the Health Board over the quality of the service. Schools could be asked to provide their views through a questionnaire, this can be raised with ALN colleagues for further consideration.</p> <p>LM: I have concerns about the benefits we receive from the arrangement with the Central South Consortium and whether we get value for money.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>PP: We recently had CSC at a Scrutiny Committee Meeting and there was opportunity to ask these questions at that meeting.</p> <p>SW: We expect the Minister to announce that there will be a review of middle organisations such as Estyn, Local Authorities and Regional Consortia and this may address any issues.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p><b><u>Any other business</u></b>          Laurence Matuszczyk raised the following:</p> <p>8.01 <u>Formula Allocation (Welsh)</u>  <b>Welsh-medium schools receive an additional allocation for the Welsh Language. Should all schools now receive this as all schools are expected to provide a level of Welsh-medium education?</b>          (AL) This is something we could consider.</p> <p>8.02 <u>Formula Allocation (SEN)</u>          On each school’s formula allocation statement there is a bottom-line statement which shows the notional SEN funding. What is included in this figure and what relevance does this figure mean?           (SW) We can consider this further and bring back to another meeting.</p> <p>8.03 <u>Teachers Pay Award</u>  <b>When a cut was made to school budgets this year, we used the bottom-line figure and then reduced it by 3.01%. This means that the any pay award was not fully funded.</b>          (AL) We normally look at individual formula lines when considering how to reduce funding, but this wasn’t done this year and the reduction was applied to the bottom line which may need to be reconsidered in future years However, as this was done after pay award and inflationary pressures were applied, these elements have been fully funded. All schools are expected to identify their own budget reductions corresponding to a 3% reduction in funding to ensure there is sufficient funding for the ongoing budget.           KM: There are clearly different ways to look at this, thank you for clarifying the authority’s position</p> <p>8.04 <u>Petition</u>          A petition has been launched to ask the Welsh Government to discuss the impact of budget cuts to schools and the negative impact it will have on education provision. LM would circulate a link to the petition which was organised by a national group of school governors.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p><b><u>Next Meetings</u></b>          The following meetings were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Budget Forum - 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023</li> <li>• School Budget Forum Working Group - 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023</li> </ul>

No	Discussion/Action
10.	<p data-bbox="161 237 384 271"><b><u>Closing Remarks</u></b></p> <p data-bbox="161 275 1477 387">The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution over the past year and thanked officers and elected members for their support during a difficult time and wished everyone a happy summer break.</p>