



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM
Tuesday, 19th September 2023
(Civic Centre)

NOTES

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

No	Discussion/Action
1.	<u>Welcome</u> Members were welcomed to the first meeting of the academic year.
2.	<u>Election of Chairperson</u> Nominations were sought for the position of Chairperson and one nomination was received - Mr Keith Maher. Mr Maher was elected Chairperson for the ensuing year.
3.	<u>Election of Vice-Chairperson</u> Nominations were sought for the position of Vice-Chairperson and one nomination was received - Mr David Anstee.

No	Discussion/Action
	Mr Anstee was elected Vice-Chairperson for the ensuing year.
4.	<p><u>School Budget Forum - Terms of reference</u> Members reviewed the Terms of Reference and agreed to accept without amendment.</p>
5.	<p><u>School Budget Forum Membership</u> The Chair welcomed Anna Morris to her first meeting as Primary Headteacher Representative. Ryan Morgan was thanked for this work with the group.</p> <p>It was noted that two vacancies existed, Governor Representatives in the Afon Taf/Cyfarthfa Cluster and the Voluntary Aided/Special School Cluster.</p> <p>If there was no interest in the positions, the Governors Association would be asked to find representatives.</p>
6.	<p><u>School Budget Forum Working Group</u> Members agreed the following membership for 2023/2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Anstee (Chair) • Rhiannon Stephens-Davies • Stuart James • Sarah Hopkins • Owen Morgan • Alwen Bowen • Simone Roden • Anthony Lewis
7.	<p><u>Minutes</u> The minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2023 were agreed as a true record. The Chair explained that sections of the minutes had been redacted to ensure commercial confidentiality.</p>
8.	<p><u>Matters arising from the minutes</u> <u>(8.01) Formula Allocation - SEN</u> Anthony Lewis provided details of the breakdown of the notional 5% SEN allocation. It was agreed this would also be circulated to members.</p>
9.	<p><u>MIS/SIMS in Schools/Wales</u> Phil Strand provided an update on the current position and explained that ESS were pressing forward with their new terms and conditions and would be asking schools to sign new contracts.</p> <p>The Local Authority had worked with Welsh Government, WLGA and other local authorities on this matter and the preferred option is to agree the new contract with ESS subject to contractual queries being resolved by our Legal Team. The timeline is for the contract to be signed in October and for information to be migrated to the new system before the end of the year.</p> <p>There is a meeting with Headteachers on Friday to try and gain consensus for the way forward and</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>we are asking this group to give their support to the proposed approach. The LA is unable to negotiate a contract as they will be held with individual schools, however, we would prefer all schools to agree a joint approach and to agree to take guidance and advice on this matter from the Schools Budget Forum as it would help keep schools safe when taking decisions in this area.</p> <p>Members agreed that approval in principle be given for schools to sign up to the new 3 year contracts subject to the local authority receiving the necessary legal assurances.</p> <p>Consensus will be sought from Headteachers and Chair/Vice Chairs to agree to follow the direction of the Schools Budget Forum in this matter.</p>
10.	<p><u>School Budget Forum - Work Programme 2023/2024</u></p> <p>Joanna Lewis presented a draft Work Programme for this academic year.</p> <p>PP: Why is procurement analysis a standing item?</p> <p>JL: Procurement are doing a lot of work in trying to ensure better value for money. It has been included as there will be updates on the progress they are making.</p> <p>AL: It's been indicated, but if there is nothing new to discuss, it won't necessarily be an agenda item.</p> <p>AB:- Procurement is a priority for the Local Authority, we know we are paying more for some goods and services than we should be and that is not acceptable. We are arranging an event where smaller providers will be offered the opportunity to tender for services and we are hopeful this will help.</p> <p>SW: The Autumn Statement is late November and so we may need to bring the December date forward.</p> <p>KM: Last year we also had a special meeting to discuss the budget settlement early January and I think that a similar arrangement would be helpful this year.</p> <p>Members agreed to bring forward the SBF December meeting to the 5th. A date for a special meeting to receive an update on the Council's settlement at the end of December would be considered for early January and a date agreed nearer the time.</p> <p>LM: I see that ALN Formula Funding Review has been included, what is the plan?</p> <p>AL: There are currently transitional arrangements in place to support the move from the SEN register to the ALN register and we review this annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose.</p>
11.	<p><u>Special Tuition/Clawbacks</u></p> <p>Joanna Lewis stated that the group had previously discussed whether PDG funding should be included in any special tuition/clawback calculation. A paper was presented which detailed two potential options for including PDG in any calculation.</p> <p>Discussion would need to take place at the Working Group and agreed by January in order for any changes to be implemented for the next financial year.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>PP: The principle is sound, but schools get that funding at the start of the year and would have committed it when they set budgets.</p> <p>KM: That is an important point, and this probably needs careful consideration.</p> <p>PP: It may be that staff have been given contracts and it won't be possible to terminate those contracts early.</p> <p>OM: There is a bigger picture and where do we draw the line, if a child transfers, for any reason, from another school, we have the same issues with PDG.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Working Group discuss further.</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p><u>Section 52 Statement</u></p> <p>Joanna Lewis presented the Welsh Government Statistical Bulletin 'Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure in Schools 2023/2024'. The following key points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budgeted net expenditure on schools in Merthyr Tydfil was £63.9 million in 2023/2024 which was an increase of £5.9 million (10.3%). Delegated School Budgets in Merthyr Tydfil in 2023/2024 was £15.2 million, an increase of £4 million and gave a delegated rate of 79.3% or 83.7% excluding home to school transport. <p>SR: How does our delegation levels compare with authorities who are highest performing?</p> <p>SW: We don't have the information to make that comparison.</p> <p>KM: It would also be difficult to measure highest performing. Secondary schools have been working to adjust performance data over the pandemic.</p> <p>I think we can note this information.</p>
<p>13.</p>	<p><u>School Balances</u></p> <p>Anthony Lewis explained that a report had been presented to the Scrutiny Committee this week on 'School Balances and Medium-Term Financial Plans'.</p> <p>The report compared the financial position of schools pre-pandemic and now. It shows the school balances were reducing pre-pandemic but were significantly boosted during the pandemic period by additional Welsh Government funding.</p> <p>School budgets in 2022/2023 had a projected year-end balance of £3.5 million as schools planned to use a significant proportion of their additional balances. The projected balance at the end of 2023/2024 indicates that this will be reduced to £1.54 million and is close to pre-pandemic figures.</p> <p>This has resulted in a reduction of 45 posts in schools (17 Teaching and 28 Learning Support Assistants) in the current year as schools adjust spending to balance their budgets. Seven of these posts resulted in redundancy payments but no compulsory redundancies were made.</p> <p>The full implications of the budget reductions made last year have not yet been seen and schools</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>will be considering further staff reductions in order to balance budgets in 2024/2025.</p> <p>PP: Can I suggest that we don't move too quickly in making decisions on budgets for 2024/2025. The Autumn Budget Statement may not be as bad as we fear, as we are moving into a general election year. Schools have already trimmed staffing levels by removing temporary posts from their structures, the next stage will be permanent posts.</p>
14.	<p><u>Any other business</u></p> <p>14.01 <u>Service Level Agreements</u></p> <p>JL: We circulated an SLA Evaluation Questionnaire to schools last term but only had a limited response due to the current ASOS action. We normally use the evaluation to determine whether this group wishes to review any of the SLAs before they are due to be renewed in April 2024. We are looking to the group to agree a way forward. The options would appear to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask schools if they wish to see any SLAs reviewed, or • This group makes the decision. <p>SR: I always find this difficult. We know very little about some of the SLAs such as Creditors/Payroll. They seem to do what they should, but we are not able to comment if they could do it better or if its cost effective. The Headteachers have the same issues with the same services such as Property Services, but little ever changes.</p> <p>KM: From the Headteacher perspective it is clear that there are some services which we regularly discuss - Property Services, Catering and HR.</p> <p>SW: They were last reviewed three years ago, so it may be an opportune time to go back to them.</p> <p>Agreed that the Property Services, Catering and HR SLAs be reviewed.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.</p>