

SCHOOLS BUDGET FORUM WORKING GROUP
Friday, 10th November 2023
(Conference Room 3, Civic Centre)

NOTES

PRESENT:	Stuart James (Afon Taf High) (Vice Chair Working Group) Owen Morgan (Cyfarthfa Park Primary) Rhiannon Stephens Davies (Greenfield Special) Alwen Bowen (Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug) Anthony Lewis (Head of School Planning, Support & Resources) Ian Kent (Education Accountant)
IN ATTENDANCE:	Joanna Lewis (LMS Manager) Gary Winston (Clerk to the Forum) Fairyal Pabani (Catering Manager) Chris Jones (Property Services)
APOLOGIES:	Sarah Hopkins (Blessed Carlo Acutis) Simone Roden (Ynysowen Community Primary) David Anstee (Ysgol Y Graig)

No.	Discussion/Action
1.	<p><u>Chairperson</u> In the absence of the Chair Mr D. Antsee, Mr S James was appointed as Vice-Chair for the working group this academic year, and Chaired the meeting.</p>
2.	<p><u>Catering Services SLA</u> Members welcomed Mrs Pabani and thanked her for her attendance. It was explained that the purpose of the meeting was to ask Service Managers to attend the meeting in order to discuss how the service has changed in the last three years and any concerns that schools had.</p> <p>The Chair explained that Mrs Roden was unable to attend the meeting, but she had sent an email with some issues she would like raised. The first issue was related to section D2.7 and the reference to the use of custom and practice and goodwill.</p> <p>This was discussed and Mrs Pabani agreed to amend that section to remove that reference.</p> <p>AL: The issue of waste has also been raised and the LA has already agreed to carry out an audit to look at this across a sample of schools.</p> <p>FP: The problem staff have is that sometimes we only get orders late and staff tend to be cautious and prepare too much food to avoid running short. This sometimes results in extra waste. The audit will review the waste in the kitchen and in the dining room.</p> <p>SJ: The mixing of some foods on plates has also been mentioned.</p> <p>FP: We are aware of this, and staff serve the whole meal with the exception of wet foods such as gravy, beans or custard and staff have been instructed what they should be doing and that</p>

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	<p>they need to ask first before putting these things on plates. Also with things such as tuna with jacket potatoes, separate receptacles should be used for these so that they don't spoil the jacket potato if pupils don't like the filling.</p> <p>SJ: My school has an issue with students having breakfast rolls instead of lunch. This cannot be a healthy option.</p> <p>AL: They are a popular choice with pupils, but we have recently carried out a pupil survey and will work with you and your pupil bodies to consider the results of this and discuss what changes to the menus you would like to see.</p> <p>OM: We have chilli con carne served to infants and almost no one eats it. This means we have children not eating lunch and a lot of waste. I discussed this with another Headteacher, and they said that the chilli meal was popular with their children. Would it be possible to have greater flexibility to cater for different tastes in schools?</p> <p>FP: Unfortunately not, our menu is analysed by Welsh Government and certified compliant and so it is set now for the year ahead. Once it is approved, we cannot change it until the following year. We have tried different mince-based meals, the menu was consulted on previously and we didn't get many comments on it. We need to keep mince on the menu as it is an important source of protein.</p> <p>AL: Perhaps we can improve our dialogue with Heads and follow-up on some of these issues. We could have taster sessions to introduce these items to pupils.</p> <p>FP: It is strange that we have different preferences between schools but there are many examples of this.</p> <p>AL: I understand that there will be a further roll-out of meal selection in January?</p> <p>FP: Yes, we had difficulties before when offering a choice as children get confused and couldn't make up their mind, and so local arrangements have been made with schools regarding foundation phase pupils only having the hot option but these arrangements can be agreed with each school. With the roll-out of meal selection parents will make the choice.</p> <p>SJ: Water is still an issue; we use bottled water which creates a lot of recycling issues and litter around the school and water should be available with the meals and that isn't happening.</p> <p>FP: We have ordered recycling bins, and they will be delivered to schools shortly. Do you have a water fountain?</p> <p>SJ: No, we have never had one.</p> <p>AL: Water jugs should be available at mealtime, and we will follow that up.</p> <p>AL left the meeting.</p> <p>AB: Is a salad bar an option?</p> <p>FP: We introduced salad bars a few years ago but they were not a success. I've checked with other LAs and it seems that only Caerphilly still have them. Hygiene is the main concern. Our new menu will have more salad items.</p> <p>SJ: The wooden cutlery is not popular.</p> <p>FP: We were required to stop using plastic cutlery. We ordered metal cutlery for secondary schools, but it quickly disappeared, and it wasn't sustainable so we then ordered wooden</p>

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	<p>cutlery, it isn't ideal but difficult to see what else we could do.</p> <p>SJ: The wooden cutlery also gets put into the food waste bins, perhaps better supervision is necessary. There have been improvements to the service but there are still issues to address and we also still use a lot of teaching staff to supervise the provision, and this is not sustainable.</p> <p>As there were no further questions, Mrs Pabani was thanked for her attendance and left the meeting.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><u>Procurement</u></p> <p>JL: We held a Clerks Forum Meeting before half-term and looked at how schools spent money and options for savings. We discussed the contract we have with Hope and that they were the preferred supplier for most school items. Information was presented which demonstrated the savings possible when purchasing common items such as paper and books compared to other suppliers.</p> <p>It seems that we need to do further work to make schools aware of the potential savings.</p> <p>SJ: Would you be able to provide a break-down on what my school spends on other suppliers? As Headteachers we don't have the time to be looking for different suppliers.</p> <p>OM: My staff will look to see if they can get items cheaper elsewhere.</p> <p>IK: Hope has guaranteed the cheapest price.</p> <p>AL: The Procurement Team are looking to have a greater involvement with schools and offer support on how schools can get best value when making purchases.</p> <p>JL: The Clerk Forum is a good way of sharing this information and best practice. I will ask Procurement if they are able to provide individual schools with a break-down on their spending.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p><u>Property Services SLA</u></p> <p>Members welcomed Chris Jones and thanked him for attending the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was outlined. JL explained that Mrs Roden had sent an email asking for clarification over responsibility for legal and statutory compliance checks and asked if this could be included in the SLA.</p> <p>CJ: I will need to go through the list but can provide the information requested.</p> <p>SJ: If some of these areas are LA responsibility as SR claims, should they be funded by the LA?</p> <p>CJ: We will look at it, but Property Services do not hold a maintenance budget.</p> <p>OM: I don't think we are suggesting that Property Services pay but it could be a LA responsibility.</p> <p>SJ: Energy monitoring has also been mentioned, should this be a LA role? I can understand that previously Caretakers were expected to take meter readings, but this is now done remotely.</p> <p>CJ: We are moving towards electronic monitoring and there are officers that are responsible for this.</p>

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	<p>SJ: The CIPFA document has been referenced for this information so that should be a clear definition of roles?</p> <p>JL: We are looking at what schools are currently paying for that, if appears it could be a LA responsibility.</p> <p>OM: A couple of years ago we brought up that some services were being paid from the mutual fund, does that still happen?</p> <p>JL: No, servicing charges are included in the calculations now.</p> <p>CJ: Im not sure about those and would not be in my domain. We do need to update our documents and have looked at what RCT provides. They do things slightly different so we would need to go through the detail.</p> <p>JL: Invoicing issues have been mentioned and we have discussed these before. Have the invoice issues and directly charging schools been addressed?</p> <p>CJ: We have tried to develop a system on RAMIS which will give schools a chance to comment before a payment is taken, but we have had difficulties due to staffing issues.</p> <p>SJ: Overtime costs for caretakers when work is being undertaken is a real issue. If the LA is funding the work, the LA needs to meet the overtime costs, can anything be done about this?</p> <p>CJ: We don't have a budget, but I can have a discussion with Anthony Lewis about it.</p> <p>OM: With regards to invoices on RAMIS, is there any way that schools can have an alert when invoices are put on there?</p> <p>CJ: I will ask if that can be done.</p> <p>JL: Is there a list of jobs that schools can undertake themselves and what they need to inform the LA before undertaking?</p> <p>CJ: Schools should inform the LA/Estates if they intend to do work as there are regulations that need to be followed. Any work needs to be done to the current specification.</p> <p>RSD: Could you provide a list of contractors we could contact if we have a job? I have gone to the preferred supplier, but the estimates have been extortionate, and I feel that we are not getting value for money.</p> <p>CJ: We carried out a procurement exercise with RCT and ACE Builders/Lorne Stewart were awarded the contract. They have to meet a lot of specifications such as appropriately qualified, have appropriate insurance and use correct materials. This makes their charges look more than a supplier who doesn't meet these requirements.</p> <p>RSD: I understand that, but the costs are enormous. We were quoted £50,000 to refurbish our ladies' toilets which was unacceptable, and we could not justify spending that money.</p> <p>CJ: There are a lot of things that need to be covered before we can agree the work. I understand the concerns, but we have to adhere to the regulations.</p> <p>As there were no more questions, Mr Jones was thanked for attending and the meeting closed.</p>