



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM
Tuesday, 05th December 2023
(Civic Centre)

NOTES

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

No	Discussion/Action
1.	<u>Welcome</u> Members thanked Mr Ian Kent for this contribution and work with the Forum over the years and wished him well for the future. Members welcomed Mrs Louise Ballinger, who will be taking over from Ian as Education Accountant in January, to her first meeting of the Budget Forum.
2.	<u>Minutes</u> The minutes of the following meetings were agreed as a true record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School Budget Forum Working Group - 10th November 2023

No	Discussion/Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Budget Forum - 14th November 2023 School Budget Forum Working Group – 21st November 2023
3.	<p><u>Matters arising from the minutes</u></p> <p><u>21st November 2023 – HR SLA</u></p> <p><i>DA: Trade Unions will always try and drag-out a process and in a case like that it is clearly damaging the school's reputation.</i></p> <p>GW: This statement is not true.</p> <p><i>SR: We also need to look at policy where staff can have full pay for 6 months and 6 months half-pay. This is abused and often they come back then, and the problem hasn't been addressed.</i></p> <p>SW: These are the agreed terms & conditions as per the Green & Burgundy Book</p>
4.	<p><u>MTCBC Financial Position</u></p> <p>LH presented an update of the Financial Update after the Autumn Statement Forecast. Budget Deficit for 2024/2025 is provisionally £13.4M and this is based on an indicative WG Revenue settlement of 3.1%. The authority has identified efficiency savings of £4.1M and potential utilisation of £1.5M of reserves, bringing the deficit to £7.8M. In order to balance to the budget an additional settlement of 6.7% is required. If all proposals were approved and no further savings were identified, a Revenue Settlement of 9.8% would be required. Over the course of the next 3 years, the cumulative gap rises to £65m. The provisional settlement from Welsh Government on 20th December, which will give us more certainty on the funding gap.</p> <p>A number of different workstreams have been established as priority projects for CMT To continue to close the funding gap.</p> <p>One of these workstreams includes rationalising all growth requests that have been received in year.</p> <p>LM – if Education was to receive a reduction, what would you expect the impact to be? As these late settlements does not help schools budgeting.</p> <p>KM – LA have a short space of time to address these issues.</p> <p>LH – the slides presented are the initial savings required but no decisions have been made as of yet.</p> <p>PP – cuts are too harsh, hopefully there will be changes to the final spring budget before the next General Election</p> <p>DA – schools are finding it incredibly difficult especially with ALN needs developing. ALN element of funding needs to be protected.</p> <p>KM – schools had their fair share of budget reductions in 2023/24 of £1.5M (around 3%) and this had a detrimental impact on standards and progression in Merthyr and schools are still working through these cuts to ensure that savings are achieved.</p> <p>LM – standards have been hit already; interventions have ceased due to staffing cuts.</p> <p>SW – in a recent All Wales Directors meeting, a letter has been submitted regarding the falling standards relating to the lack and reduction of funding.</p> <p>GW – savings have put pressure on teachers workloads with growing class sizes and intervention work.</p>

No	Discussion/Action
5.	<p><u>LRB Funding Review</u></p> <p>AL presented an update of the LRB Funding review which had been undertaken as a recommendation from the School Budget Forum in March 2023, to ensure that the model is fit for purpose.</p> <p>Following the review 9 proposals/changes are being recommended to the existing funding model:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff sickness cover 2. PPA cover 3. Other Staff cover (Not for sickness or PPA cover) 4. Resources/Equipment 5. Repairs & Maintenance 6. Funding model for LSAs / DRAs 7. Senior management/ALNCO allowance 8. AWPU funding model for Afon Taf LRB 9. Staff/pupil ratios <p>Proposal 8 is still under discussion and will be circulated as an amendment once agreed.</p> <p>OM – for clarification where is the additional funding for the review coming from? SW – this will be put forward as a growth request for 24/25 RS – Greenfield is currently overseeing the management of the Afon Taf LRB and would also require an allowance for this. LM – thank you all for the hard work that has been put into the review. With regards to the Mutual fund element – how would this work to ensure an equitable for all? AL – the process will be agreed prior to implementation. RS - the additional funding should have a positive effect on the Outreach work that is being undertaken. AM – are there plans for pupils who are currently in mainstream with LRB needs to receive extra funding? KM – there are positive outcomes from the review, and we recognise the hard work. IDP’s for pupils currently supported in schools, is extra funding proposed, otherwise they would be placed in Greenfield Special school at additional costs. Can this be considered going forward? AL – there is an annual review of the funding model during the period of transition from SEN to the ALN register. Once the ALN register is fully implemented we will review whether a new model is required. Is it fit for purpose or can funds be redistributed? KM – we are supporting the pupils in schools and the level of funding should be increased. GW – is this proposal going to be looked into? AL – the formula funding currently provides monies for pupils on the SEN and ALN registers and this is reviewed during the period of transition GW – can we accept this as a consideration that will be added to the ongoing workstream? DA – this should part of the next steps of the working group. PP – there should be equitability across all schools regardless of having an LRB AL – we can review ALN funding in the formula as part of ongoing work KM – should we include a recommendation around this as part of this item? AL – it would need to be a separate recommendation as it is a different request but we can consider</p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>further</p> <p>Proposal 1 - to accept the revised funding model for LRB's as presented in the paper Yes – Nine No – Nil Abstained – Three</p> <p>Proposal 2 – to review the funding of LA/School IDP's in the formula funding allocation to schools to ensure that it is fit for purpose.</p> <p>Yes – Twelve No – Nil Abstained – Nil</p>
6.	<p><u>Service Level Agreements</u></p> <p>AL – as discussed in the last meeting, feedback was required for any queries relating to the current SLA's. The following draft clauses to be included in all SLAs to address the concern regarding service delivery falling below the agreed standard whether due to staff shortage or for other reasons, and whether any reimbursement or financial penalties could be applied to benefit schools. Clause 1 - Service levels during periods of staff absence Clause 2 - Service Performance, Financial Penalties</p> <p>DA – no savings are made in the first 6 months for a clawback to be actioned. LH – service managers should prioritise SLA's even if there is sickness within the department to ensure that there is no detriment or risk to schools. AL – this is the purpose of the clause, to ensure this is the case, and there is a shared understanding of service responsibilities to deliver the SLA. LH – steps are being put in Corporately to address these concerns. PP – where is the independent scrutiny of the SLAs? AL – under Section 4 – Governance of SLA's – there is a proposal to strengthen the current arrangements, concerns should be brought to the SBF to be resolved, if this is not achieved then it would be escalated to Budget Board. We could consider whether this could be further escalated to Scrutiny or Audit committee if this was appropriate PP – By scrutiny I was referring to the work of this group rather than Scrutiny Committee, now we've gone over the proposed arrangements I'm happy with the proposal to scrutinise via this forum and to refer into Budget Board where required LM – in relation to the clauses, this reads as a 'buyer beware' approach, rather than reassurance to schools KM – this is a detailed paper to digest and in order to make an informed recommendation, I propose that this is delayed until the next meeting in January AL – can I propose an extension until 15th December for additional comments regarding the SLA papers that have been shared and discussed? We can then make any further amendments required prior to January's meeting.</p> <p>This was agreed by Members as a way forward.</p>
7.	<p><u>Next Meetings</u></p>

No	Discussion/Action
	<p>The following meetings were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Budget Forum Working Group – 11th December at 10am (Civic Centre) • Special Meeting - January - date to be confirmed (Teams) • School Budget Forum – 23rd January 2024 11am (TBC)
8.	<p><u>Any other business</u></p> <p>No other business was discussed.</p> <p>The Chair closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them a Merry Christmas.</p>