**DIRECTORATE OF LEARNING AND SKILLS**

**Schools Budget Forum**

**Wednesday 9th March 2022**



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| **MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** | | Trevor Baker, Cllr. Rhiannon Birch, David Blackwell, Chris Britten, Trevor Brown, Vince Browne, Cllr Lis Burnett, Mairead Canavan, Norman Craggs, Matt Gilbert, Mari Gibbs, Ceri Hoffrock, Rhodri Jones, Rhys Angell Jones, Lorraine Lancaster, Sian Lewis, Martin Price, Debra Thomas, Paula Vaughan,  **Also in attendance:** Emily Denham, Lynnis Hessey**,** Lisa Lewis, Nicola Monckton, Maria White | | |
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| **Item** | **Issue** | | **Discussion** | **Action** |
| 1. | Welcome & apologies | | Apologies from Russell Bailey, Tim Exell, Terri Vaughan Taylor, Sarah Jenkins-Welch |  |
| 2. | Election of new Chair and Vice Chair | | David Blackwell was nominated as the Budget Forum Chair for the 2022/23 financial year. Dave will be taking over the position from Vince Browne.  Norman Craggs was re-nominated as Vice Chair. |  |
| 3. | Minutes of previous meeting  Matters arising | | Agreed as accurate  **Meeting to be requested with the Education Minister** There still has not been an opportunity to meet with the Education Minister – LB to arrange.  **Scrutiny Committee representation from Budget Forum** – VB attended the scrutiny committee meeting and provided a presentation demonstrating the pressure on school budgets despite the level of school balances which are higher than usual due to the large level of grant funding provided by Welsh Government in the latter part of the financial year.  The schools’ response to the Covid-19 pandemic was also discussed and schools were praised for their actions. The committee suggested that the Budget Forum provide a presentation to Cabinet on the schools’ response to the pandemic. TB to explore the opportunity to present at cabinet in future.  **Budget Forum membership and constitution**– Covered on the agenda  **ALN support in Welsh medium schools**  DD was not able to attend the meeting but confirmed via email that work was underway to develop ALN provision in Welsh medium schools. | LB  TB |
| 4. | Budget Forum constitution and membership update | | The Budget Forum constitution determines the recommended period of office for membership as three years. NM has written to cluster leads, Unions and the Vale Schools Governors Association to request that any members exceeding three years in office are either reappointed, or alternative members nominated.  Matt Gilbert has joined the Budget Forum representing Barry Primary schools. |  |
| 5. | Final revenue budget proposals 2022/23 | | NM presented the Final Revenue Budget Proposals 2022/23 report to the forum.  The settlement from Welsh Government has increased by £17.5M, or 10.4% from the previous financial year. The aggregate external finance for the council is now £186M and the Councils Standards Spending assessment is £278.7M.  Although WG have funded growth of £17.5M, the cost pressures requested across the Council amounted to £22.5M and a further £5.8M was required to fund estimated pay awards. As a result, not all cost pressures were awarded at full value.  The budget has been prepared on the basis of an estimated pay award of 3% for teachers from September 2022 and 3% for non-teaching staff from April 2022. As a result £3.686M in pay award growth has been awarded to the directorate of which £3.381M has been awarded to schools. (note, pay award growth also accounts for the increase in National Insurance employer’s contributions)  Cost pressure growth of £3.224M has been awarded to the Directorate, of which £3.050M has been awarded to schools. The cost pressures awarded are   * Demographic growth, mainstream schools £1M * Demographic growth, special school £1M * Whitmore autism base £100k * Learning and wellbeing class £100k * Additional learning needs (mainstream) £500k * Increase in free school meals £350k   It was noted that, although significant growth has been awarded to the schools’ budget, that many schools are relying heavily on surplus balances carried forward to balance in-year budgets. Significant balances carried forward have been generated from high levels of Welsh Government grant funding awarded over the last two financial years. The process of balancing in-year school budgets on balances carried forward is unsustainable in the long term. |  |
| 6. | Grants summary 2021/22 | | NM presented a summary of grants awarded to schools and the directorate over the 2021/22 financial year.  In addition to the covid hardship fund, the following grants have been allocated to schools   * Accelerated learning and transition £3.743M * Pupil development grant £3.714M * Regional consortium school improvement £5.306M * Professional learning - £596k * ALN new system £268k * Newly qualified teachers funding scheme £486k * Teachers pay award £287k * Winter of wellbeing £261k * Revenue maintenance £2.145M * Small rural schools £59k * Reducing infant classes £291k * Enrichment session trials £340k * Consortium collaboration £455k * Winter of wellbeing music £19k * Consortium ALN Annex £19k   In addition to the grants received by schools a further £3M in grant funding was awarded to the Local Authority for education. |  |
| 7. | Grants update 2022/23 | | NM presented the information currently available with regards to grants for the 2022/23 financial year.  **Covid Hardship Grant**  This grant will end in March 2022 and there will be no funding available from April 2022.  **Pupil Development Grant (PDG)**  The 2022 plasc will be used to distribute the PDG grant to schools, as a result schools will not receive PDG allocations until later in the summer term. For preparing budgets, schools are using the previous year PDG allocations as an estimate.  **Regional Consortium School Improvement Grant (RCSIG)**  The 2022 plasc will be used to distribute the RCSIG grant to schools, as a result schools will not receive RCSIG allocations until later in the summer term. For preparing budgets, schools are using the previous year RCSIG allocations as an estimate.  **Accelerated Learning (Recruit Raise Standards and Recover)**  Schools have been emailed with allocations for the period April 2022 – August 2022. The grant will be cut to a reduced level from September 2022, however WG has not advised to what extend this grant will be reduced on a Local Authority basis.  **NQT Funding Scheme**  This grant will end in April, schools are advised to use Accelerated learning grants to retain staff where possible.  **Small and Rural Schools Grant**  This grant will end in March 2022 and there will be no funding available from April 2022.  **Reducing Infant Class Sizes grant**  This grant will come to an end in August 2022.  **Professional Learning Grant**  The Central South Consortium has indicated that this grant will be available, but the level of funding has not been communicated to Local authorities.  **No other grant funding for schools has yet been confirmed for the 2022/23 financial year.** |  |
| 8. | Free School Meal Roll-Out | | TB updated the Budget Forum that the phased roll out of free school meals to all pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 will commence in September 2022.  In order to ensure kitchens and equipment can cope with the increase in production, Welsh Government have awarded a capital grant of £1.2M which will be spent on equipment and electrical works in schools. There is significant work required at some sites, and challenges to overcome including lack of space in some schools.  The uptake of school meals is currently at 50%, and it is predicted that this will rise to 95% for year groups that have the free meal offer.  WG will be offering a revenue grant to cover the revenue costs of providing the free meals to pupils, although the value of this grant is not yet known. |  |
| 9. | Any other Business | | **2021/22 Pay awards for non-teaching staff**  The non-teaching pay award for the 2021/22 financial year has been agreed at 1.75%. Staff will receive backdated payments in the March payroll.  **Backfilling costs for shielding pregnant staff**  A central reserve has been established to fund the cost of backfilling where a school’s risk assessment has determined that pregnant staff at the post 26-week stage must shield due to covid, and hence work from home. Schools will receive an email establishing how to access this funding.  **Big Fresh Catering Company Profit Share**  The Big Fresh Catering Company is anticipating profits in the region of £500k this year. Schools buying into the Big Fresh service will receive a percentage of the profits. Information to follow.  **Next Meeting**  8th June 9.30am, Microsoft Teams |  |