**DIRECTORATE OF LEARNING AND SKILLS**

**Schools Budget Forum**

**12 June 2024 – Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg**



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| **MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** | | Dave Blackwell (chair), Trevor Baker, Tim Exell, Mari Gibbs, Matt Gilbert, Rhodri Jones (RJ), Rhys Angell Jones (RAJ) Martin Price, Sarah Jenkins, James Mansfield, Matt Gilbert, Ruth Foster, Peter Cate, Innes Robinson, Lucy Barraclough.  **Also in attendance:** Matt Bowmer, Gemma Jones, Rachel Cox, Carolyn Tapscott, Gemma Gullwell- Jones, Amanda Bennett, Joanne Ware, Lisa Lewis. | |
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| **Item** | **Issue** | **Discussion** | **Action** |
| 1. | Welcome & apologies | The Chair thanked RAJ for the lovely welcome at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg. Apologies were received from Chris Britten, Terrie Vaughan-Taylor and Cllr Goodjohn. |  |
| 2. | Minutes of previous meeting  Matters arising | Agreed as accurate.  No matters were arising other than as covered on the agenda. All actions were recorded as completed. |  |
| 3. | Budget Forum membership and constitution | The Budget Forum constitution and membership was shared with the forum for information.  Matthew Gilbert was appointed as Vice Chair of Budget Forum, unanimously. The chair also welcomed Lucy Barrowclough, the new VSGA representative to the forum. |  |
| 4. | Grant update | The content of the update was noted. It was also noted that the large amounts of grants that used to turn up at year end has not happened this year | LL/ CT |
| 5. | Unofficial funds | New guidance has been drawn up for schools and circulated prior to the meeting. This has been approved by audit. If there are any comments or feedback, please send to Lisa Lewis. There have been no changes to the regulations, just new guidance as schools have been requesting this. There was a suggestion from JM to run the unofficial funds on financial year rather than academic year; RC confirmed some schools already run their school funds on financial year. GJ confirmed happy for the guidance to stipulate a 12-month period so schools can decide if they choose financial year or academic year. | CT to distribute the guidance to all schools. |
| 6. | Next steps – school budget position and update of work of sub group (TB) | **Agency Costs**  Agency spend across all schools is currently being looked at in detail, agency costs increased from £3M in 2019 to £8M in 2023/24. TB understands the challenges around the ALN pupils, but overall pupil numbers have fallen across schools. The agency costs have been broken down by supplier, by school and by cluster; each cluster has a preference of the agency supplier used. Schools will be asked to provide a breakdown of their agency costs where needed.  FTEs are also being looked at for each school alongside the cost spent on agency staff, the yearly spend across schools can range from £50k to £150k to £300k and TB needs to know why such large variances. It was noted that some agency staff are part of the staffing structure rather than contracted staff. What structure is more cost effective? Some secondary schools employ cover supervisors who work across the school instead of agency cover.  Numbers on roll are being looked at alongside total spend on staffing for each school, once all the information has been finalised it will be shared with budget forum members.  TB asked why some schools have double the support staff to a school of a similar size for example, these things need to be looked at.  IR confirmed a school can use an agency member of staff for 12 weeks and if good can offer them a contract without having to pay any costs to the agency supplier. Sometimes if funding or grants are only confirmed on a yearly basis then the appointment of agency staff is more suitable than offering contracts. Agency recruitment is more suitable for LSA support staff rather than teaching staff.  RAJ stated the cost of an agency member of staff has increased considerably over the past few years and the quality of the staff is sometimes very poor.  CB stated it can be difficult to retain LSA support, especially when the new guidelines came into force a few years ago, whereby if LSA staff are appointed before the 1st September their salary costs are recalculated, and they are deducted ‘Term Time Adjustments’ which can be quite significant. Due to this it’s easier to fill these positions with agency staff.  TB confirmed schools do need to be challenged more on their staffing structures if they seem to be top heavy compared to other schools of a similar size.  **School Contracts**  All schools were asked to send in information regarding their variance contracts across the school, not all returns were sufficient, some schools will be asked to resubmit this information. TB would like to know what services the LA could provide that are more cost effective than going to outside companies, such as refuse collection, contract cleaning etc. Business Managers have been working with TB and the subgroup, so TB asked schools to release their BM’s as and when needed. MB confirmed there will be new legislation regarding contracts in Autumn.  DB stated looking at school contracts isn’t going to claw back the deficits overnight but it’s a positive step in helping schools reduce some of their expenditure and make savings where possible, any saving is beneficial in the current climate.  It was suggested that the LA works with cluster groups on their contracts in the first instance, as it’s a big task to get all 53 schools onto the same contract at the same time. Contracts for items such as photocopiers, refuse collection and contract cleaning will be looked at; RAJ is in favour of this and isn’t worried about who provides the service, as long as schools receive a good service and savings are made. Support will be made available to schools from the LA to look at the school contracts.  IR raised concerns regarding changing the SIMS software as there are a lot of add-ons to SIMS that schools can’t lose. TB confirmed SIMS isn’t suitable for schools in Wales and the ICT & Data Support team are working with schools on a suitable replacement, there has been a lot of correspondence sent to schools from Sara Herbert on this. Schools have been looking at the new systems being considered with the ICT & Data Support team so they can have their input into the chosen system / software. It was suggested that Sara Herbert gives a presentation to the Head Teachers on how the systems being looked at work. Sara has done a lot of work with the Business Managers on the new systems.  **Statutory Guidance**  A document on the statutory requirements for schools is currently being drawn up and once finalised will be circulated to all schools. It will cover things like class size ratios, TLR responsibilities etc. |  |
| 7 | AOB | Powys Letter  DB circulated a copy of the letter sent from schools in Powys to parents, he would like feedback from members before the end of the month so a similar letter can be drafted for parents in the Vale. The letter will be sent from Head Teachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies. TB suggested members look at the responses received from WG from the last time letters were sent. The letter will be sent out to parents at the start of the academic year. Lack of funding from WG is the main reason school budgets are so bad.  Increase in Salary Costs  DB confirmed there has been an increase of 30.7% on teaching salary costs from 2019 to now for every teaching scale.  **Next meeting dates** – 25 September 2024, 9.30am. A discussion relating to whether meetings are more effective in person and it was determined that it was preferable for meetings to be in person wherever possible. It was agreed that wherever possible they would take place in our secondary schools. |  |