

School Budget Forum

Notes of Meeting & Agenda

Location	Llangewydd Junior School	Date:	6 th December 2017
		Time	2.30 pm
Attendees on 6th December 2017:		Draft Agenda for next meeting – March 2018 : -	
Lindsay Harvey		1. Apologies for absence	
Joanne Norman	Anne O'Brien	2. Notes of previous meeting	
Cllr Hywel Williams	Andy Rea	3. Budget 2018-19 and Medium Term Financial Strategy	
Cllr Charles Smith	Reverend Edward Evans	4. Update on school balances 2017-18	
Randal Hemingway	Mark Morris (in place of S Daly)	5. Any other business	
Judith Tutssel (Secretary)		6. To agree a date for next meeting.	
Ben Blackall			
Hannah Castle (Chair)			
Neil Clode (Vice Chair)			
Huw Williams (in place of N Brain)			
Ceri Llewellyn (in place of R Dixon)			

Notes of the meeting held 6th December 2017

	<u>Actions</u>
<p>1.Apologies: Apologies for absence were received from Nicola Echanis, Angela Keller, Helen Ridout, William Bond, Sharron Daly, Nick Brain and Rhiannon Dixon. Those present introduced themselves and welcomed new Secondary School Governor Representative, Andy Rea.</p> <p>2.Notes of previous meeting The notes of the previous meeting held on 5th October 2017 were reviewed and accepted.</p> <p>3. Matters Arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding per pupil/delegation rates: Lindsay Harvey confirmed that additional information had been provided to both BASH and primary headteachers. More information on this/current year's budgets is to follow. Formula Funding: Jo Norman confirmed that outdated narratives would be tidied up as part of the budget setting/formula funding process for 2018/19. <p>4. Budget 2018-19 and Medium Term Financial Strategy The link to the Cabinet Report of 28th November 2017 had been sent to School Budget Forum members prior the meeting and Randal Hemingway informed those present of some key points.</p> <p>The provisional WG settlement saw a reduction of 0.5% across Wales, which for Bridgend was 0.6%, and better than the most likely scenario previously discussed. WG had stated that there was additional money for schools and Social Services, but this did not appear to be true and attention was drawn to the WLGA letter circulated with the minutes.</p>	<p>LH</p> <p>JN</p>

There are further challenges in terms of cuts to specific grants, for example Communities First Programme will cease and be replaced with two new grants (replacements are £3.6 million less), waste grants, and the EIG is to be reduced by £15m. Inflation is also a significant pressure – currently at 3%. The draft Council budget required £6.123m of reductions to balance.

There are also challenges around the pay award, for which 1% has been assumed in the budget. A letter had recently been received regarding the national pay award (JNC). The offer was 2% for Council staff and for the lowest paid staff, an hourly rate of £8.50 (currently £7.70).

Cabinet have proposed to freeze the 1% efficiency savings for schools for 2018/19 but this is still planned for future years. School budgets will be funded for pay awards and inflation for 2018-19. Some schools will obviously also be affected by changes in pupil numbers. Cabinet recognised the planned cut to the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) and have proposed an additional £500k to mitigate the effect. The mechanism for the allocation of this additional funding has not yet been determined. The increase for pay awards/ inflation and budget pressures equates to an increase of over £1m to schools budgets, when compared to 2017-18.

An additional £150k has also been proposed within the Education and Family Support Directorate for the continued growth in the number of ASD pupils (autistic spectrum disorder). It was confirmed that this will be in the area of Learning Resource Centres and not in respect of the ALN Bill.

The budget consultation period had closed on Sunday and will be reported to Cabinet later in December. There has been a good response with over 1,800 adults completing the survey. The Young Persons' Voice had also improved with over 120 responses, but this was still from a potential 20,000 young people.

It was reported that gas and electricity costs are likely to increase for 2018-19.

Lindsay Harvey reported that pupil numbers in Bridgend are currently quite stable.

Councillor Charles Smith raised the issue of non-statutory nursery education in Bridgend. This had previously been considered as a budget reduction, but had not been actioned. He stated that the 1% reduction in 17/18 was in lieu of this.

The group's attention was drawn to Table 7 of the report, showing an increase of £1.163m to schools budgets for 2018-19. The 1% reduction still needs to be planned for future years and headteachers need to be mindful of headlines/announcements coming from Welsh Government.

Reverend Evans enquired what may happen to the 1% cut for schools if future budget settlements were to be improved, but this is not known at present.

5. Secondary School Benchmarking

The Welsh Government had sponsored the secondary school benchmarking exercise, and all secondary schools in Bridgend had participated. To view the data, user names and passwords had been allocated to all headteachers, bursars and certain central finance staff. It was too soon to feedback on the effectiveness of the tool so it will be kept on future SBF agendas.

6. School Delegated Budget Setting Timetable

Judith Tutssel informed those present of the timetable, on a month by month basis, for the calculation of schools delegated budgets. Headteachers were asked to accurately complete and return their pupil number forms promptly after the count date in January 2018. It was stressed that even one incomplete or late form can delay the whole budget setting process across primary, secondary and special sectors.

The budget will be approved by Cabinet on 12th February 2018 and by Council on 28th February 2018, and it is hoped that school delegated budgets can be completed and distributed early in March, 2018.

7. Update on Schools' Projected Balances

Jo Norman reported that 20 primary, 4 secondary and 1 special school had set deficit budgets for 2017-18. As at period 8 (November), projected deficits had increased to 25 primary, 5 secondary and 1 special school. Finance Officers continue to work closely with schools to ensure that they work within their deficit recovery plans and that budget projections are accurate and timely.

8. Refunds for Cashless Catering

It is proposed that with effect from January 2018, any refunds due to parents for dinner monies paid via the cashless system will be processed at primary school level via COA, and not by the Local Authority Finance Team. This should ensure that refunds can be made more quickly and that the parents would only have one point of contact (the school) in the event of any queries. Detailed guidance notes are being prepared for circulation to all primary schools in the new year, and are currently awaiting approval by Internal Audit.

9. Proposed Use of COA for Secondary Schools.

Following a number of recent cash flow problems experienced by Secondary Schools, due to deficit budgets and delays in the transfer of grant income, it has been suggested that headteachers may wish to consider moving onto COA, the Authority's main financial system and bank account, instead of operating via individual school bank accounts.

It was agreed that this proposal be discussed and considered at the next BASH meeting.

10. Any Other Business

- BREP – Neil Clode reported that he and Hannah Castle had been invited to attend the BREP meeting that was held during October half term. They did not attend and it was later confirmed that schools budgets were not discussed on that day. It was agreed that the future timetabling of these meetings needs to be looked at more carefully, if headteachers are to be invited to attend.
- A query was raised regarding items to be included on the agenda for School Budget Forum meetings and how matters are reported back to other headteachers. It was confirmed that SBF headteacher members regularly update colleagues at BASH and Primary Federation meetings.

11. Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting will be held early in March, after Council have met on 28th February. The meeting will be held in Civic Offices.

On behalf of the School Budget Forum, Hannah Castle thanked Randal Hemingway for sharing complex and detailed budget information with the Group and wished him all the best for the future and his new job.