

School Budget Forum

Date	03 / 05 / 2022
Time	9.30 to 11.30
Location	Microsoft Teams
Present	Geraint Parry (Chair) - Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Mark Hatch (MH) - Dinas Bran, Helen Vernon (HV) - Bodnant, Colette Owen (CO) – Diocese, Neil Foley (NF) – Prestatyn High, Teleri Llwyd (TLL) – Borthyn, Nicola Griffiths (NG) – Pendref, Rona Jones (RJ) – Emmanuel, Rhona O’Neill (RO) – Tir Morfa, Geraint Davies (GD) – Head of Education, Maria Rimmer - Denbigh High (MR), Dafydd Davies (DD) - Ysgol Twm or Nant, Gwyn Tudor (GT) – Ysgol Glan Clwyd, Gwyndaf Davies (GHD) – Gwernant
Non Members	Craig Joyce (CAJ) - School Funding Manager, Cathy Howatson (CH) (Notes), Steve Gadd (SGD) – Head of Finance, Chris Speed (CS) – Assurance Finance Manager, Catrin Williams - Business Manager Welsh Cluster (CW) (Observer),
Apologies	Claire Armistead - Rhyl High, Shannon Gage – Vice Chair, Amanda Preston – Christ the Word, Lindsey Davenport – Secondary School Governor rep, Leah Crimes - St Brigids

1. Welcome

Geraint Parry (Chair) welcomed the group.

14 members were present at the meeting to make it quorate.

2. Matters arising and actions of last meeting 17/01/2022

No matters arising. The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed by forum.

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3. Budget Update – Steve Gadd

DCC are in receipt of 3 year indicative budgets from Welsh Government. We seem to be in a better position overall but pressures and inflation are still unknown.

Principles for schools will be the same looking at funding inflation in 2023/24.

DCC is currently not looking for 1% savings from schools in 2023/24.

Our timetable is behind due to the election. A medium term financial strategy paper will go to cabinet in June and SG will attend the next SBF with any updates.

In June, SLT and cabinet will have budget workshop and we expect the draft settlement to come through in October, finalised December.

GP asked if County would be looking at the surplus balances and if warning would be given to any changes?

SG currently there is no desire to look at this from County. Its expected the surplus figures would need to be spent and planned over 2 years.

RJ asked about planning budgets, we always have money at year end with short timeframe to spend.

SG – WG always prioritise schools and funding becomes available at the end of year, there is nothing we can do about this and it's better to have it than not.

FSM – SG and Paul Barnes have been enquiring about the latest FSM entitlement. There needs to be a joint incentive to register for FSM and we will be looking at the automatic enrolment issues.

GP - Is there any indication for the pay award for next year? SG confirmed nothing has been announced as yet. We are predicting 4% for teaching and non-teaching in 2022/23.

4. Ratification of School Budgets

Budgets were sent out in February. We have not received any queries from schools. The forum is asked to ratify the budgets.

GP/RJ/MH ratified.

5. Pooled Schemes

Spreadsheet with costings previously been sent to the group. There is an overspend circa £200k. Schools will be adjusted accordingly.

CAJ asked for a decision to be made to increase the pot for next year or report back with the figures in the summer and keep it is.

NF suggested to keep it as is.

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Agreed to keep the total pot the same for pooled schemes.

6. Swimming

The SBF voted to put through the charges the same as last year due to Covid, as some schools swam only 2 terms and some didn't swim at all. CH has put the charges through for 2021/22.

CH reminded group that schools will be charged for swimming if they do not turn up for lessons or do not cancel giving prior warning. This is because Leisure will have already staffed those lessons so costs will need to be covered.

7. School ICT charges

CAJ is looking at the ICT charges for small schools. A paper will need to go to the strategic ICT group for discussion before the SBF make any financial decisions.

GP asked who agreed the methodology? CAJ confirmed that it was ICT who decided on the basis of the charge.

TLL – Discussions have been had in the Ruthin cluster and would welcome communication through the appropriate channels regarding this.

CW asked if there would be a reduction in costs across to cover the model as there are no more schools as part of the model? CAJ confirmed that this will be discussed with ICT.

Agreed to be updated at the next SBF.

8. SIFD and School Balances

Even with the cash injection from WG we currently have 2 schools remaining in SIFD. We do expect that number to increase again as the grant funding is a cash one off and not sustainable. Balances will be made public shortly and a report will be given to cabinet and included in the section 52 statement.

MH asked for an update on the creation of holding accounts centrally for schools to save for replacement ICT equipment and outstanding GAIA termination costs.

CAJ - confirmed this has been raised but no decision has yet been made.

ACTION – CAJ to speak to Chief Accountant for a decision.

Balances –2021/22 balances have now been finalised. We were predicting a surplus of £5.7 million but it now stands at £12.5m surplus for schools. We have received £5.6m in grants and additional £4m since Christmas from WG which is the main contributor to the huge increase. Currently, DCC has no plans to take money from schools with surplus balances, however there is interest in this from WG at the moment so it could become a more prominent issue in the coming years.

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9. Matters Arising from cluster.

TLL – The small school ICT issue which has already been discussed.

10. AOB

Terms of reference – It was raised by the Chair that we have received some complaints regarding the ALN vote that took place. A discussion was had on the process of who is entitled to vote. The ALN vote was agreed to be on a cluster basis so some members didn't vote.

MR requested a copy of the Terms of reference is sent to all the members to be discussed.

GT supported MR to look at the terms of reference.

RJ found there was a difference in the cluster when it came to vote but it was on majority and felt it was a difficult situation. Is our role to vote the fairest option for all schools?

NG agreed with RJ

GP – Do schools all have a rep to vote or to go back and consult with cluster colleagues? Another point raised was that the Chair who is also a Secondary Head had the deciding vote when it came to a tie.

CH confirmed the terms of reference were followed in line with the process for the vote. We have not been in the same position before with voting.

CAJ – the guidance for the terms of reference are set by Welsh Government.

AGREED – to circulate the TOR to the group and discuss them at the next meeting in July.

The meeting ended at 10.40am

Date of next scheduled meeting – Monday 4th July 2022 on Microsoft Teams.