**DIRECTORATE OF LEARNING AND SKILLS**

**Schools Budget Forum**

**2nd December 2024 – Civic Offices**



|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**  **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** | | David Blackwell, Trevor Baker, Lucy Barrowclough, Chris Britten, Mairead Canavan, Peter Cate, Rhys Angell Jones, James Mansfield, Martin Price, Ty Golding, Ruth Foster, Mari Gibbs, Cllr. Emma Goodjohn, Gemma Jones, Rhodri Jones,.  Amanda Bennett, Matt Bowmer, Rachel Cox, Amanda Geddes, Gemma Gullwell-Jones, Elizabeth Jones, Lisa Lewis, Nicola Monckton, Joanne Ware. | |
|  | |  | |
| **Item** | **Issue** | **Discussion** | **Action** |
| 1. | Welcome & apologies | Welcome from the Chair.  Apologies received from  Tim Exell, Paula Vaughan, Terry Vaughan Taylor, Rob Thomas. |  |
| 2. | Minutes of previous meeting | The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as accurate.  No matters were arising other than as covered on the agenda. |  |
| 3. | Budget Forum membership and constitution | The Budget Forum constitution and membership was shared with the forum for information.  Paula Vaughan is retiring and therefore there is a vacancy to address. |  |
| 4. | Election of new Vice Chair - DB | Ruth Foster was elected to the role of Vice Chair of Budget Forum following the resignation of Matt Gilbert. |  |
| 5. | Initial budget proposals 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial plan refresh [attached] | MB presented the slides attached in order to update the forum on a number of areas relating to the Councils budget setting, providing some context on the Council spending and reminding Budget Forum of the key components of the Council's financial strategy.   * Council Spending * Budget Cycle * Financial Strategy * Economy – Chancellor’s Budget * Underlying Gap * Review of Cost Pressures * Restated Gap * Reshaping & Transformation   MB advised that although there is some good news, generally speaking a number of challenges remain. The Council is trying to move to a more financially sustainable model and have a genuine 5 year financial plan. This has been quite difficult on the back of just one year settlements but this is supported by our reshaping and transformation programme. Schools need to have sustainable, balanced budgets. The Council reserves are going down. If the schools collectively are deficit, the Council has to underwrite that from its own reserves. These reserves could disappear in a couple of years. There is a task force in place as a subset of this group that is feeding into the overall reshaping transformation programme. DB noted that we're the fifth lowest spending authority per pupil. We are grateful for that additional funding that gets put in by the Council because of the fact that we were not the fifth lowest funded, we're actually the lowest funding per pupils by Welsh Government. It was also noted that schools are dealing with much more complex needs and challenging pupils and this has a significant impact on budgets  Concerns were expressed by a number of forum members of the impact of the budget position on staff and in particular Headteachers. Several forum members expressed a concern that there would be an impact on retainment of staff and school leaders.  A discussion took place concerning the impact of cuts to social care on schools. in addition the impact in a cut to specialist provision. A discussion took place about the pros and cons of potentially considering increasing Council Tax payments to help to bridge the gap. Other forum members queried the impact of universal free school meals on finances. |  |
| 6. | Grants Update | CT provided a grants update to the forum.  All grants already known to the Education finance team have already been allocated to schools.  At the ADEW finance group meeting, WG colleagues confirmed that a grant would be awarded for the teachers’ pay increase beyond the amount already assumed within the settlement; and that a further grant would be provided towards the cost of the teachers’ superannuation increase. Details will be shared with schools when available |  |
| 7 | Budget forum programme of work - update and progress | TB updated the forum on the work of the sub groups looking at agency, waste and leadership models. In addition the forum will be reviewing not only the special school formula but also some aspects of the mainstream school formula as requested by some schools. |  |
| 8. | Update to long term absence scheme processes | LL provided an update on the change in process for the long term absence and maternity schemes as a result of the introduction of fusion. From April 2025, the procedures relating to both schemes will change to ensure that school budgets are reflecting the correct actual annual expenditure for staffing.  **Long term supply scheme** – From April, schools will process their own LTS invoices and timesheets to their school cost centre and corresponding LTS detail codes (to be advised). A monthly claim will then be made to Education Finance for reimbursement of the costs which will be credited to schools via recharge income codes.  **Maternity scheme** – From April, schools will now retain maternity costs on their school cost centre and corresponding maternity detail codes (to be advised). A monthly claim will then be made to Education Finance for reimbursement of the costs which will be credited to schools via recharge income codes.  There will be a change in the required administrative work within schools, but the effect on workload will be minimal now that all schools are already using Fusion to input invoices and timesheets on a regular basis. As the new processes bed in we expect there to be a reduction in general admin in terms of miscoding’s and general queries around the schemes. |  |
| 9. | Any Other Business | No other business was raised  Next meeting proposed dates   * Stanwell - 5th March 2025 9.30 a.m. * Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg 11 June 2025 9.30 a.m. |  |