



Powys Schools Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the Powys Schools Forum held on Friday 8th April 2016 at the New Life Church, Spa Road East, Llandrindod Wells.

Present:

Cabinet Portfolio Holders:

No representatives

People Scrutiny Committee:

No representative

Primary School Headteachers:

Jan Toms, Caersws Primary School

Kath Thomas, St Michael's Voluntary Aided School

Secondary School Headteachers:

Jackie Parker, Crickhowell High School

Jim Toal, Welshpool High School

John Williams, Gwernyfed High School (**Vice-Chair**)

Mike Jones, Llanfyllin High School

Special School Headteacher:

Julie Kay, Ysgol Penmaes

Teaching Union Representatives:

Deidre Hanson, JCC (Teachers' Panel)

Neil Butler, JCC (Teachers' Panel)

School Governor Representatives:

David Malcomson, Irfon Valley CP School/Builth Wells High School

Graham Taylor, Rhayader C in W School (**Chair**)

Maurice Thorn, Llandrindod High School

Ralph Miller, Gwernyfed High School

Diocesan Representative:

No representative

Officers:

Jane Thomas, Professional Lead for Finance

Nancy Wozencraft, Finance Business Partner (Schools)

Gareth Jones, Senior Manager - Central Support Services (Schools)

Catherine Cottle, Schools HR Business Partner

Mary Salmon, Procurement Specialist (Agenda Item 11)

Apologies:

Councillor Arwel Jones, Portfolio Holder for Education

Councillor Wynne Jones, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Councillor David Jones, Chair of People Scrutiny Committee
 Emyr Jones, Primary Headteacher Representative
 Michelle Humphreys, Primary Headteacher Representative
 Anthony Lancett, School Governor Representative
 Katie Moffat, School Governor Representative
 Hugh Pattrick, School Governor Representative
 Councillor Kath Roberts-Jones, School Governor Representative
 Martin Nosworthy, Diocese of Swansea and Brecon
 Ian Roberts, Head of Schools Service

		ACTION
1.	Welcome and Apologies	
	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received as noted above.	
2.	Schools Service Budget 2016-17	
	<p>Jane Thomas, Professional Lead for Finance, provided an update on the budget settlement for 2016-17 from which it was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council had received additional funding (referred to as the 'floor') of £1.9m as part of this year's final settlement, which had limited the cash decrease in the settlement to 3%; • There was no guarantee that the 'floor' would be in place in future years; • £1.2m of this additional funding had been put into schools' delegated budgets; • Schools would need to take account of any increases in pay and prices when drafting budgets for future years as the MTFs was on a cash standstill basis for schools; • The Council was reviewing and updating its budget setting timetable, with initial work in preparation for the 2017-18 budget due to commence in May 2016. 	
3.	Efficiency Savings	
	<p>An update was provided on proposed efficiency savings for the three year period 2016-17 to 2018-19 in respect of the Schools Service non-delegated budget which had been identified within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.</p> <p>Regarding the £265,000 efficiency saving in respect of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in 2016-17, it was explained that this included:</p> <p>(a) The closure of the Specialist Centre at Crickhowell Primary School</p>	

	<p>(b) Reduced staffing levels at the Brecon and Llanidloes ASD Units</p> <p>(c) A reduction in the cost of out of county provision</p> <p>Regarding the £150,000 efficiency saving in 2018-19 in respect of ALN, it was explained that this saving related to the planned reconfiguration of SEN support to schools, with a particular focus on the role and function of Specialist Centres and Pre-school Assessment Centres, following the establishment of the centrally funded Learning and Inclusion Support Team (LIST).</p> <p>In respect of projected savings as a result of the proposed change to the age of admission, it was noted that the recommendation that the level of funded 3+ pre-school provision should increase to 12.5 not 15 hours per week from the start of the 2017-18 school year would result in a shortfall of £224,000 in the savings target. This shortfall would have to found from elsewhere within the Schools Service budget.</p> <p>Regarding the projected efficiency savings as a result of a change to the appointment and payment of supply teachers and other casual school-based staff, consideration was given to the Portfolio Holder report seeking approval to consult with schools, staff and trade unions regarding the proposal. In essence, it was proposed that staff employed on a regular and/or fixed term basis should be placed onto a contract; all supply teachers employed through the Authority's supply pool should be paid on a fixed point from 1st September 2016; casually employed teaching assistants should be paid on set grades from 1st September 2016 and schools must use New Directions as the supply agency of choice if they did not employ staff through the Authority's supply pool.</p> <p>In response to a question, officers confirmed that the New Directions supply agency was included in a framework agreement under the National Procurement Service; the decision to award the contract to the company had been taken by Commercial Services across Wales, with no involvement from schools or the Schools Service. It was confirmed that staff employed through New Directions would be paid at a lower rate than those employed through the Authority's supply pool.</p> <p>In conclusion, members were reminded that there would be an opportunity to raise queries and/or concerns during the consultation period.</p> <p>In response to a question, Jane Thomas confirmed that Heads of Service would be challenged should savings targets be missed.</p>	
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	To ensure that consultation with the Schools Forum was undertaken in a timely manner Members asked for an early indication where any additional savings were first identified.	
4.	Revisions to the Scheme for Financing Schools and Fair Funding Formula 2016-17	
	<p>An update was provided on the outcome of consultation on proposed revisions to the Authority’s Scheme for Financing Schools and Fair Funding Formula for 2016-17. It was explained that as a result of the consultation exercise a number of revisions to the proposals were proposed, as follows:</p> <p>(a) Energy Allowance That the cost per kWh should be subject to annual review, based on energy costs during the Autumn Term, and the funding delivered through the formula amended accordingly for the following financial year.</p> <p>(b) Special School Funding That the revised funding basis should shadow the current funding methodology for the 2016-17 financial year, with the new funding arrangements being refined and implemented for the 2017-18 financial year.</p> <p>(c) LMS (SEN) Allowance (Primary and Secondary Schools) That the funding in respect of free school meals should be based on the number of Reception to Y11 pupils on roll.</p> <p>In addition the following was noted:</p> <p>(a) Breakfast Club Funding Although concern had been expressed around the implications of imposing a charge no change to the proposal was proposed.</p> <p>(b) Section 4.2 Reporting on the intended use of surplus balances To provide clarity further revisions had been made to the clawback process.</p> <p>It was confirmed that, when approved, a copy of the revised Scheme would be provided to the governing body and headteacher of every school. The Scheme would also be published on the public website.</p>	RD
5.	School Budgets 2016-17	

	<p>Nancy Wozencraft, Finance Business Partner (Schools Service), explained that budget packs had been sent to schools, draft 2016-17 budgets had been received from all schools and financial surgery sessions had been held with schools and governing bodies. Nancy confirmed that schools that were planning to set a cumulative deficit budget for 2016-17 were being supported in analysing their finance, curriculum and staffing needs prior to requesting approval to set a licensed deficit. It was noted that the Finance and HR Teams, together with Challenge Advisers, were also providing support to schools that were projecting a cumulative deficit budget for 2017-18 and 2018-19, with recovery plans being required by 30th September 2016.</p> <p>Jackie Parker referred to changes to the way in which ALN funding was provided to secondary schools for Year 7 pupils transferring from the primary sector and queried whether funding decisions could be made by the ALN Panel prior to pupils being admitted in September. Certainty regarding funding would ensure that schools did not have to set deficit budgets, albeit temporarily. Currently, when top up funding was removed schools were having to make staff redundant, even if the funding was reinstated at a later date, therefore incurring an unnecessary cost.</p> <p>Gareth Jones, Senior Manager – Central Support Services, reminded members that funding for pupils with statements of SEN was delegated to secondary schools to allow flexibility for schools regarding the use of the funding and only top up funding for 1:1 support was allocated through the ALN Panel.</p> <p>Following discussion it was agreed that Keith Brelstaff, Senior Manager for ALN and Inclusion, be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss the specific issue around the timing of decisions regarding top-up funding at transitional stages i.e. when pupils moved from pre-school to mainstream school, from infant to junior school and from primary to secondary school.</p> <p>Regarding the proposal to change the age of admission to school, it was noted that this would result in a significant reduction in funding for primary schools of approximately £2.8m per annum.</p>	RD
6.	Finance Support for Schools	
	<p>Jane Thomas explained that Corporate Finance, including the schools finance team, was currently undergoing external review and as a result all vacant posts had been put on hold, including the appointment of Schools Finance Manager.</p>	

7.	Education Specific Grants 2016-17	
	<p>Jane Thomas explained that there was currently a £400,000 underspend by schools in respect of the Education Improvement Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant for the 2015-16 financial year. Officers were contacting schools to ascertain whether underspends were committed expenditure not yet spent and to ensure that expenditure had been correctly coded.</p> <p>Nancy Wozencraft reported that there had been a reduction of 4.75% in the Education Improvement Grant for 2016-17. It was explained that the Schools Service Management Team would agree how the centrally held element of the grant would be used and school allocations would be notified to schools by 1st May.</p> <p>Regarding the Pupil Deprivation Grant for 2016-17, final figures were awaited from ERW and, when received, funding would be passported direct to schools. Headteacher representatives referred to the late receipt of the PDG for Looked After Children for 2015-16, which had caused problems with monies being spent by 31st March.</p>	
8.	HR Support for Schools	
	<p>Catherine Cottle, Schools HR Business Partner, provided an update on HR support to schools, following the secondment of Lorna Simpson, Schools HR Manager, to ERW and the identified need to strengthen support for schools, from which it was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rachel Hudson had been appointed Acting Schools HR Manager • Rachel Roberts, who had been employed to cover Rachel Hudson's maternity leave, had been retained as a HR Business Partner • Sarah Christoforou had been appointed as a HR Business Partner • An additional HR Business Partner was being recruited <p>Once all staff were in post the allocation of staff to support schools would be reviewed.</p> <p>To assist with allocating queries/workload, a generic e-mail address had been set up for the Schools HR Team - schoolshr@powys.gov.uk. School representatives commented that the service had improved over the last few months.</p>	HR

	Catherine explained that the HR Team was developing a bank of template documents to support schools and would also continue to offer surgeries to schools.	
9.	Breakfast Clubs	
	<p>Catherine Cottle, HR Business Partner, provided an update on the process and timetable for any reduction in Breakfast Club staffing levels as a result of the change in funding from 1st September 2016 and referred to the Council's Redundancy Policy for non-teaching staff which included a redundancy procedure timetable.</p> <p>Catherine explained that the maximum statutory period of notice was 12 weeks for a member of staff who had been continuously employed for 12 years or more. Prior to any decision to terminate employment on the grounds of redundancy consultation had to take place between the Council, Trade Unions and employees and the following formal consultation periods must be observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 days where 100 or more redundancies were proposed; • 30 days if between 20 and 99 redundancies were proposed; • Proposed reductions of less than 5 employees can have a locally agreed shorter period of consultation but this should be no less than 5 working days (14 days is the recommended timeframe). 	
10.	Schools Cashless Project	
	<p>Gareth Jones provided the following update in respect of the Schools Cashless Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system had gone live at Crickhowell High School on 14th March 2016 and was running smoothly; • There had been a small increase in the uptake of school meals; • There were outstanding issues regarding the export of data between the Council's systems and ParentPay and VAT recording which needed to be resolved; • The system would not be rolled out to other schools in the Crickhowell catchment until these issues had been resolved; • Currently the system was only being used for school meals - the option for parents to make other payments would not be available until the outstanding data issues had been resolved; • Financial savings had not yet been quantified as the system was only operating in one school – a report on projected savings and other expected benefits would be brought to the next meeting; • The official launch was taking place at Crickhowell High School today (8th April); 	NW/GJ

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next catchment where the system was expected to go live was Newtown. 	
11.	Charges for Centrally Provided Services	
	<p>Jane Thomas explained that there were proposals to transfer charges to schools for the following centrally provided services without the transfer of budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon reduction tax. This was a tax levied by government, based on projected costs but not usage. It was agreed that the schedule of charges should be circulated to members for information Recycling charges DBS checks <p>Members reminded officers that when the Council was considering cuts in other Service Areas they should be looking at the impact of any change on schools. It was noted that Corporate Finance had the opportunity to comment on any proposals brought forward by Service Areas.</p> <p>It was agreed that this issue should be a standard agenda item at future meetings.</p>	NW
12.	Review of Third Party Spend by Schools	
	<p>Mary Salmon, Procurement Specialist, referred to the Council's focus over the past 18 months to reduce third party spend which had resulted in cumulative savings of £1.15m. Commercial Services currently had limited involvement with schools but as third party spend by schools was in the region of £20m, they were looking to support schools more directly by, for example, schools banding together and Commercial Services negotiating with preferred suppliers to obtain a better price for goods or services. Mary confirmed that schools would not currently be charged a management fee for this support. As a way forward, it was suggested that an analysis be undertaken of the current spend by schools to identify areas where it may be possible to make savings.</p> <p>It was agreed that a briefing paper be prepared and representatives from Commercial Services arrange to attend the next Schools Forum meeting and other headteacher meetings to gauge the feasibility and level of interest in Commercial Services taking on this role.</p>	MS MS

13.	Fair Funding Formula Review	
	<p>Jane Thomas referred to the planned review of the Fair Funding Formula. Officers had identified the following issues and members were asked to contact Jane with suggestions of other issues to be reviewed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding of nursery aged children in 2017-18 and 2018-19 onwards – this was linked to the proposed change in the age of admission • Average Teacher Charge in the primary and special sectors • LMS (SEN) Allowance and formula element of ALN funding • Split site allowance • Identification and removal of any double funding within the formula <p>It was agreed that the current Working Group membership be circulated to members for information; if anyone else wished to serve on the Group they should let Jane know.</p>	RD
14.	Minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on 8th January 2016 and any matters arising	
	The minutes of the meeting held on 8 th January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.	
15.	Any Other Business	
	<p>(a) Revised Scheme for Financing Schools 2016-17 To meet the requirements of the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010, Members agreed that the date for schools to submit formal budget plans to the Authority should be amended to 1st May.</p>	
16.	Date of Next Meeting	
	It was provisionally agreed that the next meeting would be held at 1.30 p.m. on Monday 20 th June 2016. Confirmation to follow.	

**Graham Taylor
Chair**