

Minutes

Newport Schools Forum

Date: 14th January 2021

Time: 3:30pm

Venue: Microsoft Teams

Present:

Nicola Allan (NA), Nick Brain (NB), Caroline McLachlan (CM), Ann Tai (AT), Jo Giles (JG), Steve Rayer (SR), John Guy (JG), Dean Probert (DP), Dean Taylor (DT), Tracey Jarvis (TJ), Gavin Jones (GJ), Kate Guest (KG), Mark Rowland (MR), Eirion Jones (EJ), Kate Knight (KK), Jan de Clare (JdC)

Officers in Attendance:

Sarah Morgan (SM), Andrew Powles (AP), Karyn Keane (KK), Katy Rees (KR), Deborah Weston (DW), Owen James (OJ), Clare Watts (CW), Charlotte Clegg (CC), Nicholas Lo Turco (NLT)

1. Apologies for Absence

Peter Garland (PG) received during meeting

2. Minutes of meeting held on 26 November 2020

Attached



Final Schools
Forum Minutes 26th

ACTION: Page 2 – HT asked if an amendment could be made to the minutes dated 26.10.20. First paragraph to include when the committee reviewed the staffing ratios for the Learning Resource Bases (LRB) they were not aware of the new Rogerstone Primary's ASD class at the time.

Forum had no objections to the amendment and agreed that the remainder of the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

HT raised that the ALN implementation group is overdue and that they were acting on interim measures.

LAO confirmed there was a plan to take this forward at the beginning of February and asked if the group were happy for the current membership to continue and forum felt this was sensible. The group will link in with the formula sub group work ready for the schools forum formula meeting in Autumn Term.

ACTION: KR to review ALN Implementation membership details and agree with Headteacher leads.

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LAO asked if the existing formula sub group members were also happy to continue. SBM confirmed they were happy to continue in their roles on the group.

ACTION: CC to contact existing members and seek confirmation.

4. Update on Final Settlement – Owen James

Verbal Update

Assistant Head of Finance (AHoF) gave a verbal update on the final settlement.

The LA in a different position than previous years as the draft settlement was delayed, this would normally be received in the autumn but was not received until December.

Draft settlement was published on the 23rd December 2020 with the cabinet report published on the 4th January 2021.

Points 3.14 to 3.20 of the cabinet report pack refer specifically to schools funding and appendix 1 outlines budget investments.

Very positive settlement with a 5.48% cash increase taking into account transfers in of specific grants such as teachers pay and equates to a £12.5m cash increase.

The LA saw the largest % increase as the Distribution Sub Group (DSG) took into account the rebasing of population due to growth in the city. This makes up approx. £4m of the 5.48%.

Appendix 9 (p.125) of the cabinet report shows the £12.8m total increase, council tax increase of 5% out for consultation equating to circa £15.7m additional funding in 22/23.

Total pressures across the council such as pay, increments, schools, demand etc equate to £16.2m therefore a budget gap of £500k however cost reductions from prior years leave a balanced position.

Savings proposals are yet to be agreed by cabinet which would further improve the position detailed in appendix 9.

HT asked out of £16m pressures identified, what is included in the £1.5m 'other' pressures.

AHoF confirmed it is broken down in appendix 1 and includes pressures such as the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) transfer in of Teachers pay award, investment accounts, pension deficit, neighbourhood hubs, strategic economic development and various other pressures.

5. Review of School Cabinet Papers – Owen James Electronic Copy Issued in Advance



Public reports pack
08th-Jan-2021 14.00

AHoF gave an update on the proposed schools funding.

The total pressure for schools is circa £4.9m and the LA position is to fully fund the cost increases identified in the cabinet report in Schools.

It does not deal with deficits but does deal with cost and demand pressures and schools with deficit recovery plans will continue to be supported by the council to get back to a base position.

Pay inflation is an extra £1.8m, which compares favourably with other LAs and reflects a 4.6% growth to budget over prior years

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Central Education pressures largely relate to Learning Resource Bases (LRB's) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) provision which is also picked up in appendix 1 and closely linked to that is the confirmation that the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) grant will continue at same level as 2021.

The settlement has allowed the LA to deal with some medium term pressures such as capital financing costs which is positive.

Schools in deficit will still need to continue to focus on recovery. The LA will work closely with schools in a deficit to deliver savings.

SBM asked if the £4.9m increase to the Individual School Budget (ISB) includes the teachers' pay grant.

AHoF confirmed that both the income and the pressure were included. Whilst the chancellor has said there would be a pay freeze for teachers, England do not have control over that in Wales. The independent pay body in Wales may take the decision to award teachers a pay increase in 21/22 and this has been reflected in the budget just in case. This would reduce potential pressure on schools.

SBM stated that in the September 2020 pay award, schools had been given extra funding to get through Sept-March and queried whether schools will still have to pay for the increase.

AHoF confirmed that the April to August 20 pay award was transferred into the ISB for 2021-22 and the September 21 pay award will be ring fenced for schools and released if needed.

SBM asked if pay award costs can be split out and modelled.

AHoF confirmed that schools can work with their Finance Business Partners to identify the cost in April to August and September to March.

Chief Education Officer (CEO) said that she was thrilled that budget pressures can be met for next year. It was hard to request large sums of money as other service areas were also faced with pressures. The medium term plan demonstrates extra investment in ASD provision and to support LRB's, ensuring that the most complex needs are met whilst trying to reduce spend on Out of County provision and ensure best value for money.

HT asked if increases to the settlement like this would continue going forward and offer more stability.

AHoF stated that this increase was largely due to population rebasing and that future increases may not be as significant but this is a good base position. The average increase in settlements across Wales was 3.4%. Other LA's do not have such a growing population putting extra demands on their schools.

HT asked if this calculation is likely to keep pace with population growth if it continues.

AHoF stated that he does not sit on the DSG subgroup within WG who deal in that area but The Head of Finance, Meirion Rushworth will be able to provide an update. The DSG perform reviews on a periodic basis to avoid big leaps in population.

AHoF invited questions and comments from forum in relation to appendix 1.

HT raised concerns in relation to the proposal to reduce the size of the nursery Communication Class from 16 to 8 full time equivalent places (FTE) as this will reduce the dedicated nursery provision for children with ASD when the population of ASD pupils is continuing to rise.

LAO advised that this was a non-statutory provision and funds have been diverted to mainstream. Education Services will be looking at ALN data going forward over the next 2 months and should have future projections to feed into the system.

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HT asked if there is likely to be a requirement again next year for another ASD base in mainstream or is there going to be room in Ysgol Bryn Derw to facilitate these children.

LAO stated the LA is exploring options for creating additional ASD capacity for learners in the Foundation Phase. LAO confirmed costings were being prepared the same way as for new schools.

HT welcomed the consideration of additional provision but raised concerns over the reduction in the size of the Communication Class. It was noted that a reduction in early year's provision would lead to increased challenges around collating appropriate information and evidence in relation to these pupils.

LAO stated that the data trend analysis will be reviewed going forward and by reducing OOC placements, local provision such as Catch 22 and Newport Live could be increased therefore making use of money already in the system.

HT noted that the narrative was incorrect in relation to breakfast clubs in appendix 1.

LA to amend this and CEO confirmed that new school builds would have resource to have a breakfast club.

HT stated secondary school transitions appear to be decreasing over time and did this mean that projected future secondary schools transitions would be lower at that stage.

LAO advised that the LA has funded new demand in Primary provision in the new and growing schools, these pupils then filter their way into the secondary schools and the LA does have some surplus capacity in secondary schools. Secondary school expansions are reviewed as the pupil projection model is updated.

SBM stated that the deficit figure for his school was different on the monitoring paper (p153) than the figure he had provided and asked what had been adjusted.

LAO confirmed that the position provided by the school had been adjusted to account for the teachers pay grant that had been announced.

SBM stated that the 2021 outturn for schools was more favourable than expected but suggested this was down to the impact of COVID-19 and savings secondary schools have made in areas such as exam fees and supply cover.

This would be a one off saving due to the extenuating circumstances and that schools had also been holding balances back on the basis that COVID-19 funding was currently only available until the end of March 2021 and had been waiting for settlement information to come through.

HT reiterated this point and said the positive position was in part due to prolonged closures which have meant a reduction in school running costs. What stood out in the report was the in-year overspend for a number of Primary Schools despite the circumstances. Schools have reduced their reserves and the challenges remain.

HT asked what the plan was for the transfer from FMS to BMS over the next couple of months and asked if training would be rolled out.

LAO advised that at present only budget monitoring had been moved over and schools would still need to keep FMS for other functions for the time being. All core service school business managers had received training and in enhanced service schools, Finance Business Partners will provide individual training and update your schools forecast with you during your monitoring visits.

Chair NA lost internet connection and vice chair MR took over in her absence.

SBM asked what the timeline was for the indicative budgets.

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AHoF confirmed the budget will go to Cabinet on 22nd February 2021, and then to Council on 3rd March 2021 to get the go-ahead.

LAO advised the intention is to get the indicative school budgets issued by 14th Feb with final budgets by 31st March as we are still aiming for the normal timetable however the pandemic is impacting on certain elements required to run the funding formula.

6. Questions

Raised in above section

7. AOB

Chair re-joined the session and resumed her role.

LAO shared proposals regarding pupil count arrangements and Catering funding.

Secondary Pupil Count Data - The funding formula for the secondary pupil count requires the following as the basis for a 3 point average:

- January 2021 PLASC count
- September 2021 estimate
- January 2022 estimate

Given the delay to the PLASC collection, now not likely until sometime in March, it was proposed the following for 21/22 pupil average:

Count based on 26 January 2021 as per the initial delayed count date from Welsh Government.
September 2021 and January 2022 estimate to be determined by school as normal

The above will be compared to PLASC 2021 for the retrospective adjustment in 2022/23 financial year.

For the 20/21 retrospective adjustment in 21/22 funding this would normally compare the following:

- Jan 2019 PLASC
- Sept 2020 estimate v actual
- Jan 2021 estimate v Jan 2021 PLASC (delayed)

It is proposed that the Jan 2021 estimate is compared to the Sept 2020 count for the adjustment.

SBM confirmed that he and other school representatives were happy to progress based on these proposals.

Free School Meal (FSM) Funding - The following is the basis for allocating FSM funding to schools within the formula:

Primary pupils:

- The number of pupils per school receiving free school meals during January 2021.

Secondary Schools:

- The number of pupils per school receiving free school meals each month from April 20 to January 21 and a projection for February 21 and March 21.

Special School:

- The number of pupils per school receiving school meals during January 2021.

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The pandemic has impacted on the uptake of FSM and it was proposed that the LA use 20/21 allocation basis for 21/22 with the actuals included if reasonable for February to March for secondary schools.

The LA had met with the school forum secondary school business managers to consult on these proposals prior to the meeting and all agreed this was a sensible approach.

HT queried if the proposal should be to use *actual* free school meal entitlement numbers.

LAO advised that the funding formula it is based on the actual uptake of meals which is lower at approx. 70-75% of the entitlement figure. If the formula was based on entitlement alone then it would fund schools for more meals than they were actually providing.

AHoF advised will need to monitor this for future pressures and finance will carry out some analysis on entitlement and will share with forum.

Forum agreed this was a sensible approach and would be interested in the results of the entitlement analysis.

Action – CW to share results of FSM entitlement analysis with forum.

AHoF advised forum that he would be leaving the authority in the next few months and thanked everyone for their support over the years and it had been great working with you all.

Forum thanked the AHoF for being available for forum member's queries and sharing data and wished him all the best.

Meeting closed.

Date of next meeting(s) –

11th March 2021

15th July 2021