

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM JOINT EDUCATION SERVICE JOINT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint
Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 28 March 2023 at 3.30 pm

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

**County Borough Councillors - Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint
Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor R Birch (Vale of Glamorgan Council) (Chair)
Councillor R Lewis
Councillor J-P Blundell (Bridgend CBC)
Councillor M Jones (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough)
Councillor S Merry (Cardiff Council)

Officers in attendance

Mr E Cooper - Lead Chief Executive, (Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council)
Ms S Davies - Service Director, Finance Services (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council)
Mr L Harvey, Lead Director of Education, (Bridgend County Borough Council).

Others in attendance:-

Ms C Seery - Managing Director, Central South Consortium
Ms L Blatchford Deputy - Deputy Managing, Director Central South Consortium

38 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In Accordance with the Councils Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of interest made parenting to the agenda.

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39 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 12th December 2022 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

The Service Director, Finance Services updated the Joint Committee briefly that further to last December's meeting at which the MTFP and 23/24 budget were presented, all constituent LAs had set their budgets and there was no further feedback or objections regarding the 23/24 contributions.

40 2022/23 BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE

The Service Director, Finance Services, advised that the budget of £3.6M was

agreed by Joint Committee on 22nd Dec 2021 and the current position showed an estimated underspend for the year of £224k compared to £187k reported in December. The majority of the underspend was attributed to Employee budgets of £259k which was mainly due to the timing of recruitment and the utilisation of grant funding, and there was an offset of additional IP capacity to support ongoing business requirements. Premises showed a projected net underspend of £47k where there were savings on the Valleys Innovation Centre accommodation, offset by external premises hire. Transport showed a projected overspend of just under £9k, resulting from increased face to face meetings in line with the lifting of Covid restrictions. Supplies and services projected an overspend of £46k as a result of investment in ICT equipment and there was also additional work undertaken for translation, advertising, promotional materials and website development. In addition, there was also an overspend on Support Services as a result of the business need for further services to be delivered by the host authority relating to ICT, data protection and some administrative support.

The Service Director, Finance Services, continued that paragraph 3.4 referred to the Service Remodelling Earmarked Reserve, to support the setting and delivery of budgets over the medium term. As detailed at the previous Joint Committee meeting, this reserve stood at £200k and no drawdowns were required in 22-23, to date. At the previous Joint Committee meeting, Members authorised the lead S151 officer to allocate any year end underspend to this Earmarked reserve, to support the setting and delivery of balanced budgets going forward and that would be picked up in the year-end position report, to be reported in a future Joint Committee Meeting. The Service Director, Finance Services completed her presentation by advising Members that section 4 covered the use of grant funding and details were presented at Appendix 1 and demonstrated that nearly 93% of funds were delegated to schools and the local authorities.

The Chair complimented officers on the compilation of the report.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the current projected outturn position for 2022/23 (paragraph 3.2) and the allocation of any year-end underspend, after taking account of specific financial risks, to the existing Service Remodeling Earmarked Reserve to support the setting and delivery of balanced budgets over the medium-term (as approved by the Joint Committee on 13th December 2022).

Note the current grant funding position for 2022/23

41 **CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM GRANTS REPORT**

The Deputy Managing Director CSC presented Members with an update on the grants received by the Consortium in 2022/23, for which notifications have been received, and provided the methods of allocation of each. She noted the recommendations at section 2 and, following a discussion with Directors, it was their recommendation to approve the distribution of those grants, as in section 4. The background to the report, was provided for Members in section 3, and it was highlighted to Members that as host authority Rhondda Cynon Taf would act as 'banker authority' and under the terms of the grant agreements, was responsible for accepting the terms and conditions on behalf of the Joint Committee. The method of apportionment of each of the grants varied, depending on its nature,

the intended recipients, and the purpose and terms and conditions of those grants. For each grant received, the process adopted was outlined in section 4.2 of the report. The Consortium prepared a proposal distribution method that was taken to the Management Board and Directors of Education that approved that basis and then provided recommendations to Joint Committee. The report in front of Members today, was the recommendations of the Management Board.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC continued that section 5 highlighted the revised award of funding to the value of £48,236 which was an addition to the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant. The aim of that funding was outlined in section 5 and was to continue to support curriculum reform. The breakdown of the apportionment could be found at Annex A, and she highlighted a few of the areas included, from Annex A, the funding had been awarded for.

A Member asked for clarification around the Design resource development working group.

The Managing Director CSC explained that it was a group that was working with Welsh Government (WG) on curriculum design, so they could then generate materials and resources and share them across the country. She advised that she could provide a list, which could be circulated to Members, of CSC schools that were participating, as this was a matter of public record.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

Approve the distribution of grants as detailed in section 4 of the report (and Annex A).

42 REGIONAL AUDIT REPORT

The Deputy Managing Director CSC advised that section 3 provided background to the report and explained how CSC was responsible for putting in place the arrangements for the governance of its affairs and to facilitate the effective exercise of those functions, one of which was the system of internal control, and audit work, that was undertaken each year, independently, to assess that work in line with the Legal Agreement. Members would be aware that CSC was also responsible for undertaking an assessment of its overall governance each year, and this included internal control, the findings of which, were set out in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The conclusions from the two reports presented today, would also form part of that report of the AGS for this period (with the AGS being reported to the 23rd May 2023 Joint Committee meeting).

The Deputy Managing Director CSC continued that section 4 went through the two audit reports, one of which was the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant (RCSIG), and this detailed report could be found in Appendix A, starting on page 29. Members attention was drawn to the report, which said there was substantial assurance, with many areas of strength identified, and no recommendations. The other grant that was audited by Regional Internal Audit Service was the Pupil Development Grant (PDG), and this report could be found in Appendix B, starting on page 37. Members were again advised that substantial assurance had been provided, with a number of areas of strength, and no recommendations.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC drew Members attention to the conclusion at section 5 of the report and noted that Internal Audit played an important role in

providing that independent assurance on systems of internal control and based on the work undertaken by the Service during the year, there were no recommendations for improvement that were deemed necessary in respect of the internal control arrangements within the Consortium.

A Member asked the Deputy Managing Director CSC, to define Substantial Assurance.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC, advised that the definition of Substantial Assurance, could be found on each of the back pages of the Appendices, under Definitions, before reading aloud to Members.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

Note the Internal Audit report issued during 2021/22 and to raise no matters of governance requiring further actions.

43 CSC ANNUAL ACADEMIC SCRUTINY REPORT

The Deputy Managing Director CSC advised that previously CSC would have produced an annual Efficiency and Effectiveness report, however as part of the recommendations to Joint Committee, on the reporting and work of the Consortium, this had moved to twice yearly reporting, so there would be the annual Academic Scrutiny Report, which was being presented to Members today, and at the end of the financial year, in the summer term, the annual Financial Report, would be presented. Usually this would be done as one report, but Members would notice the body of the report, and then a series of Appendices.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC began by advising that section 1, provided an overview of the work of the CSC, to provide assurances to Members and the general public, and stakeholders, on the work of the CSC to date. Section 2 then provided the background to the CSC and as part of the reporting for this period, would look back at the first half year of the business plan and report on the progress that had been made. An annual report would then come back in the summer term, on the whole business plan. This section also provided an overview of the work of self-evaluation and how the priorities within the business plan, were achieved. Section 3 provided an overall overview of performance, which was very high level and this detail sat in the local authority scrutiny reports, which were presented to most local authorities in the spring term, as well as information about Estyn inspections from a regional perspective, with local authority perspectives provided in the local authority scrutiny reports, presented to Education Scrutiny Committees.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC continued that section 4 provided progress within the current business plan, looking at the period April to October 2022, and highlighted the different sections within the business plan, with page 50 showing a summary of progress that had been made, which was summarised in table 3. Members were advised there had been very good or strong progress made in almost 40% of the elements within the business plan, and satisfactory progress made in the further 47%. It was noted that there was some limited progress in some areas, although when reported in the summer term, all areas would have made progress. Section 4 then provided an overview of the impact and evaluation of the different areas within the business plan, noting on page 52 that each of the priority areas was worked through, using the success measures

agreed at the beginning of the business plan cycle, and provided a summary of the progress and impact where it was available, within those sections of the report. Section 5 then provided a progress update with recommendations, from published reports, as detailed on page 56, table 4, with the 4 publications available in Appendix B. Section 6 then provided an overview of the main strands of activity, with the Deputy Managing Director CSC advising that each year, 4 different areas were looked at in detail, which could be found in Appendix C.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC finished by noting that section 7 provided Members with an overview of funding, which was also mirrored in the local authority scrutiny reports and walked Members through the core contributions and additional funding whilst noting at paragraph 7.3, a section on the resource board. Section 8 highlighted the conclusions and Members were informed that it was judged that currently there was satisfactory progress that had been made against the business plan priorities and against the progress of recommendations from regional published reports, which name Consortia as a recommendation. The Deputy Managing Director CSC concluded that colleagues would be invited back to talk to Members about the 4 different strands, being reported on today.

The Chief Executive Officer (Merthyr Tydfil) asked how the Consortia, could include the user voice, in terms of feedback, in its evaluations.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC acknowledge that this was built into the self-evaluation, with all stakeholders asked via governance groups, with this report, as well as others, e.g., Management Board, RSG and Governor Stakeholders, etc., to glean that information. Members were informed that the stakeholder survey, due to take place in spring had been paused, as currently, the Consortia was unlikely to get feedback that would be valuable with headteachers currently not engaging with that type of survey, but it was hoped that this could be circulated, straight after Easter, to get a much better return.

The Managing Director CSC noted there was a minor error on page 109 of the report in respect of table 6, which would be corrected before publication.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

Note the Annual Academic Report (and Annex B and C).

44 CSC ANNUAL SELF-EVALUATION

The Managing Director CSC advised that it was felt inappropriate to bring the self-evaluation report to Members today, that did not take into account the views of stakeholders, following sharing that with a range of governance groups, so it was agreed to defer this item to a subsequent meeting of the Joint Committee.

Joint Committee Members **RESOLVED** to defer consideration of this item to a subsequent meeting.

45 CSC RISK REGISTER

The Deputy Managing Director CSC advised that the report provided an update on the corporate risk register and noted that following a meeting of CSC Management Board in February 2023, Members of the Management Board

(which included the LA Directors and CSC SMT), recommended to Joint Committee to consider and approve the revised corporate risk register, attached as Appendix B. Members were then provided with some background and advised that a revised risk management policy, outlined how risks were reported in the Operational Plan and how they were then categorised into themes and considered how they should be treated. This approach was embedded within the annual governance cycle and progress would be included when the AGS was reported back, in May 2023. It was then for Members to determine whether these changes should be made, following those recommendations. Following the fourth quarter of the business planning cycle, a review of the organisations risk register, in light of the revised risk policy, took place, and was provided for Joint Committee as Appendix A. The Deputy Managing Director CSC then went through the changes, that Members were being asked to consider.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC, noted in respect of changes to Risk 1, that she had previously presented to Members the view that EIG would be allocated through LAs for the upcoming financial year, as well as PDG allocations. Since the report, WG had advised, this was no longer the case for EIG, and EIG would now revert back to allocation through regional consortia. The Managing Director CSC had since written to schools, highlighting that they would work with colleagues in WG and LA colleagues, over the next few weeks, to get those allocations out, as swiftly as possible whilst working with WG officials to iron out any inconsistencies. Members were then advised, the changes to Risk 5, in particular in respect of the impact of action short of strike and industrial action on being able to assess the impact of grants in schools as well as highlighting, Risk 10, changes to the narrative, with regards to schools causing concern and a revised policy would be taken back through governance in due course. The Deputy Managing Director CSC then highlighted to Members the 2 new risks, that the CSC Management Board had proposed to be included, as detailed in Risks 11 and 12.

A Member referred to Risk 2, the Implementation of Curriculum for Wales (CfW), and asked about the impact of Covid-19 with regard to this.

The Managing Director CSC advised that covid had impacted schools differently, with some having time and space to do a lot of curriculum work, during lockdowns, and schools that weren't. All schools had worked incredibly hard to ensure they were compliant, but the curriculum was not finished. All primary schools had started developing their curriculum, as clusters, and that was continuing to evolve. She highlighted that the danger was where schools felt they had done the new curriculum, because it wasn't that kind of curriculum, it was about how it met the needs of the learners in a school. She was relatively pleased with where most schools were, and lots of different examples of practice happening within schools, had been shared, but there remained some significant challenges.

Within secondary schools the challenge was still the accountability and assessment measures, in terms of KS4 and KS5. So, although they may not have legally started the curriculum, they were working towards a CfW ethos, but there was a reluctance to take it much further without knowing what those exams would look like, so there was a need to make sure that schools weren't planning their curriculum to meet the accountability measures, but planning the curriculum, to meet the needs of their learners. Another potential bigger secondary school issue were schools moving to a 3-year GCSE programme, because that didn't fit with the ethos and philosophy of a broader balanced

curriculum, and WG colleagues were getting more concerned that was becoming the norm, so it was important that learners, had a broad and balanced curriculum for that full period of KS3.

The Member felt it was difficult for this to be prevented, without becoming extremely prescriptive about exactly what was taught in year 9

The Managing Director CSC acknowledged that the concern was not schools incorporating GCSE content, into year 9 content, but in schools where learners were taking their GCSE options in year 8, knowing they would take public exams in year 10, because that didn't fit with the ethos. The concern was making sure schools were going back to what was right for the learners and having a rationale behind their curriculum. She noted that IP's were talking to schools about it. She was hopeful, this was few and far between, but an eye needed to be kept on what schools were doing, as accountability measures were changed.

A Member referred to Risk 3 and noted it talked about the reluctance of a small number of schools to engage with their cluster and asked for an example of why that might be.

The Managing Director CSC explained that there were 60 clusters across the region, and 57 of them worked well, although there was a reluctance from secondary schools to be involved to the same extent as primary schools. All schools across the region were working in collaboration with other schools, be that their cluster schools or other schools, although faith schools had to work slightly differently, as they took children from other schools in the area. Going forward, they would keep going back to those schools and offering support, going to their inset days, etc.

A Member noted the arrival of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) and welcomed this wholeheartedly but asked how the needs of children, who were presently eFSM, would be addressed, so as not to lose any information held, as parents may not want to provide that information going forward.

The Managing Director CSC advised it was about working with LA's, governors, and parents, in all schools, to change that narrative, so schools were still asking parents for those eligibility entitlements, so that they could access that additional PDG funding that supported their learners, although she acknowledged this was going to be difficult, noting the issues in England. More and more systems had been put in place over the last 5 years to gather that eligibility information when children started school, so it was how to refrain that.

The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support (Bridgend) agreed this was a fantastic initiative but acknowledged there were some logistical challenges, with regard to categorisation about these learners. Management systems needed to catch up and there were several logistical issues with regard to curriculum time, supervision and access to school meals, where perhaps kitchen facilities were not where they needed to be. In addition, he highlighted the challenge of different groups being eligible, so trying to avoid, in one term, one group of children being eligible, and then in the next term, they're not.

A Member agreed this raised a very valid point as currently eFSM, was used as a measure, in comparison with the nFSM. He felt the formula needed to change, and agreed, parents who currently applied for eFSM, would ask why they would need to give this information, as UFSM. A conversation needed to be had with

WG colleagues to ask, what could be done to ensure getting those figures right, otherwise children would fall through the cracks, just because parents didn't think they needed to apply.

A Member highlighted her support, for what had just been said, noting the stark difference in data between English and Welsh Medium schools, in her area, which underlined not using data linked to geographical areas to talk about the levels of deprivation within individual schools, and the importance of not losing track of that, even while trying to deliver on the USFM element. This needed to be addressed.

A Member largely agreed with the comments already made, and wondered whether a survey could be done, across the consortium area, to get an idea on what the thoughts might be and if there were any innovative ideas. He felt it would be useful, between now and the next meeting, to gather some information and potentially to approach WG as well, as they had a huge part to play in terms of the messaging to parents. There needed to be a more rounded approach across the consortium area.

The Chief Executive Officer (Merthyr Tydfil) noted a recent letter from WG, which had gone out to all schools that required eligible families to still apply for FSM status....which would provide them with a PDG grant, so felt it may still be possible to capture a lot of the data discussed, although there was still a need to follow up with WG, as part of the conversation.

The Chair acknowledged this was good to hear but was concerned that parents had to be pressed to make the application in the first place. It was important for those people, who were governors to raise this with their governing body, as something to think about.

The Managing Director CSC felt that this should be kept on the agenda and would be raised at CSC meetings with WG and would come back Members at the next meeting with an update.

A Member referred to risk 10 and wondered how much headway could be made, against the problems?

The Managing Director CSC acknowledged that staffing in schools was a real issue, with the biggest concern moving forward, schools coming back to say they would not be able to engage with the professional learning next year, because they didn't have the capacity to release staff / afford supply teachers. Part of the response was looking at ways that professional learning could be delivered e.g., asynchronous, so people could access in a variety of ways, however the benefits of some of that professional learning was being in room and discussing that in dialogue, with other people. In terms of the risk, those schools causing concern or schools that were in an inspection category, were being looked at in particular, noting the current action short of strike, which had not been cancelled by the NAHT, and the expectation was that if a school was in category, it still engaged with that support, which had to be really pushed with schools. There were multiple opportunities to support schools so, staff were spending more time with those schools as well as those schools getting the first call on that capacity to provide brokered support. Additionally, where schools were not engaging with that support, and making progress, this was being taken back to the LA's, asking them to use their statutory powers to issue pre-warning notices and warning notices.

A Member referred to risk 11 and asked how that impacted on the previous risk.

The Managing Director CSC explained that whilst the NEU strike was over, the NAHT strike was causing the biggest concern, because headteachers' weren't engaging with consortia, so not responding to questionnaires, which provided the information needed, to report on grants, in particular, so working with WG, to ensure this was changed for next year, to reduce the bureaucracy and the amount of evidence gathering needed. Potentially, it would not be possible to report to LA's or WG around some of the things normally done, e.g., grants spends and the progress that schools were making. A log was being kept of all the visits that were cancelled, with only the NAHT currently involved, which primarily impacted on primary schools, so the curriculum support, for this term, had been able to carry on, because it was set up earlier in the year, with the agreement of the headteacher. The worry moving forward, was if headteachers didn't agree that support, it was going to be very difficult to implement any new support for the summer term. However, some schools were now starting to engage with the support, so the number of schools, seemed in some areas, to be decreasing. The ASCL were talking about doing indicative, getting expressions, as to whether people should be joining the action, so the summer term would be a whole new ballgame.

The Chair asked if there were any comments in relation to risk 12?

The Managing Director CSC noted the increase in the proportion of staff on long-term sick, with more staff saying it was work related stress, but acknowledged they were working with RCT, as the host authority, to develop the culture within the organisation, but it was a significant risk and there wasn't the capacity to replace those people, so that impacted on the system.

The Chair felt it would be useful to follow up on most of the points, in the next meeting, if that was possible. She reiterated the point that was made about FSMs and how all should be encouraging parents to apply for them whilst circulating to all Councillors, who were governors, or even that weren't governors.

Following consideration by Members it was **RESOLVED** to:

Approve the revised corporate risk register, which aligns to the updated Risk Management Policy (September 2022).

46 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 4.41 pm

**Cllr R Birch
Chair**