

**SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM
(DRAFT MINUTES - SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM)**

Minutes of the meeting of the School Budget Forum held on Monday, 30 November 2020 at 2.00 pm (via a Virtual meeting).

EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES

<p align="center">PRESENT</p>	<p>Councillor C Leyshon (Vice-Chair) Councillor M Webber Councillor R Lewis</p> <p>Mr R Jones – Treorchy Comprehensive School Mr P Morgan, Glynhafod Juniors / Cwmaman Infants Ms. L. Bailey, Tonysguboriau Primary Ms K Retallick, Ysgol Nantgwyn Mr S Roberts, Maesybryn Primary Mr D Mogford, Maesgwyn Mr A Roberts, Parc Lewis Primary Ms B Cheetham, Y Pant Comprehensive</p>
<p align="center">IN ATTENDANCE</p>	<p>Ms C Jones Mr M Cleverley Ms A Winter – Central South Consortium Mr C Bradshaw Ms G Davies Mr P Griffiths Ms C Edwards Ms S Davies</p>
<p align="center">APOLOGIES</p>	<p>Councillor J Rosser (Chair) Councillor A Morgan Councillor M Norris</p> <p>Mr R Evans – Y Pant Mr D Davies, YGG Aberdar Mr D Jenkins, Ysgol Ty Coch Ms S Mitchell, St John the Baptist School Mr C Coole, Darran Park Primary Ms J Rees, Cwmlai Primary Ms E Beasley - Ysgol Nantgwyn Ms H Nicholas – Tonyrefail Community School</p>

No	Discussion / Action	Action	By Who
8.	<p data-bbox="320 197 932 300">BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021/22 (INCLUDING MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE)</p> <p data-bbox="320 344 999 591">With the aid of a PowerPoint Presentation the Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services provided Members with a summary update in respect of the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan 2020/21 to 2023/24 (MTFP) and Phase 1 of the Budget Consultation 2021/22.</p> <p data-bbox="320 636 999 1361">During his overview of the MTFP Members were provided with information on the Council’s 2020/21 Revenue Budget and financial position, and an outlook over the next 3 years, as set out in the MTFP. The Service Director provided specific updates from the MTFP that included assumptions around Welsh Government Settlement levels; Council Tax; Schools; forecasted ‘inescapable’ and ‘risk’ budget pressures, fees and charges and inflation; Reserves; and overall forecasted spend requirements and resource availability. With specific regard to Schools, the Service Director advised that the Schools Budget for 2020/21 equated to £161.6M (over 31% of the Council’s total budget) and highlighted the long term commitment of the Council to support schools and recognizing that there has been a requirement for local efficiency planning at an individual school level over a number of years.</p> <p data-bbox="320 1406 999 1697">The Service Director went on to provide Forum Members with a series of PowerPoint slides covering the Budget Consultation 2021/22 arrangements, indicating that it is a 2 phase process, adopts a ‘digital by default’ approach due to Covid-19 and provides alternate means for those with reduced or no access to the internet.</p> <p data-bbox="320 1742 999 2058">The Service Director proceeded to ask Forum Members questions contained within the budget consultation and Members were reminded that their feedback would be incorporated into a Phase 1 Budget Consultation report, alongside the feedback received from all other stakeholders, and would be considered by Cabinet as part of it developing a proposed Revenue Budget</p>	Noted	PG

Strategy for the 2021/22 financial year. Forum Members were requested to provide feedback on the following questions.

School Budget

Do you agree that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay cost pressures in our schools?

- Members agreed that the Council should continue to provide sufficient resources, referencing the extra pressure put on schools over the last 8 months due to the Covid 19 pandemic with such pressures continuing into the future. Members referenced the extra support provided through hybrid learning approaches and the essential support being provided by schools in respect of mental health awareness and support, notwithstanding the staffing resource implications and pressures due to Covid itself.
- Members commented on the risk teachers were experiencing everyday (and the risk this presented for their own families) on the frontline due to the pandemic, continuing to keep children's education and wellbeing a priority and commented that in light of this any national pay freeze for teachers would be scandalous.

Fees & Charges

What are your views on fees and charges levels for next year for the following areas (*as outlined within the presentation*) plus any other areas?

- Forum Members were happy with the current position in respect of Fees & Charges.

Council Service Priorities

The Council provides a wide range of important services – which do you think should be most protected and prioritised for additional resources in 2021/22?

- Forum Members were content with the priorities outlined within the presentation slide.

Council Tax

What would be your preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year?

- Some Forum Members commented that any increase would cause financial difficulties for some families and other Forum Members fed back support for the proposed 2.85% increase.

Efficiencies

Do you think this is a good strategy?

- Forum Members commented that all schools were continually trying to deliver efficiency savings although it was noted that schools were now needing to deliver even more during the pandemic, delivering services usually taken forward via other services with specific reference to wellbeing services.

(N.B. Officers commented on the additional measures provided by the Council to assist and support the emotional and wellbeing agenda of pupils through additional funding of family engagement officers, specific grant funding and significant investment for social, emotional and behavioural support)

Council Reserves.

Do you think the Council should continue with such a strategy?

- The Forum agreed that the Council should continue with its strategy in respect of Reserves.

General Comments

- Elected Members of the Forum took the opportunity to place on record their thanks to all schools and their staff who have gone above and beyond and have continued to deliver for the benefit of the young people of RCT in very difficult and unprecedented times. Members commented on the inspiring support being provided to pupils in all aspects of education and wellbeing. The Members also spoke of the importance of the feedback provided by the Forum as part of the budget consultation process and the Council's on-going commitment to support young people across the County Borough.

- Forum Members commented on the genuine pressures placed on schools and again spoke of the support needed to assist them to deliver. Members recognised and appreciated the support already being provided by the Council, at the same time as recognising the on-going challenging environment schools are operating within, and the Forum welcomed working further with the Council to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Part II – Council Priorities

Council Priorities

Do you think that the Council should focus on the 5 key areas of digitisation, commercialisation, early intervention and prevention, independence and efficient and effective organisation to maximise resources and deliver improved services?

- Forum Members agreed that the Council should focus on these areas.

Council Investment Priorities

Do you think the Council should invest in the priorities set out?

- One Forum Member commented on the 21st Century Schools priority and spoke of the huge benefit this priority has for pupils, staff and the whole community.
- The Flood alleviation scheme area was also commented upon as an important investment priority.

Corporate Plan

Do you agree with the Council's Vision and Purpose?

- Forum Members agreed with the Vision and purpose.

Do you agree with the Council's Corporate Plan priorities of People, Places and Prosperity?

- One Forum Member commented on the importance of partnership working between children's services and schools and the continual progress that needs to

be delivered upon.

Part III - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Extended Payments - Do you think that 4 weeks is a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work?

- Forum Members agreed that 4 weeks was a reasonable period.

Disregard War Disablement Pensions/War Widow's Pensions income

- Forum Members felt it was reasonable for the Council to continue to totally exclude War Disablement and War Widow's Pensions income when assessing entitlement to CTR Scheme.

Back dating Claims - Do you think that 6 months is a reasonable period to backdate claims for working age and pensioners?

- Forum Members were content that 6 months was a reasonable time period.

General Comments

- Forum Members commented that they appreciated the support (financial and non-financial) provided by the Council.

The Service Director thanked all Members for their comments and reiterated that these would be included within the Phase 1 Consultation report presented to Cabinet.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to note the 2021/22 Budget Consultation.