

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL 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, 12 December 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 L. Harvey Lead Director of Education, Bridgend Council)

Ms S Davies – Service Director, Finance Services, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

Ms C Seery – Managing Director Central South Consortium

Ms L Blatchford Deputy Managing Director Central South Consortium

Mr E Cooper – Lead Chief Executive, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough

26 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

27 MINUTES 07.11.23

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 7th November 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

28 BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE 2023/24

The Service Director - Finance Services presented the report to provide Members with an updated position for the current financial year and a summary of the 2023/24 grants allocations.

The Service Director- Finance Services reminded Members that the core budget of the consortium was set in December 2022 based upon a 3% reduction in Local Authority contributions. In approving that budget, Members were also reminded of the use of a small proportion of the service re-modelling earmarked reserve providing one off transitional funding supporting the setting of a balanced budget. The value of this was £33k.

Members were informed for the current financial year; the outturn currently shows an underspend of £20k with no amounts required to be drawn down from the earmarked reserve.

Members were taken through line-by-line variances as highlighted in section 3.2

of the report with the Service Director- Finance Services sharing the following:

Employee costs are underspending by £41k resulting from changes in Improvement Partner (IP) salary costs – budgets are based upon salary points when the budgets are set but are updated with actual salaries during the year. Different IP's will be at different salary progression points. In addition, there are underspends where there have been temporarily vacant IP posts.

There are also savings in Business Support on an administrative post and a finance post (senior admin assistant) where additional support is being bought in from the host authority.

There is a slight underspend on Premises of £3,299 by utilising the space at Valleys Innovation Centre rather than incurring external premises hire costs. These savings are partly offset by one-off adaptation costs to create additional meeting space to enable the accommodation to be fit for purpose for agile working.

Transport is underspending by just over £4k due to savings on staff travel.

Supplies and services shows a net underspend of £8,324 being one off underspends mainly due to savings on data analytics offset by general office expenses.

Support services are overspending by £30k mainly due to additional services being bought in from the host authority for business support and ICT.

Income is overachieving its target levels by £27k due to income received for inspection work undertaken and unbudgeted bank interest.

Members were directed to paragraph 3.4 of the report which requests that the committee continues to authorise any underspend in financial year 2023/24 to be allocated to the service remodelling earmarked reserve to support the challenging financial outlook going forward.

Members were directed to section 4 of the report which highlights the use of the grant funding; the Service Director, Finance Services informed Members that in addition to the information provided, the consortium has also received a further £185,425 as detailed in Agenda item 21 at the last meeting.

To conclude, the Service Director, Finance Services advised Members that the projected outturn position for the full year is £20k underspend and the Consortium will continue to closely monitor and manage its resources and report updates to Joint Committee through to year-end.

The Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the current projected outturn position for 2023/24.
- Authorise the lead Section 151 Officer to allocate any year-end underspend, after taking account of specific financial risks, to the existing Service Remodelling Earmarked Reserve to support the setting and delivery of balanced budgets over the medium-term.

- Note the current grant funding position for 2023/24

29 CSC Medium Term Financial Update (Indicative 3-Yr Budget, 24/25 - 26/27) and Budget Setting 2024/25

The Service Director, Finance Services presented the report to Members providing an update to the Medium-Term Financial Plan update for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27 and a proposed revenue budget for 2024/25.

The Service Director – Finance Services outlined the background financial position acknowledging that the public sector has faced a sustained period of real term reductions in funding levels for a number of years and unprecedented challenges continue for services across local government.

Members were informed that the indicative all Wales settlement level provided by Welsh Government for 2024/25 is currently 3.1% and it is clear that this position is significantly out of line with inflationary and service pressures being faced across local government. The Consortium's medium term financial planning is positioned to operate within this challenging financial outlook, with the continuation of robust arrangements to identify and deliver budget savings over this period.

Members were referred to paragraph 3.4 of the report which details the earmarked reserve for service remodelling which currently stands at £609k as at 31/03/2023 and is likely to be topped up this financial year for any in year underspends.

The Service Director – Finance Services outlined section 4 of the report which provides the details of the Medium-Term Financial Planning (MTFP) assumptions. Members were informed that the 2023/24 approved budget is the starting point for the projections. When applying inflationary increases for pay and non-pay spend, the annual inescapable budget pressures are £124k for 2024/25, £103k for 2025/26 and £106k for 2026/27 as detailed in Table 1 of the report.

Members were informed that the Chief Executives of the constituent local authorities recommend that the Consortium should model its medium-term budget planning arrangements for 2024/25 based on a gross 10% reduction to the core budget position. This position reflects the financial challenges faced by constituent local authorities and amounts to approximately £350k. This includes the consortium absorbing the inflationary pressures as detailed in Table 1 plus absorbing required cost reductions resulting from 2024/25 core contributions reducing by 6.6%.

The Service Director – Finance Services shared that the estimated budget reductions required, resulting from a reduction in contributions of 6.6% plus absorbing the inflationary pressures are detailed in Table 2. The budget gap for the next financial year is £357k, then £169k in 2025/26, and £170k in 2026/27 showing cumulative impact of £696k. Members were advised that subject to the approval of the Joint Committee, the Lead Section 151 Officer will formally notify constituent local authorities.

Members were also referred to section 5 of the report which focussed on Budget setting for 2024/25 and reminded that the legal agreement requires Joint

Committee to approve the following year's budget by the preceding 31st December. The draft budget at Table 5 was constructed based upon a 10% core budget reduction after adjusting for inescapable inflationary pressures, resulting in a 6.6% reduction in contributions from constituent local authorities as detailed in Table 6.

Members were advised that in order to enable the consortium to set a balanced budget, savings proposals have been put forward at Table 4. These include reducing budgets for the following:

- general supplies and services, external room hire and travel
- reducing employee costs
- charging further base budgeted costs to grants
- and recognising a budget for income receivable since interest rates have increased.

The Service Director – Finance Services also highlighted that subject to the decision of the Joint Committee, agreed contribution levels for 2024/25 showing a 6.6% reduction will be notified to constituent local authorities for their approval and confirmation back to the next Joint Committee meeting.

Following the conclusion of the presentation of the report, the lead Chief Executive shared with Members that discussions had taken place with Directors and the Central South Consortium Senior Management team as well as with the Chief Executives of each authority within the Consortium. Members were informed that good debate had been held as to how this was to be approached but shared there was an emphasis placed on maintaining front line support, parity with local authority efficiency challenges and longer term sustainability. Members were informed that from Chief Executives perspective they were happy to commend this approach presented today going forward.

A Member acknowledged the content of the report and the details shared by the Service Director – Financial Services and the Lead Chief Executive commenting that the information was reassuring. Members acknowledged the difficult decisions being made and felt the report reflected the position that all Local Authorities are in.

Following consideration, Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Approve the Medium-Term Financial Plan update (2024/25 to 2026/27) and instruct the lead Section 151 Officer to notify the constituent local authorities of the recommended indicative 3 year budget to inform the medium term financial planning arrangements within each Council.
- Approve the revenue budget for 2024/25, instruct the lead Section 151 Officer to notify constituent local authorities of the approved revenue budget for 2024/25 (to enable incorporation into the respective budget setting arrangements for each Council) and for constituent local authorities to confirm their approval to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

The Deputy Managing Director presented the report to provide Joint Committee with a progress update on the proposals for improvement made within the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

Members were reminded that the AGS was reported to and approved by Joint Committee at its meeting held on the 7th November 2023. The document described the governance arrangements in place, challenged their effectiveness and set out proposals for improvement.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC advised Members that the AGS 2022/23 made four proposals for improvement and noted the Consortium's Senior Management Team had accepted these and was committed to their implementation during 2023/24.

It was noted that at present, the Senior Management Team confirmed that an update on progress would be reported to the Joint Committee during the year to enable elected Members to review and scrutinise the extent of progress being made.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC informed Members that progress had been made on all four of the recommendations for improvement and provided a summary on these as contained in Appendix 1.

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

- Seek clarity and explanation where there are areas of concern.
- Form an opinion on the extent of progress that has been made to date in implementing the proposals for improvement reported (Appendix 1).

31 ANNUAL ACADEMIC SCRUTINY REPORT AUTUMN 2022

The Deputy Managing Director CSC presented the report which provided Members with the academic year 2022-2023 report on the progress & impact of the Central South Consortium (CSC) Business Plan.

Members were provided with background information with the Deputy Managing Director outlining that as part of the annual monitoring and reporting arrangements, CSC provide a report to stakeholders on a biannual basis. The annual academic year report includes analysis of the progress against priorities in the first six months of the business plan. In addition, it reports on the progress made against regional recommendations from published reports, the outcomes of the annual survey and an overview of value for money of the CSC professional learning office.

The Deputy Managing Director presented section 3 of the report providing an overview of performance and highlighted to Members that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Welsh Government (WG) cancelled most of the statutory data collections for 2020, 2021 and 2022 however some have now been resumed as detailed in this section of the report. Members were also presented with data in relation to GCSE / A Level examination results, as set out in the report. Members were also informed that section 3 of the report contains information about Estyn inspections from a regional perspective and that at the time of

writing the report PISA 2022 results information was not available and will therefore be reviewed and included in a future report.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC continued that section 4 provided the findings from the CSC Annual Pupil and Staff Surveys which gave insight to pupil and staff views as outlined in the summary diagrams contained within the report.

The Deputy Managing Director also referenced the progress made against the CSC Business Plan for the period April – October 2023 and highlighted that Very Good or Strong Progress has been made in 52% of elements within the business plan and Satisfactory Progress made in 24% of elements which is to be expected at this point in the 3 year plan. It was highlighted to Members that 10% of elements have 'Not Yet Started' with the Deputy Managing Director CSC explaining that these elements are based on the timeline of completion being targeted for the Spring term 2024.

Members were informed that CSC meet on a quarterly basis to look at the progress across all the areas to ensure progress is challenged with the area leads undertaken by members of SLT within CSC. Reports are produced and shared with LA Directors, as well as Directors being invited to attend. The Deputy Managing Director CSC advised Members that section 5.2 provides examples of the reports shared with Directors and a summary of the progress and risks identified also.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC continued to outline section 6 of the report which contained information relating to progress made against recommendations from published reports reminding Members that as reports are published, CSC have developed a process for ensuring any recommendations relating to the work of CSC are incorporated into the business planning process. For this period, there was only one report for CSC to provide feedback on which was outlined in the report at section 6.1 and 6.1.2.

Lastly, the Deputy Managing Director CSC shared an overview of section 7 of the report relating to the value for money of CSC Professional Learning offer 2022/23. The Deputy Managing Director CSC drew Members attention to the next steps in this area as outlined in the report.

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

- Note the contents of the report.

32 CSC BUSINESS PLAN 2022/25

The Deputy Managing Director CSC presented the report which looked in detail at the Business Plan (BP) appendix for 2023-2024 which provides an update on the following:

- The context of CSC in 2022-2023;
- The outcomes of self-evaluation processes;
- Progress made to date of the priorities for 2022-2025
- Revisions to the business plan priorities for the financial year 2023-2024;
- Summary of consortium funding 2023-2024.

Members were reminded that the five priority areas which have been updated in the BP Appendix are as follows:

- a) Curriculum;
- b) Professional Learning Pathways
- c) Equity & Wellbeing
- d) School Evaluation and Improvement
- e) Leadership & Governance of Central South Consortium

Members were also informed that for each of the priorities there is a detailed annual delivery plan that outlines how and when the aspects of each priority will be delivered. LA Directors are members of specific drive teams and support and challenge the development of the specific delivery plans.

The Deputy Managing Director CSC highlighted that the delivery plans for the final year of the current business plan will be developed over the spring term 2024 and a self-evaluation report will be drafted for review. Members were also informed that LA's will continue to help develop and support the delivery planning process to ensure that LA priorities are identified and incorporated at an early stage as part of stakeholder engagement. The delivery plans will continue to reflect the Vision of CSC and the CSWC delivery strategy although the Deputy Managing Director CSC shared that a revised proposal for the Central South Wales Challenge 2024/25 will be presented to the CSC Partnership Group in February 2024 for review and agreement.

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

- Approve the business plan appendix for 2024-2024.

33 **CSC RISK REGISTER**

The Managing Director CSC presented the report to provide Members with an update on the corporate risk register of Central South Consortium.

Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report and were informed that any amendments to the risks have been highlighted in red in the document and made particular reference to risks related to Curriculum for Wales (CfW) implementation with the Managing Director CSC sharing that it is being picked up that schools are implementing CfW and addressing the relevant actions needed but that there is a lack of confidence in schools own ability therefore this is reflected in the document. They highlighted that CSC are working with schools to provide them with support around the curriculum but there is a challenge around the ability of schools being able to release staff to attend PL. CSC are looking at ways that this can be improved but feel this is something to keep under review. The Managing Director CSC also raised the point that there are some challenges around the impact of ASOS and the knowledge / intelligence of schools not being as strong as it could have been as a result.

Members were also informed that the biggest challenge moving forward will be in relation to finances and making sure CSC can still operate a viable service that will provide schools with the guidance and support needed going forward in a system that is filled with uncertainty.

A Member raised the reference to 'attendance' in risk 5 outlined in Appendix 1

and commented that the latest figures released in relation to attendance paints a concerning picture, in particular to FSM pupils and the gaps increasing post covid. The Members asked how the consortium views moving forward on this matter working with LA's. The Managing Director CSC acknowledged that attendance is one of the biggest challenges faced and that it's a joint partnership. They shared that the CSC Equity & Wellbeing lead is working with LA attendance teams and Improvement Partners are promoting the attendance strategies that different LA's are putting in place. Members were informed that attendance is always on agenda for Improvement Partner visits and the CSC Wellbeing lead works with attendance lead collaboratively to address issues. The Managing Director CSC added that this is an ongoing matter that is difficult to achieve and the only way to see improvements is by working in partnership and sharing best practices. They also added there is a need to re-engage parents/ communities to see the value of education again to get children back into school.

Another Member referenced the sharing of best practice and case studies and felt this would be beneficial to be looked at in more detail. The Managing Director CSC acknowledged this and confirmed this will be brought to a future meeting.

Another Member also raised a question around the attendance of staff in secondary schools and the impact of this on pupils asking whether this would also be viewed as a risk. The Managing Director CSC agreed that staff absences / vacancies are significant across the consortium but shared that CSC do not have the level of detail of this at present. The Managing Director CSC added that CSC have been working with schools that where they have non-specialist staff in place and that there has been support provided to deliver the specialist teaching. Another area that has been identified as a significant challenge is teaching Welsh in English Medium schools, with the Managing Director CSC sharing that CSC are working on a model whereby working with other schools to develop a package of learning that can be shared with Teachers which is now being trialled. The Managing Director CSC acknowledged there would be further work needed to find out more information about the level of vacancies. The Lead Director added to the discussion by sharing that the points made are valid and that there are challenges around STEM and Post 16 subjects along with geographical challenges with getting people into posts. Additionally, the financial implications in relation to supply staff also need to be considered. The Lead Director also referenced Estyn remit item done previously in 2017 and provided details of effective practice that can be shared but acknowledged the issue is significant at present.

(Note: At this point in proceedings Councillor M Jones declared a personal interest in this item:

"I work for a recruitment company that supplies Teachers to our schools.")

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

- Approve the corporate risk register for Central South Consortium, which aligns to the updated Risk Management Policy.
- Request information relating to the levels of staff vacancies across the Consortium and the risk posed to pupils as a result.

34 URGENT BUSINESS
None.

This meeting closed at 4.25 pm

Cllr R Birch
Chair.