

**Minutes of the meeting of the Ceredigion Schools Finance Forum,
held remotely via ZOOM on Friday, 1 July 2022.**

Non-school members: Meinir Ebbsworth, Corporate Lead Officer: Schools and Culture & Councillor Endaf Edwards (Chair of Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

School members:

Headteachers: Mike Carruthers (Comins Coch Primary School); Jane Wyn (Ysgol Bro Pedr); Dorian Pugh (Ysgol Henry Richard) & Mair Hughes (Penglais School).

Parent Governors: Gary Davies (Ciliau Parc Primary School).

Officers in attendance: Cheryl Evans, School Admission Officer; Chris Macey, Service Accountant- CLO Support; Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer; Carol Thomas, Translator & Rhidian Jones, Translator.

(10.25am – 10.43am)

1. Apologies

- i) Gwion Dafydd, Corporate Manager: Accountability and Progress; Carol Davies, Head Teacher: Ysgol Dyffryn Cledlyn; Peter Leggett, Head Teacher: Ysgol Gymunedol Rhydypennau; Stephen Cooper, Parent Governor: Ysgol Bro Pedr & Chris Evans, Parent Governor: Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.
- ii) Councillors Wyn Thomas (Chair) and Bryan Davies apologised for their inability to attend the meeting due to other Council commitments.

2. Procedure

The Corporate Lead Officer: Schools and Culture explained that she had agreed to Chair the meeting in Councillor Wyn Thomas' absence. The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were made.

3. Disclosure of personal interest

There were no disclosures of personal interests.

4. To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2019

It was **RESOLVED** to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2019 as a correct record.

5. Matters arising from the Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2019

None.

6. School Reserves as of 31 March 2022

The Service Accountant – CLO Support noted that the past 2 years had impacted School Reserves as Welsh Government (WG) had provided additional funding towards the end of the financial year. Due to the short notice, schools were unable to spend this additional funding by 31 March 2022. WG were aware of the situation and was unconcerned with the

significant school reserves. An exercise had been undertaken over the past month to understand how each school within the local authority intended to use the additional funding over the next 1-3 years. By the end of the 3 years, schools will be in a similar situation to how they were financially prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. It will be key to monitor the situation moving forward.

The School Reserves as of 31 March 2022 stood as follows: primary schools- £4.2m, secondary schools- £2.6m, all-age schools- £1.7m (total of £8.5m). School Reserves had increased by over £2m since March 2021. The Finance Group were in the process of collecting information nationally; the increase in School Reserves appeared to be the case in all local authorities. Although a few schools in Wales were in deficit, no schools in Ceredigion were in this situation at present.

The Corporate Lead Officer: Schools and Culture stated they were aware of the schools' feelings towards late grants from WG, as it added to their workload. It was highlighted that grants accounted for £3m out of the £8m of School Reserves. She appreciated the efforts and the co-working between the finance team and the schools and the creativity in ensuring schools have the best value. No schools in Ceredigion have less than 5% of reserves. The threshold of reserves set by the Audit Office for primary schools is over £50k with secondary schools set to over £100k. 3 schools within the local authority are below the threshold. Financially, the position schools were in was temporary and the situation could change rapidly with the increase in energy prices, which would need to be monitored.

School members shared that they welcomed the additional funding and hoped that WG continued with the generosity considering they were only now seeing the true effects of the pandemic. Despite significant school reserves, they were conscious that schools may be in deficit soon given the increase in energy prices unless WG provided additional funding.

It was **AGREED** to note the information.

7. Corporate Finance Update

The Service Accountant – CLO Support explained that in the past, this meeting had been held either in the Autumn or Spring term and an update regarding the budget for the year would be provided. At present, the budget for this year had been set and the work for the next budget had not yet commenced. In addition to the grants, he highlighted that the current financial settlement had been more than the past few years but the increase was for this year only. From national indicative budgets, the budget for the next year would be £5.3bn followed by £5.4bn the following year. As Ceredigion's population had decreased, there would be less of an increase for the local authority. There were concerns and uncertainty nationally around energy prices and the level of salary increase for staff in April and for teachers in September. In moving forward, working together and with other local authorities would be key.

The Corporate Lead Officer: Schools and Culture noted that the discussion with governors and headteachers would continue as the academic year progressed. Consideration should be given to the use of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Access Grant to support increasing costs.

It was **AGREED** to note the information.

8. Any other business

None.

9. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the forum was required to meet twice a year. Date of the next meeting to be circulated in due course.