EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CARDIFF SCHOOLS' BUDGET FORUM

Time: 8.30am – 10.30am
Date: 11th February 2026
Location: Microsoft Teams
Present: Chair – Nic Naish (NN), Cllr Sarah Merry (SM), Cllr Chris Weaver (CW), Helen Williams (HW), Ian Allwood (IA), Eifion Austin (EA), Jennie Hughes (JH), Stuart Davies (SD), Brett Andrewartha (BA), Angela Jardine (AJ), Nicola Price (NP), Paul Tucker (PT), Marc Belli (MB), Tim Adams (TA), Gareth Davies (GD); David Silver (DS), Abigale Cuthbert (AC), Sarah Parry (SP), Gareth James (GJ), Gareth Rein (GR), Carys Prytherch (CP), Will Howlett (WH), Sarah-Marie Jones (SMJ), Rhodri Thomas (RT), Ivor Gittins (IG), Education Management Clerk

Apologies: Andrew Skinner (AS), Melanie Godfrey (MG), Richard Portas (RP), Wayne Murphy (WM), Emma Richards (ER), Sara Allen (SA), Matthew Evans (ME), Suzanne Scarlett (SS), Rachael Fisher (RF), Nick Alexander (NA), Diane Gill (DG), Cllr Joel Williams (JW), Suzanne Williams (SW), Patrick Brunnock (PB)

Ref	Conclusions/Actions	Who
1.0	**Apologies and welcome**	
1.1	The Chair welcomed members and accepted apologies.	
2.0	**Minutes of the previous meeting / matters and actions arising from the previous meeting**	
2.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record. <u>Matters arising</u> • MSF 2026/27 proposal was suggested to SAJC as an agenda item. • Update on the Ed Tech/IT SLA options (MG/MO'B) – feedback provided at the primary heads conference was requested in writing. EA/MG will follow up.	EA/MG
3.0	**School Formula Update**	
3.1	EA outlined potential changes to the school formula and invited comments by 13th February. Uncertainty on potential changes due to ALN and specialist places expansion were noted in January SBF. Changes to the formula were made following the meeting and further work undertaken to firm assumptions. Points highlighted included: • Net delegated school budget increase of £19.m (of which £5.5m was increased cost commitments from 2025/26 financial year). • 5.9% increase overall	

- Current assumptions - an increase in special schools' budget of £5m (21%), £4m of this will facilitate increase of 156 places (17%).
- New pupil band descriptors will be implemented following discussion with the sector.
- Transition costs (forward funding) for placements beginning in September 2026 will be funded outside of the formula.
- Primary SRBs – increase of £3m (46%). An additional full year equivalent of 91 places funded. Transition costs will be funded through the formula.
- Secondary SRBs – increase of £1.2m (14%), relating to 9% increased places. Transition costs (forward funding) will be funded through the formula.

Primary mainstream

- Increase of £3.8m (2.5%)
- 5% reduction of number of pupils funded through the formula
- AWPU 5.9% increase
- ALN mainstream funding 5.3% increase
- An additional 24 schools receiving protection for falling numbers on roll (£480k, 133% increase)
- A further 3 schools receiving a small school lump sum due to decrease in pupil numbers (£157k, 43% increase)

Secondary mainstream

- Increase of £6.2m (5%)
- Static pupil numbers
- AWPU increasing 5.7%
- ALN mainstream funding increasing by 5.9%

Unallocated

- £350k currently unallocated within the formula, set aside to fund premises costs from specialist placement setting growth, likely to be retained for increases that materialise.

Formula budget adjustment scenarios were presented for primaries and increase to lump sums considered, proposing a transfer of £1m from AWPU to lump sum per additional £10k of lump sum funding, and 1% reduction in AWPU value.

Members were asked whether to retain the lump sum at the current value, to maximise funding following pupils, or increase the lump sum to support smaller schools.

MB asked whether the rate of reduction for larger schools would reflect similar proportions. EA confirmed the larger the primary school the less funding would be received (transfer from pupil to lump sum funding). MB drew attention to risk for larger schools which was acknowledged.

The secondary sector had expressed a preference for pupil led funding rather than lump sum.

IA noted several challenges for the primary sector, one being the significant number of surplus places. AWPU would not fund the surplus places, a balance was sought.

The formula seeks to maximise support to all primary schools. The proposal on increasing the proportion of lump sums was suggested to assist all primary schools, whilst recognising AWPU as the fundamental principal driver. As the principles of the formula can sometimes clash sustainability is required, focusing entirely on pupil numbers was a risk.

SMJ noted the primary heads conference recognised while AWPU must be reduced to fund additional ALN places and specialist provision, had AWPU for nursery or early years pupils been considered, primary schools provide for unidentified needs in the cohort for twelve months or more. EA confirmed consideration on Early Years and ALN, with a proposal put forward to change the ALN formula for greater weighting in Early Years.

The Chair reiterated smaller schools deliver the same curriculum and community offering as larger schools, with fewer staff. Discussion on fair balance was welcomed. Recognition of this with an increased lump sum (at the lower values) was supported, not impacting significantly on larger schools.

EA confirmed teacher and TA to pupil ratios at different age groups would remain the same as last year. Funding reflects the employer pension contribution reduction for TAs next year. Early Years may not increase as much as other year groups due to the TA element cost being less than the teacher element.

<u>ALN mainstream funding</u>

Previous ALN comments on a proposal to reduce ALN mainstream funding to fund places were acknowledged.

An additional £170k funding to the ALN formula (current base assumption 5.3% increase) was proposed, equivalent to 0.2% of AWPU, increasing ALN funding a further 1%, to 6.3%. The allocation method would remain as planned, with an additional 30% Early Years weighting introduced for nursery to year two pupils.

A minimum of 0% change would be implemented (to avoid funding losses from 2025/26) and maximum increase 15% (to balance allocated funding on need whilst minimising volatility).

GR sought clarification that ALN funding to mainstream schools would not be reduced. EA confirmed based on the formula that was correct. GR questioned where funding would be sourced to meet the need to increase resource places in special schools and whether this was additional funding. EA explained the funding envelope remained the same, as stated in January. Further work was undertaken to understand use of funds and allocation. Confirmation was received on various funds from outside of the authority, which will forward fund a significant increase in special schools from April to August.

GR noted a significant swing in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) for some areas due to new builds, although income in the areas had not changed and questioned effect on school budgets. EA gave assurances changes had not been made since the 2017 WIMD, to avoid volatility. The Chair questioned whether use of the data would be reconsidered at a future point. EA noted discussion between the LA and WG on considering the most appropriate deprivation measure.

	IA echoed EFSM and WIMD use was being discussed with WG officials, decisions from WG were pending. Whilst use of the former data was recognised, there was risk in using one or other of both the indicators until a decision from WG is received. The LA did not want to unnecessarily add volatility in the system without being in check with others. MB referred to the FSM indicator, noting children with ALN and FSM have a disproportionate impact on their progress, and asked what weighing EFSM was being given within the formula identified. EA noted two different weightings, based on analysis for the primary and secondary sector. EA requested feedback on moving £170k from AWPU to the ALN funding formula, ensuring money was allocated through the formulaic allocation at a quicker rate, or capping the maximum increase lower at 10% / 12.5%. The Chair noted broad acceptance and thanked officers for their work undertaken. AJ asked whether there would be a review point following the change made, perhaps to reverse the decision or opportunity to adjust mechanism. EA noted incremental and capped ALN formula change from last year, allowing modification as necessary, and recommended reviewing in the autumn, the first expansion phase of ALN specialist placements. The Chair welcomed reviewing in the early autumn. AJ recommended adding ALN mainstream funding as a standing agenda item. IA confirmed the formula was reviewed annually, with actuals informing future proposals. Officers will continue to adapt to matters emerging in-year, refresh and review, whilst communicating with the forum, as part of the ongoing conversation. EA sought views on continuing implementation of formulaic distribution of ALN mainstream funding for secondaries, with minimum change 0% and maximum 15% funding, or pause whilst ALN expansion of specialist places continues. SD and MB were content to proceed. IA noted some budget challenges would remain for schools next year, collective spend in 2026/27 is presumed c£3m above budgets. Difficult decisions remain for some schools. Various levers were being explored to assist different types of schools, with solutions for each sector considered. EA reiterated challenge for primaries with falling pupil numbers (impacting some more than others), how to address through the formula will be explored with the forum. Members were requested to provide comments on the proposals by close of business day, 13th February.	Clerk, Chair
4.0	**Any Other Business**	
4.1	IA suggested a letter from the Chair to the Cabinet on the consultation from the forum. Members were invited to send any comments they would like included in the response to the consultation letter to NN or AS. NN will liaise with AS. HW thanked EA and IA for their hard work undertaken and alignment of budgets. NN echoed the praise, particularly with tangible examples provided, enabling fair reflection.	

5.0	**Summary of actions**	
5.1	a. EA will follow up written feedback requested on the Ed Tech/IT SLA options provided at the primary heads conference. b. ALN mainstream funding to be a standing agenda item.	EA/MG/ MO'B Clerk

<u>Acronym Reference</u>

ADEW	Association of Directors of Education in Wales
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
ALP	Additional Learning Programme
AWPU	Average Weighted Pupil Unit
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
BSR	Budget Strategy Report
SBF	School Budget Forum
CC	Cardiff Council
CCHF/HF	Cardiff Council Hardship Fund/ Hardship Fund
CNE	Complex Needs Enhancement
CoC	Chair of Conferences
CoG	Chair of Governors
CSC	Central South Consortium
CT	Council Tax
DSB	Delegated School Budget
EHW	Emotional Health and Well-being
EOTAS	Education Other Than at School
EIG	Education Improvement Grant
FP	Financial Plan
FS	Financial Services
FSM	Free School Meals
FY	Financial Year
HR	Human Resources
LA	Local Authority
LAS	Local Authority Settlement
LFMO	Local Financial Management Officer
LG	Local Government
LGHF	Local Government Hardship Fund
MEAG	Minority Ethnic & Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Learners
MSF	Mutual Supply Fund
MTBS	Medium Term Budget Strategy
MTFB	Medium Term Financial Budgets
MTFM	Medium Term Financial Management
MTFP	Medium Term Financial Plan
NI	National Insurance
NoR	Numbers on Roll
PA	Pay Award
PL	Professional Learning
PDG	Pupil Deprivation Grant
PLG	Professional Learning Grant
Q_	Quarter_ (number relating to)
RLW	Real Living Wage
RSG	Revenue Support Grant
SAO	School Attendance Officer
SB	School Balance
SBF	School Budget Forum

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

SEN	Special Education Needs
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOP	School Organisation Programme
SRB	Special Resource Base
TU	Trade Union
UFSM	Universal Free School Meals
WG	Welsh Government
WIMD	Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation