

Cllr C Weaver
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

cc. Cllr S Merry

30th Jan 2020

Dear Cllr Weaver,

Cardiff Council Budget 2020-21 Consultation

I write on behalf of the Cardiff Schools Budget Forum in response to the 2020-21 budget consultation.

As in last years budget consultation the council has committed is proposing to “invest in preventative services to catch problems early and stop them getting worse and costing more in the long term”. The Forum would like to remind you that excellent services for children and young people are key to realising this aim. The financial and social costs of children and young people becoming disaffected and not fulfilling their potential are well known. We would urge the council to commit to “intervening early to support vulnerable young people”, to ensuring that a “realignment of Targeted Support, Early Help and Engagement Teams” results in more and better services for children and to continue to prioritise investing in our schools.

We cautiously welcome the better than expected Welsh Government Settlement that has enabled you to reduce the efficiency contribution from schools from 1% to 0.5%. We also welcome the increased transparency of this approach. However, we would remind you that this budget comes after many years of a 30% cap on schools’ non-demographic growth which has placed enormous pressure on schools. In our meeting on 13th March last year colleagues shared the impact of the last years delegated budget on schools. One particularly poignant comment came from a secondary headteacher who reflected that the only place left for him to make savings would be a reduction in support staff which would change the very DNA of his school. Comments also included concerns around standards, curriculum breadth, staff welfare and increased sickness rates due to increased workload, headteachers being forced to teach to cover staff absences in smaller schools, and the impact of losing experienced staff with considerable expertise.

We would encourage offices to be as transparent as possible in signposting how schools will benefit from the improvement in the Welsh Government Settlement and urge that as far as possible additional resources should be channelled into the AWPU.

We support the 5% reduction in Cardiff’s annual contribution to CSC, but would welcome a review of CSC, looking at effectiveness and standards.

We question whether education central services will still be able to deliver high quality services following further staff reductions as part of the directorate’s efficiency savings. Concern were also expressed over the viability of SLA’s if sign up rates from schools decrease. This may be prompted by increasing charges and concerns over the quality of some services.

The savings proposals include a price increase for Storey arms. We must be careful to protect one of the LA’s prize assets.

We remain concerned about MEAG and urge offices to continue to work closely with the Welsh Government over the future of this essential funding. It would be very detrimental if the Welsh

Government changes the way this funding is distributed without also increasing the quantum available to reflect the increase in the numbers of pupils from ethnic minorities in the country. Colleagues have raised similar concerns when considering the high degree of uncertainty over the permanency of other grants on which many schools depend to support their most vulnerable pupils.

The forum is also concerned over the lack of recognition for the training needs of support staff in the Professional Learning Grant and would like officers to ensure the Welsh Government understands the vital role they play in our schools and the importance of ensuring that schools receive funding to support their training. It is concerning that the new RCSIG (which will include EIG and the professional learning grant) appears to indicate a reduction of £1.224M at an all Wales level according to figures released by the Welsh Government.

Headteachers would be keen to have further briefings regarding main budget headlines from officers in the run-up to the budget release date, for example, visits to headteachers conferences to talk about specifics and provide clarity before the final distribution is made to schools.

A FAQs paper would be useful for headteachers, especially those new to post, around school budgets, for example, what could be done in preparation for the budget and what needs to be done in the first few days after the budget is released to schools? This could avoid confusion and uncertainty and allay fears that headteachers are managing the budget appropriately. LFMS officers could assist with creating such a paper.

The forum would like to thank to thank officers for all the work they do in supporting schools and the work of the Budget Forum.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Griffiths

Chair, Cardiff Schools Budget Forum

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Fy Nghyf / My Ref : CM43135
Eich Cyf / Your Ref:
Dyddiad / Date: 21st February 2020

Ms Sarah Griffiths
Chair, Cardiff Schools Budget Forum

Annwyl / Dear Ms Griffiths,

2020/21 Budget Consultation

On behalf of myself, Councillor Merry and the rest of the Cabinet, I would like to thank you for your response to the 2020/21 Budget Consultation. As a group, we value the participation of the School Budget Forum in our financial planning process and take seriously the points raised in both this letter and meetings of the forum.

Overall, it is pleasing to note the positive response to the Cabinet's decision, following the better than expected Welsh Government settlement, to reduce the efficiency saving required from the school budget to 0.5%. I can confirm that it was one of the Cabinet's highest priorities in terms of revising the budget proposal, when it became clear that the settlement was going to provide an opportunity to amend the overall budget strategy. I appreciate that the it would have been preferential for the full efficiency saving to be removed from the proposals, however we felt that it was appropriate that schools made a contribution towards the bridging of the budget gap, particularly when considering the level of efficiency savings required from other parts of the Council's budget.

I recognise that schools have been under a significant amount of financial strain for a number of years and that the removal of the full efficiency saving would have eased the pressure on individual school budgets. However, it is important to note that the change from a 30% cap on schools' growth to a flat rate efficiency saving of 0.5% is a comparatively positive position in relation to previous financial years. I do understand that this means that some schools will still face tough decisions in order to balance their budgets for 2020/21, however I

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GWEITHIO DROS GAERDYDD, GWEITHIO DROSOCH CHI

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg, Saesneg neu'n ddwyieithog. Byddwn yn cyfathrebu â chi yn ôl eich dewis, dim ond i chi roi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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would hope that this better financial picture will reduce the impact upon educational provision and alleviate some of the challenges being experienced by schools.

I note that you have suggested that officers need to ensure there is sufficient transparency regarding the impact of the settlement on individual school budgets and that the AWPU is boosted by the additional resources as much as possible. I am aware, from discussions with officers and as part of the forum, that every effort will be made to increase AWPU rates as much as possible, whilst paying adequate regard to any other costs that need to be funded as part of the pooled arrangements within the school budget. There is also a suggestion that a document for new headteachers and additional briefings for headteachers should be arranged. This suggestion has been fed back to officers and will most likely be considered for the 2021/22 budget round. However, a letter that outlines the main changes within this year's school budget will accompany the individual school budget distribution for 2020/21, currently scheduled for Monday 2nd March 2020.

Quite rightly, your letter raises a number of concerns in terms of grants, most notably the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant and Professional Learning Grant. I recognise the impact that the ongoing uncertainty regarding the future of particular grant streams has on both the local authority as a whole and individual schools. I can assure you that Cabinet members will continue to lobby for more certainty and a longer term outlook for these key funding streams, as well as demanding that these grants provide an appropriate level of funding, and flexibility, to meet the needs arising.

In terms of the central Education budget, your letter raises a number of concerns regarding certain savings proposals and the impact they will have. In addition, you have emphasised the importance of investing in preventative services and ensuring that potential problems are identified and addressed before they have the opportunity to worsen. I would hope that you can see from our budget proposals that this is an area we place extremely high importance on. We have allocated additional funding to a number of important areas and priorities, including Cardiff Commitment, educational support for looked after children, the Youth Service, including open access youth provision, and the Child Friendly City initiative. A number of these allocations are permanent and we hope that, in conjunction with the realignment of the Targeted Support, Early Help and Engagement teams, the overall provision of preventative services will be enhanced.

In response to your concerns regarding the ongoing quality of services provided to schools on a traded basis, I have sought the view of relevant officers and been assured that the quality of service will not be diminished. In addition, every effort will be made to improve services wherever possible. In terms of the price increase proposed for Storey Arms, I can assure you that the Council is determined to protect its valuable assets and this price increase is part of the strategy for ensuring that assets such as this can continue to operate and offer the range of services they currently do. In terms of the proposed reduction in annual contribution to the Central South Consortium, I can confirm that agreement has been reached regarding a 3% reduction for 2020/21. I can also

confirm that the Council will continue to hold the Consortium to account and will review its effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

I hope that this response has addressed the points raised in your letter and goes some way towards addressing the concerns shared by the School Budget Forum. To reiterate, the contribution of the forum is highly valued and both myself, and Councillor Merry, look forward to further interaction with yourself and representatives from our schools as we move forward to plan the Council's Budget Strategy over the medium term. I can assure you that our schools and educational provision remain one of the main priorities for the Cabinet and we will do everything we can to ensure that additional resources are directed to the education budget in future years.

Yn gywir / Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Weaver', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Cynghorydd / Councillor Chris Weaver
Aelod Cabinet dros Gyllid, Moderneiddio a Pherfformiad
Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance

