

Headteacher's Meeting 3rd February 2023.

Responses to the budget consultation:

Clarity was provided on the 5% uplift for school budgets, the energy and pay pressures are being met and then a 2.8% reduction is being applied.

There were concerns over the proposed reduction of 1 FTE in Educational Psychology, this will affect the most vulnerable children. The Chief Officer for CYP explained that the ALN transformation grant will be able to support this post for the next two years, it is also anticipated that this grant can cover the ALN admin post where there is also a proposed 1 FTE reduction.

Heads asked if there had been any consideration of amalgamating services with other local authorities as this would reduce costs. Cllrs said that amalgamations had been looked at and they would continue to look at these, there have already been several successful amalgamations: EAS / SenCom however tensions can be created where Local Authorities want to reduce their overall contributions. While in the past there has been some discussion around political amalgamations this was not popular and has not been progressed. Welsh Government have created their amalgamations on a regional level such as the Cardiff Capital Region. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that this was being looked at but given that the budget needs to be agreed in March it would not be possible in the timescales, however it is a significant work that would be progressed.

Heads raised that the increase in breakfast club charges would hit low-income families significantly and, in some cases, it would result in parents having to give up work as they would not be able to afford this. In this proposal the unexpected consequence needs to be considered. It was also raised that schools are not holding large reserves and in some cases they are in a deficit, any reductions would result in staff being made redundant and in most cases it will be those staff that support the most vulnerable pupils. It was asked if council tax could be increased so that the cuts would be less. The Chief Officer for CYP responded saying that there were 3 options discussed for breakfast clubs, reducing the club to ½ an hour just for breakfast and no childcare, delegate the funding to schools so that they can set their own charges or increase the cost to £2 per day. It was a very hard decision to make but it also needed to be remembered that with the roll out of UFSM no primary aged child will need to pay for a school dinner. In discussions with schools, it was understood that families welcome the breakfast club as it allows them to go to work. In addition to this it was not presumed that schools have high reserves and the local authority are aware that as a result of this some difficult decisions will need to be made and there may be schools facing deficits. Schools were reminded that the RRR's grant is being maintained at the same level. Cllrs responded saying that there had been some very hard decisions to be made, but they have a statutory duty to set a balanced budget and the consequences of not doing this will result in other regulators making decisions on the cuts for MCC not knowing our communities. It also needs to be remembered that a number of the children in our schools are also being supported by social services and that budget needs to be protected as well.

Heads asked if it was possible to charge different rates to different families depending on what they could afford, for example could wealthier families pay more for breakfast clubs and music lessons and lower income pay less. The Chief Officer for CYP said that this was not in our gift to solve this but understood the problem. In addition, the local authority does not hold the data to look at means testing families. The Deputy Chief Executive detailed the tax reforms that are being debated with Welsh Government and this will result in different charges based on property values.

Cllrs acknowledged the request to increase council tax higher than the proposed rate but stated that this decision would not be acceptable by all members.

There were a number of questions raised via MAPS the cost of the Welsh Medium school is funded by a capital grant from Welsh Government and they have confirmed their commitment to the school.

The withdrawal of a grant has resulted in support for transition from year 6 – 7 at a county level, the grant that replaced this, the terms do not allow for this work to continue.

Other questions raised included could the EAS contribution be cut by more than 10% as other authorities were looking to do this, the Chief Officer explained that this would put schools and the Local Authority at risk and that a number of authorities were maintaining their contribution.