

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS' FORUM 21st November 2023

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

New Budget Monitoring System for Schools

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Wirral Maintained schools are required under the Scheme for Financing Schools, to provide budget setting, budget monitoring and 3-year projections throughout the financial year. Headteachers have requested, through Wirral Schools Forum, to consider alternatives to the current process for budget monitoring to allow more control, particularly when considering the effects of staffing changes on budget projections.

2.0 THE CURRENT PROCESS

2.1 The current process is managed through an Excel spreadsheet for each school. For those buying into the Premium & Standard Plus Financial Support SLA this is a comprehensive spreadsheet that calculates the cost of salaries, staffing changes, income & non-staffing expenditure, projecting income & expenditure to the end of the year, along with 3 year projections. Those schools who buy the standard service are provided with a summary spreadsheet for completion but may have school specific systems in place to manage their staffing costs and projections.

2.2 The current system/process has the following limitations to provide the flexibility that schools have requested through Schools Forum:-

- The reports only provide schools with data at set periods in time.
- If staffing scenarios are required schools have to refer back to their LMS Bursar.
- Schools receive a PDF version of the report for headteacher & governor meeting
- Entering data, particularly staffing, can be time consuming if there are many changes.
- Staffing data is re-entered every year at budget setting.
- It also relies on the LMS team to have a high level of Excel expertise.
- Collating the overall school picture is manual & time consuming

3.0 BOUGHT IN SYSTEMS

3.1 Selected market leading School Specific Budget monitoring systems (Access, Arbor & Bromcom) have been looked into by the LMS team.

3.2 A new bought in, school specific, Budget Monitoring system will address some of the issues with the spreadsheet, as well as other benefits as follows:-

- Provide budget setting & budget monitoring data in a more timely manner for schools.
- Staffing data will be entered once, with only staff changes going forward.
- Provide scenarios to see the effect of additional spend/income on projections, again this can be managed by the school or through the Financial Support SLA.
- Allows schools to take control of their own finances, if they wish, or to continue purchasing a high level of support from the Financial Support SLA.
- Reduce the need for Excel expertise within the LMS team.
- Local Authority back office access, providing accurate, summarised school data on a more timely basis.
- School level access, from full access for finance staff to viewing level for governors.

4.0 THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

4.1 The process to purchase a school specific budget monitoring system through the LA is as follows:

- A business case is presented to the Change Advisory Board (CAB) to consider.
- Once this is agreed the procurement process can begin through the Chest.
- The requirements will be agreed to purchase a bought in, school specific budget monitoring system.
- The aim is for implementation for a new system for 1st April 2024.

4.2 The business case is being presented to the CAB on Wednesday 15th November.

4.3 There will be a cost to purchasing a more robust budget monitoring and projection system. There will be an annual central charge, along with a license charge per school. The estimated costs are as detailed below and the mechanism for charging to the schools will be finalised after the procurement process but will not be confirmed until the procurement process has been completed.

- Central cost £6k - £7k, reducing to £2k - £3k in future years
- Annual license cost for each school will be confirmed following procurement process

5.0 RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 Forum notes the report.

Simone White
Director of Children, Families and Education