

**COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES**  
**Convener – Education Scrutiny**  
**Performance Panel**

**BY EMAIL**

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*Our Ref:* JR/KH  
*Your Ref:*  
*Date:* 1 September 2020

Dear Councillor Jones

In response to your letter following the meeting on 15 July 2020, and request for confirmation about the financial position to schools that operated as hubs during the lockdown, I would make the following comments:

Schools have worked together as hubs with the expectation that available resources would be shared to support the specific hubs that have been operated during the lockdown. There will have been additional costs incurred by a specific school delegated budget on behalf of a wider cluster and which will need to be appropriately shared across each school's budget within that cluster. It would clearly be inappropriate for a school that has been open throughout as an emergency child care setting to be effectively penalised by comparison with a school which was not required for a setting over this period.

We have provided advice and guidance to schools which stressed that:

- As an Authority we are not proposing to review or reduce the delegated schools budget quantum in any way as a result of the lock down.
- As an Authority we are seeking to capture the clear additional financial impacts of the current COVID 19 crisis. However, it is important to recognise **the need to be cautious at this stage in terms of any significant additional spending commitments that schools enter into**. The present Welsh Government (WG) ground rules are very limited and **it cannot be assumed that any financial impacts will simply be under-written either by the WG or the Authority**.
- There are two main avenues that we are continue to pursue with the WG to seek to do this, specifically recording and evidencing:
  - The additional costs incurred by the Council in responding to the crisis – some specific costs clearly should be reclaimable against the national, but limited, overall sums available.
  - Any resulting loss of income - it is hoped that some income losses will be recompensed.
- Clearly any reimbursement of costs to schools is dependent on the extent of success in any claim for reimbursement from the WG.

We have advised that the following basic principles should be followed in regard to any claim for reimbursement would include:

- **Unavoidable** – it would not be reasonable to seek to recover costs incurred where action was unnecessary or there were other less costly alternatives
- **Additional** – schools and wider education services have received base funding in the usual way and we have first sought to respond to the crisis by using existing available resources, particularly existing staffing. Any clear additional costs incurred must be purely the result of COVID 19 actions and not any underlying base budget shortfall that a school would in any case have had to manage (for example due to falling pupil numbers).
- **Mitigated** – before seeking reimbursement of any specific additional costs it is only reasonable to expect that these should wherever possible have been mitigated or offset by any savings accruing over the period from the changes in scale and nature of provision, across all schools
- **Evidenced** – no claim for reimbursement from the WG is likely to be successful without clear recording and evidencing of the specific costs and other financial impacts

In the first instance the priority has been to identify and evidence the financial impact on the education budget as a whole in order to seek to recover the appropriate amount as part of any authority wide claim made to the WG. In this respect it would be expected that the additional costs incurred by some schools would be balanced (mitigated) against any savings benefiting other schools, in the same way as any additional non-delegated costs will need to be offset by any potential savings across other non-delegated budgets.

Examples of the possible costs that schools might wish to consider in terms of identifying and evidencing any claim for reimbursement would include:

- Additional staffing costs facing school delegated budgets as a result of the freeze on ER/VR processes
- Additional hours of teaching assistants paid outside of term and normal contracted hours
- Additional net utility, PPE and travel costs to support emergency childcare settings and the distribution of free school meal 'grab and go' daily packs and weekly food bags
- Loss of income from school lettings and clubs where such income would have been excess of the additional costs incurred by the school

Please let me know if you require any more information.

Yours sincerely



**Y Cynghorydd / Councillor Jennifer Raynor**  
**Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Wella Addysg, Dysgu A Sgiliau**  
**Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills**