



**Walsall Council**

**Walsall Children's Services**

**Report to:** Schools Forum

**Date:** 11th June 2013

**Subject:** Request from Walsall Learning Consortium Headteachers  
Working Group to Explore Funding Options

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**Purpose of the report:** To outline how a Walsall Learning Consortium could be funded

**Recommendation:** See final section of report

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 With the termination of the Serco contract a number of working groups have been established to develop new initiatives and allow schools to define what they want going forwards.
- 1.2 One of these groups has been to discuss the concept of a 'Walsall Learning Consortium'. This paper is not to discuss the concept of a Walsall Learning Consortium (except where appropriate for context) but further information can be provided on request.
- 1.3 There are several members of the Walsall Learning Consortium working group who are also members of Schools Forum. A request was made by the Headteacher members of the Working Group, for the potential ways of funding a Walsall Learning Consortium. Clearly there are a number of unknowns around how such a proposal would work but this report outlines proposals based on a broad concept.

## **2. What is a Walsall Learning Consortium?**

- 2.1 Very briefly this would be a group of education providers, preferably all state funded schools in the borough acting together with other education providers as appropriate. The idea would be for schools to direct resources to support better outcomes for learners in Walsall. This could be directing existing staff employed by Walsall Council or if a budget was established 'commissioning' services between schools to enable school to school support to be effectively brokered, co-ordinated and evaluated for the benefit of all partners.
- 2.2 Clearly a Walsall Learning Consortium could be very wide or very narrow. In simple terms budgets could be used to fund school to school support or to 'purchase' services on behalf of a number of schools using 'bulk' purchasing as a cost effective mechanism.

## **3. Funding Options - Subscription**

- 3.1 The simplest way to fund a Walsall Learning Consortium would be to ask schools to contribute. This would be the approach advocated by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Schools could be asked for a 'subscription' fee on an annual basis. This could be a simple flat fee for each school or could be driven by pupil numbers or another metric. There could also be levels of membership from a simple subscription to paying for a higher level of services.
- 3.2 There is a simplicity to this option as schools who are interested can contribute.

3.3 Issues could arise due to timings. Schools would need adequate information in a time frame which allows them to understand, agree and respond.

#### **4. Funding Options - Formula Factor**

4.1 In previous years it would have been possible to put a factor into the schools funding formula. This is no longer possible.

4.2 Approval of the Secretary of State could be sought but that may seem unlikely

#### **5. Funding Options - Central Retention**

5.1 In previous years it would have been possible to retain funding centrally subject to a vote from Schools Forum. This is no longer possible.

5.2 Approval of the Secretary of State could be sought but that may seem unlikely

#### **6. Options - Surplus**

6.1 There is a separate report on 11 June 2013 agenda regarding use of surplus. In short the local authority could invest in the Walsall Learning Consortium and some of the surplus DSG could be allocated.

6.2 This is also simple and would be through a Schools Forum vote. Schools Forum would need to be clear what they expected for the contribution but equally be aware that the Local Education Authority (LEA) would also be contributing an additional sum to the surplus DSG amount. There would need to be clear guidelines and parameters as to how the Walsall Learning Consortium could use its budget so that it was transparent and fair. A Business case and plan would need developing.

6.3 In the longer term a surplus, as a one off fund, would be used up and run out. At that point schools and the LEA would need to look again at how to continue funding if the idea has been successful. A surplus could be used to 'pump prime' the Walsall Learning Consortium. A principle of the Walsall Learning Consortium would be to operate on a not for profit basis ensuring that all resources were used to support Walsall pupils.

6.4 Clearly any surplus would mean that all schools could access this but schools may prefer to use the money elsewhere, a consensus view would be needed to support the idea. There would need to be clear understanding of how the Walsall Learning Consortium would operate and a robust governance model put in place.

#### **7. Options - Local Authority funded**

7.1 The newly formed Education Services Grant reduces funding from the local authority every time a school converts to academy. Since 2011 £2,184,394 per annum has flowed from council mainstream budgets into academies, this is outside of changes to DSG.

7.2 Walsall Council as a body is forecasting having to reduce all expenditure by c28% or £80 million by 2017/18.

7.3 Walsall Council remains committed to working with schools and would look to contribute where possible and if appropriate.

## **8. Recommendations**

8.1 Schools Forum is asked to note that there are discussions about a Walsall Learning Consortium taking and Headteachers are key to driving the developments forward and Schools Forum members are actively involved.

8.2 Schools Forum is asked to note the funding options available

8.3 Schools Forum are asked to decide what, if any, further action they require. E.g. Production of a potential budget for a Walsall Learning Consortium, business case and resource plan, further research or setting up a sub group to look at funding