



Walsall Council

Walsall Children's Services

Report to: Schools Forum

Date: 1 March 2011

Subject: Central retention of former National Strategies
Matched Funding

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Purpose of the report: To request that Schools' Forum allow the continued retention of £421k to provide funding to support 'schools causing concern' because of their current standards and/or because they are at risk of failing to meet at least satisfactory outcomes at their next Ofsted inspection. Additionally this will underpin the need to establish a traded School Improvement Support Service to schools with effect from 1 April 2011 by retaining some core staff to provide support to schools in difficulty.

Recommendation: The Schools' Forum support this request and that the Theme 3 Output Specification be amended to ensure continued delivery of this invaluable support service to 'schools causing concern'.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current contract sum includes a contribution of £421k from the central expenditure element of the Schools' Budget. This sum was formally the required matched funding element of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies Standards Fund Grant.
- 1.2 All Standards Fund Grants have either been abolished or mainstreamed within the Dedicated Schools Grant. As a general rule, the LA retained elements of these grants have been abolished. Therefore, a request is being made to the Schools' Forum to allow the central retention of this funding from 1 April 2011 and support the continuation of a vital support service to schools.
- 1.3 Without the continued support of this £421k, the School Improvement support to schools will be put at further risk.

2. Use of the funding

- 2.1 The Local Authority remains responsible for the performance of its schools through Children's Area Assessment. Schools are universal services and carry a high weighting in this process. Therefore, the council must continue to support schools, where needed to continue to improve and achieve the best outcomes for pupils.
- 2.2 The funding, if approved, will be used to maintain a service to support schools that are facing major challenges. There are many factors that can cause a school to be in difficulty, some of which are controllable, but some of which are not. However, irrespective of the circumstances, it is important that every effort is made to provide help and support to protect the education of the children and young people currently in the school, and in 'schools causing concern' across the borough.
- 2.3 The funding of £421k would be held in Schools' Specific Contingency would be deployed as follows:
 - 2.3.1. Option One – the funding would fund posts which would enable the local authority to build capacity in the school by provision of limited 'free of charge' consultancy support to 'schools causing concern' on a proportionate rate to the size of the school with a primary school having between 5 to 10 days of support (approximately £3000 - £6000) and a secondary school having between 10 and 20 days of support (approximately £6000 - £12000). It would also give the local authority funds to broker quality assured external support if the expertise required was not available centrally. Also if there was a leadership inter-regnum, we could use some of this funding to second a senior leader from another school by negotiation. Often such schools have little funding to buy in such additional support to build capacity to improve rapidly.
 - 2.3.2 Option Two – the funding could be distributed to schools and if this was equally split across the 116 schools, this would mean an additional (approximately) £3,600 per school to support school improvement or to buy in from traded packages from the Quality and Improvement team or other quality assured agencies brokered to meet your needs. In reality, the funding would probably be included the total individual Schools Budget and run through the formula

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Schools' Forum is asked to support the Option One proposal to retain £421k within the Contract sum, on the condition that the Theme 3 Output Specification clearly outlines this vital support service to schools facing significant challenges because this will enable the local authority to give support to 'schools causing concern', in line with the expectations outlined in the Education Bill.

Reports will be written to inform the Forum on the use of this funding and its impact on school improvement and capacity building.

- 3.2 The retention of £421K within the central expenditure limit may cause a breach, as former grant funding is not included in the baseline for comparison services. If approval is given to the retention of the former National Strategy Grant then the Forum will need to approve a possible breach as a result of this agreement.