

SCHOOLS FORUM REPORT

Subject: Proposal for Schools Block to contribute to the Admissions Service

Summary

The creation of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding blocks in 2012/13 restricted some central services that could be funded from the DSG thereafter to historical levels.

Rotherham is one of only two authorities in England who do not receive a contribution from Schools for the cost of the Admissions Service. The restrictions post 2013 meant that this situation could not be rectified.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance for 2017/18 has relaxed this rule for Admissions.

The Local Authority therefore requests Schools Forum to approve a contribution from all schools totalling £154k.

Background

Previous DfE guidance stated:

Some elements of the central provision within the schools budget cannot increase above 2015-16 levels. The relevant expenditure lines are ... 1.4.2 (Admissions),

This meant that for Admissions (and other areas) the Council could not request an increase to its contribution from schools, which is £0 (zero).

The recently published DfE Schools Revenue Funding Guide for 2017/18 relaxed this position:

A number of the services that are covered by funding that is held centrally are subject to a limitation of no new commitments or increases in expenditure from 2016 to 2017, for 2017 to 2018 this limit no longer applies to admissions or the servicing of schools forums.

...If the local authority and schools forum are unable to reach consensus on the amount to be retained by the local authority, the matter will need to be referred to the Secretary of State.

Key Issues

The Council is facing significant budget pressures due to reductions to some its core funding resources, including Revenue Support Grant and Education Services Grant. Its budget is forecast to reduce by 25% over the next three years from a net revenue budget of £200m in 2016/17. In spite of this it has over the last two years invested over £20m in Children's Services. A further £8.5m will be added to the base budget in 2017/18 to support the Children's Directorate on its improvement journey.

Rotherham is one of only two local authorities in England who do not currently receive a contribution from Schools towards the cost of admissions. In 2017/18 there is the first opportunity to put right this historic oversight.

The total cost of the Admissions Service in 2017/18 will be £384k. If existing arrangements continue it will be funded from £238k of the the Council's own resources and from an income target of £146k from the traded service with academies.

Breakdown of the £238k expenditure:

- £154k on the co-ordination of admissions arrangements in the borough. Activities including School Organisation, monitoring and tracking and coordinated consultations / admissions work – all LA statutory functions.
- £84k admissions administering work for LA maintained schools (traded for academies).

The Council is requesting that the £154k is funded from the School Block in 2017/18.

In order to ensure equity between academies and maintained schools, the Council is of the view that the maintained schools should pay their fair share, a maximum of £84k in 2017/18. Given maintained school representation at school forum is low, it may be best to defer a decision regarding this to a separate meeting of maintained school heads and council officers.

Recommendations

That Schools Forum:

- Agree to fund statutory admission functions totalling a maximum of £154k.

That Schools Forum (maintained schools only):

- Note the issue regarding funding the administering of admissions and agree for a meeting of maintained representatives to discuss a contribution of no more than £84k to the LA.