

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	Cabinet
2. Date:	10th April, 2013
3. Title:	School Improvement Strategy
4. Directorate:	Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS)

5. Summary:

The Government’s aim, ‘to support the school system to become more effectively self-improving’, charges schools with the primary responsibility for their own improvement. As the capacity of Local Authorities reduces and schools and leaders take on greater responsibility for school improvement, leading improvement work across the system, there is a need to put in place suitable safeguards and a support infrastructure to ensure all children and young people fulfill their potential.

In April 2011, Cabinet agreed to enter into a minimum of a two year agreement with Rotherham School Improvement Partnership. This report sets out the proposals for the next phase of school improvement delivery across the borough.

In September 2012, Learners First Schools Partnership Ltd., was set up as a school company by Wickersley School with the support of Rotherham MBC. Learners First is the legally constituted successor to Rotherham School Improvement Partnership.

Learners First Schools Partnership Ltd is a ‘not for profit’ company. Through the Strategic Director of Children and Young People’s Services, the Council acts as the supervising authority for the company. The School Effectiveness Service is working in partnership with Learners First.

Schools agreed through the Schools Forum meeting on 5th October, 2012 that funds to develop and deliver a school-led school improvement model should be allocated from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in the 2011/12 financial year to Learners First and unanimously supported the proposal. Agreement has subsequently been given by schools to extend this up to and including 2014/15 financial year with a proposed annual allocation of funding of £765k.

Cabinet is requested to approve the payment of the above funds which are currently retained and managed by the Children and Young People’s Services Directorate to Learners First.

6. Recommendations:

That Members support the recommendations of the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services, and the Schools Forum as follows:-

- **The provision of DSG funding to Learners First Schools Partnership Ltd., to develop and deliver a school-led school improvement model up to and including 2014/15.**
- **That until a governance and accountability structure is agreed and implemented that the residual balance of DSG funding currently allocated to the Rotherham School Improvement Partnership for the financial year 2012/13, is vired to the 6 local authority maintained Schools responsible for leading the Learners First priority improvement areas.**
- **That Members note the HMI findings on its recent inspection into good practice and the strengths of collaborative working.**

7. Proposals and Details

The Government's aim, 'to support the school system to become more effectively self-improving', charges schools with the primary responsibility for their own improvement. As the capacity of Local Authorities reduces and schools and leaders take on greater responsibility for school improvement, leading improvement work across the system, there is a need to put in place suitable safeguards and a support infrastructure to ensure all children and young people fulfil their potential.

During 2011/12 it became evident that aligning the strategic groups for Rotherham School Improvement Partnership (RoSIP) and the Teaching School Alliance (TSA) would better serve our schools and allow us to firmly root local priorities within the national context. From the outset, school leaders agreed that RoSIP and the TSA must build the necessary, sustainable capacity and capability required to deliver the agreed Mission in all settings. This will mean investing in, and drawing on school based staff to take lead roles in developing and delivering school improvement programmes – in effect re-investing resources in the schools system to be more self supporting.

As funding pressures on the local authority increase, schools are aware that increased investment from the local authority is highly unlikely and that existing revenue funding for school improvement will focus on the LA's statutory responsibilities. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) currently provides for the majority of funds to support school improvement work both through staff employed directly by the local authority and through school-led provision.

Improvements in the performance of schools continued in the 2011/12 academic year despite significant system reform and upheaval. The model established by Rotherham schools through 'Learners First' demonstrates the commitment of Headteachers to work collaboratively for the collective benefit of all Rotherham children with the shared Mission being the driving force behind all activity and areas of school improvement focus:-

- all students making at least good progress
- no underperforming cohorts
- all teachers delivering at least good learning and
- all schools moving to at least the next level of successful performance

Strategic priorities for the group are informed by an annual audit of school need using data from the local authority and Headteachers lead and direct the activities aimed at delivering improvement. The six strategic priority areas are:- Key Stage 2; Key Stage 4; SEN; Initial Teacher Training; Leadership Development; Targeted Professional Development. Governor development is a new seventh addition to the priorities.

Partnerships and relationships between schools and Children and Young People's Services remain strong owing to collaborative working and School Effectiveness Service colleagues act as partners in practically all activities. The model established in Rotherham is becoming a nationally recognised model of

good practice and it is critical that new partnerships are given time to develop and flourish. Early indications are positive but it is important that momentum is maintained and capacity is created within the system to enable more of the best practitioners in Rotherham to be provided with opportunities to develop themselves, share practice and have wider impact both within and beyond their own school. Interest from schools outside of Rotherham wanting to join the partnership is also growing and this is bringing inward investment into Rotherham in terms of skills, knowledge and finance that serve to benefit Rotherham children. This is especially so from schools in Sheffield and Doncaster who see the approach as 'ground breaking'.

Rotherham is at the forefront of change and its partnership model is one that others are seeking to follow. During the recent 'Good Practice Survey of Local Authority Work in Supporting Improvement', HMI were very impressed with the commitment to the collective mission which underpins all strategies and provides core values, a moral purpose and a collective responsibility. It is seen as 'the glue' which gels together the LA, its partners and schools as a cohesive community. Collaborative working is seen as a particular strength and a key part of that, is the use of diverse arrangements to meet schools' needs in terms of school improvement. Professional development and training is regarded as being of good quality and a strength is the focus on the development of sustainable capacity for improvement in schools, with the responsibility given back to schools. The Learners First Schools Partnership is seen as a strong response to the changing landscape and is highly innovative as is the use of the Teaching Schools Alliance and the nationally awarded Leadership Licence to develop and grow leaders.

8. Finance:

Currently, funding for the schools partnership is allocated from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) – a ring fenced grant payable to local authorities in support of the Schools Budget.

Initial investment was derived from savings made through 'value for money reviews' of centrally managed services provided for schools conducted by Head teachers in 2010/11 and a realignment of spending priorities. As such, no school had their individual budget reduced to provide the funding for the partnership, which was £765k in 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years. This funding is to pay for additional school improvement capacity such as national leaders of education, national leaders of governors, local leaders of education and leadership development etc. There are no staff being subject to TUPE.

A 3 year budget was proposed by the Learners First Strategic Group covering the period 2012/13 to 2014/15 and agreed by schools and the Schools Forum.

The request for virement to the schools is in accordance with the Financial Regulations guidance note: virements – section 8(f).

9. Risk and Uncertainties

The Government aims to extend autonomy and freedom for schools in England. With increased independence for schools and some opting for Academy status, there is an increased risk of fragmentation in the schools system. Evidence to date however, suggests that the existing school-led partnership model in Rotherham has helped maintain coherent and collaborative networks with positive results on student progress.

The effectiveness of Learners First in supporting improving standards and value for money will be monitored and evaluated by the Rotherham School Improvement Board (to be established). This board will be Headteacher led supported by representatives of the LA.

The Government has announced the introduction of a national funding formula in the next Spending Review period. This may impact on the method by which the partnership is funded beyond 2014/15. Changes in pupil numbers or increases in the number of academy conversions in 2013/14 and 2014/15 may also impact on the level of funding available.

An important aspect of local decision-making is the Schools Forum. Schools Forums were put in place to support local authorities on matters relating to school budgets and they play a critical role in representing the views of all the schools in the area, including Academies, Free Schools, maintained schools and early education providers. The Schools Forum fully supports the governance and funding arrangements for the Schools Partnership and monitoring and reporting arrangements in place.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Despite the Governments continued attempts for schools to become more autonomous and free from local authority control including academisation and free schools, there is still a level of accountability placed on the LA for the performance of all schools.

It is therefore essential that the relationship with Learners First allows for a level of scrutiny and challenge. The LA continues to use its statutory powers in relation to Schools of Concerns and those requiring additional support.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Sustaining School Improvement in Rotherham from April 2011, Report to Cabinet 6th April, 2011

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