

Report to: Schools' Forum

Date of meeting: 14 January 2022

Report By: Alison Jeffery

Title: School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant

Purpose: To provide an update on the DfE's consultation on the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant and how this will be managed in East Sussex in 2022-23.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Schools' Forum are asked to:

- a. note how the impact of the changes to the Grant will be managed in East Sussex for the financial year 2022-23**
- b. approve the ending of the practice whereby the LA pays for DBS checks for school staff where the Council is the employer.**

1 Background

1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) launched a consultation on 29 October 2021 titled '*Reforming how local authorities' school improvement functions are funded*'. The consultation was seeking views on the removal of the local authority (LA) School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant (the Grant). The consultation ended on 26 November 2021.

1.2 The Grant is provided to LAs to support them in fulfilling their school improvement functions. In July 2021 the DfE confirmed that, following a previous consultation, they would be ring-fencing spend of the Grant and attaching conditions in order to ensure that LAs use it to contribute to the delivery of urgent school improvement priorities in the context of the covid pandemic. The DfE also confirmed that the Grant would be reduced to reflect the reduction in the number of maintained schools since the grant was introduced in 2017. A report on these changes was considered by Schools' Forum at the meeting on 9 July 2021. The report concluded that the changes did not represent a risk to the delivery of the school improvement functions by East Sussex local authority at the current time.

1.3 The consultation (Appendix 1) launched on 29 October asked for views on the following two proposals:

- Remove the Grant which is currently allocated to local authorities to support school improvement activities; and
- Make provisions within the School and Early Years Finance Regulations for the financial year 2022-23 to allow local authorities to fund all of their school improvement activity (including all core school improvement activities) via de-delegation from schools' budget shares.

1.4 The rationale provided for these proposals was that there is no longer a distinction between a LA's core improvement activities (as outlined in the Schools Causing Concern guidance and for which the Grant is provided) and additional school improvement activity that LAs undertake. The consultation proposed that the ending of the Grant is phased with a reduction to 50% for financial year 2022-23 and ended from the start of financial year 2023-24.

2 Outcome of the consultation

2.1 The DfE had indicated that they would publish their response to the consultation in December 2021. To date, the outcome of the consultation has not been published.

3. Impact of the changes on East Sussex

3.1 The Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) leads for the LA on our school improvement functions. The service has a range of responsibilities and is supported by funding from a range of sources, including government grants and LA funding.

3.2 SLES have been preparing for a possible reduction in the Grant and, if these changes go ahead, will seek to manage the reduction proposed for 2022-23 within its own resources for the first year. In financial year 2021-22, the LA received a total of £432,359 for the Grant so we estimate that a 50% saving in 2022-23 financial year would be in the region of £216,180.

3.3 The SLES budget will be reviewed to identify what savings can be made on projects, consultancy support and through vacancy management whilst minimising impact on our school improvement activity. This will include reviewing the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve that was previously allocated to SLES and is being used to support the delivery of Excellence for All.

3.4 In addition, the LA currently holds a budget of approximately £60K a year which is used to pay for the costs of DBS checks for school staff where East Sussex County Council is the employer. This is a historic practice and it is proposed that the LA no longer pays for these staff DBS checks with effect from the start of the financial year 2022. If agreed by Schools' Forum, this funding will be moved to the SLES budget to mitigate the impact of the reduction and removal of the Grant. This is proposed as a permanent change and would mean that all schools will be responsible for paying for their own staff's DBS checks from this date.

3.5 It is not currently anticipated that the LA will therefore need to request de-delegated funding from the DSG to support school improvement activities for the financial year 2022-23.

3.6 A White Paper on the role of the LA in education is expected in the spring 2022. This White Paper will require consideration as part of the ongoing broader discussion about how we fund the school-led system in East Sussex alongside statutory school improvement duties. A further report will be brought to Schools' Forum to set out proposals for how the removal of the Grant from 2023-24 financial year will be managed within this wider context and is likely to include request for de-delegated funds from the DSG. The Primary and Secondary Boards will be fully involved in these discussions.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The reduction of the Grant in financial year 2022-23 will be managed by SLES through careful budget review and the use of other available funding to mitigate the reduction. There is no request at this stage for de-delegation of funding from the DSG.

4.2 Schools' Forum are asked to approve the ending of the practice whereby the LA pays for DBS checks for school staff where the Council is the employer to help mitigate the reduction of the Grant.

4.3 A further report will be brought to Schools' Forum later in the academic year setting out proposals for managing the impact of the removal of the grant from 2023-24.

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