

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 24th January 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education & Social Care

SUBJECT: School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant Consultation October 2021- November 2021

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The report aims to share a summary of the DFE Consultation that was launched on 29th October 2021 and closed on 26th November 2021 regarding DFE proposed changes to the Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant (SIMB) funding and the role of the Local Authority in relation to School Improvement. The report will also outline the potential impact of this paper on schools and wider LA services across the region. The outcome from the responses and plans following consultation moving forwards were due to be published either late December 2021 or early in the New Year 2022. As of 4th January 2022, the government website states that feedback is still being analysed but will be published soon.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) **Members are aware of the key risks and issues which may arise from this consultation if plans proposed do evolve**
- ii) **Members will consider future proposals to new ways of working with schools if this grant is reduced and/or fully removed.**

3.0 **BACKGROUND**

3.1 Under Section 72 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Local Authority have a statutory duty to act as champions of excellence for education and to risk assess and monitor it's maintained schools. The Local Authority also have a duty to provide support and challenge to schools; encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to take responsibility for their own improvement and support other schools, whilst also issuing warning notices for schools causing serious concern.

4.0 **REFORMING HOW LOCAL AUTHORITIES' SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUNCTIONS ARE FUNDED - DFE CONSULTATION - 29TH OCTOBER 2021- 26TH NOVEMBER 2021**

4.1 On 29th October 2021, DFE launched a consultation to consider the future funding arrangements of the Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant. This consultation outlined that it would consult on:

- Removing the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant ('the Grant'), which is currently allocated to local authorities to support school improvement activities; and
- Make provisions within the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations for the financial year (FY) 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.
- The document outlined that the plan would be to reduce the school improvement monitoring and brokering grant by 50% from 1st April 2022-31st March 2023 and then fully remove the funding from 1st April 2023.
- The consultation suggested that as schools would be receiving on average 3.2% increases in core funding, then schools could agree to use some of this funding to fund school improvement work.

5.0 **WIDER CONSULTATION DOCUMENT RATIONALE**

5.1 The consultation assumed the position that:

- Council school improvement activity can be based on "core" school improvement activity and "additional" improvement services. Core was deemed to be roles identified within the Schools Causing Concern guidance which included roles such as issuing warning notices; removal of delegated budget; intervening to appoint an Interim Executive Board (IEB). Additional school improvement was viewed to be school improvement activities that were additional to core and may be funded through traded services or de delegated funding from school budget shares.
- As more schools were now academy schools nationally, the rationale was that the Local Authority had less maintained schools for which it was responsible so should be funded to reflect this change and that additional school improvement activities would reflect local arrangements and could be funded through a traded services model for which school leaders could select to buy in such services.
- Effective councils acted early to identify risks and intervene early to reduce risks therefore few warning notices were being issued. The rationale has therefore been taken that there is no need to have a distinction between core and

additional school improvement activity therefore all school improvement could be funded through a traded model or de delegating school budget shares to fund improvement activities across the local authority area

- Schools will be receiving a 3.2% uplift in their budgets next year, therefore it is only right that schools use some of this budget to spend on school improvement functions and places decision on where to source this support in school leaders hands.
- The consultation stated that by top slicing from budgets via de delegation this would align maintained schools with the way in which academy schools are funded and would enable a smooth transition to becoming part of a multi academy trust in line with the government's position. It did not make the distinction that academy schools automatically have funding top sliced from their academy trust and do not need to consult or approve this funding allocation, whereas under this consultation maintained schools would need to be consulted to de-delegate any funding streams.

6.0 **PROPOSED TIMING FOR SUGGESTED CHANGES**

- 6.1 The consultation proposes that the removal of the grant is phased so that it would be reduced to 50% of the current amount on a per school basis in Financial Year 2022-23 and completely removed for the beginning of the financial year 2023-24.

Current Grant Funding:

- 6.1.1 Halton Local Authority received £167,814 for the year April 2021-2022, a decrease from £183,337 in the financial year 2020-2021. This money is used to fund educational, statutory local authority duties. This includes a range of duties such as leading on training, advice and administering statutory assessment and moderation; acting as the Appropriate Body for Early Career Teachers (ECT) or legacy Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT)'s; acting as the Directors representative to support governors in the recruitment of headteachers and school leaders, whilst championing excellence in schools, supporting an increase in the capacity of a school led system, whilst risk assessing and monitoring schools and providing challenge and support to lead to improvement and delivering improvement networks, leadership training and continuing professional development. Wider partnership work including support, advice and training for governors; Early Help, SEND/Inclusion partnerships working; Early Years; Health and Covid support/monitoring and Public Health multi agency partner support is also provided by the small team fulfilling these roles. Educational professionals funded through this funding also play a key role in leadership of Early Years and providing support and being part of the Covid outbreak management support and planning throughout

the pandemic.

- 6.1.2 As a Local Authority Halton have a very high proportion of maintained schools with 88% of primary schools maintained schools; 100% nursery schools are maintained; 50% of special schools are maintained; the pupil referral unit is a maintained school and 25% of secondary schools are maintained.

Risks:

- 6.1.3 If the plans to reduce the SIMB grant by 50% from 1st April 2022 would pose huge risks to schools and the education sector as this grant provides the funding for key educational duties and responsibilities. Given the timing of the consultation the results are not yet published and there is therefore insufficient time to draft a paper to consult with schools forum or Elected Members as to how this important work will be continued or funded prior to potentially losing significant funding. Currently there is no information published as to whether the Local Authority Statutory duties are changing and if so what their role would be and how they would be funded. This also disproportionately impacts negatively on small Local Authorities with very limited funding and small teams, therefore very little capacity for other areas to supplement these key areas financially. As an area with a high proportion of maintained schools which we highly value, this is a concerning policy change which could impact on a large number of maintained schools. It would also negatively impact on the capacity to work in partnership with the entire school system including the academy sector if funding was reduced or removed.
- 6.1.4 In order for this work to continue to ensure that schools are providing a high quality education this would require de delegation of funding from maintained schools or a move towards a traded model. However given the nature of some of the work, it is unlikely that a school causing concern would select a traded model from some of the challenge and accountability functions that go alongside school improvement support and capacity building.
- 6.1.5 If such work and improvement work was not carried out the risks would be that the quality of education could suffer as a result. Any drop into an Ofsted category of concern would lead to a forced Academy order for schools to convert to academy status. This would impact far wider than the education sector as a loss of maintained schools is likely to lead to a reduction of purchasing service level agreements for services such as HR, payroll, school meals, property services, cleaning services; legal services, educational welfare officers; educational psychologists; IT support etc. This could potentially negatively impact upon loss of wider council services as well as having a reduced role in the educational offer of the Borough.

6.1.6 Currently as the consultation response is not published nor are any changes to the role of the Local Authority in School Improvement duties there will be no policy changes as yet. However given this is likely to have such a significant impact if the proposals do go ahead, it was important to alert members and schools to the potential changes on the horizon. Once the response is published plans and potential policy changes will be shared as soon as possible to ensure Halton maintained schools continue to have a high quality educational support offer.

7.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None currently, until the consultation response is published

8.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Potential loss of funding for educational school improvement support for maintained schools and potential risk to educational professionals roles. Potential risk to wider council services and less buy in to council services.

9.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

Likely to impact on council offer to maintained schools unless consultations agree to de-delegation of funding. There may be an increase in academy conversions of schools.

9.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None currently, until the consultation response is published.

9.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Potential risk to educational professionals' roles. Potential risk to wider council services and less buy in to council services impacting on number of roles required.

9.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None identified

9.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified

9.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified

10.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

10.1 None identified

11.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

11.1 None identified

12.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant Consultation October 2021- November 2021	www.gov.uk	Divisional Manager for Education 0-19
Section 72 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006	www.gov.uk	Divisional Manager for Education 0-19
Schools Causing Concern Guidance September 2020 – Guidance regarding Local Authority Statutory Duties in relation to schools causing concern	www.gov.uk	Divisional Manager for Education 0-19