

Schools Forum 8 December 2009

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Staying Safe on School Trips

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for an increased financial contribution of £10,000 pa to the Offsite Educational Visits and Journey's service for Dudley's schools from 2010/11.

Budget Working Group Discussed

2. Yes.

Schools Forum Role and Responsibilities

3. The Schools Funding Regulations include a provision for "Combined Budgets" under the types of funding that can be retained centrally from the Dedicated Schools Grant; it is conditional that the Schools Forum agrees the amounts involved.
4. In considering whether to approve a request from a local authority to retain an amount of funding centrally for this purpose, the Forum must ensure that the educational benefit test is met. To do this the local authority must demonstrate to the Schools Forum that there are clear benefits to pupils and schools from the increased contribution.

Action for Schools Forum

5. To approve an additional contribution of £10k from the Dedicated Schools Grant to support additional costs associated with Dudley's Offsite Educational Visits and Journey's service.
6. The request is in accordance with Schools Forum powers under the combined budgets provision of the School Funding Regulations.

Attachments to Report

7. None.

Karen Cocker
Children's Services Finance Manager
18 November 2009

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Combined Budgets

2. In considering whether to approve a request from a local authority to retain an amount of funding centrally for this purpose, the Forum must ensure that the educational benefit test is met. To do this the local authority must demonstrate to the Schools Forum that there are clear benefits to pupils and schools from the increased contribution.
3. If Schools Forum agrees to a deduction from the Schools Budget under the combined services regulations, then there is no need for the authority to seek the Schools Forum's formal agreement to the continuation of the deduction, but the local authority should report to their Schools Forums on the progress of the joint working.
4. Central government policy clearly envisages a key role for school partnerships in the reform and development of children's services as a whole, working with other providers and agencies to meet the full range of children's needs

Background

5. The Offsite service was set up in 2001 as an innovative way of fulfilling an important function that ensures safety of children and young persons' learning outside of the classroom. It is an on-line authorisation system for the risk assessment and the recording of off-site visits by Dudley children and young people. Over 27,000 risk assessments have been submitted to-date.
6. Lindsay Newton was responsible for the creation and maintenance of the service and was supported by Veronica Ross, who manages the daily processing and authorisation of risk assessments submitted in advance of visits away from school premises. Lindsay retired in August 2009 and Veronica's contract will end in March 2010.

7. Since Lindsay's retirement the service is now administered by Tony Wells, Children's Services Transport team.

2007 Approval

8. At the December 2007 Schools Forum meeting, a business case was presented in respect of the Offsite Educational Visits and Journey's service requesting financial support to facilitate the enhancement of the health and safety duties required of schools and local authorities for offsite visit assessments. Schools Forum approved an annual contribution of £22k to fund the service.
9. All Dudley schools have access to the offsite service.
10. In order to keep pace with development and health and safety issues, there is a need to increase the budgetary contributions from 2010/11 by an additional £10k pa. This is required to fund the following:
 - Training. The training budget is inadequate to accommodate this crucial element of the service. Due to recent staff changes, the current members of staff involved require initial and continuation training to maintain their competence and effectiveness in assessing the risk to pupils who undertake offsite educational visits.
 - Increased cover for Offsitemag.net risk assessment authorisation. The increasing level of offsite educational activity and the complexity of these visits have created a need for more time to be spent on evaluation and investigation. Transfer of responsibility for Offsitemag.net has resulted in the service being supported on a full time basis rather than part time. Additional service support from the Transport Manager and an Officer ensures that the service is maintained during periods of high demand, leave and sickness.
 - Information Technology. The IT server needs routinely updating and periodic maintenance; the daily rate from the service provider is £500. There is also a need to upgrade and develop the software on the web-site, currently provided by Trilby Media; there is an associated cost of £7k for this service. Publication of the Health and Safety of Learners Outside the Classroom (HASLOC) guidance, currently under consultation, will necessitate a wholesale review of the information and reference materials provided on Offsitemag.net by the IT provider.

Proposal

11. The additional £10k pa required to support the offsite educational visits service from 2010/11 can be funded from the central budget areas of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) without diverting funds from schools or breaching the Central Expenditure Limit (CEL). However, as this type of expenditure is not directly eligible to be charged to the DSG then Schools Forum is required to approve the budget as a combined budget. Paragraph 2 of this report details Schools Forum's role for guidance.

Finance

12. The funding of schools is prescribed by the DCSF through the School Finance (Amendment)(England) Regulations 2008.
13. Schools Forums are regulated by the School Forums Regulations 2002 as already amended by the Schools Forums (Amendment) Regulations 2004 the Schools Forums (Amendment) 2005 Regulations and the Schools Forums (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008.
14. From 1st April 2006, the Schools Budget has been funded by a direct DCSF grant: Dedicated School Grant (DSG)

Law

15. Councils' LMS Schemes are made under Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The Education Acts 1996 and 2002 also have provisions relating to school funding.

Equality Impact

16. The Council's Equal Opportunities Policy is taken into account when considering the allocation of resources.

Recommendation

17. Schools Forum is invited to approve additional financial support from the dedicated schools grant to support Dudley's Offsite Educational Visits and Journey's Service, at an estimated additional cost of £10k per annum from 2010/11, in accordance with their powers under the combined budgets provision of the School Funding Regulations.



Mark Wyatt

Director of Children's Services

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