

 Brent	<p>Schools Forum</p> <p>16 October 2013</p> <p>Report from the Director of Children & Families</p>
<p>For Decision</p>	
<p>Review of the DSG funded Schools in Difficulty (SID) Budget</p>	

1 Consultation and Decision Making

The Schools Forum has decision-making powers on the budget covered in this report.

At the meeting of 18 September 2013, the Schools Forum asked for a series of reports to be prepared, allowing the Forum to review and challenge the spending on services provided by the Council and funded through DSG. This report is part of that series.

This particular report focuses on the Schools in Difficulty budget, which has been funded over 20 years through the DSG and is managed by the Children and Families Directorate.

2 Schools in Difficulty (SID) Budget

This budget currently stands at £184,800 which equates £4.90 per pupil. This is the same level of funding that was allocated last year in 2012/13. Historically, it has used primarily as a way of allocating cash sums to individual schools which are in difficulty, for purposes agreed between the school and the previous Head of Services to Schools. Over the last five years, 50 schools have been allocated cash sums, normally in the region of £5,000 - £10,000, but on occasion a more substantial sum. Some of these schools have received funding on more than one occasion.

Previously, the link adviser of a school would alert the head teacher to the possibility of securing funding from the SID budget, and would inform the Head of Services to Schools. Head teachers were invited to submit a short application in writing, stating what the funding will be used for. Each application was considered along with monitoring information on the school held by Services to Schools. If the request was approved, the agreed sum was transferred to the school.

On occasions, the SID budget has been used centrally to pay for support: to secure the services of an interim head, for example, or to pay costs relating to the managed departure of a head teacher.

A previous report sent to Schools Forum in September 2012 suggested that the monitoring of this budget following allocation to schools had not been sufficiently robust.

From September 2013, the School Improvement Service is working to a new Core Offer for School Improvement. This Core Offer explains the differentiated support to be provided to all schools in Brent at no cost to the schools' budget. The Core Offer also explains a new methodology for allocating money to schools from the Schools In Difficulty budget. It is believed that this methodology provides greater transparency and will ensure that funds are allocated where there is greatest need.

For schools which require improvement and those in an OfSTED category, a one year cycle will be established to ensure rapid improvement or ultimately to trigger intervention. Schools are responsible for their own improvement and must develop their own capacity for improvement. But the Local Authority, through the School Improvement Service, has a statutory requirement to provide challenge and support for those schools failing to provide all children and young people with the standard of education required.

This one year cycle will consist of regular half termly Rapid Improvement Groups (RIGs), to which the head teacher, chair of governors or their representative, school improvement specialist, Head of School Improvement or school Improvement lead officer and other relevant school or school improvement staff will be invited.

The work of the RIG will be informed by an action plan, the production of which will be the responsibility of the school, working with the link adviser. The content of the action plan will lead to the implementation of a support programme which will be monitored and reviewed at each half termly meeting. The production of an effective action plan will trigger external financial support funded by the LA through the Schools in Difficulty budget should the school's own budget not be able to support the plan. This will be in discussion with the School's link adviser and appropriate financial advice from the Local Authority. The plan should be specifically tailored to the needs of the school to include support for leadership and management, teaching, learning, inclusion and governance.

Improvement for schools in these circumstances must be swift and embedded in good sustained practice, recognised at OfSTED monitoring visits or through LA reviews. If a school is deemed to be good before the end of the annual cycle, and it is generally agreed that the strategy group is no longer required, it will be disbanded. If at the end of the year, this improvement has been achieved, the school will continue its improvement journey as it sees fit. If this has not been the case, the LA will use its powers of intervention to ensure improvement at speed.

This financial year has fallen across the transition from one process and the next, meaning that some allocation of the Schools in Difficulty budget was managed under the previous arrangements. But now all allocations will be determined through the production of an action plan, which will be properly costed and will determine to what extent the school can fund its own improvement. Where this is not possible, application can be made to the Schools In Difficulty budget.

The Brent Schools Partnership has approved the Core Offer and reports will go to the BSP Executive with regard to progress with schools in difficulty and the use of Schools In Difficulty resources. It is the

intention to use the funding in part to resource school to school support, which will be supported by the BSP.

3 Take-up

Spend on SCC budget	12-13 (Actual) £	13-14 (YTD Actual) £
Total Federation support	10,000	
Total Headteacher consultants	133,898	10,046
Total IEBs		4,620
Total Cash sums to schools	110,000	71,500
Total spend on SCC	<u>253,898</u>	<u>86,166</u>
Budget available	(184,800)	(184,800)
Balance	<u>69,098</u>	<u>(98,634)</u>
	<u>Funded by the LA</u>	<u>To spend this year</u>

Eleven schools have been supported so far in this financial year and in total eleven were supported last year. Only two schools received money this year and last, both of which are in Special Measures. Of the remaining schools, most are schools in challenging circumstances. As stated earlier in the report, some allocations were made before the RIG process was established, but from the start of this academic year, all allocations will be through that process.

4 Impact

The RIGs will monitor and evaluate progress being made in schools in an OfSTED category or Requiring Improvement. They will decide whether the identified support is making a difference and whether progress is being made. These decisions will be made jointly by the head teacher, the governors, the LA and any other stakeholders represented on the RIG. The particular contribution made by additional funding will also be monitored and evaluated, to inform future spending decisions through the Schools in Difficulty budget.

Ultimately, the final judgement on impact for this budget will be the improving profile of schools in Brent as judged through the OfSTED inspection process. As schools are removed from categories and more move to good, the requirement for this additional funding for a small group of schools will be removed.

Any future proposal for additional funding should be proportionate to need and evidenced through the risk analysis of the schools in Brent.

5 Risk Analysis

Without this budget there is currently a risk that schools causing concern and those requiring improvement will face even greater difficulties in bringing about much needed improvements within the short time scale required by OfSTED and demanded through our statutory responsibility for the children and young people of the borough. The improved transparency of allocation and the rigorous monitoring of the budget's use and effectiveness through the RIG process makes this a robust and accountable improvement strategy.

6. Proposed 2014/15 Budget

In order to support the approach presented in this report Schools Forum is being asked to approve a budget of £184,800. This equates to pupil unit value of £7.06 which reflects the reduction in pupil numbers arising from the academy conversions in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

7 Recommendation

Schools Forum is asked to approve the de-delegated budget of £184,800 for Schools in Difficulty for 2014/15

Rebecca Matthews

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