

Report of the Director of Children and Families Services

Report to the Leeds Schools Forum

Subject: Schools Covid Contingency Fund 2020/21

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1 Summary of main issues

- 1.1 This report is to ask the maintained mainstream members of Schools Forum to consider a proposed Covid Contingency Fund 2020/21 for maintained mainstream schools.
- 1.2 As reported to Schools Forum (June 2020) in the DSG Outturn Report 2019/20 the de-delegated service budgets 2019/20 were underspent by £596k overall largely as a result of an underspend of £516k on schools contingency.
- 1.3 A proposal was put forward to schools forum to use this underspend of £596k to create a Schools Covid Contingency fund 2020/21, this will support mainstream maintained schools that have incurred exceptional Covid related costs which are not covered by government funding.
- 1.4 The following report will outline the proposed criteria and application process for the Schools Covid Contingency Fund 2020/21.

2 Covid Government Funding

- 2.1 Whilst schools have continued to receive their core funding allocations through the pandemic crisis, it was recognised by the government that in some instances schools faced additional costs due to Covid which could not be covered from their existing resources.
- 2.2 To address these additional pressures and ensure that schools could continue to focus on their vital roles at this time, financial support was provided by the government to cover schools up until the end of the summer term 2020. This financial support was restricted to the following criteria:
 - increased premises-related costs of keeping schools open during holidays
 - support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school
 - additional cleaning – required due to confirmed or suspected coronavirus cases

- 2.3 This funding was available to all maintained schools, academies and free schools but only if they were unable to meet such additional costs from their existing resources or which they could only meet by drawing down on reserves and undermining their long term financial sustainability. Schools were not able to make a claim against this fund if they expected to add to their existing historic surpluses in the current financial year.
- 2.4 Schools were asked to make the necessary payments from their existing budgets and then make a claim for the exceptional costs which fell within the above criteria. Schools were able to make claims up to the following set limits:

Mainstream Schools:

- 250 pupils or fewer £25,000
- 251 – 500 pupils £30,000
- 501 – 1000 pupils £50,000
- Over 1000 pupils £75,000

Special Schools and Alternative Provision:

- All schools £50,000

- 2.5 This funding was focused on additional costs that schools faced over and above their expected expenditure, in delivering appropriate support for their pupils through the period of partial school closures over the summer term. The initial window for these claims has now closed and approved payments have been made to qualifying schools.
- 2.6 Although no further details have been confirmed at this time, the DFE has indicated that there will be an opportunity for schools to make another claim against this funding in the autumn term however claims will still be restricted to the criteria as above and only for costs incurred between March and end of July 2020.
- 2.7 There are currently no indications that further government funding will be available for Covid related costs incurred outside of either this period or this restricted criteria. However the local authority does recognise that schools may have incurred Covid related costs both outside of this criteria and timescale, as such it is proposed that a Covid Contingency Fund is established to further support school budgets during this pandemic.

3 Proposed Covid Contingency Fund

- 3.1 It is proposed that the underspend on the DSG de-delegated services budgets 2019/20 of £596k is used to create a Covid Contingency Fund to provide financial support to schools who have incurred exceptional costs due to Covid pressures in the 2020/21 financial year. The Covid Contingency Fund will only be available to mainstream maintained schools as they contribute to the de-delegated service budgets from where this fund is derived.

Criteria for Funding Applications

- 3.2 All maintained mainstream schools will be able to apply for additional funding from this fund subject to the following criteria:

- The costs are outside the scope of the government Covid funding as demonstrated in paragraph 2.2, if any costs fall within the criteria and timescales of the government funding then it is expected that schools will apply to this central fund in the first instance or until the individual school claim limit is reached.
- The costs are exceptional and specific to Covid related issues, the costs should not be considered normal school running costs.
- The fund is to support only additional expenditure and will not consider application for loss of income for example in extended school provisions

Application Process

- 3.3 Schools will need to submit an application form for funding, for your information a proforma for application is attached as appendix A. This will ask schools to outline the exceptional costs they are claiming for and provide supporting evidence such as invoices to verify the claimed amount.
- 3.4 All applications should be submitted to finance by the end of December 2020, this will allow sufficient time for applications to be considered and agreed by Children and Families with payments to be made by the end of March 2021.
- 3.5 If the total value of claims against the Covid Contingency fund exceeds the initial fund of £596k then applications will be paid in proportion to the total value of claims made. However any bids that cannot be paid from the funding set aside by Covid could potentially be accommodated through the current year fund for schools in financial difficulty, and if this is the case we will have further discussions with maintained mainstream members of Schools Forum as to the best way to consider these.

Approval process

- 3.6 The use of de-delegated funding for Covid related costs falls within the scope of the contingency fund already approved by Schools Forum, as it will provide funding towards exceptional costs for schools in financial difficulty.
- 3.7 Ordinarily, individual applications for the schools in financial difficulty fund would go to the Schools Forum panel who would review these and make a recommendation to Children and Families on whether the application should be approved. The final decision on applications for the schools in financial difficulty fund rests with Children and Families.
- 3.8 Due to the volume of applications that could be received in relation to Covid costs we are proposing that mainstream maintained Schools Forum members pre-approve the criteria set out above. The council would then review the claims against the agreed criteria and grant approval if they are satisfied that the conditions have been met. Approval would be granted by the Director of Children and Families or an officer who has been given delegated authority to take this decision. In practice, these decisions are usually delegated to the Chief Officer, Resources and Strategy (Tim Pouncey).
- 3.9 The amounts agreed would then be reported back to Schools Forum. If the full amount set aside for Covid related costs is not paid out through these claims, then the remaining balance would either be distributed out to mainstream

maintained schools proportionate to their original contribution, or offset against future de-delegated contributions, depending on how significant the values concerned were.

3.10 Applications for schools in financial difficulty funding that do not relate to Covid would still be taken to the Schools Forum panel as usual.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Schools forum are asked to consider this proposal to establish to establish a Covid Contingency Fund which maintained mainstream schools can apply to for support with exceptional Covid related costs which are not covered by the existing government funding available. Maintained mainstream members are asked to vote on whether they support the proposals.