



Report of the Head of Learning Improvement & Area Lead, Primary Learning Improvement

Report to the Director of Childrens and Families

Date: July 2021

Subject: Delivery of Approved Business as Usual Financial Challenge Plan within Learning Improvement

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary

1. Main issues

- A small structural change is required to the Learning Improvement Team staffing structure to implement the changes approved by Executive Board in order to deliver the BAU Financial Challenge savings. A change on the staffing structure is required to add and appoint 1.7 FTE School Improvement Adviser posts to replace external staffing contracts currently in operation.
- Currently annual contract workers are used to provide learning improvement services to meet statutory requirements within the maintained school sector and is a more expensive provision than the use of substantive School Improvement Adviser capacity. The change will deliver £30k savings per annum to the Council's budget once implemented.
- It is anticipated that the change will lead to improved quality assurance of service provision through management oversight and performance management of staffing capacity which annual contracts do not facilitate easily.
- The combination of the current structure and annual contractors does not allow for sufficient flexibility or adaptability to meet the needs of the service to support schools in challenging circumstances without incurring additional costs to the Directorate when annual contractors are used.

- A further minor amendment to the staffing structure is required to effectively reduce the grade of a vacant post by deletion of a Senior Improvement Adviser post and replace with a School Improvement Adviser post to align capacity to business need. The vacant post has been included within the 2021/22 budget at the lower grade to contribute towards savings and the SAP staffing structure needs to be aligned accordingly prior to recruitment and is an essential post to relieve service pressures.

2. Best Council Plan implications (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- Health and well-being – as there is an increasing strain on the service substantive employees' to support our schools and young people due to insufficient capacity, increased service needs and government expectations to support educational recovery from the pandemic which the proposals address.
- Child friendly Leeds – the changes will alleviate reduced capacity to supportively challenge schools around outcomes for all learners and ensure the provision for children is of high quality.

3. Resource implications

- This report is requesting:
 - a) As set out in the approved BAU Savings Plan, to make amendments to the structure and release for immediate recruitment of an additional 1.7 FTE permanent School Improvement Adviser posts to replace annual external contract workers, realising £30k savings per annum.
 - b) Deletion of a **Senior** School Improvement Adviser post (1.0 FTE) and the creation of a School Improvement Adviser post to the structure which will contribute to savings incorporated within the 2021/22 budget. The permanent replacement post on the structure needs to be released for immediate recruitment.

The proposals are fully funded and necessary to effect the structural changes to realise the Financial Challenge BAU savings plan approved by the Executive Board in September 2020 and endorsed by Children and Families Leadership.

Recommendations

The Director of Children and Families is recommended to approve:

- the creation of 1.7 FTE School Improvement Adviser posts to the Learning Improvement Team structure to replace the use of external staffing contracts
- Replacement on the current structure of a 1.0 FTE Senior School Improvement Adviser post with a 1.0 FTE School Adviser Post.
- Immediate recruitment to the posts on the structure to enable the BAU Financial Savings Plan to be delivered whilst at the same time ensuring crucial support and challenge is provided to maintained schools from the start of the 2021/22 academic year.

Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report has been completed to request changes to the Learning Improvement staffing structure to facilitate the implementation of the Financial Challenge BAS Plan, approved by the Executive Board in September 2020 to generate annual savings of £30k. Approval is being sought for the addition of 1.7 FTE School Improvement Adviser posts to the structure to replace the current external Associate Adviser contractors thus realising the budgeted savings from 2021/22.
- 1.2 Approval is also being sought for the deletion a vacant Senior School Improvement Adviser post (1.0 FTE) and replace with the creation of an additional permanent School Improvement Adviser post (1.0 FTE) to align capacity, reduce service pressures and enhance the Learning Improvement Team.
- 1.3 Approval for immediate recruitment is sought to facilitate appointment for the start of the 2021/22 academic year in September 2021 to meet statutory responsibilities for School Improvement and Best Council educational and wellbeing ambitions for Leeds children and young people.

2. Background information

- 2.1 There is currently a small team of 3.6 FTE Adviser posts to provide support, challenge and oversight to 165 maintained primary schools. This provision has been reduced from 13.0 FTE Adviser posts 5 years ago which resulted from vacant posts not being reappointed and has caused significant pressure to the service and an over-reliance on contracted Advisers to operate at a minimal level of oversight on schools. The decreased staffing capacity has adversely impacted on service provision, staff wellbeing and retention. As highlighted in the Annual Standards Report, improving academic outcomes in the primary sector, as well as raising the number of children attending a good or better school, are paramount priorities for the city.
- 2.2 To ensure that all schools receive a core level of support, and to enable the LA to provide an increased level of support and challenge to vulnerable and 'at risk' schools, the Local Authority has used Associate Adviser Contracts to add significant capacity to the team. This is provided at a more expensive daily rate and equates to approximately 370 days (1.7 FTE) per academic year in order to provide adequate capacity. The budgeted cost of Associate Adviser Contracts totals £160k in 2020/21.
- 2.3 An initial evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the current model has been made with a view to restructuring it to create a more effective service aligned to Best Council Plan and pupil outcome priorities.
- 2.4 Currently, associate advisers are employed to support schools, including vulnerable and 'at risk' schools. Employing a 'contracted' adviser is not the most effective method of ensuring oversight of the support and challenge provided to schools. Transferring these 'posts' to substantive core posts will increase the oversight of our schools and enable a more coherent and rigorous support and challenge offer to support school improvement and educational outcomes for Leeds children.
- 2.5 There is a cost differential between a substantive core adviser and the equivalent contract associate adviser. The proposal is to substantially reduce the Associate contracts (equivalent of 1.7 FTE) and recruit to substantive Adviser posts to our core team which would represent a more effective use of financial resources. This would increase our core Adviser posts from 3.6 FTE to 5.3 FTE but would reduce the use of Associate contracts to minimal urgent ad-hoc 'supply' needs only. This

would save £30k annually, whilst at the same time maintaining and improving our current offer for the strategic challenge and support of school leadership and address improvement priority areas for educational outcomes for Leeds children.

- 2.6 The impact of the proposal would enable us to continue to realign the service to match the Best Council Plan priorities for the city, as well as enabling us to strengthen the support and challenge to schools in order to improve outcomes for children.
- 2.7 In conjunction with the changes to service delivery already being undertaken, the effect of the proposal would result in a more coherent team of core advisers that would provide greater oversight of the primary improvement strategy across the city.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 Leeds still has a number of primary schools (16) that remain 'requires improvement' – intensive work is underway to support these schools to a good Ofsted judgement
- 3.2 The outcomes across Early Years, KS1 and KS2 remain in the bottom 25% of authorities nationally, particularly for reading.
- 3.3 There is an increase of the statutory work required to be undertaken, i.e. Headteacher recruitment.
- 3.4 This is a request to realign posts and resources to mitigate the risks to schools and increase the capacity of the team to intervene proactively within the school system.
- 3.5 The realignment of one post in the structure seeks to appoint a School Improvement Advisor rather than appointing to the senior post in the structure.
- 3.6 The savings of ceasing the annual contracts and replacing with substantive posts would be £30K

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 The proposals have been considered by the Childrens and Families Leadership Team and have been shared with Trade Union colleagues for information and comment.
- 4.1.2 The Executive Member for Learning, Skills and Employment has been briefed on these proposals.
- 4.1.3 These proposals have been submitted to and approved by the Executive Board meeting in September for approval, in regards to the proposed savings.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 The current position creates an inequality of supportive challenge across the school system. The proposal seeks to rectify this for future years.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 These proposals fit with Health and Well-being and Child Friendly Leeds priorities on the Best Council Plan.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

- 4.4.1 Completion of these minor structural amendments and subsequent recruitment will enable a robust and equitable service to schools to be in place to ensure the Council receives value for money and schools receive an effective and cohesive Learning Improvement Service.
- 4.4.2 The budgeted cost of Associate Adviser Contracts totalled £160k in 2020/21. The cost of the proposal is £130K (*1.7 FTE SIAs + £10K retained budget for external contracts to respond to the complex response demands of the service*) and has been incorporated into the 2021/22 service budget to implement the proposed savings submitted and approved in the Executive meeting in September 2020.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 4.5.1 Legal Services have advised that the proposals to increase the core team of School Improvement Advisors rather than using annual contractors would not have any implications for TUPE or working rights of the annual contract workers.
- 4.5.2 These proposals would allow for the development of a sustained and effective improvement team that will enable the LA to fulfil its statutory responsibilities for schools.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 The learning improvement team will manage any potential risks such as annual workers commissioning their own traded work within the school sector.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The proposals have been scoped out and appropriate advice has been sought with the procurement and legal teams. As a result, the proposal to increase the school improvement advisory team by 1.7 FTE and recruit a SIA to the vacant Senior SIA post would ensure sustained and effective school improvement – allowing for flexibility and adaptability whilst delivering the savings approved under the Financial Challenge BAU Plan.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 The Director of Children and Families is recommended to approve:
- The creation of 1.7 FTE School Improvement Adviser posts to the Learning Improvement Team structure to replace the use of external staffing contracts
 - Replacement on the current structure of a 1.0 FTE Senior School Improvement Adviser post with a 1.0 FTE School Adviser Post.
 - Immediate recruitment to the posts on the structure to enable the BAU Financial Savings Plan to be delivered whilst at the same time ensuring crucial support and challenge is provided to maintained schools from the start of the 2021/22 academic year.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.