

1 Role of the Schools in Financial Difficulty Panel

- 1.1 Every Local Authority is required to have a Schools Forum for its area. The composition, constitution and procedures of the Forum are determined by the Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012.
- 1.2 The Leeds Schools Forum Terms of Reference (section 7) allows for working groups from its members to discuss specific issues and produce draft advice for consideration by Schools Forum. The Schools Forum should not delegate actual decisions or the finalisation of advice to a working group, as this may have the effect of excluding legitimate points of view.
- 1.3 The role of the Schools in Financial Difficulty panel (SIFD) is:
 - To consider and make recommendations to the Local Authority on applications made by maintained schools to access funding from the Schools in Financial difficulty contingency budget.
 - Review and make recommendations to the Local Authority on applications made by maintained schools to retain excess surplus balances which are liable to clawback per section 4.2 of the Leeds Scheme for Financing Schools.

2 Meetings

- 2.1 The SIFD working group will meet at least termly to consider all SIFD bid applications received. Meetings will be held remotely.
- 2.2 The SIFD working group will also meet at least once in the summer term to review and consider school proposals to retain excess surplus school balances subject to clawback.
- 2.3 The SIFD meetings will be chaired by a Local Authority Officer representing either the Childrens and Families directorate or Financial Services.
- 2.4 The SIFD meetings are not public meetings and minutes will not be published. The minutes will be issued to members of the SIFD working group within 10 working days of the SIFD meeting. Minutes will be available on request by schools whom have had a SIFD bid or excess surplus balance claim reviewed by the SIFD working group.

3 Membership

- 3.1 The SIFD working group will consist of a minimum of 6 Schools Forum representatives from the maintained sector only with at least 2 governor representatives.

4 Terms of Office

- 4.1 Members shall remain in the working group until (whichever comes first):

- a) The member's Schools Forum term of office expires.
- b) The member ceases to hold the office by virtue of which the member became eligible for election, selection or appointment.
- c) The member resigns by giving notice in writing to the Clerk.
- d) If a member has not attended two consecutive SIFD meetings then a reminder will be sent to the member. If the member does not attend the next meeting then the Local Authority will consider whether the member should remain in the SIFD working group.

5 Declaration of Interests

- 5.1 Members of the SIFD working group shall declare a personal interest in any individual bids / applications which directly affects them or any person closely associated with them (e.g. if the proposal concerns the school at which they are a governor or at which their children attend). It is not a declarable interest when the Forum considers the allocation of resources between all schools.
- 5.2 In considering whether to declare an interest a member should apply the following test: would a member of the public, knowing the facts of the situation, reasonably think that the member might be influenced by the interest. If necessary, the member should withdraw from the discussion and take no part in the decision.

6 Consideration of applications

- 6.1 Members of the SIFD panel will use their knowledge and experience of school budgets and management of those budgets to assess whether a SIFD bid is recommended for approval. Issues to consider include:
 - Has the bid been completed in line with the guidance provided?
 - The overall financial position of the school making the bid.
 - Whether the funding claimed for is in respect of an exceptional circumstance.
 - Whether all other options (such as alternative funding or compensatory savings) have been considered before the bid was submitted.
 - Is the bid related to a statutory requirement (e.g. health and safety, Ofsted requirements)?
 - The extent to which any additional costs could have been avoided.
 - Has sufficient supporting evidence for the need for the funding been submitted with the bid?
 - Have the costs in the bid been satisfactorily evidenced and is the value proportionate (e.g. have quotes been obtained)?
 - If the bid is rejected, what would be the impact on the school concerned?
 - Any comments from Leeds City Council officers relating to the bid.

6.2 In considering applications to retain excess surplus balances, members of the SIFD panel could consider:

- Whether the application has been completed in line with the guidance provided.
- Whether the proposed use of the surplus balance is appropriate.
- Whether sufficient evidence has been provided to support the application.
- The impact on the school if the application is rejected.
- Any comments from Leeds City Council officers relating to the application.