

**Report of Director of Children's Service**

**Report to Executive Board of the Council**

**Date: 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

**Subject: Permission to consult on the proposal to cease the provision of school clothing allowances**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): <b>City Wide</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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 of main issues**

1. Leeds City Council currently operates an annual school clothing allowance scheme for the families and carers of children at school, if they are eligible for free school meals. This is a discretionary payment. Neighbouring Local Authorities no longer have similar schemes in place.
2. In 2012 /2013 approximately 11,500 household received the school clothing allowance scheme at an approximate cost of £0.6m.
3. From 2013/14 Leeds schools are due to receive around £28m of Pupil Premium (approx £900 per qualifying pupil) which is a resource targeted at providing direct support to children and young people eligible for free school meals and looked after children. Schools will decide how to spend this funding as they are best placed to assess what additional support and services individual vulnerable pupils need.

**Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that a consultation exercise is undertaken on the proposal to cease the current discretionary school clothing allowance scheme to take effect from the start of the school year in September 2013 for which the majority of payments would be made in June of 2013.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To outline the current school clothing allowance scheme; and recognising the availability of targeted pupil premium funding to all schools across Leeds, to seek permission to consult on the proposal to cease the current discretionary school clothing allowance scheme for the start of the school year in September 2013 and the payments which would be paid in advance, mainly in June of 2013.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 Leeds City Council currently operates an annual school clothing allowance scheme for the families and carers of children at school, if they are eligible for free school meals. This is a discretionary payment. Neighbouring Local Authorities do not have similar schemes in place. Wakefield ended its scheme in 2006 and Kirklees has recently phased their scheme out completely. Calderdale ended their scheme in 2005, but provide a limited allowance for children moving from year 6 to 7. Manchester provides a high school grant, this is restricted to pupils eligible for free school meals who are in Year 7.
- 2.2 A number of schools in the city report that they already provide school clothing for vulnerable families.
- 2.3 If a child qualifies for free school meals they qualify for the school clothing allowance scheme. This equates to:
- For reception year children £27.50
  - For children in years 1 to 6 £20.00
  - For children in year 7 £37.50
  - For children in years 8 to 11 £30.00
- 2.4 In 2012/2013 approximately 20,000 children within 11,500 households were eligible for this discretionary school clothing allowance with an approximate cost of £0.6m, with the majority of the payments (approx 90%) are made in June/July each year in order for children to start the new school year (in September) with a new school uniform. This allowance has been made available directly to families on a low income regardless of the school policy or other school schemes. Academies can opt out of the scheme and if they chose to opt-in they are recharged for the allowances awarded.

## **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 Leeds schools are due to receive around £28m of Pupil Premium in 2013/2014 (approx £900 per qualifying pupil) which is a resource targeted at providing direct support to children and young people eligible for free school meals and looked after children. The only growth in funding per pupil is expected to come from the Pupil Premium. Schools have the freedom to spend the premium, which is additional to the underlying school budget, in a way which they think will best support the raising of attainment for the most vulnerable pupils. In addition, a number of maintained

schools and Academies already support children to purchase a school uniform. Because of this there is a need to review the current discretionary school clothing allowance scheme.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 Permission is sought to undertake a consultation on the proposal to cease the current discretionary school clothing allowance scheme for the new school year in September 2013, payable to parents and carers in June 2013.
- 4.1.2 The consultation will have two distinct parts. Firstly consideration of the impact of the withdrawal of the grant upon children and their families as against other potential budget saving measures. This will be undertaken through further engagement with focus groups representing children, young people and their families through; the Children and Young People's Voice and Influence Service, parent partnership service, cluster parent groups, children's centres and parent governors.
- 4.1.3 Secondly an engagement with key stakeholders such as schools, governors, cluster chairs to consider possible mitigation of any likely negative effects upon children and their families.
- 4.1.4 It is proposed that the consultation process runs throughout February 2013 and will report back to Executive Board for a decision in March 2013.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.2.1 An Equality Diversity cohesion and Integration screening assessment has been undertaken which has identified the need for a full Equality Impact Assessment.
- 4.2.2 The full equality impact assessment is being undertaken currently, focusing on mitigating the risks of the ending of the allowance on low income families.

### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 4.3.1 The three priority areas for improvement in Leeds are:
  - to support children to live in safe and supportive families so that the need for children and young people to become looked after is reduced,
  - to improve school and college attendance and behaviour in school so that more children can benefit from the opportunities provided, and
  - to enable more young people to be able to take up opportunities for education, training and employment by the age of 19.
- 4.3.2 It is recognised that a proposal to consult on the ending of this allowance is made in response to the need to achieve significant budget savings in 2013/2014, in response to changes to school funding arrangements as well as the need to protect front line services in line with the three priority areas for improvement.

#### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 It is estimated that approx £0.6m of budget savings would be achieved if the school clothing allowance scheme ceases with effect from the new financial year.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 It is estimated that approx £0.6m of budget savings would be achieved if the school clothing allowance scheme ceases with effect from the new financial year.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 There are four main areas of risk to be managed in relation to this proposal; that stakeholders do not fully engage with the consultation; the timeframe for implementing changes; that the required budget savings for 2013/2014 are not achieved; a negative impact on school attendance.

### **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 The current financial context requires significant budget savings to be made from the 2013/2014 budget as well as the need to review all areas of discretionary spend. There is also a need to assess the impact of changes to school funding and the shift of responsibility for elements of service provision from local government to other bodies.

### **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is recommended that a consultation exercise is undertaken in February 2013 on the proposal to cease the current discretionary school clothing allowance scheme to take effect for the start of the new school year in September 2013 and payable in June of 2013.

### **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.