

Report of The Director of Children's Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 24th April 2013

Subject: Review of the school clothing allowance- outcome of consultation and request to cease with effect from June 2013



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" 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 issue

- 1** In response to wide ranging changes and developments in funding arrangements the Council is reviewing many of its discretionary policies. In line with the initial budget proposals of December 2012 the Executive Board had in February 2013 agreed to consult with stakeholders about the proposal to end the current school clothing allowance.
- 2** This paper is reporting the outcome of the consultation with school, parents and young people around the present school uniform allowance. Consultation was undertaken from 26 February 2013 to 22 March 2013, seeking views from over 1,000 stakeholders.
- 3** The majority of head teachers, chairs of governors and clusters chairs who responded to the consultation believed that the change would have a minimal impact for children as a significant number of schools already had a range of systems in place to support families with uniform and other hardship, in relation to their learning attainment and wellbeing.
- 4** Parents and young people surveyed suggested that being able to buy uniforms from supermarkets and low cost stores, establishing clothing exchanges and

having a key person to talk to in school would be most helpful if they had financial difficulties.

- 5 The Department for Education guidance suggests that school uniform plays a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of a school, but that there is no legislation that deals specifically with school uniform. Guidance suggests that the governing body should ensure that uniforms are good value for money, that cost should be regularly reviewed and that sustainability including recycling of uniforms is to be encouraged.

Recommendations

- 1 Executive Board is asked to:
 - Consider the findings from the consultation process;
 - Approve the recommendation to end the current school clothing allowance with effect from June 2013.

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To report back to the Executive Board on the outcomes of the consultation to review the school clothing allowance and to ask the Executive Board to recommend ceasing the policy with effect from June 2013.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 Leeds City Council currently operates an annual school clothing allowance policy for the families and carers of children at school, if they are eligible for free school meals. This is a discretionary policy providing a small annual cash grant for approximately 20,000 children.
- 2.2 Changes in funding in 2013/14 have resulted in Leeds schools receiving around £27m of Pupil Premium (£900 per qualifying pupil). This applies to approximately 40,000 children in Leeds. This is a resource which is targeted at providing direct support to children and young people eligible for free school meals, looked after pupils and other children to improve attainment. It is for schools to determine how to spend this funding as they are best placed to assess what additional support and services individual pupils need.
- 2.3 In line with the initial budget proposals in December, the Executive Board agreed, at the February meeting, to consult with stakeholders about a proposal to end the current school clothing allowance policy, to take effect from June 2013. A consultation was undertaken during the period 26 February to 22 March 2013 using, as recommended by Executive Board, focus groups, on-line and postal questionnaires with a range of stakeholders including parents, schools, governors and young people.
- 2.4 In terms of our neighbouring local authorities, Leeds is currently one of only two that offer any financial support at primary school level. Bradford operates a discretionary voucher scheme with the same qualifying criteria as Leeds, paying £26 per child on an annual basis. York has a scheme for secondary school pupils but not for primary school pupils or pupils in year 11. North Yorkshire offers a clothing grant for children in year 7 only, whilst Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield have recently ended their schemes.

3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 Consultation has been undertaken from 26 February 2013 to 22 March 2013, seeking views from a range of stakeholders, including head teachers, chairs of governors, cluster managers, parents and young people using a range of

consultation formats. Over 1000 stakeholders were contacted to take part in the consultation, with 393 responding, providing a participation rate of 38%.

- 3.2 The largest group of stakeholders consulted with were head teachers, chairs of governors and cluster chairs. Schools are very clearly aware of their duty around the school uniform. Many schools had recently reviewed school uniform policy and have a range of strategies in place to support families in difficulties, a universal offer of subsidised or low cost uniform and have uniform exchanges in place .

The consultation asked them: what they thought the impact might be of ceasing the school clothing allowance; how they support families presently to ensure families are able to meet the guidance around school uniform; and what actions they would consider in the future if families needed more help.

- 3.5 The majority of professionals were clear that they believed this change would have a minimal impact for children. The reasons for this were that a significant number of schools already had a range of systems in place to support families, including clothing exchanges, local hardship funds; providing uniform for some or all pupils; reviewing their school clothing policy in response to the changing needs of communities; working with the families who are struggling financially across a range of issues.
- 3.6 Almost 300 parents and young people responded to questions around what would be helpful to families providing school uniforms for their children. A significant majority suggested that the most helpful approach was to enable parents to purchase school uniform and equipment from supermarkets or outlets that offered low cost options. Uniform and equipment from supermarkets and low cost outlets were cheap to purchase and more easily replaceable than purchasing from specialist stores or school. The named person to contact in school was also a welcomed option.

4.0 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation has been undertaken from the 27 February to 22 March 2013. The consultation offered a mixed methodology to increase validity with a range of data sets and sampling techniques used. The most effective method was through focus groups, where high engagement and participation was gained (278 responses).
- 4.1.2 Consultation sought views from 1,017 individuals, including 531 professionals, 316 parents, 170 young people, gathering 393 individual responses. The outcomes of the consultation were very valuable in terms of suggesting future actions around minimising impact of reducing family incomes. Consultation responses document attached at appendix 1.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and a copy is attached at Appendix 2.

4.2.2 Whilst the ending of the grant may affect some families, a number of opportunities have been identified by schools, parents and young people to respond to changes in the financial position of families, this is much further reaching than the school uniform allowance, linked to benefit changes, increasing unemployment and poverty. The consultation asked what recipients, young people and schools would do to reduce the impact and the responses are set out in the previous section.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The Council has prioritized achieving Value for Money in order to ensure resources are released for the provision of “front line” services.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The revenue budget to support the School Clothing Policy in 2012/13 is £0.6m. The agreed budget strategy for 2013/14 includes estimated savings of £0.6m based on the proposal to end the policy from June 2013.

4.4.2 There are no staffing implications with the ceasing of the allowance, as the existing staff who assess claimants also assess eligibility for free school meals which is unaffected by this proposal.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 This decision will be eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 To reduce the risk and increase validity around the consultation process a mixed methodology was used consisting of a number of data sets from different population groups including: school professionals; a random selection of parents of primary and high schools; parents from Children's Centres and young people. The postal survey sampled a small section of the population due to cost and low response rates, with a 11.5% rate offers the least validity (David and Sutton 2004). However the correlation between focus groups and the questionnaire in terms of supportive actions is high, therefore we can assume a validity and reliability in these actions.

4.6.2 Whilst the monetary value of the cash grant is relatively low, on average £20-30 per year, the risk to families should not be minimized. The local authority will work with schools and Children's Centres to ensure the suggestions from the consultation are responded to. Children's Services will continue to work with Leeds Benefits and Advice Service to ensure families are in receipt of all their benefits, have access to debt advice and counseling locally and are supported into training and employment.

4.6.3 Early Start teams have recently agreed financial management pathway for staff. All cluster managers and staff have received information and briefings around benefit changes to support families with reducing family incomes.

4.7 Timetable for implementation

Action	Outcome	Success Measure	Timescale
Communicate Executive Board decision to parents	All parents aware that policy has ended.	No complaints and sufficient notice to make alternative arrangements.	May 2013
Inform all schools	School governing bodies work together with the local authority to action the recommendations from the consultation	No complaints and sufficient notice to make alternative arrangements.	May 2013
End policy and cease paying grants.	No payment made after 31 st May 2013	No complaints from stakeholders and sufficient notice to make alternative arrangements – No impact on bullying or attendance.	June 2013

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 Recognising the significant financial challenges facing the Council, and as part of a review of all discretionary service provision, it is recommended that the Executive Board make the decision to end the school uniform allowance from June 2013.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Executive Board is asked to:

- consider the findings from the consultation process;

- approve the recommendation to end the current school clothing allowance with effect from June 2013.

7.0 Background documents¹

7.1 None

8.0 Appendices

Appendix one: the consultation documents

Appendix two: Equality Impact Assessment

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.