

South Gloucestershire Council

SCHOOLS FORUM

2 March 2023

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON DEDELEGATION OF FUNDING TO SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF LA MAINTAINED SCHOOLS 2023/2024

Purpose of Report

1. To share the outcomes of the recent consultation with Local Authority (LA) Maintained schools on options for new arrangements for school improvement of LA Maintained schools and to seek Schools Forum agreement to the recommended arrangements for 2023/2024 outlined in this report.

Policy

2. In relation to the duties which the local authority has for improving its schools the expectation is that core school improvement activity goes beyond exercising of formal intervention powers, and that councils should:

- Understand the performance of maintained schools in their area, using data as a starting point to identify any that are underperforming, while working with them to explore ways to support progress.
- Work closely with the relevant RSC, diocese, and other local partners to ensure schools receive the support they need to improve.
- Where underperformance has been recognised in a maintained school, proactively work with the relevant RSC, combining local and regional expertise to ensure the right approach, including sending warning notices and using intervention powers where this will improve leadership and standards; and
- Encourage good and outstanding maintained schools to take responsibility for their own improvement, support other schools; and enable other schools to access the support they need to improve.

Background

3. Up to 31 March 2023 local authorities received a grant from the Department for Education (DfE) to support the authority to undertake activity to deliver on its statutory responsibilities. The grant was reduced by 50% in 2022/2023 and removed completely for 2023/2024.

4. The DfE position is that local authorities are not expected to meet the cost and schools have received sufficient funding to be able to cover the cost of services provided or organised by the local authority through de-delegated arrangements.

5. This means that LAs can seek to recover funds to meet the costs through de-delegated arrangements and if sufficient funding isn't provided by schools can seek the agreement of the Secretary of State for Education to top-slice appropriate school budgets.

6. Consequently, a consultation exercise was undertaken with schools to determine schools' preference on whether they wished to support a centrally coordinated school improvement offer or to make their own arrangements. For the latter option it would be necessary to include within those arrangements the opportunity for the LA to maintain oversight, monitor improvement including effectiveness of support through the school's own arrangements, as the LA is the accountable organisation.

7. Schools were invited to respond to the consultation after deciding which of the two following options they would support:

Option 1

The school has decided that it does support de-delegation and prefers to return funds to the local authority in order that a centrally co-ordinated school improvement offer will be available. It is understood that this offer will be developed in collaboration with the South Gloucestershire Schools Alliance Board and will include the following:

Central coordination of activity by the local authority Strategic Lead for School Improvement and Commissioning and

- Access to a dedicated Director of School Improvement/Standards, working alongside the LA Strategic Lead and as an integral member of the Alliance Board and associated hubs ensuring access to quality assured support for continuous improvement of the school
- Access to Quality Assured Challenge and Support Partner
- Access to agreed priority CPD in support of school improvement across the year.
- Access to pastoral support and programmes to support wellbeing of school leaders.
- Co-construction (with Alliance Board) of the agreed priority support programme
- Brokerage of targeted specific support for schools when required.
- Support for Ofsted inspection preparation and during the inspection process
- Opportunity to contribute into a system supporting all children across South Gloucestershire

Option 2

The school has decided that it does not support de-delegation and prefers instead to make alternative arrangements to ensure the school has access to appropriate support for school improvement.

For schools choosing Option 2 you are required to provide an assurance statement which meets the following requirements:

- Details of the arrangements you will have in place to ensure you have access to appropriate support for school improvement, this will include details for quality assuring those arrangements;
- Agreement to share, when requested, the outcome of any review of the school with details of plans to address any areas of concern;
- Agreement to share current performance data when requested with details of robust plans to address any areas of underperformance.

8. In the consultation document it was stated that it was assumed those schools which had already made the decision to convert to academy in the 2023 calendar year and had alternative arrangements for school improvement support in place, would not be expected to contribute financially to any central coordinated arrangements.

Outcome of Consultation

9. The consultation commenced on 9 December and closed on 2 February. A total of 75 responses were received of which:

- Preference for Option 1, support de-delegation: 26 schools.
- Preference for Option 2, do not support de-delegation: 49 schools.

10. This means that most respondents do not support de-delegation and would also be the case if all those schools that did not provide a response, had all expressed a preference for Option 1.

Proposed Response

11. As the majority of schools have opted not to support de-delegate, the LA does want to respond positively to that outcome by giving those schools the freedom to make their own arrangements through models of school-to-school support, facilitated by competent advisors.

12. However, as the LA is accountable to the Secretary of State for Education, for the quality of education provided by LA maintained schools until those schools convert to academy, arrangements for providing assurance about the quality of the arrangements schools have in place, and which include the opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of the support, will be necessary.

13. For those schools that have chosen to support de-delegation, the level of funding provided by those schools is sufficient to meet the cost of a centrally coordinated school improvement service as outlined in the consultation document, and at paragraph 7 above. This means that it would not be necessary to seek Secretary of State approval to a top-slice to cover cost.

14. Therefore, for schools in support of de-delegation who have not made alternative arrangements, it is proposed that a one-year service level agreement is established which is effective from 1 April 2023. This will include a reviewed after 6 months, that is, end of September 2023 to inform the arrangements for

2024/2025.

15. This approach means that the LA is responding positively to the two different groups of schools, those that have expressed support for de-delegation **and** those that wish to retain their funding to make their own arrangements.

16. This also means that representatives of LA maintained schools on Schools Forum will not be required to vote on de-delegation and instead will be asked to consider if they support the recommendations set out in this report.

Recommendation

17. It is recommended that the LA establishes new arrangements for delivering on its responsibilities for school improvement of LA maintained schools by establishing:

- (i) a service level agreement with those schools in support of de-delegation requiring a centrally coordinated service; and
- (ii) quality assurance and monitoring arrangements for those school which choose to make their own arrangements for school improvement until the point at which the school has converted to academy and the LA is no longer responsible for its improvement.

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