

Schools Forum – 4 July 2017

Recommendations:

1. That Schools Forum notes progress made by Families First in partnership with Head Teacher representatives, to explore the potential for schools and LSTs to co-design local early help provision drawing learning from the evolution of pilots across the County.

PART A

Reasons for recommendations:

2. On 31 March 2015 Schools Forum requested a review of the quality and impact of the work of Local Support Teams on outcomes for school-age children and young people. The outcome of the review informed Schools' Forum decision-making on the future allocation to the Local Authority from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Historically, this financial transfer was agreed at the point of the conclusion of the Extended Schools' programme in 2012, with the principle that it would facilitate the collective funding of 'family/parent support'. The annual transaction is for £1.44m, and has remained at this level since the grant was originally agreed. This contribution represents 15.8% of the total annual budget for LSTs of £9.1m: schools are consistently represented as circa 40% of the agencies that request support from Local Support Teams.
3. It is currently planned as agreed by Schools Forum that this sum of £1.44m reverts back to the DSG as from April 2018.
4. Schools Forum asked that a report be prepared for their summer 2017 meeting which would provide a further update on the work undertaken by the partnership group. This brief report places that work in the context of the wider programme to reshape the Children's System in Staffordshire, and updates on progress in exploring ways of working that can best meet the needs children, young people and their families, in partnership with schools.

PART B

Background

5. The report to Schools Forum in December 2016 noted that the Schools and Local Support Partnership Working Group has since expanded and reshaped its terms of reference to act as an advisory body to Families First for the continued improvement and performance management of local support teams.
6. Therefore the discussions within the group have been informed by:
 - School involvement in the piloting of new ways of working across the children's system, in each district
 - Examples of where district LST's and schools have started to explore different ways of working together
 - The extent to which schools reported the deployment of their own resources in creative ways to meet the welfare needs of children and families

- Data collated from the current LST provision across Staffordshire
 - Attendance at the group from Richard Hancock Deputy Director of Childrens Services and Vonni Gordon Strategic Lead for Early Help and Safeguarding.
7. The purpose of sharing the above data and examples was to explore how best to take forward the partnership between families first and schools, in the context of the wider reshaping of the children's system in Staffordshire.
 8. The discussions included consideration of how the ending of DSG funding currently allocated to the local support teams for the provision of Early Help could be managed across the County, so as to ensure that the needs of children young people and families could continue to be met at an early stage and avoid escalation where possible and appropriate to higher tier services. The group agreed that in order to reach and involve the wider school population that the Local Authority would facilitate meetings with Heads or their representatives on a district basis to discuss and explore the implications of the above.
 9. Schools Forum is asked to recognise that progress is being made following discussions within the Schools and Local Support Partnership Working Group, but that these discussions now need to be widened to ensure all schools have the opportunity to participate and contribute to any potential change to the provision of Early Help services within their District.

Current situation

10. Meetings have now been arranged and begun to take place in each district for these discussions to take place and the schools forum is asked to encourage their peers to attend, in order to ensure an inclusive and informed conversation takes place.
11. At the time of writing, two district meetings have taken place, which have included a presentation on the "children system" transformation project, the development of the "place based" approach and a very constructive and engaged dialogue as to the role and contribution of schools to this local partnership approach to "earliest help".
12. This discussion has included positive exploration of how the transfer of monies, currently directly funding Early Help, back into the DSG could potentially continue to be used to support this agenda, via a district based partnership approach.
13. This itself has raised a number of questions as to how, if schools across a district were to agree earliest help as the focus for this resource, this could be organised. Local primary/secondary heads forum were suggested, along with a potential option of the Local Authority retaining the current £1.44m DSG top slice, on the agreement that it acted only to facilitate the pass-porting of this monies (disaggregated on the agreed formula), though to each District as the "Place Based" partnership arrangements are rolled out. Therefore enabling local school representatives to bring a resource to the table in the development of the place based partnership, to be deployed in support of the "earliest help" agenda in a manner agreed locally as best able to meet the identified needs.

Conclusions

14. Clearly there are a number of consultation events remaining (two more will have taken place by 4th July) from which other options may emerge, but Schools Forum is asked to note the current activity and to agree to a fuller report, including options for consideration, to be presented in October.
15. Whilst this work is developing, Families First will continue to engage with schools and implement the practice changes that have so far been identified.
16. Local Support Team District Leads have been tasked with raising the awareness of the discussions within their districts.

Karl Hobson, County Manager Families First
June 2017