

Supporting Learners - Service Review

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide Members with an update on the implementation of the Supporting Learners Service Review 2014; specifically ongoing work to mitigate the removal of the Classroom Assistant role and allocation of support; and to highlight challenges in delivering the final tranche of committed savings for 2017/18.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to: -

2.1 note the mitigation activity in response to the ongoing implementation of the Supporting Learners Service Review as set out in paragraphs 3.11 to 3.14;

2.2 agree that further savings required to meet the anticipated shortfall of £0.4m for 2017/18 should be considered by Groups as part of the budget setting process; and

2.3 agree to receive a further report on the Resourced Provision admissions policy as detailed in paragraph 3.19).

3. Considerations

Background

3.1 Members of the Education Committee agreed in November 2014 to Option B of the Supporting Learners Service Review, and the introduction of area based Supporting Learners teams. The option set out the approach which realigned existing staff resources into 4 integrated teams to deliver a more effective, coordinated, targeted and sustainable service for children with Additional Support Needs as set out in Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 (amended), and also for those with poor attendance and/ or at risk of exclusion. The area team model was the preferred option identified through consultation with parents and schools.

3.2 The Service Review also set out a savings package with a target of £1.9m over three years. To date significant savings (£1.5m) have been achieved, and a final target of £483k for 2017/18 remains outstanding. The original savings schedule was predicated on the availability of ERVS to Additional Support for Learning teachers and well as non-teaching staff, and the subsequent freeze on teacher pupil ratios numbers has limited the capacity to deliver this final tranche of £483k savings. Members are asked to note that in order to achieve this target a substantial further reduction in the number of support hours to schools would be required for next session.

3.3 The removal of the Classroom Assistant post, a total reduction of 27fte, was a key component of the Service Review's savings. To mitigate the loss of the role an additional investment in the new Learning Assistant role was agreed by Members, to increase available hours for direct support for children and young people with ASN. There are three tiers of additional support needs - Universal, Targeted and Specialist. Learning Assistants provide some limited support at the Universal level but predominantly support children and young people who have Targeted or Specialist support needs.

3.4 Members have previously received briefings (Summer 2016) on the difficulties involved in the 2016/17 allocation of Additional Support (a total of 10,825 hours a week) and the briefing note is attached as **Appendix 1**. Further investigation has highlighted a significant over allocation of support between the Education Committee decision in November 2014 and the end of the 2015/16 school session, which resulted in a significant overspend. The allocation process for the school session 2016/17 brought this overspend back within budget in addition to removing the Classroom Assistant role as agreed; together these changes intensified the reduction in support.

3.5 In order to meet the savings targets as committed, the review recommendations were progressed to the timescales agreed by Committee in November 2014. The Service has acknowledged that the capacity to deliver the task was underestimated and the timescale ambitious. **Appendix 2**, a circular detailing the outcome of a Joint Trade Union meeting with Directorate in October 2016, outlines the challenges.

3.6 One of the specific challenges was the process of allocation. This year's allocation was the third year the process had been used and the first time it has been problematic. The process of allocation is based on information provided by schools and is drawn from the identified needs of individual pupils captured in an ASN Matrix for each pupil. Taken together these provide a collated level of need for each school at Universal, Targeted and Specialist levels. Support is prioritised to those children with the greatest need, effectively those in need of Specialist support. However, analysis suggests that the current set up and practice in use of the matrix does not allow enough differentiation within this group and an additional exercise has been used to identify those pupils requiring the highest levels of support.

3.7 A key issue which was identified in the 16/17 allocation was the high number of pupils headteachers recommended for Specialist full-time support (one-to-one). This year's exercise saw a 60% increase from 170 to 280 children, using up 70% of the total hours available. This was an unprecedented increase and is not reflected in a similar increase in the number of children being recorded through the matrix as having Universal, Targeted or Specialist support needs. However, due to the time constraints as outlined above the numbers were not moderated or robustly quality assured and this raw data formed the basis of the allocation of 70% of the available resource.

Impact

3.8 Working within the new levels of available support has proved challenging for schools and the Supporting Learners Service. Previously there was capacity to move support around in school, as and when needs emerged, changed or as new children arrived (some attracted by Dumfries and Galloway's positive reputation for inclusive education). This session there is no "spare" capacity in the system. The totality of available resource was used in the allocation process and the Service Review contingency fund is being used to provide transitional relief, and therefore all new additional support needs are a budget pressure.

3.9 Efforts continue to mitigate the impact of the changes and to quality assure the allocation process for 2017/18., Headteachers are aware of the challenges, both financial and in leading change, and have been adapting to the new circumstances by finding alternative ways of working including supporting class teachers to meet the expectations of

the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and Education Scotland, on Universal provision.

Mitigation Activity

3.11 A review is ongoing of all pupils identified by schools as needing specialist full-time support (one-to-one) to identify potential over-allocation that could be redeployed to provide support to other schools. This review will be completed by the end of this term, but to date has not suggested there is a significant over allocation of support available to be reallocated, because schools have used their total allocation to provide support at Universal, Targeted and Specialist levels. The risk is that any redistribution of hours will shift pressure to another school, and result in other schools and parent bodies reacting in a similar manner to that seen over the summer. Furthermore, this would mean an additional and unwanted move for staff who are by now settled into schools and building positive working practices and relationships.

3.12 The option of undertaking a completely new allocation exercise to redistribute support across all schools in the New Year is not recommended because of the disruption for schools - support plans are timetabled for the year and importantly relationships are well established with pupils, parents and staff.

3.13 A key mitigation has been the provision of short term transitional relief for the 30 primary schools experiencing the biggest proportionate reduction of support. This additional support was due to finish at Christmas and though many schools have adjusted, officers advise that a number of schools are not yet prepared for the relief support to be removed at this time. While work is ongoing to develop sustainable supports, these will not be ready by Christmas and to ensure a sufficiency of support the transitional relief will be extended for some schools for the remainder of the session, funded from the Service Review Contingency Fund.

3.14 In the longer term increased support will come from the enhancement of Universal support in class, delivered by teachers. Dumfries and Galloway has the second lowest pupil teacher ratio in mainland Scotland and class teachers will be supported to deliver differentiated learning and teaching, releasing Supporting Learners staff to focus on providing Targeted and Specialist support. General Teaching Council for Scotland and Education Scotland emphasise the expectation that teachers should support children to access the curriculum through differentiated teaching approaches.

Allocation for 2017/18

3.15 In preparation for the next allocation changes to the timings of the process are planned to ensure a timely, transparent and equitable allocation.

3.16 Having reviewed the process, adjustments are now being made to the ASN Matrix to better differentiate levels of Targeted and Specialist need. More differentiation will provide clearer direction to match needs to support, which along with quality assurance and school led moderation will ensure the allocation process is based on robust data. The revised matrix and process will be tested with headteachers prior to the allocation process.

3.17 School led moderation is being included both to support the adoption of consistent thresholds of need and support, and to introduce peer led support and challenge. There is

currently inconsistency across schools, with many different approaches in the way Supporting Learners staff are utilised. A number of high intensity staffing models are unsustainable in the context of reduced resources, and do not necessarily evidence improved outcomes. The Supporting Learners Team are working with colleagues to rethink these approaches, and peer moderation will be key to embedding change.

3.18 Changing the expectations of what additional support should look like remains a challenge. Inclusive education is not simply about being in class but rather about accessing the curriculum. Employability data highlights that young people with additional support needs are most at risk of not securing a positive destination. Therefore new approaches are needed to create better pathways to inclusion, and to enhance opportunity through a greater focus on targeted interventions.

3.19 To deliver new approaches, the Supporting Learners staff working in class will be more responsive to the changing needs of learners. They also need to be complemented by a more robust process to manage and review access to Resourced Provision (Learning Centres, Behaviour Support Units and other specialist resourced provision). The complexity of needs supported through Resourced Provision have changed and intensified over time being, including disability, social communication and behaviour. To date, the iterative development of Resourced Provision has resulted in limited strategic direction and the risk of inequitable access. A review is underway to establish a strategic approach with consistent admission criteria and procedures, new staffing and management models, long term financial planning and robust pathways to inclusion. It is proposed to report to Committee on the outcome of this review, as set out in recommendation 2.3.

Analysis

3.20 These are challenging times and Education Services have been making every effort to use these opportunities to improve children's experiences and outcomes. Lessons have been learnt about timescales and ambitions in delivering change and about ensuring all stakeholders are well-prepared.

3.21 During this year of adjustment, pace of change and adaption is dependent on schools and parents supporting new ways of working. The lack of preparation time to manage the changes prior to this school session exposed some schools to pressures that they are not able to meet from within their original allocation. Ongoing and additional pressures have for some schools been mitigated by transitional relief and for others by providing additional staff (incurring a budget pressure). The final savings tranche of £400k from the supporting learner's budget remains a very challenging target in the short term, until wider adjustments are made to the allocation process and approaches to provision of additional support, and stakeholder expectations adapt to the realities of reduced resources.

4. Governance Assurance

4.1 The Corporate Management Team, Education Services Management Team, have been consulted on this report and are in agreement with it. Teaching Union and support staff Union representatives have been consulted on this report and are not in agreement with it.

5. Impact Assessment

5.1 As this report does not propose a change in policy, the formal adoption of a plan, policy or strategy it is not necessary to complete an Impact Assessment.

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Appendices 2

Appendix 1 - Additional Support for Learning - Member Briefing August 2016

Appendix 2 - Supporting Learners Review – Joint Trade Union clarification meeting with Directorate 3 October 2016

Background Papers

<http://egenda.dumgal.gov.uk/aksdumgal/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=EDU&meet=53&arc=71>