

## Appendix 1

### Additional Support for Learning - Member Briefing August 2016

The ongoing implementation of the Supporting Learners Service Review of 2014 is improving the way Dumfries and Galloway Council delivers Additional Support for Learning by bringing together staff into locality teams. Creating area teams enables the Service to more effectively target resources and coordinate staff, which in turn improves our ability to provide the appropriate short and long term support required to help children and young people overcome barriers to learning.

The reorganisation of staff and management into area teams was a direct response to our consultation with schools and parents. Families and schools agreed that the existing services were fragmented, confusing to negotiate, poorly coordinated and inconsistent in the type of support offered.

In response to this feedback our new integrated Supporting Learners Area Teams will be working to revised job descriptions from August 2016, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Moving colleagues across to the new structures has required a significant amount of change for some staff, with new expectations and new contracts, and for some the need to change school. We acknowledge this has been a challenging time for some and that there is a clear need to revise our staffing procedures and improve our communication with staff.

In response to these issues the Supporting Learners Service will work with staff, unions and schools to develop a new transfer policy to ensure that there are better and more supportive arrangements for staff when a transfer is required. -

The allocation of Supporting Learners staff needs to be responsive to the changing needs of our pupils. The 2016/17 allocation process had the added complication of needing to accommodate new staff who have moved from Classroom Assistant to Learning Assistant, and to cover gaps in service where staff have taken voluntary retirement, as part of our Council's no compulsory redundancy policy.

Although the post of Classroom Assistant in primary schools was deleted as a result of the Service Review, Elected Members opted to divert additional resource into specialist and targeted support for children and young people with Additional Support Needs. The funding released by the removal of this post delivered savings and provided funding to increase the amount of learning support for 2016/17. The amount of support available in schools on a weekly basis has increased from 9,065 hours a week for 2015/16 to 10,825 hours a week for 2016/17.

The loss of the Classroom Assistant post has been felt keenly by some primary schools who have also seen their allocation of Supporting Learners staff reduced as levels of additional need have changed. We are therefore putting in place some additional support hours initially for the 15 schools experiencing the biggest reduction. These transitional arrangements will be in place while further review is undertaken of the levels of need identified by schools.

Over the summer the Supporting Learners Team have been working on a number of areas that need to be addressed over the next school session, to ensure that resources are being effectively and appropriately deployed.

1. The majority of Additional Support for Learning is provided by the new Learning Assistants, who are allocated using information provided by schools about the amount of Specialist and Targeted Support needed for the following

year. Support is prioritised to those children with the greatest need and for 2016/17 schools identified a 60% increase (from 170 to 280) in the number of children and young people requiring Specialist Support (the highest level of support). This increase represents a significant shift in the balance between specialist and targeted provision, with specialist provision now consuming almost 70% of the available weekly hours of support.

This unprecedented rise in the number requiring Specialist Support is a major challenge because of the disproportionate demand on staff capacity. Early in the next session the Supporting Learners Service will work with schools to review the plans of all who have been identified as needing this level of support to establish what has influenced this increase.

2. A key challenge for the Supporting Learners Team has been the need to better evidence the impact of the additional support we provide. Area managers and their teams will work with schools to ensure the impact our staff are having on supporting children and young people to overcome barriers to learning, is robustly monitored and reviewed. The nature of additional support needs means that for the majority of children the type and level of support required will change over time, and not just annually. This regular quality assurance and review of progression will ensure resources are most effectively targeted.

3. The Supporting Learners Service Review of 2014 identified that the capacity of the Service was overextended because it was delivering support at the universal level. The Service fits within a wider provision of support of which there are 3 levels. The Supporting Learners Service focuses on “specialist” and “targeted” needs. The third level is “universal” support, which happens in the classroom with teachers delivering a quality of learning environment that meets the needs of almost all children and young people. Responses from some parents and schools to the removal of the Classroom Assistant role has suggested that along with Supporting Learners staff, the balance between teachers and support staff in providing universal support in the classroom requires further development. Education Scotland have recently reminded us that they expect universal support to be teacher led. Education Services will work with teachers and schools over the next session to ensure that they are confident in providing Universal Support in the classroom.

4. There is a need to consider whether the current annual staffing allocation process and subsequent staff transfer is fit for purpose. This year’s process has resulted in some parents being left anxious about the supports that will be available to their children this session, and head teachers concerned about their allocation of support staff. A review of the whole allocation and staffing process will be undertaken early into the new term, and will involve parents and schools in determining if the existing process is the most effective way to provide support to children and young people needing help to overcome barriers to learning.

5. All parental concerns raised with the Supporting Learners Service are being reviewed individually. Individual letters have been written to parents to explain that we need to work with school staff to amend any arrangements for next session and this can only commence during the in-service day. Area Team Managers will meet with school staff at the start of term to discuss the concerns, plan a way forward and agree how this is communicated to parents.