

Cabinet Report

Date of Meeting: 13 March 2018

Report Title: Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) – Award of Grant

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jos Saunders, Children and Families

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek formal approval to receive external funding to the value of £638,452 as recently awarded to Cheshire East Council as the named lead in a successful Round 2 SSIF bidding process.
- 1.2 This successful bid is a significant grant award which focuses on improving pupil outcomes in 39 primary and secondary schools located across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester. The specific focus of this bid is to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners and maths – both areas have been identified by both Authorities as priority areas. As the named Lead Authority, this grant will be used to fund sector leads from across our schools and Teaching School Alliances to deliver school to school support in the 39 identified schools.
- 1.3 It is a strategic aim of the Council to improve outcomes for all young people especially those who are more vulnerable than their peers. This bid will contribute significantly to helping to close achievement gaps for learners and maximise their potential in terms of academic and personal outcomes.

2. Recommendation

2.1. That Cabinet:

- 2.1.1. Approve a supplementary revenue estimate, in accordance with the Council's Finance Procedure Rules, where services wish to undertake an activity not originally identified in the budget or incur additional revenue expenditure on an existing activity where this is fully funded.
- 2.1.2. Doing so will approve the receipt of the allocated DfE grant to the value of £638,452 into the Council accounts on behalf of both Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West & Chester Authorities & Teaching School Alliances.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Financial Procedure Rules (part of the Constitution) require Cabinet to approve a supplementary revenue estimate to increase the service budget (fully funded by grant) by more than £500,000.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. An alternative option would be for another relevant educational body to receive this SSIF Grant funding on behalf of the 39 named schools. It was agreed by all leading institutions and supported by Cheshire West & Chester Council that Cheshire East Council should lead on this Round 2 bid due to the significant work undertaken by Cheshire East Council Officers to prepare and submit the bid.

5. Background

- 5.1 The £140 million Strategic School Improvement Fund is a grant to support primary, secondary, middle, all-through, alternative provision and special academies and maintained schools, and pupil referral units. It is intended to further build a school-led system, and aims to target resources at the schools most in need to improve school performance and pupil attainment; to help them use their resources most effectively, and to deliver more good school places.
- 5.2 The fund will support a broad range of school improvement activities including, but not limited to, improving leadership, governance, teaching methods and approaches, and financial health and efficiency. The fund will support medium- to long-term sustainable activities across groups of schools with a preference towards school-led provision, that is, support provided by schools, for schools.
- 5.3 Teaching schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities can submit to the Department for Education applications for funding on behalf of the sector to address local improvement priorities across groups of schools. To ensure that support reaches those schools which need it most, and in the most effective way, we expect that, in shaping these applications, regional schools commissioners, multi-academy trusts, local authorities, the Teaching Schools Council, and diocesan representatives will work collaboratively with schools to bring together their local intelligence to identify shared improvement priorities.
- 5.4 The recently submitted Round 2 bid, whilst retaining a collaborative approach across Teaching Schools, Multi Academy Trusts and Cheshire West and Chester, was brokered and submitted as Cheshire East Authority as the named lead partner.

- 5.5 The overarching theme of this bid was targeted at improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for Pupil Premium) who also have low maths outcomes and who have poor parental engagement/support. Both primary and secondary schools across the two Authorities were targeted using primarily 2016 school performance data.
- 5.6 In total, 39 schools would be supported through this bid – 20 Cheshire East schools and 19 from Cheshire West & Chester. Schools identified for support are identified through a structured SSIF eligibility criteria which provides a national consistency and ensures that those schools deemed as underperforming are in receipt of additional SSIF resources.
- 5.7 Other bids were submitted by other stakeholders in the West Midlands region but primarily, only two bids directly impacted on CE schools – our own CE led bid and one lead by Aspirer Teaching School Alliance (lead Ash Grove School in Macclesfield). Only 4 out of 15 bids were successful in the West Midland Region in Round 2 – two of these were heavily involving Cheshire East Schools.
- 5.8 The overall total of £638, 452 is broken down into specific costed areas – the majority of which is to cover costs of sector leads working closely with underperforming schools (£503,000).
- 5.9 The Council will have to follow rigorous monitoring arrangements relating to this DfE Grant which will be paid on a termly basis based upon evidence of impact against the action plan submitted as part of the bid. This will likely require sector leads to monitor their specific work in schools and the three programme leads to coordinate their responses and present these to the strategic steering group for the project. This evidence will also need to be submitted to SSIF regional leads as clear evidence of progress against agreed performance outcomes.

6 Implications of the Recommendations

6.1 Legal Implications

- 6.1.1 The Council will need to fully comply with the Conditions of Grant which are currently being finalised with DfE Officials and which will need to be approved and scrutinised by Financial Legal services. The current grant conditions relate to specific aspects of the bid costings – namely:
- a. Ensuring costs identified for system leaders offer value for money
 - b. Ensuring commissioned work from Achievement for All (AfA) is sufficiently evidence based.
 - c. Ensuring links to existing maths hubs is strong and sustainable

6.1.2 At this point of time, the DfE/SSIF team have not released the revised monitoring and quality assurance framework which will determine the evidence of progress of the programme. Once received, these will refer to the formal conditions of grant in that if progress is not at the expected rate, subsequent payments of grant could be withheld. We are currently aware that funding will be released on a termly basis over the four terms of the programme and is likely to be lagged funding – ie, the initial payment in Term 2 to cover cost occurred in Term 1.

6.2 Finance Implications

6.2.1 Sections 2.39 and 2.40 of the Financial Procedure Rules state that:

2.39 Where services wish to undertake an activity not originally identified in the budget or incur additional revenue expenditure on an existing activity where this is fully funded (for example through additional specific grant allocations), approval must be sought for a supplementary revenue estimate in accordance with paragraph 40 below. The Chief Operating Officer must be consulted to establish that the funding identified can be legitimately linked to the expenditure in question.

2.40 Approval limits for fully funded supplementary revenue estimates are as follows:

In excess of £500,000 up to and including £1,000,000 - Cabinet

6.2.2 The Conditions of Grant will require robust financial monitoring to ensure that allocated funding is being utilised to meet all identified criteria. Additional financial support will be needed to assist in this process which has been factored into the bid costs. Further details of this support need to be agreed with Finance.

6.2.3 It is expected that the funding will be received and spent during 2018/19.

6.3 Equality Implications

6.3.1 The identification of schools for this programme of work has been scrutinised locally and nationally to ensure it is being targeted at those schools which meet national criteria.

6.4 Human Resources Implications

6.4.1 Additional capacity will be required to successfully meet the grant conditions – any temporary appointments will be time related for the duration of the grant but in most cases, will be drawn from schools where specialist leads will be commissioned to undertake programmes of work in the targeted schools.

6.5 Risk Management Implications

6.5.1 A requirement of this SSIF bidding process is to show that the programme of work is cost effective, time specific, targets those schools in greatest need and adheres to a set programme of work. These factors will be rigorously monitored by DfE officials to ensure we are fully compliant to the grant conditions

6.6 Rural Communities Implications

6.6.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities although some rural schools are included within this SSIF bid

6.7 Implications for Children & Young People

6.7.1 There are significant implications for children and young people in that the core purpose of this bid is to improve outcomes for learners within the 39 named schools.

6.8 Public Health Implications

6.8.1 There are no direct implications for public health.

7 Ward Members Affected

7.1 The majority of Wards across the borough will be affected by the inclusion of 20 Cheshire East Schools within this programme of work.

8 Consultation & Engagement

8.1 Detailed engagement has taken place prior to this grant being awarded with those schools named within the bid and the various sector led providers who will provide specialist leaders to deliver the programme.

9 Access to Information

9.1 All SSIF programme information and processes are available via the following link

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-school-improvement-fund>

10 Contact Information

10.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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