

REPORT TO SCHOOLS FORUM - 23rd January 2018

PROPOSALS TO ADDRESS THE LOSS OF THE CLOTHING GRANT

SUMMARY

1. The Local Authority has been distributing a Clothing Grant of £30 to support with the cost of uniform for families who are eligible to Free School meals.

Clothing grants were funded from the general funding rate element of the LA Education Services Grant which the Government has ceased.

Provision of clothing grants is discretionary by the LA. Decisions on the provision of clothing grants are for the LA to make.

As part of the conversion to academy status, the discretionary responsibility for clothing grants transfers to academies.

Schools and academies in the Borough receive pupil premium for disadvantaged pupils totaling over £10.5m

Other sources of support to families are available and can be signposted.

Given the loss of grant through which the Clothing Grant was funded, it is proposed that the Council cease the Clothing Grant to families and signpost them to other sources of support including schools.

DETAIL

2. The Local Authority has been distributing a Clothing Grant to families of £30 to support with the cost of uniform for families who are eligible to Free School meals. The grant is available for secondary aged pupils.

Families have been able to contact the Local Authority directly through the Stockton Council Contact Centre where the grant has been administered. No receipts were required.

The Clothing Grant was part of the Education Services Grant (ESG) which was cut from councils in April 2017. The Council has been left with an ESG Funding Gap of £1.4m, this has already been removed, but the cost of delivering the grant has been covered for 2017/18 through other resources, and will be maintained until the end of March 2018.

3. There is no statutory duty on the Local Authority to provide a Clothing Grant although they have a discretionary power to do so:

The Education Act 1996 (Sections 510 and 511) specifically section 510(3):

- (3) *Where it appears to a local education authority, in a case where neither subsection (1) nor subsection (2) applies, that a pupil at—*
- (a) a school maintained by them [or a grant-maintained school], or*
 - (b) a special school (whether maintained by them or not),*
- is unable by reason of the inadequacy or unsuitability of his clothing to take full advantage of the education provided at the school, the authority may provide him with such clothing as in their opinion is necessary for the purpose of ensuring that he is sufficiently and suitably clad while he remains a pupil at the school.*

This discretionary power transfers to academies upon conversion.

It is to be noted that neighbouring authorities in the Tees have not offered a Clothing Grant for several years. Some councils do support families to access recycled uniform but many leave it to schools to organise support.

4. Since the Education Act, schools now have specific resources allocated to them to support disadvantaged pupils and families based on their number of pupils from families eligible to Free School Meals – the Pupil Premium Fund. The Pupil Premium is additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and to close the gaps between them and their peers.

In the 2018 to 2019 financial year, schools will receive the following funding for each pupil registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last 6 years:

- £1,320 for pupils in reception to year 6
- £935 for pupils in year 7 to year 11.

The fund is intended to improve the life chances of disadvantaged pupils by ensuring they have high quality learning experiences and are able to participate in the full life of the school. This can include funding access to interventions, extra-curricular activities and resources. Purchasing of uniform could be a use of the Pupil Premium Fund for those families who struggle to purchase it.

5. In order to understand the practice in schools regarding supporting families with uniform costs, sample schools were contacted.

Practice varied widely.

One secondary academy gave uniform free to all families or issued a £30 voucher which could be redeemed for uniform at a named supplier who would then invoice the academy.

Allocations from the academy were considerable:

15/16 159

16/17 127

17/18 80

Other academies were aware that their families used the clothing grant and were prepared to arrange a process to support families with the cost of uniform so there would be no hardship. Many used second hand uniform schemes to support families in need.

Some academies expressed concern about meeting uniform costs for eligible families through Pupil Premium.

One specialist academy had been promoting the grant to its families and had encouraged many to apply. They would look to signpost the Family Fund in future to enable these families to be supported. The Family Fund enables parents / carers raising a disabled or seriously ill child to apply for a grant if they are eligible for help with a number of things including clothing:-

<https://www.familyfund.org.uk/>

Other schemes such as the Back on Track Fund are also available to families:

<https://www.stockton.gov.uk/environment-and-housing/back-on-track-scheme/>

PROPOSALS

6. The council can no longer support the clothing grant allocations.

It is proposed the Council cease the Clothing Grant to families and signpost them to other sources of support including schools / academies

- . Further clarification will be gained on sources of support for families and a script will be agreed with the staff in the Contact Centre to enable families to be appropriately signposted. Schools will be informed so they can make arrangements to support families where necessary with their uniform costs.

7. Two other options were considered but have been discounted as set out below:-:

i) The Council to continue to allocate the grant to families through the Contact Centre and charge schools retrospectively.

ii) Schools to pay into a fund from their Pupil Premium monies on a proportional basis to enable the Clothing Grant to continue to be administered by the Council.

The main issues associated with these two options:-

- This would only be applicable to maintained schools. Whilst some families of primary school aged children have accessed the grant previously, this was never within its remit. There is only one secondary maintained school. It would not be sensible to set up an arrangements of this kind for one school.
- Schools have a choice and unless all schools agreed to participate it would create a two tier system making the arrangements complex to manage / administer and difficult to understand for parents.