

OPTION: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ACADEMY TRADED INCOME

**BUDGET SAVING: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SAVINGS - £131,000
ACADEMY TRADED INCOME - £60,000**

DESCRIPTION OF OPTION

The Council funded school improvement budget is £1,547,900. Over the last two years there have been reductions in the school improvement budget in both resources and staff reflecting changes in government policy and the academies programme. This has led to a marked reduction in the support and challenge the Council offers to schools. The current budget of £1,547,900, along with an additional £1,034,400 agreed by the Schools Forum funds both statutory duties on the local authority in relation to schools and early intervention activities.

The focus of the school improvement service is on the core statutory duties of the local authority (maintaining standards in maintained schools and statutory assessments), whilst developing a new traded service with schools for the services that are non-statutory. This traded service, Education Quality (EQ), has achieved 94% buyback from Wirral schools over the last two years. EQ encompasses support for professionals and volunteers in schools through a range of services including, Safeguarding Support and Training; Governor Support Services; Leadership and Management Programmes; Whole School Improvement and Standards; Subject Leader Networks; Data Support and Analysis; Teaching, Learning, Curriculum and Assessment; Coordination of Wider Workforce Professional Development; Risk Management and Advice on Educational Visits; and Swimming Coordination. EQ is currently a partnership between the local authority and its member schools and has an annual turnover in excess of £1m. The Localism Act 2011 provides a range of opportunities for the future of EQ, such as a social enterprise and other school traded services.

This option is to reduce the level of school improvement support and training provided to achieve a saving of £131,000.

Over the last couple of years, Wirral has reviewed its statutory duties and costs in relation to its academy schools. Whilst some services have reduced others are now trading with academies.

This option would also generate additional income of over £60,000 from services traded to Academy schools.

RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS

DFE benchmarking data indicate that School Improvement is a cost area spending above average compared to statistical neighbours (£40 per pupil compared to an average of £21).

- Provisional attainment results at the end of EYFS, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage are the highest ever for Wirral.

- The gap between pupils in receipt of free school meals and non free school meals has narrowed at the end of each primary key stage.
- Attainment against the 3 primary floor target measures (English & Mathematic L4+, 2 levels progress in English and 2 levels progress in Mathematics) has increased this year meeting the Local Authority FFTD (Fisher Family Trust Data) targets.
- At the time of writing this report at least 70% of primary, secondary and special schools have been judged as good or better which is well above national averages.
- No maintained schools are currently in an Ofsted category.

Some other local authorities have commissioned out a range of their statutory school improvement functions to private providers or schools themselves. The evidence of success of this is mixed, with some initial savings financially to the council, but typically an increase in the need for statutory intervention in its schools.

IMPACT

There are no direct staffing implications as a result of this change. School improvement does contribute significantly to the budget at Acre Lane.

The main risk is around attainment outcomes for around 60,000 youngsters across Wirral. This could then potentially impact on individual schools which would then be vulnerable to being placed in an Ofsted category.

The school improvement budget also contributes to supporting Wirral's largest group of volunteers, school governors.

MITIGATION

Most savings proposed are one off costs in the current financial year. There is a continued focus on improving the targeted early intervention in maintained schools and improving and expanding the traded services to all schools.