

Schools Management Forum

Report of: Sean Hogg

Subject: Early Help Practitioners – Independent Review of Funding Decisions taken by SMF

Date: 27th March 2019

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is:
 - To provide an update on the approval for the Early Help Practitioner posts and the funding source.

Background

2. At the SMF meeting held on the 4th July 2018 a paper was presented requesting SMF approval for four Early Help Practitioner posts to work with schools to support the role of Lead Practitioner and provide a restorative whole family approach.
3. The funding of the posts was to be from a choice of two sources, centrally retained budgets or direct school grant.
4. However, after discussion and agreement to fund the posts, the agreed source of the funding was not clearly identified and/or recorded.
5. This led to subsequent discussions at further SMF meetings and latterly, offered a third option of funding from the additional one off high needs allocation.
6. It was requested at the February meeting that an investigation be made into the process and what lessons could be learned to assure that the uncertainty around sources of funding could be avoided in future.

Evidence

7. **SMF 4th July 2018**
8. Extract from Agenda Item 5 – Schools and Early Help.

Proposal

11. SMF consider the funding of four Early Help Practitioner posts at a cost of £89,604 (4 x £22,401) to be managed by the Family Partnership Team within Stronger Families. These posts will work with schools to support the role of Lead Practitioner and provide a restorative whole family approach.

12. This proposal is modelled on good practice from a number of Local Authorities judged as 'Good' by Ofsted including Leeds and North Yorkshire who have adopted this approach whereby SMF allocate funding to the Council to provide early help services on behalf of and working with schools.

13. *It is proposed that the funding for these posts of £89,604 is allocated by SMF from the centrally retained budgets or from the direct school grant.*

14. *If approved, updates of early help undertaken and outcomes achieved would be presented to SMF for consideration of future funding allocations and would also be reported to The Children's Trust.*

Recommendation

1. *SMF vote to agree to the funding of £89,604 to recruit to four posts to be managed within the Councils Stronger Families service to carry out early help and prevention work within schools, across the primary and secondary schools sector.*

9. The highlighted sections demonstrate that the source of funding for the posts was not specified under the recommendation from the two options given in point 13.
10. Extract from the minutes of the meeting.

Early Help – *The purpose of this report is to provide a proposal for SMF to agree to fund 4 early help practitioners to support students and families who require extra help as soon as a need is identified.*

- The report includes an update on what is happening in early help at present. The new MAST team is in high demand*
- Early Help is a partnership approach that provides support to families and also offers a training programme. Early Help also has the capacity to provide case consultations and advice and support to families and professionals.*

Concerns –

- The largest proportion of Early Help cases are directed towards Stronger Families and the Family Casework team.*
- Schools have reported struggling to keep up with the level of demand from families needing extra support.*

SMF is urged to agree to consider funding for 4 Early Years Practitioner Posts who would work directly and exclusively with schools to support the role of lead practitioner and support the family approach. The posts would provide support where schools cannot – carrying out direct parenting work within families and addressing issues such as substance misuse and mental health. Dedicated posts would acknowledge the complexity of need that complicated family cases require.

The role of the proposed posts was then discussed.

SMF agreed the recommendations to fund 4 posts and decided that the posts should be full time and not term time only.

11. Again the highlighted section demonstrates that the source of funding for the posts was not specified in the recommendation or the minutes.
12. **SMF 16th January 2019**
13. Extract from Agenda Item 6

6) *Early Help Practitioners*

Following discussions at SMF during 2018/19 SMF approved the funding of 4 Early Help Practitioner posts from the DSG. These posts have been recruited to and the costs are currently being covered by the Local Authority, pending funding being received from the DSG. This is unsustainable and is creating a pressure within the Local Authorities budget. Therefore, the Local Authority proposes to de-delegate this service in 2019/20, this would fall under the 'Behaviour Support Services' heading in point 4 above. This has therefore been included in the model attached in Appendix A. This will require a majority buy-back from schools to remain sustainable. The only other option to fund these posts would be out of the central services block, however this has limited resource available. The central services block is currently under review and a report will be brought to SMF in February regarding this.

14. The first highlighted section indicates that approval was given by SMF for the posts to be funded from DSG. However, there is no evidence from the previous meetings minutes to support this.
15. The second highlighted section offers an option to fund the posts from the central services block and that a report would be brought to the February SMF to provide more information.
16. Extract from the minutes of the meeting

Early Help Practitioners

Posts were agreed in July 2018 to commence in September 2018 for a 1 year contract.

- *Officers were deployed to pick up Early Help cases in schools, offer safeguarding guidance, and build family plans and signpost families to relevant services. Officers are allocated to clusters.*
- *Schools should feedback to SMF in regards to the impact of Early Help in schools.*
- *Funding for the Early Help officers could potentially be provided from the central services block – to be discussed in February SMF.*

Impact of the service is as yet unmeasured and this will make it difficult for academies to buy back into it. The proposal to de-delegate presents a risk for Middlesbrough Council.

Action :

- ***Discussion with regards to Early Help Practitioners and clusters to be presented to a future SMT by Gail Earl.***

17. The highlighted section indicates the option to fund the posts from the central services block and that it would be discussed at the February SMF.
18. **SMF 27th February 2019**
19. Extract from the Decision/Action Log from the SMF meeting of 16th January 2019.

Early Help Practitioners

- *Discussion with regards to Early Help Practitioners and clusters to be presented to a future SMT by Gail Earl.*

20. This indicates that SMF was expecting to be updated on this matter. However, no-one was able to attend the meeting.
21. Extract from Agenda Item 7

6) Early Help Practitioners

Following discussions at SMF during 2018/19, SMF approved the funding of 4 Early Help Practitioner posts from the DSG. These posts have been recruited to and the costs are currently being covered by the Local Authority, pending funding being received from the DSG. This is unsustainable and is creating a pressure within the Local Authorities budget. Therefore, a proposal is that the Local Authority de-delegates this service in 2019/20, this would fall under the 'Behaviour Support Services' heading in point 4 above. This has therefore been included in the model attached in Appendix A. This will require a majority buy-back from schools to remain sustainable. Another option is to fund these posts out of the Central Services Block, but upon review there are no available resources within the allocated funding in this block to support this service. Another option proposed by Andrea Williams is that for 2019/20 funding may be provided from the additional one-off funding received into the High Needs budget (£336k), but this would only be temporary and longer term funding streams would need to be established, and also this would limit what can be achieved from the additional funding.

22. The highlighted areas re state the original options and an additional option to use the additional high needs funding. This demonstrates that the source of the funding for the posts is still unclear.

Summary

23. From the above extracts and comments it is clear that the funding of the posts was agreed at the July meeting.
24. However, by not making a specific list of the funding options in the initial document, presented at the July meeting, and in subsequent discussions in later meetings, the source of the funding for the posts was still to be agreed by SMF at the February meeting.
25. At the February meeting SMF did agree to use the additional high needs money to fund the posts to October 2019, the first year of the appointments. Further discussions and decisions would be made in subsequent SMF meetings to evaluate the posts and whether they will be extended for another year.

Recommendations

26. SMF note that all requests for additional resources are made with specific options for funding arrangements within the Recommendations before the item is tabled for SMF meetings.
27. SMF note that all minutes must clearly record the SMF decisions regarding funding sources when agreeing additional resources.