

**REPORT FOR: EDUCATION
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting:	10 November 2010
Subject:	School Clothing Grant
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Heather Clements Director Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Brian Gate Portfolio Holder Schools and Colleges
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the options for the future of the school clothing grant.

Recommendations:

The Education Consultative Forum is asked to consider this report and:

1. comment on the four options for the future of the school clothing grant in Harrow
2. express a preference about a recommended option for consultation
3. comment on the proposed consultation arrangements.

Reason: (For recommendation)

For the Education Consultative Forum to contribute at an early stage to the consideration of future options for the school clothing grant.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

1. Under the Education Act 1996 (Sections 510 and 511), local authorities have the power to provide financial help to parents on low incomes to assist them with buying school clothing for their children.
2. This is not a statutory duty and the eligibility criteria for financial help are at the discretion of the local authority.

Harrow's current policy

3. Harrow's policy is limited to parents / carers resident in Harrow with children attending a school in Harrow.
4. Clothing grants are only available to parents / carers living in the London Borough of Harrow who receive one of the following support payments:
 - Income Support
 - Income Related Job Seekers Allowance
 - Income Related Employment Support Allowance
 - Support as an Asylum Seeker
 - Children who receive Income Support in their own right
 - Pension Credit
5. Clothing grants are payable for children who are due to start full-time in a high school in Harrow (i.e. for the academic year 2010-2011, the grant is payable in Year 7 and Year 8).
6. The grant may also apply if the child changes secondary school within the borough between Years 8-11.
7. Only one clothing grant per child is allowed.
8. The grant is £30 paid by cheque to the parent / carer receiving the support payment, and must be used to buy uniform and footwear approved by the school.
9. Applications should be made by the end of the Summer Term in order to be processed in time for the start of the new academic year. The majority of payments are made in August in preparation for the start of the school year in September.

Options considered

10. The school clothing grant has not been reviewed for some years. There are policy criteria that may be viewed as inequitable. For example, parents / carers resident in Harrow with children attending a school outside Harrow are not eligible. Parents of children attending a primary sector school are not eligible.

11. The budget for 2010-2011 is £10,683. The policy is demand led and the budget has over spent for the past two years. It is not targeted to those in greatest need, and payments do not vary according to need.
12. The administration and other costs associated with current arrangements are significant, involving: postage to potentially eligible families; processing of applications; processing of cheques; postage of cheques. The assessment and grant payment processes have not been modernised and lead to increased costs to administer. Introduction of on-line applications and payments by BACCS need to be considered if the grant payments continue and are processed by Harrow Council.
13. Four options have been identified with a view to consultation about the future of the school clothing grant in Harrow.

Option 1 Do nothing – leave the policy as is

PROS	CONS
Continues to support families in receipt of benefit support payments	Budget will continue to overspend. Not all potential claimants apply and there are more benefit claimants in the borough.
	Continued cost of administration (including postage, processing of cheques, and time spent by Access Harrow advisers)
	Policy criteria would continue that may be viewed as inequitable and not targeted to those in greatest need.

Option 2 Stop paying clothing grants altogether

PROS	CONS
Makes saving on both budget and administration costs	Adverse impact on families most in need. This could be ameliorated by one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing advice to families about support already available in schools (second hand uniforms) • Help through PTA, other school charities • LA to make a small one-off grant to schools to support transition period.

Option 3 Continue with clothing grant but adjust to meet the budget available, for example by

- Apply first come first served to applications until the available budget is exhausted
- Stopping payments where students change secondary school within the borough between Years 8-11
- Reducing the amount of the grant from £30 to a lower amount that will fit within the available budget, for example £25 or lower

PROS	CONS
Continues to support families in most need. Will impose controls on the demand led budget	Continued cost of administration

	Policy criteria that may be viewed as inequitable would continue
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Option 4 Delegate all/some of the budget to schools

PROS	CONS
Continues to support families in receipt of benefit support payments.	Could result in discrepancies across schools.
Combined with the systems already in place, schools could help families in exceptional circumstances.	
Schools know the families that are in receipt of free school meals and can exercise discretion and flexibility to target greatest need.	
Saves cost of administration by the council	

Neighbouring authorities

14. **Barnet** – no longer offered.
15. **Brent** – the council does not currently provide clothing grants or clothing vouchers for school uniforms.
16. **Ealing** – available to parents / carers receiving specified support payments with a child in Reception year or Year Groups 3 or 5 in primary schools or Year Groups 7 or 9 in high schools. £40 for primary school pupils. £60 for high school pupils.
17. **Hertfordshire** – no longer offered. The decision to withdraw the grant was made following a Members meeting.
18. **Hillingdon** – due to financial pressures uniform grants are no longer provided by the council.

Recommended option for consultation

19. Officer analysis of the four options concludes:

Option 1. Do nothing – leave the policy as is

This option is considered to be not financially viable because the available budget is exceeded, and the administration costs associated with the current policy do not represent value for money. The policy criteria do not target greatest need and may be viewed as inequitable.

Option 2. Stop paying clothing grants altogether

This option would remove a policy that does not target greatest need, would ease pressure on council resources, and would be in line with the approach of all except one of Harrow's neighbouring authorities.

Option 3. Continue with clothing grant but adjust to meet the budget available

This option would control expenditure on the budget and ease pressure on council resources, though administration processes would need to be modernised. A level of support to families in receipt of benefit support payments would be retained, though policy criteria that do not target greatest need and may be viewed as inequitable would continue.

Option 4. Delegate all/some of the budget to schools

A level of support to families in receipt of benefit support payments would be retained. Help could be targeted flexibly and in exceptional circumstances to families in greatest need. However, a formula for distributing the grant would need to be agreed and expenditure monitored.

20. The Director of Schools, Quality Assurance and Commissioning recommends consultation about Option 2, and that views are sought about Option 4 as an alternative if there is opposition to stopping the school clothing grant.

Consultation

21. Consultation about the future of the school clothing grant in Harrow could be included with, but separate from, the annual consultation on admission arrangements. This would mean both parents and schools were consulted. The admissions consultation will take place between 29 November 2010 and 28 January 2011.
22. Feedback from the consultation could be presented to March 2011 Cabinet for decision, with implementation for September 2011. Information about changes would be published on the website with immediate effect. A letter could be sent to all parents with children due to transfer to secondary school in 2011. This means that any family affected would have this information in advance of their child starting school. For future years details would be included in the Guide to Secondary Schools in Harrow.

Financial Implications

23. There is a need to ensure that value for money is achieved in relation to the school clothing grant. The budget in 2010/11 is £10,683 and due to the additional costs of the change to the age of transfer there is an overspend of £7k.
24. In addition to the grant cost there is a significant administration costs incurred on assessment and payment process. These would need to be modernised if grant payments are to continue.

Risk Management Implications

25. The proposed consultation and report to Cabinet would ensure that stakeholder views are taken into account to minimise risk management issues.

Equalities Implications

26. The approach being adopted of discussion and consultation with key school stakeholders will ensure full consideration of equalities implications and

opportunities. Equalities impact assessments would be undertaken for the recommendations that are made to Cabinet in March 2011.

Corporate Priorities

27. Harrow Council has embarked on its Better Deal for Residents: Shaping Harrow for the Future programme to ensure that efficiency gains are achieved through reshaping service delivery and improving the way organisations in Harrow work together. The programme also includes a role for residents to take greater responsibility for themselves, their area and their communities.

28. The consultation about the future of the school clothing grant in Harrow will provide the opportunity to consider this policy in relation to corporate priorities.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name:	Emma Stabler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date:	22 October 2010		
Name:	Sarah Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date:	20 October 2010		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Madeleine Hitchens, Service Manager, Place Planning and School Admissions, 0208 424 1398
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Background Papers: None