

Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



Nottingham
City Council

Reference Number:

5169

Author:

Samantha Morris

Department:

People

Contact:

Samantha Morris

(Job Title: Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement, Email: sam.morris@nottinghamcity.gov.uk, Phone: 07811035796)

Subject:

Department for Education 24/25 Improvement Funding Allocation

Total Value:

£342,752 (Type: Revenue)

Decision Being Taken:

1. To agree to accept £342,752 funding from the Department for Education to support Children's Services ongoing improvement work following its inadequate Ofsted inspection in July 2022.
2. Of this funding to note the agreement of the Sec 151 officer to spend a) £85,000 for an Improvement Specialist (Spend Control ID 6894), b) £130,000 to invest in LiquidLogic (Spend Control ID 3132)
3. Of this funding to delegate authority to Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement to be responsible for £91,952 to support learning from Quality Assurance, including seeking Spend Control authorisation when appropriate.
4. Of this funding, to delegate authority to Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement, to be responsible for £35,000 to commission specialist safeguarding training, including seeking Spend Control authorisation when appropriate.

Reasons for the Decision(s)

In July 2022 the Local Authority was judged to be inadequate following its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Children's Integrated Services have been liaising closely with the Department for Education (DfE) around additional support and resources it would required to support its ongoing improvement journey to deliver good services to children and young people in need of help and protection. A bid was put in and approved by the DfE to provide funding to support key pieces of improvement work. The areas identified have been identified as areas of work that will reach the maximum number of the workforce to support wider continuous improvement and support delivery of quality services for children and families through: training, development and practice learning activities; reduction of bureaucracy through a more effective functioning of the case management system; and supporting the continuous improvement of practice and capacity to learn from other Local Authorities. The following areas of funding have been approved by the DfE:

- Improvement Specialist (£85,800). This has previously been funded by the DfE and would continue to address essential strategic capacity to support the leadership team around the improvement plan in readiness for Ofsted Monitoring visits and a full ILACS inspection. The role provides dedicated senior leadership to shape and drive the embedding of consistently good strengths based social work practice.
- Liquid Logic Investment (£130,000) - continuation of funding for a consultant to support our ongoing development of the Liquid Logic case management system through ongoing project management of key system developments and upskilling of permanent employees to ensure ongoing development of the system is sustainable.
- Learning from Quality Assurance (£91,952) - funding to support practice events, development of thinking tools, and purchase of direct work toolkits and VR headsets to support the embedding of learning from quality assurance to ensure practice is consistent and continually improves.
- Training for the workforce (£35,000) - funding to commission specialist safeguarding training for more experienced social workers.

Other Options Considered:

Do nothing and do not accept the DfE funding allocation. This option is not the preferred or recommended option as the Department for Education have been working closely with Children's Integrated Services to support its ongoing improvement journey. The funding has been allocated to support the service move from Inadequate to delivery of good quality services for children and families. The DfE have already committed the funding and there is an expectation that the Local Authority will spend the money on the identified activities. It would create a reputational risk to refuse the monies - both in terms of the success of any potential future bids, but also the need to move at pace to make practice improvements. Without the funding Children's Services will struggle to deliver key practice improvements at pace and risk being able to make the significant improvement required to satisfy Ofsted and provide them with assurance at future inspection visits.

Background Papers:

N/A

Published Works:

N/A

Affected Wards:

Citywide

Colleague / Councillor Interests:

None

Consultations:	Those not consulted are not directly affected by the decision.
Crime and Disorder Implications:	N/A - acceptance of and spend of DfE monies to support Children's Integrated Services Ofsted improvement journey
Equality:	EIA not required. Reasons: As above - acceptance of and spend of DfE monies to support Children's Integrated Services Ofsted improvement journey
Relates to staffing:	Yes
Decision Type:	Portfolio Holder
Subject to Call In:	Yes
Call In Expiry date:	18/09/2024
Advice Sought:	Legal, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources
Commissioner Comments:	The Commissioners approve this decision
Legal Advice:	The report seeks approval to accept £342,752 funding from the Department for Education, it is crucial to ensure compliance with all terms and conditions stipulated in the funding agreement. This includes adhering to reporting requirements, expenditure timelines, and specific usage stipulations to support strategic improvements in Children's Services. Additionally, all procurement activities related to the hiring of specialists and consultants, as well as the purchase of tools and training services, must comply with public sector procurement regulations. It is essential to ensure that all initiatives funded by this grant comply with relevant legislation, such as data protection and employment laws, and contribute to the overall improvement plan following the inadequate Ofsted inspection. Establishing robust financial oversight and accountability mechanisms is necessary to maintain transparency and ensure that the funds are used effectively and sustainably. Advice provided by Amana Parveen (Solicitor) on 30/07/2024. Advice provided by Amana Parveen (Solicitor) on 08/08/2024.

Finance Advice:

The report is asking for approval to accept funding from the DfE for £342,752 in order to address some of the issues identified in the ILAC inspection of 2022 following a successful bid to the DfE, to support its ongoing improvement journey to deliver good services to children and young people in need of help and protection. The DfE have already committed the funding and acceptance of the funding by the council is fully supported. Should the proposal in this report be rejected then the council will forgoes access to a considerable amount of funding resource to help support the service in its journey to improve.

The grant conditions stipulate that spend will have to be completed by 31st March 2025. Should the activities proposed below as part of the spend profile are not fully completed then any unspent funding will have to be returned back to the DfE. All expenditure must comply with public sector procurement regulations. The spend Profile on the proposal(as detailed in the grant offer acceptance letter) is broken down as follows:

- £86k - improvement specialist
- £130k - Liquidlogic investment
- £92k - learning for quality assurance
- £35k - Training for the workforce

Totals costs - £343k

All the costs will be incurred on cost centre 16522 Children's Improvement and Transformation, and DfE have confirmed that inclusion of costs can be backdated to 01 April 2024 in line with the full years Grant allocation. There should be no additional cost to the authority.

Sadrul Alam - Interim Strategic Finance Business Partner
Advice provided by Sadrul Alam (Strategic Business Partner - interim) on 01/08/2024.

HR Advice:

Acceptance of the funding is fully supported. Retaining the current capacity will ensure that the delivery continues at pace and that appropriate options are worked through using the required expertise which does not exist within the organisation. Wider capacity achieved through the funding needs to be maintained in order to deliver the required improvements within the service.

Marie Read
HR Business Lead

Procurement Advice:

Procurement colleagues will assist with any tendering exercises that arise from the acceptance of the funding and will ensure compliance with our CPRS and value for money outcomes with any external supplier expenditure.
Advice provided by Paul Ritchie (Procurement Manager) on 30/08/2024.

Signatures

Cheryl Barnard (Exec Member - Children, Young People, Education)
SIGNED and Dated: 06/09/2024
Ailsa Barr (Interim CD Children and Education)
SIGNED and Dated: 04/09/2024