

SCHOOLS FORUM – 23 APRIL 2015

Title of paper:	STRATEGIC ALLIANCE - ACTIVITY FUNDING
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Creating an enabling environment within which collaboration can flourish.

This report proposes the formulation of a match funded budget that is designed to facilitate the development of a 'strategic alliance' across the City of Nottingham, providing clarity, focus and coherence, making the best use of resources available and engaging Teaching Schools, Multi-Academy Trusts, schools working in Trust arrangements and individual schools and academies to work together to improve overall education provision and outcomes for Children and Young People and reduce the gap in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils.

Recommendation(s):

1	Approve the allocation of £0.600m from the Statutory Schools Reserve (SSR) in 2015/16 to develop a citywide strategic alliance and fund focussed improvement activities. City Council has agreed to match fund £0.600m to the project.
2	If the proposal is accepted the alliance will present further update reports to Schools' Forum identifying spending streams and their impacts aligning to section 4 of the report.

1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To assign £0.600m within the SSR; this will match fund the Local Authority's (LA) contribution to support collaborative activity carried out by the Strategic Alliance.

2. BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

2.1 Context - The London Challenge

A decade ago, parents were leaving inner London to avoid sending their children to local schools. Today, all pupils are more likely to perform better in the capital than anywhere else in the country. Much of this is down to the London challenge policy of school collaboration.

City challenge was distinctive in a number of ways. It was underpinned by a belief that the educational problems facing urban areas should be addressed at area level, and that LAs, schools and academies need to work together to do this.

It aimed to improve educational provision and school performance across a broad geographical area, not simply in a specific group of participating schools. City Challenge focused on all aspects of the education system: working strategically at area level and with LAs, community organisations, parents and pupils and developing a range of specific school interventions which were closely focused on the intended outcomes of City Challenge. There was no single view of what schools needed to do to improve; all the interventions involved local solutions with key stakeholders centrally involved in the decisions. The various activities and interventions were characterised by:

- a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in school improvement;
- a recognition of the importance of school leadership and;
- a data-rich approach to tackling issues and sharing learning.

2.2 **The Nottingham Challenge**

There is a growing consensus that there needs to be a city wide, all party 'strategic alliance' if we are to tackle the challenges we face in Nottingham.

Whilst the London Challenge provides a starting point for discussion our alliance has to be appropriate to local circumstances and will only work where we have the consent and active participation of the operational partnership formed by schools/academies in the area- we are encouraged by the discussions held with all our key partners to collectively commit to the challenges we face in the city of Nottingham, and, given the breadth and depth of expertise across the City of Nottingham this is the right time to unleash the enormous potential an alliance of this kind has to offer.

2.3 **Cultural shift**

A key aspect of the alliance will be to recognise that people, schools and academies, tend to thrive when they feel trusted, supported and encouraged. Success is also more often realised when participants have ownership and involvement in the changes rather than being 'done to'. It is important that this is not seen as an LA initiative and propose the Education Improvement Board, independently chaired (Professor Sir David Greenaway) and representing all key stakeholder groups in the city manage the Governance and leadership of the alliance and distribute the fund to an agreed range of activities and interventions.

2.4 **In the first instance** the alliance has agreed to focus upon securing improved outcomes in mathematics across city schools and academies.

The improvement activities in 2015/16 will focus upon developing 'world class' and 'cutting edge' teaching and learning in mathematics (Early Years Foundation Stage – Key Stage 4). This will also include developing further strands to include:

- Transition;
- Leadership;
- Subject knowledge and expert teaching;
- Mastery;
- STEM;
- Recruitment;
- New technologies;

- Learning behaviours;
- Innovative learning environments and parental/community engagement.

The fund will then continue to enable the alliance to drive further focused strands of activity over the next 3 years. The work will be launched at a City Head Teacher Conference on the 3 July 2015 hosted at Nottingham University's Jubilee Campus site.

2.5 Assigning funds within the SSR match funded by the LA will enable the development of a budget to support agreed activity. Approval to spend the allocation from the SSR will form part of a separate report during 2015/16.

2.6 This fund will initially be used to secure improvements in mathematics across the city. Once improvements have been secured the strategic alliance will agree the next priority according to the city's need.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 No other options are available to fund this activity.

4. OUTCOMES/DELIVERABLES

4.1 Objectives

To establish an all-partner, city wide strategic alliance designed to;

- reduce the number of underperforming schools and academies;
- increase the number of good and outstanding schools and academies;
- improve the educational outcomes for all children;
- break the link between deprivation and attainment.

4.2 This will be achieved by:

- having a clear focus for improvement across the city;
- experimenting on the ground- developing leading edge practice led initiatives;
- providing strong project management across different strands of work;
- recognising the importance of effective leadership, networking and collaboration, system leadership roles and sustainability;
- using the assets in the system efficiently; drawing on existing assets in the system rather than seeking to recreate or replace them;
- establishing and deploying a city wide team of school improvement experts, working in all schools and academies at a strategic and an operational level. Expertise will be found in National Leaders of Education, Local Leaders of Education and other head-teachers, consultants, Specialist Leaders of Education, Nottingham's 2 Universities, local Maths hubs within and beyond the city, LA officers, and in expert teachers from city schools and academies;
- developing a mutually supportive and sustainable model for school and academy improvement;
- promoting the best teachers into the poorest performing schools and academies; tracking pupil progress properly; and creating citywide networks of schools and academies that collaborate to raise achievement.

4.3 Accountability / Evaluation

Accountability will be shared across the alliance and will focus upon:

- Delivery and implementation - How efficient were the monitoring processes for the key interventions and how can they be improved? / What can be said about the effectiveness of the interventions?
- Assessing impact - What impact has each of the programmes had at school/academy and system level in the short, medium and long term?
- Future policy recommendations - What issues are relevant to the sustainability of successful interventions / approaches?

The evaluation will include, in the first instance, four main methods:

- A mathematics quality review;
- Analyses of documents and achievement data;
- A survey sent to schools and academies receiving support through the strategic alliance programme;
- Qualitative research including:
 - a) Interviews with key stakeholder across the City and
 - b) In-depth case studies of schools/academies receiving support through the programme.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)**

5.1 This report seeks approval to spend £0.600m within the SSR to support a strategic alliance of activity with match funding from the LA. This will create an initial budget of £1.2m for collaborative activity.

5.2 Use of this reserve has to align to the Schools and Early Years Finance Regulations 2014 and the categories of expenditure as set out in the SSR report presented to Schools Forum on 23 April 2015.

5.3 As at 23 April the 2015/16 forecast opening balance of the SSR is £5.747m which equates to 2.47% of the Dedicated Schools Grant. A reduction of £0.600m would reduce it to 2.21%, which is still within the recommended range included in the LA's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The risks for 2015/16 are valued at £0.818m;

5.4 If approval from Forum is gained, in accordance with the Local Authority's constitution, a report will be presented to Executive Board for approval.

6. **RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS)**

6.1 The current law in force in this area is the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2014. Spend from the SSR needs to align with the requirements of the Regulations as noted in section 5.2.

7. **HR ISSUES**

7.1 Not applicable

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An EIA is not needed as the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions.

9. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

9.1 None.

10. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

10.1 DfE - Schools and Early Years Financial Regulations 2014.