

BRIEFING NOTE

SUBJECT: Document PI Appendix 4a

School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant (SIMB) Spending & De-delegated Fund Arrangements

- 1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Schools Forum of the spending of the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant (SIMB) for the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22, and to discuss the de-delegation of funds from maintained primary and secondary schools in 2023/24.**

Background

2. Since 2017, local authorities have received from the DfE a School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant (SIMB), to support their “core” school improvement activities, with the amount received calculated to be proportionate to each authority’s number of maintained schools. The DfE is ceasing this Grant at 31 March 2023, with the value (per maintained school) allocated in 2022/23 already reduced by 50%. In 2021/22, the Authority received £285,854 in SIMB Grant. In 2022/23, the Authority has received £122,194.
3. As a result of underspending, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, a surplus balance of £426,000 in SIMB Grant funds has been carried forward from 2021/22. This surplus balance is available to be used to offset some of the impact of the full cessation of the SIMB Grant, but subject to the DfE’s decision making on whether unspent SIMB Grant monies will now be recovered. The Conditions of Grant state that the Secretary of State reserves the right to clawback unspent SIMB Grant.
4. The DSG Regulations have been adjusted to permit local authorities to fund all improvement activities, including the core improvement activities previously funded by the SIMB Grant, via de-delegation of funds from maintained schools’ budget shares, with the agreement of their Schools Forum or with the agreement of the Secretary of State, in instances where the Schools Forum does not agree. Effectively, authorities are required now to charge maintained schools for their school improvement support, with the DfE’s view being that this approach brings maintained schools in line with the academies sector.
5. With the agreement of the Schools Forum, we initially de-delegated a sum of £133,000 from maintained primary and secondary schools for the 2022/23 financial year, with contributions taken at £4.29 per pupil. Adjusting for the conversion of maintained schools up to September 2022, the final sum de-delegated in 2022/23 is £122,060. Added to the SIMB Grant, a total of £244,254 is available to the Authority in this current financial year. Added to the £426,000 balance brought forward, the total available is £670,254.
6. Within the 2023/24 DSG budget setting cycle, we will need to agree the continuing value of de-delegation for school improvement support, in the context of the full cessation of the SIMB Grant, but also the carry forward of the SIMB Grant balance. On current estimates, inclusive of forecasted academy conversions up to 1 September 2023, retaining a contribution of £4.29 per pupil would produce a budget of £94,500 in 2023/24, with this split roughly £82,300 primary

and £12,200 secondary. On this basis, without use of the balance brought forward, we would need to substantially increase the per pupil contribution that is levied through de-delegation, in order to continue to make available the same cash value of annual budget that has been available prior to April 2023. For reference, on current estimates, a £10.90 per pupil contribution would be required to produce a budget of £240,000 in 2023/24. Whilst it may be anticipated that, as our number of maintained schools reduces following academy conversions, the cost of the Authority's school improvement programme will also reduce, this is not necessarily the case. We are likely always to have a small number of maintained schools that require additional intensive support, irrespective of our total number of maintained schools. Support for new headteachers and governance will also continue. We estimate that we will spend in the region of £206,000 in this current 2022/23 financial year. We then anticipate that the Authority's programme will continue to cost between £200,000 and £250,000 in 2023/24.

7. Comparisons of spending with other local authorities are complicated, including because the position of other authorities depends on their proportions of maintained schools vs. academies, as well as because we do not yet have figures on which to compare how other authorities will react to the full cessation of the SIMB Grant (these figures will be available in autumn 2023). The latest benchmarking indicates that 43% of local authorities de-delegated some value from maintained schools for school improvement in 2022/23, with contributions per pupil in these authorities ranging between £1 and £34 and with a median average of £6 per pupil. The full national mean average is £4 per pupil. So, our current contribution (£4.29 per pupil) is not out of step with these averages. We do expect then that the contributions taken per pupil in other authorities will increase in 2023/24, as authorities respond to the full loss of the SIMB Grant. We will be able to confirm this in autumn 2023.
8. Without the continuation of funds, the Authority will not have the resources on an on-going basis to continue to financially support school improvement in maintained schools. There would be no capacity to fund schools that offer their knowledge and expertise to support other schools. The SIMB Grant provides funds for backfill for schools, to enable staff to be out of schools, but also support that is delivered by Authority Advisers. These Advisers would not have the capacity to deliver improvement support work e.g. working alongside teachers to improve practice. The only mechanism that would be available would be to ask schools to support other schools, for altruistic reasons, which does not have a secure basis and which also may have detrimental impact on the supporting school.
9. In this context, whilst the decision on de-delegation is one for the Schools Forum, was the Forum to not approve the continuation of de-delegation in any form, it is very likely that the Authority would need to consider an approach to the Secretary of State. We anticipate however, that the discussion with the Forum will more focus on funding the right quantity and type of school improvement support, and reviewing the impact and value for money of this support.
10. As we have stated in previous reports to the Forum, most recently on 12 October 2022, a large proportion of the Authority's school improvement programme allocates monies to reimburse schools that provide peer-to-peer school-led support for maintained schools. A good proportion of the programme also provides maintained schools with support for governance. The Authority's academic year SIMB programme has typically estimated the following:
 - a. Induction of new headteachers – 5 days support for each new headteacher of a maintained school, from an experienced and successful headteacher partner. Estimated at 6 schools at £2,500 per school. Total of £15,000 per year.

- b. Support for interim or acting headteachers – 5 days support for each interim or acting headteacher of a maintained school from an experienced and successful headteacher partner. Estimated at 3 schools at £2,500 per school. Total of £7,500 per year.
 - c. Support to bring about rapid improvements in maintained schools causing concern. The model for each school will be bespoke, but typically will include leadership support, teaching support and mentoring and support for governance, delivered by a partner school, and additional monitoring by an Authority advisor and support from other consultants (such as early years), with monitoring through school review days. Allocation is decided against a costed improvement plan, which is submitted to Authority's Schools Causing Concern Group and which is then monitored through the Authority's Scrutiny Group meetings that take place with the school's headteacher and chair of governors. Estimated at 10 schools at c. £15,000 per school. Total of £150,000 per year. This is the largest single area of use of funding.
 - d. Support delivered by Leaders of Governance, supporting schools where governance requires support, challenge and modelling of good practice. Estimated at up to 1 year's support (for 8 meetings) for 10 schools at £2,400 per school. Total of £24,000 per year.
 - e. Additional advice to governing bodies in difficulty. Estimated at £1,000 per school for 10 schools. Total of £10,000 per year.
 - f. Core governance support (proportion of governance officer salary to support the delivery of the School Improvement Support programme). Estimated at £25,000. Total of £25,000 per year.
 - g. Curriculum support for middle leaders in primary schools and for subject heads in secondary schools. Estimated at £25,000 for primary-phase and £25,000 for secondary-phase. Total of £50,000 per year.
11. To its fullest extent, this programme costs annually c. £282,000. However, the programme is based on estimates of delivery, and the actual quantity and cost of support in any single year does vary from this. It has also been the case the Authority's programme has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, most significantly in the 2020/21 academic year. However, we estimate that we will spend in the region of £206,000 in this current 2022/23 financial year. We then anticipate that the Authority's programme will continue to cost between £200,000 and £250,000 in 2023/24.
12. Funding allocations are made to maintained schools that are causing concern to the Local Authority, following intelligence from:
- Education Adviser visits to schools
 - Data: including attendance, attainment, safeguarding
 - Governors
 - Headteachers
 - Finance
 - HR
13. At the Authority's monthly Schools Causing Concern meetings, information is shared and decisions made about the need for and the type of support required. These meetings are attended by senior officers from HR, finance, governance, attendance, safeguarding, data, sufficiency and admissions. The Headteacher and Chair of Governors are informed of the concerns (if not raised by them) and, together with the Adviser and / or Governor Support

Officer, a plan is drawn up with costings. This is then submitted, and support is agreed. Monitoring of the plan, and its costs, is carried out through Scrutiny meetings of relevant officers, the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, which take place at least half termly. Monitoring of the impact of the plan is done in schools through reviews by Advisers and relevant officers. Reports are provided to governors and to the school.

14. At all times the Authority is concerned to deliver value for money for the support that is provided. School to school support plans are costed using pay “day rates”, which are the agreed rates for headteachers / NLEs, teachers and middle leaders at SLE and business managers.

SIMB Grant Spending 2020/21 and 2021/22 Academic Years

15. The attached tables (appendix 4b) provide details of the spending of the SIMB Grant in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years. In summary:
- a. £98,095 was spent in the 2020/21 AY. Spending in this year was substantially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. £172,897 was spent in the 2021/22 AY.

Financial Overview

16. As a result of underspending, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, a surplus balance of £426,000 in SIMB Grant funds has been carried forward.
17. On current forecasts, we estimate that the Authority’s school improvement programme will cost in the region of £206,000 in this financial year and between £200,000 and £250,000 in 2023/24. It is likely that there will be 6 additional schools in need of targeted intensive support. Some schools have not been able to halt a decline in outcomes, which started before the pandemic, and some schools continue to experience turbulence in leadership. We also see that it is important to seek to continue to provide governance support, and an induction for new headteachers, as well as a mentor headteacher to support these during their first year of headship in Bradford.
18. We plan to charge the estimated £206,000 spend this year fully to the SIMB Grant monies. This means that our 2022/23 SIMB Grant allocation (of £122,194) will be overspent (by £84,000) with this charged to the £426,000 balance brought forward. We take the view that this approach will help protect our school improvement resources in case of DfE clawback.
19. On this basis, the £122,060 that has been de-delegated from maintained schools in 2022/23 would be fully unspent to be carried forward within Schools Block ring-fenced de-delegated funds balances. In addition, a net £342,000 of SIMB balance would remain to be carried forward. In total therefore, there would be £464,000 of SIMB monies carried forward into 2023/24.

Options and Recommendations

20. There are two main options for the funding of the Authority’s school improvement programme in 2023/24.

- a. **Option A** – not to take any de-delegation contribution from maintained schools, instead using the £464,000 estimated carry forward balance to cover the cost of the 2023/24 programme. Under this option, we would hold (estimated) a remaining £234,000 of balance, which would be carried forward into 2024/25 (assuming a programme cost of £230,000). This means that we could potentially continue to fully cover the programme cost for a further year in 2024/25, or we could partially subsidise the cost for 2 years. This option would rely on no clawback of SIMB Grant by the DfE. Was the DfE to fully clawback, we would not hold sufficient funding to cover the cost of the 2023/24 programme and we would need to set contributions in 2024/25 to respond both to this and then to meet the on-going full cost of the programme.
- b. **Options B** – continue to take the existing per pupil contribution of £4.29 from maintained schools, using smaller proportion of the £464,000 estimated carry forward balance to subsidise the cost of the 2023/24 programme. Under this option, assuming a de-delegated fund value of £94,500 and a programme cost of £230,000, we would hold an estimated £328,500 of balance to carry forward into 2024/25, meaning that we could potentially continue to more substantially subsidise the cost of the programme for 3 more financial years. Was the DfE to fully clawback SIMB Grant funds, we would hold in de-delegated funds sufficient monies (£95,400 contribution in 2023/24 plus the £122,000 carried forward from 2022/23) to cover the cost of the 2023/24 programme and the ‘hit’ to schools in having to increase per pupil contributions in 2024/25 would be significantly lower than under option A.

21. The Authority proposes Option B, as this option is likely to delivery greater security of funding and will substantially protect maintained schools’ budgets from the full cost impact for longer, albeit that Option A would remove the de-delegation charge that would be levied on maintained schools in 2023/24, which is to the immediate benefit of schools’ budgets that are under pressure.

22. The Authority proposes Option B also in seeking to reduce the disproportionate impact over the medium term, as more maintained schools potentially convert to academy status. Where the annual cost of the programme continues largely unchanged (due to the likelihood that we will always have a small number of schools that require additional support, irrespective of our total number of schools), but the number of pupils in maintained schools reduces, higher rates of per pupil contribution will need to be levied in the future. Option B means potentially that more of the existing SIMB surplus balance will be available over the medium term to manage the impact of this.