

<b>Grants Scrutiny Sub-Committee</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017</b>	
<b>Grants Determination Sub-Committee</b> <b>10<sup>th</sup> July 2017</b>	
<b>Report of:</b> Debbie Jones, Corporate Director, Children's	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>School Clothing Grants: 2017/18 academic year</b>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Christine McInnes
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards
<b>Key Decision?</b>	Yes
<b>Community Plan Theme</b>	A Prosperous Community

### Reasons for Urgency

The Clothing Grant is an important practical way that the Council supports lower income families to ensure their children have the appropriate school uniform at the beginning of the school year.

Last year the decision was made late which meant that families were not issued with the grant until late in August which caused them undue stress and resulted in reputational damage to the Council.

The work around enabling the payment of the grants straddles two directorates and due to staff changes it was not appreciated that Education and Partnerships Division should lead on drafting the report. This has meant that the report has not been prepared sooner. It is requested that the report is considered at the 10<sup>th</sup> July meeting of the Grants Determination (Cabinet) Sub Committee (GDSC) to ensure timely payment is made to families.

### Executive Summary

This report seeks approval for the continuation of the school clothing grant. The policy was formerly approved by Commissioners for 2016/17, and the award agreed for 2016/17. This seeks approval for the school clothing grant for the 2017/18 year.

### Recommendations:

The Grants Committee are recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the provision by the Council of school clothing grants in 2017/18 within the budget specified in paragraph 5.1 of this report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Corporate Director Resources or her duly authorised representatives to be able to determine the granting of funds from that

budget on a time for time basis for the purposes of carrying out the activities described in this report.

## **1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 The amount of £201,000 was allocated for the purpose of school clothing grants in this year's budget. This allows the Directorate to direct funds towards areas of identified need, and is the recommended option.
- 1.2 Grants Committee are asked to review and renew this aspect of discretionary award scheme with regard to school clothing grants. The policy given in Appendix 1 is as approved on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2015, updated with an appropriate closure date for 2017 within section 4.1

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 The policy to disburse these grants was agreed by Commissioners on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2015. The alternative would be to not provide grants. This would have a negative impact on the ability of families in receipt of welfare benefits in the borough to provide uniform and related items for their children and thereby possibly limit their involvement in the school curriculum.

## **3. THE DIRECTORATE'S PROPOSED DISCRETIONARY AWARD FOR CLOTHING, 2017/18 ACADEMIC YEAR**

### **3.1 School Clothing Grant Policy**

- 3.2 The Council has power under section 518 of the Education Act 1996 and the Local Education Authority (Payment of School Expenses) Regulations 1999 to pay expenses to enable a child attending a maintained school to take part in any school activity. The Council may make such a payment where satisfied that it should be made to relieve financial hardship, but the payment must be related to the means of the child's parents. The 2012 awards were made under this scheme in the 2014/15 academic year, awards were made under the scheme in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years.
- 3.3 The School clothing Grants policy is attached at Appendix 1. A minor revision has been made to paragraph 2.4.1 of the policy to take account of Universal Credit which was introduced to Tower Hamlets in the 2015/16 financial year.

## **4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 4.1 The funding allocated the school clothing Grant is £201,000 for the academic year 2017/18. There are no new financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

## **5. Legal Comments**

- 5.1 The Council has power to make the grants under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which gives the Council the general power of competence. This means that the Council has the power to do anything which an ordinary human being could do, unless statute specifically restricts the Council from acting in the way it wishes. It appears that there is no specific legislation prohibiting the making of the grant itself.
- 5.2 The Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This is referred to as the Council's best value duty. This means that it will have to ensure that any grant is made under terms that enable the proper monitoring of outcomes to demonstrate that the money achieves the intended results.
- 5.3 To this end the Council should also ensure that it has proper resourcing in place to monitor the use of the grant payments. The Council could consider requiring repayment of the grant in the event that the funds are used for a purpose for which it was not originally intended.
- 5.4 The Council must operate a fair and open application procedure to process a request to obtain funding. Requests for grant funding should ordinarily be measured against a predetermined set of criteria and the criteria themselves must be fair and transparent. The criteria must also reflect any statutory restrictions and imperatives.
- 5.5 In any event the Council must apply its School Clothing Grant Policy equally in respect of all recipients of the grant in order to demonstrate that a reasonable and rational process has been followed. The 2016/17 School Clothing Grant Policy is at Appendix 1.
- 5.7 When making decisions, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). A level of equality analysis is required in order for the Council to properly understand the implications of its decisions in respect of persons who have a protected characteristic to discharge the duty.

## **6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 Education is crucial in allowing people to compete successfully in society. The adoption of the power to make discretionary awards will help to ensure equality of opportunity by mitigating financial barriers to education and thereby assisting equality of access to all residents regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and religion/beliefs. This will assist the work of building aspiration among Tower Hamlets students at a time when

the lack of economic opportunity means that competition for jobs is ever greater.

- 6.2 Equalities Analyses were carried out on the Discretionary Awards Schemes shown in this report for previous academic years and the scheme was found to have an overall positive effect on breaking down barriers to participation and on the protected groups concerned. There is no significant change proposed to the scheme and information gathered during 2016/17 has not suggested any adverse equalities impact. In the circumstances the last equalities analysis is still considered to be relevant.

## **7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 This money is administered by our Benefits team using their established systems and procedures, thereby minimising administration costs. Families will typically already qualify for benefits and so will be known to the staff administering the scheme, ensuring a high degree of reach.

## **8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT**

- 8.1 There are no SAGE issues arising from this report.

## **9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The discretionary award policies are cash limited wherever possible and an overspend in one can be compensated by an underspend in another. Reputational risk is guarded against by the annual review of the policies which seeks to ensure that they respond to need.

## **10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Cutting crime and anti-social behaviour is about improving quality of life. The discretionary award policies do this by obviating financial need where possible, by allowing young people to fulfil their potential by channelling their energies in a positive way and in some cases by focussing on early intervention.

## **11. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no safeguarding implications. However, these grants ensure that children from our poorest families are able to afford basics of school uniform, potentially freeing-up family funds for use elsewhere in the family budget.

## **12. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – updated School Clothing Grant Policy 2017/18

None

N/A

**1 School Clothing Grant**

- 1.1 The School Clothing Grant is a single payment of £110 made on one occasion where a pupil transfers from primary to secondary school for pupils from low income families. The grant is made for the academic year in which the pupil reaches the age of 12.
- 1.2 Grants will be made wherever possible in advance of the start of the Autumn term so that parents have access to the money when most needed.

**2. Conditions of eligibility**

- 2.1 Applicants **must** satisfy the following requirements of the policy to be eligible for a School Clothing Grant:
- age;
  - residence;
  - school;
  - income.

**2.1 Age limits**

- 2.1.1 Pupils can be considered for a School Clothing Grant for the academic year in which they become 12 years old. Overage and underage pupils may also qualify where their secondary transfer has been approved by the Educational Psychologist and School Development Adviser.
- 2.1.2 The start of the academic year is defined as 1<sup>st</sup> September.

**2.2 Residence requirements**

- 2.2.1 The Authority will consider applications from parents and carers living within its area.

**2.3 Approved institutions**

- 2.3.1 School Clothing Grants will be made to pupils attending courses of secondary education at maintained and private sector secondary schools.

**2.4 Benefit requirement**

- 2.4.1 To be eligible for a School Clothing Grant the parents or carer must receive one of the following:
- income based Job Seekers Allowance;
  - Income Support;
  - Income related Employment Support Allowance
  - Guaranteed Pension Credit
  - Universal Credit with assessable earnings of less than £16,190 per annum

or

- Have a total income of less than £16,190 (excluding child tax credit and child benefit, but including any Working Tax Credit you may receive).

2.4.2 Pupils whose parents or carers are asylum seekers will be eligible to be considered for a School Clothing Grant where their parents or carers receive NASS (National Asylum Support Service) support under part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

2.4.3 The applicant, their parents or guardians must receive a qualifying benefit at the time of applying.

### **3. Administration of the payment**

3.1 The School Clothing Grant is paid as a single cheque of £110 or bank transfer to the parent or carer of the pupil.

### **4. Closing dates**

4.1 The School Clothing Grant application forms for the academic year must be received by the Housing Benefits Team by **5pm on the last working day of September.**

### **5 Exceptional circumstances**

5.1 Applications for School Clothing Grants received after the closing date will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances where the pupil and family meet all the criteria of this policy other than having made an application on time.

5.2 Parents applying on exceptional grounds will be asked to provide supporting evidence from a relevant professional, for example an Attendance and Welfare Adviser or Lead Professional.

### **6 Appeals**

6.1 Appeals must be made in writing and will be considered by a panel comprised of at least two senior officers from Pupil and Student Services. Appeals must be accompanied by evidence that the parent or guardian was in receipt of an appropriate benefit as described on paragraph 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 at the time of applying.