

Cabinet	 TOWER HAMLETS
31 October 2018	
Report of: Debbie Jones , Corporate Director, Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
The Tower Hamlets Education Partnership annual report	

Lead Member	Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools & Young People
Originating Officer(s)	Christine McInnes, Divisional Director, Education & Partnerships
Wards affected	All
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	n/a
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities;

Executive Summary

The Tower Hamlets Education Partnership was established as a company and charity separate to the council as a mechanism to support and improve schools. The appendix to this brief covering report is the THEP's annual activity report and audited accounts to enable appropriate governance of the organisation by the council. There will be a second annual report which focuses on the validated school results for 2017-18 which will come to Cabinet in February 2019.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the activity of the THEP over the academic year 2017-18
2. Accept the audited accounts for THEP
3. Endorse the role of THEP in delivering council priorities from 2019 when the Council's seed funding ceases.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Cabinet has agreed that it would receive annual reports on the activities of the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership. This is the first such report and it provides an over view of activities and the audited accounts. The second

annual report will include the school results with a commentary.]

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

2.1 None

. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1. Longstanding collaboration between schools and the local authority has been strength of education in Tower Hamlets. Schools established the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) to promote and extend joint working so that the successful collaboration could be developed further for the good of children and young people.
- 3.2. The Council agreed to provide three years of seed funding to establish THEP and 2018-19 is the final year of that funding. From September 2017, additional council funding was agreed through a commissioning exercise so that there was sufficient capacity for THEP to actively support school improvement whilst establishing its value with schools. This amounted to £120k in the financial year 2016-17 and £285k in the financial year 2017-18. Schools currently pay a modest subscription based on pupil numbers which supplements the council finding and income generated through the selling of services to schools.
- 3.3. Whilst council's retain the statutory responsibility to monitor schools and intervene in maintained schools causing concern, the bulk of the government funding for this work (Education Support Grant) has been removed from council budgets and a proportion of the funding was redirected through the relatively new mechanism of the Regional Schools Commissioners. Teaching School Alliances could bid for funding for funding to support individual schools of concern and other organisations such as THEP could bid for wider ranging projects for example to raise standards in mathematics. When THEP was established, the intention was that bids to this funding source would play a part in sustaining the THEP and indeed a successful bid was made to support work in one school of concern. A bid to improve standards however was not successful in part because Tower Hamlets schools have relatively high standards and bids from lower performing geographic areas were prioritised.

4. **Activity**

- 4.1 The vibrant programme of support and challenge which has been developed over the past year and the level of engagement by schools is remarkable. Although it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between this and school standards, the work of the THEP is all drawn from evidence based practice and within a context of the increasing expectations of schools and reductions in funding we are confident it will play an important role in **at least** maintaining standards of achievement, but ideally improving them.

4.2 Working with the Teaching School Alliance, a successful bid was made to the Regional Schools Commissioner for additional funding to support one secondary school which was in difficulty. Due to internal school leadership issues which have resulted in the LA issuing a Warning Notice, this was not particularly successful. As a consequence an executive headteacher is now working in the school and leading an intensive intervention programme. Unfortunately the government has changed its education policy with no warning or formal policy announcement over the summer months which means that there is no school improvement funding available through the RSC.

5. **The future**

5.1. THEP has established a well-regarded multi-faceted programme which headteachers, school staff and other key stakeholder have confidence is supporting schools appropriately to enable them to maximise pupils' life chances. There is a very high level of engagement both with regards to participation, but also with regard to school leaders and staff contributing to the programme delivery at no cost. THEP is already playing an important role in the retention of high quality staff and in the future will no doubt also positively impact on local recruitment. In this financial year, the council's contribution to THEP is circa £600K.

5.2. The key risk going forward is financial. As the seed funding comes to an end, THEP is planning to increase the cost to schools, however this is within the context of reducing school budgets. The changing demographic in the borough and the number of surplus places in some primary schools alongside reductions in school budgets has left some small schools on a financial knife edge. The sustainability of schools is being addressed through the primary place review, but until proposed changes to school organisation can be confirmed and implemented some schools will struggle to fund their own professional development and school improvement.

5.3. A growth bid for £250K has been submitted by officers for consideration within the Tower Hamlets budget planning process for the financial year 2019-20 to support THEP going forward.

5.4. The unannounced cessation of the funding through the RSC has worrying implications as THEP and the council were planning to fund the estimated £250k costs of the recovery plan for the secondary school causing concern referenced above through this source. We are not prepared to withdraw the support because of the serious implications for pupils attending the school and officers are working closely to identify how this budget pressure can be met.

6. **Conclusion**

6.1 The appendix will show that THEP is a highly successful enterprise and that it is playing an increasingly important role in supporting schools to ensure that they can maximise the life chances for pupils.

- 6.2 In view of the changing government policy in relation to school budgets and school improvement consideration will need to be given about the expectations of THEP going forward and the possible implications for school standards.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The key equality implications are concerned with the ability of all children and young people to access effective and high quality education provision to enhance their life chances. Targeted work takes place to address areas of poor performance and with target groups who are under-attaining in relation to national averages, such as with children on free school meals.

8. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The THEP provides good value for money for the Council through delivering statutory school improvement services through a lean and flexible structure. It's effective operation reduces the risk of school standards deteriorating and thus providing poor opportunities for children and young people. Effective schools make a key contribution to keeping children and young people safe and to crime reduction.

9. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 9.1 THEP's latest audited financial accounts indicates a stable financial position but this needs to be seen in the context of the three years seed funding provided by the Council which ends on 31st March 2019.
- 9.2 A growth bid of £250K has been developed to support THEP for a further year in 2019/20 and approval of this proposal remains subject to the Council's budget setting processes. During this period, trustees will also need to consider sustainable forms of funding for THEP.

10. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 10.1 The Council has the power to do anything incidental to the carrying out of any of its functions. The Council therefore has the power to appoint contractors to support the carrying out of it's education related functions and to support schools.
- 10.2 Ordinarily the Council would subject such a contract to a competitive procurement exercise. However, the Council exercises sufficient control over the THEP such that the Council may commission services directly from the THEP without competition in satisfaction of Regulation 12 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. This means that they may continue to do so in the future notwithstanding any decision relating to funding.

- 10.3 This means that the Council can continue to purchase services from the THEP should it be required to deliver against the Council's priorities.
- 10.4 However, the Council still needs to ensure that any money spent with or utilised by the THEP represents Best Value notwithstanding the fact that the Council is not obliged to subject to spend to competitive tendering. Therefore, an agreement should be in place which allows for the Council to control quality of delivery and utilisation of any funds.
- 10.5 In the event that the Council decides to make a grant of seed money rather than commissioning services this would be properly a matter for approval by the Grants Determination Sub-committee rather than the Mayor in Cabinet. However, the allocation of funds and the overall strategy are properly matters for consideration and decision by the Mayor in Cabinet
- 10.6 Any equalities issues will be considered at the point of commissioning further services from the THEP.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix 1 THEP Annual report
- Appendix 2 Audited accounts

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A