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**People: Education & Inclusion**

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**Title: Free Schools Meal Eligibility – Funding request to support new administration process.**

**Recommendation**

This item is for the School Forum to approve

- To approve DSG funding for one-off costs to purchase software modules for the Academy Revenues and Benefits system.
- To approve the application to the Secretary of State for Education by Coventry City Council for disapplication of DSG funds, which is necessary to support the above mentioned costs.

**Voting: All Members**

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. Councils and schools receive grants from Government which are wholly or partly based on deprivation. Specific funding for schools is also received through the Pupil Premium. Both these income streams are based on the entitlement for free school meals (FSM).
- 1.2. Entitlement for a FSM is based on application and income. Many unitary councils base their application process through their Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support (HB/CTS) application process. All of the information needed to process a FSM is captured as part of the HB/CTS assessment process. This helps to ensure that take-up is maximised.
- 1.3. From September 2014 the introduction of universal infant free school meals means that all children attending primary schools in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 receive a free lunch regardless of their financial circumstances and without the need to apply. This had initially resulted in a drop in the number of parents applying for a FSM in these year groups. However, significant work has been undertaken to ensure that parents still register.

- 1.4. Despite this, our understanding is that there are children on the HB/CTS data base who should qualify for a FSM, who are currently not registered for one.
- 1.5. The level of the pupil premium in 2015/16 is:
- Deprivation Premium
- £1,300 per primary age pupil
  - £935 per secondary age pupil
- 1.6. Currently the FSM Eligibility process is dealt with by the Admissions and Benefits Team. Parents are encouraged to apply by their schools and either send in their applications direct to the council or details are passed on via the school. Application information on parents is uploaded in batches to the Dept for Education Eligibility Checking Service website which confirms automatic entitlement. This information is then linked to the child's details on the Capita One system which is the EMS database for all pupil data, so their application will stay with them as they move schools. Schools are provided information by reports generated for each school twice a week. These are sent electronically via our EMS online system.
- 1.7. Councils that administer FSM through the HB/CTS IT System, maximise this funding for all cases and therefore generate more income for schools. This maximisation is even more important given the recent changes to infant FSM.
- 1.8. To ensure we maximise monies attached to FSM entitlement we considering the transfer the FSM application process to the Revenues and Benefits service, which will be enabled by purchasing an additional module for the Revenues and Benefits IT system.
- 1.9. One off costs for the software are broken down as follows:

<b>Software Modules</b>	<b>One-off Cost</b>	<b>On-going Cost</b>
Academy Module	£30,265	£2,500
Data Transfer	£15,000	£0
Schools Portal	£15,500	£1,250
Auto Update Module	£7,500	£750
<b>TOTAL Costs</b>	<b>£68,625</b>	<b>£4,500</b>

- 1.10. It is possible that a discount will be negotiated, as all modules will be purchased. There are unlikely to be any additional one-off costs involved in the system implementation.
- 1.11. As this proposal is likely to financially benefit schools, Schools Forum are being asked to approve funding for the one-off costs from DSG. On-going costs will be met from the existing DSG and SLA funding that supports FSM Eligibility.

- 1.12. If Schools Forum approve expenditure for the one-off software costs, it will then be necessary to seek Ministerial approval for the disapplication of the DSG. Funding would show against 'Exception Agreed by the Secretary of State' on the 2016/17 Section 251 Budget Statement.

## **2. Further Information**

- 2.1. As with many other councils, the HB/CTS IT system used at Coventry has a module for Education Benefits which includes FSM. All customers with children of school age have two additional questions to answer than a normal HB/CTS claim:
- a) *'Do you want to claim for a free school meal for your child/children? (we can vary this question to suit our needs, but this is just to demonstrate that the information needed to process a claim is already being captured in the HB/CTS claim process)*
  - b) *'Which school do your children attend? (We would need to add in some sort of statement to explain the funding benefit for schools, given the new arrangements for children up to Year 2.)*
- 2.2. The IT system also has functionality for schools to access data themselves for their schools. Using the HB/CTS process would also channel shift most new claims to online application. We would also wish to continue the current online process for any non-HB/CTS applicants. We would also want to investigate it's usage for the recording of pupil premium for 3/4 year olds and any potential links to entitlement to a 2 year old nursery place.
- 2.3. A business case will be presented to the ICT Strategy and Client Services panel on June 23<sup>rd</sup> for approval.
- 2.4. It is envisaged that the current Capita One Grants and Benefits module currently used for FSM data that is integrated into the EMS system, will no longer be used as this incurs an additional cost and would also involve a duplication of duties.

## **3. Who does the report affect?**

- 3.1. This report affects all schools (including academies) who receive funding linked to FSM registration as a pupil proxy for deprivation.

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Tim Savill	Head of Revenues & benefits	Resources		

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