

## **LEARNING SUPPORT UNITS**

### *Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families*

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#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To inform Schools Forum of the recommendations from a CSF Officer and Headteacher working group, which reviewed the current funding arrangements for Learning Support Units (LSUs) in Hertfordshire and to consult on proposals for additional expenditure to support an increase in the number of LSUs from 21 to 23.

#### **2. Summary**

- 2.1 This report provides Schools Forum with:
- a) Information about a review of LSUs carried out in Autumn 2006
  - b) Recommendations from the review for:
    - changing the formula for allocating funding to secondary schools
    - increasing the total number of LSUs from 21 to 23
    - financial support to cushion the impact of closing 2 of the existing LSUs that would no longer qualify for funding

#### **3. Conclusions**

- 3.1 Schools Forum is asked to consider the proposal to allocate additional funding to enable an increase in the number of LSUs and to cushion the impact on the 2 schools that would no longer qualify for funding. The proposed additional funding would be -

2008/09	£250,000
2009/10	£188,000
2010/11	£125,000

This is reflected in the Schools Budget proposals for 2008/11.

## 4. Background

4.1 A working group of CSF Officers and Headteachers (nominated by HASSH) reviewed the current funding arrangements for LSUs in Hertfordshire during the Autumn Term of 2006. The previous review had taken in place in 2003, leading to 21 LSUs being established in 3 phases.

4.2 The review was commissioned in response to concerns that the criteria initially used to allocate funding were unclear and there was no mechanism in place to respond to changes in the student profiles of schools.

4.3 LSUs form an essential part of the Authority's Behaviour and Achievement Strategy for pupils who have become, or are in danger of becoming, disengaged with mainstream education and who may have any number of, or a combination of, disadvantages. As such, they play an important role in the Local Authority's strategy for behaviour support and for reducing the achievement gap.

4.4 The LSU is an integral part of a continuum of support for such pupils and operates from within the school to promote separate, short-term teaching and support programmes for individual children. In the LSU environment, pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are able to address their problems, engage with their learning and be supported in preparing for reintegration into mainstream education.

4.5 The Review Group met 3 times and considered the following elements:

- The formula used as criteria for the allocation of LSU funding
- Feedback from Headteachers through the HASSH Executive
- A CSF report: 'Learning Support Units in Hertfordshire: Data, Performance and Provision 2004/05'
- Operational Guidance for Learning Support Units in Hertfordshire (April 2005)
- The Learning Support Units Self Evaluation Framework (September 2005)

### 4.6 Outcomes of the Review Group's considerations

- a) The Review Group recognised the value of the work carried out by the LSUs to support inclusion work with students. LSUs are intrinsically and demonstrably beneficial to schools with an intake profile reflecting areas of social deprivation and where there are above average numbers of casual admissions and 'hard to place' students.
- b) It was noted that the nature of LSUs can vary between schools as they tailor this provision to meet the needs of the students in their school and employ suitable staff accordingly.
- c) The Review Group concluded that there should be more LSUs in schools across the county and that their location and use should be placed within the context of a countywide policy for Inclusion and Support in order to enhance the support available to achieve the Local Authority's targets for reducing exclusions (LAA targets).
- d) With the introduction of the Key Stage 4 Learning Centres, the realignment of Education Support Centres (ESCs) and the review of the behaviour support services, as well as the review of SEN funding

arrangements, it was felt that in 3 years time a different holistic picture of provision may emerge and that a further evaluation should take place then. It is suggested that this further evaluation should tie in with the next 3 year funding period, 2011/14, and start in April 2010. In the interim, however, it was considered that the continued support for and further provision of LSUs would be essential to the delivery of high quality inclusion work.

- e) The Review Group concluded that there should be clear criteria for schools to qualify for an LSU on site and that, alongside this, there should be consideration of the location of LSUs within communities, towns, consortia and Strategic Area Partnership Groups (SAPGs). It should, however, not be the case that one school in area which has an LSU should become the 'dumping ground' for all needy students within that area. The school would have qualified for an LSU on its intake profile and to take additional students from other schools would skew the distribution still further.
- f) It was noted in feedback from HASSH that the current funding of LSUs met only part of the full cost of the provision. Estimates of between £85,000 and £120,000 to run the provision were noted from the schools that currently operate LSUs. This does not include the provision of other additional services, such as counselling and attendance tracking, which are necessary to a significant extent in schools that require LSUs. It was not felt appropriate, therefore, to spread the current budget more thinly when increasing the LSU provision.
- g) The Review Group concluded that the current formula arrangements were inadequate. The formula was not based on recent data and the criteria that had been used sometimes failed to represent the true intake profile of a school. More recent data on PLASC can be specific about the profile of students and communities in terms of levels of social deprivation and it was considered that this should be used when the formula is calculated.
- h) It was also considered that the existing formula contained too many overlapping criteria and that the data was sometimes inaccurate. Numbers of students within a particular criteria (e.g. casual admissions) needed to be considered as a proportion of the school roll.
- i) At present the 'cut off' criteria for qualification for LSU funding was constrained by current budget allowances within CSF rather than there being an 'absolute standard' by which a school may qualify. It was difficult to envisage how this may change in the short term future.
- j) The impact of running a new formula and the possibility of some schools no longer qualifying for LSU funding was considered. It was felt that a combination of an increase in the number of funded LSUs alongside a 'parachute' arrangement to taper-off funding for those that no longer qualify would be the most appropriate solution.

#### 4.7 Recommendations of the Review Group

- a) The formula used as qualifying criteria for LSU funding should be revised and updated. The criteria should be:
  - Free School Meal Entitlement (from Section 52 budget statement)

- GCSE Average Point Score (from DCSF tables)
  - Children in Need Census (Number of pupils from PLASC 2007)
  - Casual Admissions (as percentage of school roll)
  - Non-Statemented Special Educational Needs (from Section 52 budget statement)
  - Economic deprivation (AEN) (from Section 52 budget statement)
  - Key Stage 2 APS (for current year 7 – May 07 SATs)
  - Permanent Exclusions (Year 2006/07 from IRIS)
- b) The application of the revised formula clearly identified a group of 23 schools that would benefit from a LSU. The number of schools qualifying for LSU funding should, therefore, be increased from 21 to 23 with effect from April 2008. Funding should remain at the same level and continue to be inflation-linked.
- c) Additional funding should be found to support the continued provision and expansion of the LSU programme across Hertfordshire (*see Appendix 1*).
- d) A transition plan should be agreed to successfully introduce the newly eligible schools and to implement support arrangements for schools that are no longer eligible (*see Appendix 1*).
- e) Schools that receive funding for an LSU should take part in regular reviews of the effectiveness of their provision and the county self-evaluation format for LSUs should be reviewed, considering the views of Headteachers. This work should be led by the Lead Officer for ESCs and Behaviour Support and the outcomes reported annually to HASSH.
- f) The provision of LSUs across the county should be mapped so that consideration of the placement of LSUs within Learning Communities can be included in the work of the SAPGs.
- g) The changes put in place should remain for 3 years until a further, more wide-ranging review is conducted as changes to the shape of other inclusion provision and their impact becomes evident.

## Proposals for transitional funding arrangements

### 1. Additional Funding Requirements

- a) To increase the number of LSUs from 21 to 23 would cost £125,254 (2 x £62,627) plus inflation. This will be the effective increase in later years after 2 years of transitional funding arrangements.

### 2. Transitional Funding Arrangements

- a) Using the Review Group's proposed amended criteria there would be 5 schools that would now qualify for funding that previously did not.
- b) There would be 3 schools that would no longer qualify for funding that currently have a funded LSU. The Review Group's report included proposals for cushioning the impact of closing 2 of the existing LSUs - the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Barnwell (at Collenswood School) has been kept open as an agreed transitional arrangement and will not now need protection.

### 3. Proposal

It is proposed that full funding should be provided for the additional 2 LSUs from April 2008. It is further proposed that the transitional arrangements for the 2 LSUs that will cease to be funded should be supported by providing full funding for the 1<sup>st</sup> year (2008/09) and half-funding for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year (2009/10)

Additional cost	2008/09	£250,000
	2009/10	£188,000
	2010/11	£125,000