

Policy issues arising from the new Government-- schools

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on emerging government policy.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This paper summarises what is known to date on new policy relating to schools.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Forum is asked to note the report.

4. Background

- 4.1 It is clear that the new majority Conservative government is likely to make some significant changes to the direction and means of implementation of current policies. This report briefly summarises these but does not address curriculum or similar issues.
- 4.2 There are three major sources of information so far on what DfE intends to do. These are the Childcare Bill dealt with elsewhere, the manifesto, and the Education and Adoptions Bill.

Funding

- 4.3 As regards the future of schools funding, the main guidance is currently the Conservative Manifesto, which included a commitment to flat cash per pupil. Our forecasting of the DSG/schools budget position going forward has been based on that as a working assumption. However, there is a Budget due on

25 July at which we expect a degree of clarity round the 3-4 year outlook. Issues in play – which that might not resolve – will be:

- Scale of reductions to non-protected areas, such as capital
- Approach to ESG and its counterpart for Academies
- Exact definition of the ring fence and what “flat cash” means
- Post 16 and under 5’s funding.

- 4.4 Whether or not and in what form we get a National Funding Formula remains to be seen. There has been no overt reference to one, and certainly a coherent system for allocation of funding between Local Authorities would not require legislation. Any further steps are likely to be via Regulation.

Role of the Local Authority and the regional offices/agencies of DfE

- 4.5 The absence of proposed legislation suggests no wholesale transfer of existing LA functions to central Government. However, it is clear that the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner in overseeing and controlling the local schools system is likely to increase. Powers previously exercised by DfE itself have been delegated to the Commissioners, in terms of oversight of the Academy Transfer programme.
- 4.6 The Education and Adoptions Bill sets the scene for further extension of the compulsory Academisation programme, through sponsorship of coasting and failing maintained schools. The Commissioner will in effect choose sponsors and schools and the LA will be required actively to support the process. It remains to be seen what requirements will be made of LAs and whether or not these have financial costs. This will depend on the way in which the deficits of converting schools are in future treated.
- 4.7 The detail of how the extended programme will be rolled out will, again, be set out in Regulations.
- 4.8 Remaining maintained schools will need to consider the extent to which voluntary movement to Academy status is the best future option in the new environment.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 There is perhaps less clarity than could have been expected yet over the future direction of government policy. The tools or means will be in place for further rapid movement towards large scale academisation, but it remains to be seen whether or not this is pursued. There is clearly a major constraint placed on this by the level of available sponsors. There is also the issue of how DfE will address increasing numbers of Academies falling into the categories described as coasting or indeed failing.
- 5.2 Forum will continue to receive reports covering these matters as they develop.