Background

The DSG annual contribution to children's services is currently £272,700 per annum. Historically this was set at 10% of the staffing budget and was agreed as recognition of the work that children’s services do with schools in relation to the welfare and safety of children. The DSG contribution is no longer 10% of the staffing budget and has been effectively capped at the current level.

It is clear that the current picture in Sutton is one of changing demographics, an increasing child population and more demands on services. In addition, expectations in relation to children who go missing, child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and ‘PREVENT’ have resulted in more activity both in terms of service delivery and also training. Schools and children’s services are expected to know about the local pathways for all of these specific safeguarding matters as well as all of the more usual safeguarding and child protection matters. Of course legislation and statutory guidance has not changed and the principle that safeguarding is everyone's business and that children are protected most effectively through strong partnership work still holds true. The Pan London Child Protection Procedures and Working Together 2015 set out the obligations and expectations on all agencies, including schools, in respect of children and young people who may be at risk of harm.

In reflection of all of the above the Council has invested in dedicated resources to manage Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing children. In addition, the Council’s commitment to providing advice, guidance and expertise to schools by MASH and in relation to Early Help has continued and the interactions between social workers, their managers and senior managers within the service and schools has grown and developed over the last three years. This investment has been made because I believe this is the best way to respond to these challenges and that they will be more the most effective. It is not a statutory obligation to have these dedicated resources and we could simply have the expectation that everyone gains the necessary expertise.

The DSG funds of £272k enables the service to be organised and resourced effectively to support vulnerable children and ensure all agencies meet their statutory obligations. The money specifically enables the service to have a dedicated practice lead for CSE and Missing children. Many colleagues will be aware that in addition to focussing upon CSE and
Missing, the postholder also leads on specific safeguarding challenges in relation to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Forced Marriage and PREVENT. In addition the funds enable MASH and Early Help to have sufficient resources to provide advice and direct support in relation to early help assessments (EHAT). The service recognises that safeguarding and child protection can produce complex scenarios that often require additional advice and support. So, for example, a school may come across a potential forced marriage case or a child at risk of FGM without having any previous experience of such a scenario. The local authority, in these circumstances, is able to provide expertise and advice based on experience to that school as a direct result of having DSG money. The ability of the service to provide support and advice would be severely restricted if the DSG were to be withdrawn.

I would also suggest that a decrease in safeguarding resources at this particular time would be particularly counterproductive. The cumulative impact of having unaddressed need amongst children and their families impacts upon all aspects of children's lives including their school life. Children who are not cared for properly often do not learn, require more support within schools and exhibit problematic behaviour. Schools may feel they already under significant pressure managing vulnerable children and I am aware that schools do a great deal of work themselves in this area. I would also maintain that Council also does a lot of successful work with vulnerable children as well.

To reduce or remove altogether the DSG funding from schools would, in my opinion, have a significant impact that would be felt by all agencies including schools. I strongly recommend not taking this course of action and I am more than happy to engage in any required dialogue to emphasise this point.

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