

Appendix 1

Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 5 September, 2013

School Music Service

During the above meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the following questions and comments were raised by the Committee in scoping a report for the meeting on October

- Concern was raised on the requests from the school that parents pay for the music lessons for a full 12 months.

In order to run the Music Service efficiently, we need schools to commit to lessons over the full twelve month period. Teachers Pay and Conditions make quick alterations to the working hours of the team impossible. It is understandable that having given this level of commitment on behalf of the learners, that schools will ask for a similar commitment from parents.

- Concern was raised that asking parents to pay for music lessons in advance did not take into account pupils who may not want to commit to learning a musical instrument for longer than a couple of weeks/months.

Schools are legally required to balance their budgets and to this end many will want the money to be paid in advance and not face problems from non payment of fees. If parents do request tuition for their child, who gives up after just a short period, the cost of this would be left for the school to pay.

- A member said that they had been told that there would be flexibility around payment methods for parents who could not pay the 12 months in advance. It was asked if all schools had been told to make parents aware of this flexibility.

The remissions process supports families with learners receiving Free School Meals. Charging policy is at the discretion of each school and not for the Music Service to set. However, if any school was reported as acting unreasonably in barring access to Music tuition the service would seek to work with the school to resolve the issue. No such reports have been received.

- Concern was raised on the additional administration burden which was put onto schools to administer the school music service.

The Service is grateful for the support being given by schools. Collection of cheques and collation of responses in consultation with the Music Service Manager should not be too onerous. However, maintaining accurate records of flexible payment systems would result in an additional administrative burden on schools, hence, the service has not directly requested this.

- No commitment had been given on the number of music lessons pupils would receive even though parents were being asked to pay for music lessons in advance.

The exemplar letter sent to all schools states that “there will be a minimum of 30 lessons during the academic year”.

- No commitment had been given on whether there would be a reduction in cost for siblings or pupils who wanted to learn to play a second instrument.

The Council has maintained its remissions for free school meals pupils, but the service receives no extra funding to maintain any other remissions that may have been offered in the past.

- Concern was raised around pupils whose summer music exams had been deferred to November. It was asked whether this was to ensure that those pupils continued to learn a music instrument in the new school year.

Early warning of a November examination is paramount if the pupil is to be fully prepared and the teacher sure that all aspects of the examination process will be successful. As there is only a three week period at the beginning of the Autumn Term before the closing date for examination entry the early warning is not a disingenuous ‘cherry’, but is in fact good practice. The Service is also very aware of the financial implications to parents of music examinations, this year the cost of taking Grade 1 is £35 and Grade 8 has risen to £80. Therefore, the teachers of the music service are instructed not to enter pupils unless they are appropriately prepared.

- Was there the ability for pupils to have a trial period of learning a musical instrument to see whether they wanted to continue to receive lessons? This has previously been offered to pupils.

The teachers of the service are contracted on Teachers Pay and Conditions and the difficulty in maintaining staffing levels with an opting in and out would be impossible to manage and could affect the quality of service provision. The budget of the Music Service does not allow for “taster sessions” to be offered. If parents do request tuition for their child, who gives up after just a short period, the cost of this would be left for the school to pay.

- It was stated that school governors were concerned around their contractual responsibilities and asked that further guidance on this be issued to schools.

In the summer term, schools were sent a detailed guidance document from the Music Service including exemplar letters and forms of agreement which they could personalise with school

logos, and send to parents. Briefing sessions for Headteachers and Heads of Music in Secondary Schools were also arranged. Schools that have contacted the service have been given detailed help as to how to collate their requests and balance their budget.

- Comments were made on the provisions of tuition and concerns raised around the implications for schools if there were insufficient pupils who committed to places.

Schools are working together to reach solutions where insufficient interest has been shown in an instrumental/vocal area to be financially viable to enable pupils to still have their choice. Schools that have contacted the Music Service have had all the service options fully explained and any implications for the schools have been highlighted and solutions sought. This facility remains available to schools.