

Paper 7 - for information and consideration

Provision of Supply Teachers

Key Messages

Forum members are asked to note:

- The background and historical context to the Local Authority's potential role in providing supply teachers.
- The current position including increased demand in light of Covid-19 and the changing education landscape.
- That a council-owned agency for teaching staff would be unlikely to deliver better value for money than schools could do for themselves.
- The recommendation for the Schools Forum to consider the practicalities, benefits, and viability of schools taking a collective approach to a supply teacher service.

1. Purpose

Following a recent query from NASUWT (Teachers' Union) about the Local Authority's position and potential role in providing supply teachers, this paper is intended to provide relevant historical information, as well as a view on the changing face of education and the role of Sheffield City Council in relation to such a service.

2. Background

- 2.1. In 2001, in response to requests from schools at a time of a national shortage of teaching staff, and a weak local market, the Council created the Sheffield Education Service Supply Agency (SESSA). Most of the requirement was within the primary sector – at that time this would usually have been handled personally by the Head Teacher.
- 2.2. SESSA offered favourable terms and conditions for their agency workers - including access to pensions for both teaching staff and support staff, and providing training, at no extra cost, which was initially very well received.
- 2.3. However, the following ten years saw a significant increase in the number of national and local supply agencies offering services to the education sector. Although the favourable terms and conditions available at SESSA meant that they attracted good quality workers, this meant they were unable to compete on price, which led to a reduction in bookings.

- 2.4. In 2010/11, Sheffield schools spent £7m on agency teaching staff, plus a significant additional spend on support staff. At this time, it was evident that schools could save a minimum of 10% (£700k p.a.) saving on teaching supply staff by using other agencies.
- 2.5. The Council reviewed the requirement to provide such a service, and decided to cease the internal provision, which took effect at the end of March 2012.

3. Current Position

- 3.1. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a spotlight onto the accessibility and cost of accessing supply teachers, and NASUWT has written to councils recently to consider the direct employment of supply teachers. The expenditure levels for 2018/19 quoted in this letter are significant, however it is not clear whether this is any higher in Sheffield than the 2010/11 figure above. Equally, it is not clear whether the commission fees quoted nationally are representative of Sheffield or not.
- 3.2. The enquiry refers to the lack of access (for supply teachers) to an occupational pension provision. Whilst the point is undoubtedly valid, the provision of better terms and conditions led to the previous SESSA service becoming financially unsustainable, raising the question of how such an improvement might be funded.
- 3.3. It is also clear that the education landscape has changed significantly in the last ten years. At that point in time, most schools in the city were maintained schools, with only a small number of academies. This is no longer the case. In October 2020, there are 29 Secondaries, 69 Primaries and 1 Special School with academy status:

| Type | Maintained | Academy | Number of schools | Notes |
|-----------|------------|---------|-------------------|--|
| Secondary | 1 | 29 * | 30 | *Includes UTC's and Hinde House, Don Valley & Astrea Sec phase |
| Primary | 67 | 69* | 136 | *Includes Hinde House, Don Valley & Astrea Primary phase |
| Special | 12 | 1* | 13 | *Becton |

- 3.4. In terms of pupil numbers across the city, 68.7% are currently on roll in academy schools.

- 3.5. Most academy schools are part of multi-academy trusts (MATs), many of which operate at a regional or national level. These organisations have options to provide sickness cover from other schools within the MAT and have considerable buying-power with employment agencies.
- 3.6. The ESFA set up a “Deal for Schools” to support them in using their list of approved supply agencies to deliver value for money and quality approved staff. Despite this, local academies prefer to have direct contact with agencies. They believe that the arrangements set up by the ESFA are more expensive than going to the local market.
- 3.7. Feedback from schools is that they would only use an arrangement managed by the local authority if no additional costs are added. Pension contributions would quickly make the arrangements more expensive than the current local market.

4. Considerations

- 4.1. It is questionable whether the provision of such a service should be undertaken by a local authority in the current climate, where less than a third of pupils are educated in maintained schools. National evidence shows schools prefer to use their own permanent staff members to reduce the numbers of additional people in the school environment. In addition, schools currently recruit their own supply teachers, and if the Council were to offer an alternative, schools would continue to make their own decisions.
- 4.2. It is a large assumption that a local authority could operate a scheme of this nature that led to cheaper prices for schools. Operating such a scheme would mean that the authority would assume the role of employer for agency teachers, which would create significant employment liabilities. The only mitigation would be to reflect this in the price. The likelihood is that the council service would then be more expensive than agencies, which may prevent many schools from using it.
- 4.3. The Council and schools are supported by procurement legislation to ensure that they can procure recruitment contracts in a fair and competitive way, and achieve best quality and value for money. If the schools in Sheffield took a collective approach, they could have a greater buying power than the Council, provided this is not impacted by any procurement or monopoly legislation.
- 4.4. Workplace pensions have improved in the last ten years, including auto-enrolment, which must be offered by all employers (including agencies). Sheffield schools are collectively a large employer, offering a wide range of teaching roles across the city. If any agency teacher wants more employment stability, there are always good opportunities available within the schools.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1. Considering the above information, a council-owned agency for teaching staff would be unlikely to deliver better value for money than schools could do for themselves. It would however create financial liabilities for the Council.
- 5.2. Our view is that the Council does not develop a service, but instead the **Schools Forum is asked to consider** the practicalities, benefits, and viability of schools taking a collective approach to doing this as a collective body.