

## **Academy conversion contributions approach - questions and answers**

### **Q. Why is the county council proposing a change and implementing this new approach?**

To date, the number of academy conversions in our county has meant that county council has managed to undertake all of the work required from within our existing capacity by redirecting staff and resources. However, with the combination of increasing numbers of schools converting and diminishing funding to the council a review has been conducted in order to find a new, fair and proportionate mechanism for funding this activity and finding the additional resources required.

The council's intention is to levy a contribution of £6,000 from schools that are converting to become academies in order to enable the conversion process to be appropriately resourced to run efficiently and effectively to support schools in their decision to convert to become an academy.

### **Q. What does the money pay toward?**

When a decision is made for a school to convert to become an academy there is process of conversion that requires a range of action from schools and also action needed from the council. We have produced a short guide (Introduction to becoming an Academy) to set out much of what is involved. It includes things like establishing new legal contracts, managing property transfers, undertaking staff TUPE, securing pensions and payroll, and transferring to suitable arrangements in regard to school IT, finance and records management. The county council receives no additional income or grant to undertake this additional work whereas each school is granted £25,000 which is targeted to meet the costs of conversion. The £6k contribution from schools will help the council to undertake the work required and this value is at least matched by council funding to recognise our duties and make the most of the resources we continue to devote to this work.

### **Q. Why is the contribution set at a single rate?**

We felt a single rate is simple, equitable and manageable for schools. £6k is around half of the usual cost to the council and a reasonably proportionate call on the £25,000 each school receives. At this value we believe there will be no deterrent or detriment to a school's planning or decision-making to convert and there is sufficient funding available to a school to meet all of the school's own costs associated with conversion.

As a fixed contribution it is also a figure schools can plan for. The grant to a converting school is not scaled or differentiated (every one gets £25k) so a consistent approach that avoids additional bureaucracy was recommended to council members for decision.

**Q. Doesn't the council have funding to pay for this?**

The council has revenue grants but these are reducing whilst academy conversion activity is increasing. Staffordshire County Council is required to make significant savings to respond to the reductions in our Revenue Support Grant amounting to close to £30 million in 2016/17 and even more over the next three years. These savings will impact in many areas of the county council's operations, including education. Therefore current funding is not enough to meet the need for increased capacity to undertake more conversions.

**Q. Isn't this a statutory duty that the council cannot charge for?**

Within the conversion activity there are statutory elements, including the consultation with and TUPE transfer of staff. The council is continuing to meet all statutory obligations and the costs associated with these activities through our contribution to the costs of conversion.

**Q. What if a school can't afford to pay?**

Each school receives a conversion grant of £25k so we expect that the vast majority of schools will face no difficulty in affording the contribution. Our conversations with the Department for Education also indicate that the rest of the £25k is sufficient to meet the school's own usual costs of conversion.

**Q. How will the contribution be collected?**

The contribution will be collected against the £25k conversion grant.

**Q. When is the approach being implemented?**

The approach is being implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 for schools where the Academy Order is issued after this date, a contribution will be sought.

**Q. Who has to pay?**

Any maintained school that is subject to an academy conversion order issued by the Secretary of State.

**Q. What do other council's do?**

There are different practices in different councils. We did look into some of these as part of our review and we have identified an approach that we think works best for Staffordshire schools.

**Q. Is the contribution voluntary or compulsory?**

We believe the contribution is reasonable for all schools who are converting. We know that a school's governing body will contact us if there are exceptional circumstances that they wish to discuss with us.

**Q. Why is a contribution not refundable if the conversion is not completed?**

We would be unable to refund simply because much of the work will have been done already and the costs incurred.

**Q. Why implement contributions now - when academy conversions have been happening for a number of years?**

The implementation comes as a result of a new combination of pressures of on the council that did not affect us previously. The reduction in revenue grants and the increase in academy conversions is why we need to change our approach now.

**Q. Will schools that are part way through a process be asked to contribute?**

For schools part way through a conversion the council will welcome any contribution they can make. However, academy orders issued from 1<sup>st</sup> April will be in scope for this contributions approach.

**Q. Will schools who have already converted be asked to contribute?**

This isn't possible as the work has been completed under previous arrangements and the school is now outside of council control.

**Q. Is the rate of contribution per school? What about when groups of schools convert together?**

The rate is per school. Multi-school conversions are not cheaper – and are sometimes much more complex and therefore more costly. So the contribution rate of £6k per school is still applied.

