

Notice of Non-key Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Talk Matters Programme 2023-26
Decision Maker:	Tara Geere, Director of Starting Well
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Oscar Ford, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
SLT Lead:	Tara Geere, Director of Starting Well (DCS)
Report Author and contact details:	Trevor Cook, Assistant Director of Education trevor.cook@havering.gov.uk 01708 431250
Policy context:	Supports improvement in children's communication skills.
Financial summary:	Havering will receive total grant income of £395,000. This will be paid in 3 annual instalments over the financial years 2023/24 to 2025/26. Havering is required to contribute £17,500 towards the programme costs in 2025/26.
Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Sub Committee:	Children and Learning
Is this decision exempt from being called-in?	The decision will be exempt from call in as it is a Non key Decision

Non-key Executive Decision

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Things that matter for residents X

~~Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy~~

~~Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place.~~

Part A – Report seeking decision

DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. The Assistant Director of Education Services is recommended to approve the Council receiving £395,000 funding from London's Violence Reduction Unit to implement the Talk Matters Programme 2023-26.

AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

3.3 Powers of Members of the Senior Leadership Team

Financial responsibilities

(c) In consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member to apply for, accept and manage external funding up to a limit of £500,000 per grant in support of any function within their Directorate provided that any financial contributions by the Council are made from within existing budgets.

STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION

London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) believes that violence is preventable, and that early intervention is key to minimising the risk factors that might eventually lead a child or young person to becoming involved in crime or violence. One such risk factor is being excluded from school.

The VRU funds local authorities and schools across London to work in trauma-informed ways to reduce preventable exclusions – from implementing nurturing approaches and healthy relationships education, to mentoring and after-school support – so that schools can play their part effectively in keeping children safe, engaged in their education and empowered to reach their potential.

Despite much good practice across London, the number of school exclusions remains high. Children who are excluded are seven times more likely to have a special educational need, and ten times more likely to have recognised mental health problems. They are twice as likely to be in care, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty. There is also disproportionality in gender and ethnicity, with boys three times more likely to be excluded, and Black Caribbean children in London three times more likely to be excluded than their peers.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists asserts that communication difficulties are strongly associated with disruptive and antisocial behaviour, because of

Non-key Executive Decision

the impact that Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) have on the skills and abilities a child needs to behave appropriately. Children with SLCN often have problems understanding what others say to them, or understanding indirect requests, leading to being perceived as uncooperative or disobedient. Children with SLCN often have poor working memory abilities, meaning they are more prone to distractions and require repetition of information. They may have difficulties finding the words which describe their own feelings, can find it hard to cope with their emotions. They may also have difficulties understanding the rules of conversation, including how to take turns or repair misunderstandings.

The ability to communicate is recognised as the most fundamental life skill for children, and early language development is a primary indicator of child wellbeing. It directly impacts on their ability to learn, to develop friendships, and their future life chances.

There is increasing concern about the numbers of children starting school with poor language skills, which often go unidentified. In some areas of deprivation more than 50% of children start school with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

The Government's recent SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan highlights that where children do not receive the right support early to address SLCN, they are at increased risk of poor educational attainment, poor social emotional and mental health and poor employment outcomes later in life. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists asserts that children with SLCN are at an increased risk of poor mental health, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, victimisation and bullying.

Despite the evidence, there is little consistency in addressing these issues. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on oracy stated in its 2021 report *Speak for Change* that there is a concerning variation in the time and attention afforded to oracy across schools, with less than half of primary teachers saying they are confident in their understanding of the spoken language requirements outlined in the National Curriculum. It concludes that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on pupils' spoken language development, as well as their wellbeing and mental health, should make oracy education a priority.

The aim of the VRU's new pilot programme is to support schools to prioritise oracy, identify SLCN in children early and close gaps in their learning, so that children can fully engage in all aspects – academic and social – of their education. The evidence strongly backs the VRU's assumption is that early identification of language difficulties may reduce the likelihood of school exclusions and a potential future trajectory into exploitation and criminality for the most vulnerable children.

Evidence-backed recommendations advocate a tiered approach to service delivery: universal, targeted and specialist.

Non-key Executive Decision

An estimated 10% of children have an identified speech and language disorder. For those children, a universal approach can complement but never substitute specialist help, and they must be able to access individually tailored speech and language therapy for as long as is necessary. As a statutory service, speech and language therapy – i.e. the specialist tier – falls outside the scope of this programme.

The VRU is providing LBH with £395,000 grant funding over three years to implement a Talk Matters programme, intended to support:

- Five primary schools (all key stages) per borough for the first two years
- Five new primary schools (all key stages) per borough for the third year

Outputs will include:

- A whole-school approach to oracy. This must be provided by a credible organisation and be evidence-based. It must have a strong focus on upskilling school staff, providing ongoing support, and keeping parents and carers informed. The VRU expects the local authority and headteachers to collectively decide on an approach, and for the local authority to purchase or procure one approach across all five schools.
- A targeted intervention for children identified as needing additional support to reach expected levels of language development. This must be evidence-based and possible to deliver in school by teachers or teaching assistants. It must be time limited, tailored to needs, and monitor progress. Like the whole-school approach, the VRU expects the local authority to purchase or procure this across all five schools.
- Strategic initiatives that support social and emotional skills and wellbeing. This must include a strong element of engagement with parents and carers. The funding may be used for purposes including, but not limited to training, clubs and wrap-around care, services, equipment and facilities, resources, events, food, and trips. Read more on Mentally Healthy Schools about how to support wellbeing in primary. The VRU expects this funding to be paid directly to schools except in cases where schools have agreed that the local authority will procure one or more services centrally.

The VRU recognises that primary schools already work hard to develop children's speech, language and communication skills. This programme allows schools to strategically prioritise this area by offering support for high-quality, expert-led oracy provision; consistent and collaborative support from local education services; and resource for wellbeing and staff cover as key enablers for success. Our hypothesis – and our hope – is that this will allow children's language development to be supported effectively and sustainably.

Non-key Executive Decision

The VRU also acknowledges the possibility that increasing the awareness and knowledge of oracy and SLCN in schools may initially lead to more referrals to specialist services, before subsequently coming down as the impact of preventative and targeted provision starts to be felt. The VRU hope that this programme will contribute to more appropriate referrals to specialist services over time.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The VRU approached LBH to consider participation in the programme. Refusal to engage would have meant the LA would have missed the opportunity for £395,000 VRU grant to support improvement in communication skills in children.

PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

None.

NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER

Name: Trevor Cook

Designation: AD Education Services

Signature:



Date: 16/11/23

Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Council must ensure that there are sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education in its area, which must be sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education, in accordance with section 14 of the Education Act 1996. The Council is making a decision to accept funding from a grant from London's Violence Reduction Unit to implement a program to support pupils with communication difficulties for that reason.

The Council and the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) have already made a grant agreement for the allocation of the Talk Matters program for 2023 to 2026. The Council is the Recipient of the grant money as defined in the grant agreement and it must comply with the requirements of the grant agreement. In particular, the Council must comply with the requirement not to use the grant money ineligible expenditure, as well as other requirements in the grant agreement. If the Council fails to comply with its requirements in the grant agreement, MOPAC can reduce, suspend or withhold grant payments, require the grant money to be repaid or terminate the grant agreement.

Therefore, the Council can accept the funding from the grant.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The total grant funding for Havering is £395,000, which will be paid in 3 annual instalments at the start of each school year. The funding for the first two years is for the same five schools (considering the expected slower start due to implementation halfway through year one). The funding for the third year is for five (or more) new schools.

The Grant Funding Profile sets out the maximum amount of the Grant that can be claimed per Financial Year;

Title of Funded Project	Maximum Funding Year 1 (FY 2023/24)	Maximum Funding Year 2 (FY 2024/25)	Maximum Funding Year 3 (FY 2025/26)	Combined 3-year maximum spend
Talk Matters	£137,500	£137,500	£120,000	£395,000

Eligible Expenditure

The following expenditure is eligible for grant funding.

Non-key Executive Decision

	Indicative costings	Per borough FY 2023-24	Per borough FY 2024-25	Per borough FY 2025-26	Totals
Oracy approaches	Both universal/whole school and targeted, costing up to a combined max of £6,600 per school per year	£33,000	£33,000	£33,000	£99,000
Teacher cover	Up to 18 days @ £200 per year per school = £3,600	£18,000	£18,000	£18,000	£54,000
Wellbeing	£10,000 per school per year	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£150,000
Borough coordination	£35,000 per borough per year for up to a 0.5FTE plus on-costs	£35,000	£35,000	£17,500	£87,500
Speech and Language Therapist involvement	6 days @ 250 = £1,500 per borough per year	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	£4,500
		£137,500	£137,500	£120,000	
				Total	£395,000

Match Funding

Details of the match funding to be provided by Havering are set out below:

Organisation / Source	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Confirmed / Pending	Comments
<i>Match funding contributing to the overall running costs of the project:</i>					
Borough coordination			£17,500		
Total			£17,500		

Havering's match funding requirement of £17,500 in 2025/26 will be met from HSIS budgets.

Non-key Executive Decision

In order to ensure that the full grant is received, Havering must comply with the Terms and Conditions of the grant agreement with MOPAC.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

The programme will be project managed by a range of staff in the HSIS team. Grant funding is available to offset salary costs, and arrange back-fill as appropriate.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

The project will help improve the communication skills of children targeting a number of specific schools.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are no environmental and climate change implications as a result of this decision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

APPENDICES

None.

Non-key Executive Decision

Part C – Record of decision

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Decision

Proposal agreed

~~Proposal NOT agreed because~~

Details of decision maker



Signed

Name: Tara Geere

Cabinet Portfolio Held:

ELT Member title: Strategic Director of Starting Well

Head of Service title

Other manager title

Date: 21/11/23

Lodging this notice

The signed decision notice must be delivered to Committee Services, in the Town Hall.

For use by Committee Administration

This notice was lodged with me on _____

Signed _____

Non-key Executive Decision