

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION PROPOSED BY HUW LEWIS AM

Introduction

Parents on low incomes regularly face difficulty in meeting the cost of distinctive school clothing. Local authorities have the power, but not the statutory duty, to provide financial assistance to help parents meet the cost of school uniforms and clothing. Local authorities have this authority under the provision of the 1996 Education Act.

Provision throughout Wales is therefore not uniform and the support offered to parents is dependent upon the local authority in which they live.

Objective

The objective of this motion is to introduce minimum standards for the support local education authorities provide to help meet the cost of distinctive school clothing. The new standards should cover eligibility criteria, levels of grants, payment methods and accessibility of the schemes.

It will introduce a minimum standard of support and assistance that parents, regardless of where they live, can expect.

Current Situation

Across Wales the provision of support for parents is neither uniform nor adequate. Parents on low incomes face considerable pressures in meeting the costs of school uniforms.

Although there is no centrally held data available on the support offered by each local authority the Citizens Advice Bureau reports that the provision differs markedly between areas. Their most recent report, *Uniform Failure*, also reported that even where provision does exist, it is often inadequate to meet the needs of parents on low incomes.

The CAB reports that this has an effect even with individual schools. In *Uniform Failure* it reported:

“The fact that not all LEAs provide financial assistance with the costs of school uniforms results in stark inequality of provision at a local level. For example, Llangollen CAB reported that it is on the border of Denbighshire and Wrexham local authorities. Its local secondary school therefore has children attending it who live in both local authorities. Whilst one local authority provides assistance with the costs of school uniform the other does not. This means that some children in the school

are eligible for LEA assistance with the costs of school uniforms, whilst classmates in similar economic circumstances are not."

The National Assembly Research Library found that 16 of the 22 local authorities in Wales offer some financial support to parents. Of this 16 the eligibility criteria and the level of grant offered can differ considerably.

While each of these local authorities target their resources at the parents they regard as being most in need of assistance, there is no uniform set of criteria employed. In short there is no uniform pattern of provision.

Where support is available it does not often meet the full costs that parents face. The CAB report estimated that the full cost of a school uniform at the start of secondary school ranges from £105 to £274. The same survey, in January 2001, found the average value of support offered by local authorities across England and Wales to meet the costs of a school uniform on joining secondary school was just £49.

In *Uniform Failure* the CAB stated:

"The availability of financial assistance with the costs of school uniform has been a long standing concern of the CAB Service. It is far from adequate and fails to meet needs."

Just as worryingly the CAB service found that the 'real terms' value of the grant between 1990 and 2000 declined in all but one of the local authorities surveyed across England and Wales.

It is to address these key issues - the inequality of provision between different local authority areas and the level of grant provided - that minimum standards are required.

In the words of the CAB:

"The time has come for the Government to introduce a statutory duty on LEAs to meet minimum standards in relation to school uniform grants."

Cost - Benefit Analysis

The following costs can be estimated:

- Staff time - approx. £15,500 (around 90 days), for consulting on draft minimum standards and preparing necessary legislation to be put to the Assembly (based on previous Subordinate Legislation figures).
- Miscellaneous costs (translation, printing, accommodation, copying etc) - unable to quantify, but unlikely to be more than £5000.

It is not possible to quantify the costs that will result from the implementation of the new Minimum Standards, as the standards employed would determine the level of funding required. Similarly, to cost the effect of the minimum standards would prejudice the drafting of the minimum standards.

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