

# **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

**WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2010**

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

### **Update on Review of Service Level Agreements with Schools**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report seeks to update Schools Forum on the progress to date of the review of traded services offered to schools by Wirral Council. These services are all due for renewal on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, having extended the agreement period for a number of services by one year.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Schools have been purchasing services from the Local Authority through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) since 1988 as a consequence of the step by step delegation of funding and responsibilities to schools. Originally the model used was one of simple buy back where the amount delegated to a school was returned in its entirety, regardless of the actual cost of the service to that school, in order to protect those schools that were 'losers' in terms of funding.

Gradually as the market place developed the Local Authority supported schools explore the options available to them by providing trade fairs, offering training to governors and setting up the Headteacher groups to consider services in more detail. The charging mechanism for SLAs became more commercial and reflected more accurately the actual costs at school level, although not in all cases.

The mechanism for consultation and feedback was one where each service was overseen by a group of Headteachers who were able to provide information to providers on schools' developing needs. This however proved onerous in terms of a time commitment for Headteachers.

#### **CURRENT POSITION**

1. Currently fifteen services are offered and procured through this mechanism totalling a value of approximately £7,000,000. All SLAs with the exception of Technical Support Services are for a period of three years and are due for renewal on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.

2. Mindful of the need to address Headteachers' work-life balance a new consultation and feedback model and approach has been introduced. A panel of Primary Headteacher representatives from the five Primary Cluster groups in operation in Wirral together with representation from voluntary aided schools and governors was convened to act as a conduit between schools and Authority service providers. Discussions at cluster level are reflected in the minutes of Primary Heads Consultation Group. The remit in the first instance is to consider proposals for the new SLAs from providers, feedback the information through cluster groups and respond on behalf of schools to those proposals. Once the new SLAs are in place the panel will act in a monitoring and quality assurance role on behalf of schools.

3. The panel meets half termly and to date has considered outline proposals from the following services:

Facilities Management  
Risk Assessment & Insurance  
Grounds Maintenance  
Wirral Community Patrol  
Metro Catering  
Metro Caretaking & Cleaning  
Cash to Bank  
Human Resources  
Financial Support  
Employee Administration  
Payroll & Pensions

The remaining services are due to be considered in the second half of the Summer Term 2009-2010.

Feedback from schools has on the whole been extremely positive both in terms of any proposed changes to service and the quality of services delivered. Schools welcome the proposal that Wirral Community Patrol provide a key holding service for an additional charge (already operating successfully in some schools) in order to support Headteacher and support staff well-being, preventing callouts in the late hours. Schools have requested that each Primary Cluster has a nominated Project Officer for facilities management and contact re day to day repairs and have agreed that the role of the nominated Heating Engineer not only be retained but increased in capacity. Interest has been expressed in a Bidding Officer working on behalf of all schools to explore possible funding opportunities and support schools with actual individual/group applications. More detailed information on the specification for Grounds Maintenance has been requested in order that schools are clear on the areas covered and frequency of provision whilst Metro Catering are asked to clarify responsibility for movement of dining furniture. Feedback is awaited on the proposal to merge the three SLAs for EAT, Payroll and Pensions into one SLA, together with consideration of a new self service model of pay whereby the provider role changes to one of advice and guidance rather than operator input with the concomitant reduction in charges.

4. It is intended that service providers offer detailed specifications of their service and proposed charges to schools by the end of September 2010. This timescale fits in with national Formula Consultation and the next Spending Review. It also enables services to consider any staffing implications of a reduction or increase in the levels of procurement by schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That Schools Forum note this report.

**Howard Cooper**  
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