

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM Tuesday 19th January 2021

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

WIRRAL TRADED SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a brief update on Wirral Traded Services for schools.



2. BACKGROUND

Wirral Council operates a range of traded services to its schools and beyond. The current range of 25 Wirral Traded Services for 2020/21 includes:

- Construction and Facilities Management*
- Corporate Procurement
- Data Protection Officer*
- Data Service for Schools (Data Reports)*
- Distribution Services*
- FFT for secondary schools*
- Financial Support for Schools*
- Health & Safety*
- HR Consultancy Services*
- ICT Schools' Telecoms
- Internal Audit
- IT Services for Schools*
- IT WAN*
- Legal Services*
- Marketing Services
- Minority Ethnic Achievement Service (MEAS)*
- Occupational Health*
- Payroll & Human Resources Administration*
- Risk and Insurance*
- Safeguarding Training and Support Service for Schools and Educational Settings*
- Software Support*
- Schools' Library Service*
- The RADY project*
- Wirral Community Patrol*
- Wirral Printing Services

Those services with a * next to them are the services that offer annual SLAs to schools and for the majority of those services, the schools are the main customer of that service.

Most of these services, such as Software Support and the Minority Ethnic Achievement Service provide their service almost exclusively for schools. Some, such as Payroll & Human Resources Administration and Health & Safety are integrated into providing their services for other customers such as the Council.

Wirral Traded Services is coordinated by a Senior Manager with 1 day a week support from a Consultant Headteacher (School Traded Services). Collectively they employ nearly 150 Wirral Council staff (around 120 FTE).

For 2020/21, a new Wirral Traded Services brochure was produced along with a separate pricing schedule. There was a successful launch event attended by over 60 school colleagues in January 2020 at the Floral Pavilion. Schools were invited to sign up for the annual SLAs and express interest in the PAYG services by February 2020. The schools have received confirmation letters of all the annual SLAs they are purchasing along with the amounts.

The services have been collecting the income in via journal for maintained schools and will be issuing invoices for academy and independent schools. Every maintained and academy school across Wirral buys at least one of the annual SLAs on offer. There are over 1000 individual SLA agreements from Wirral Traded Services across Wirral Schools.

These new additional service offers from Wirral Traded Services for 2020/21 included:

- Data Service for Schools (Data Reports)
- The RADY project
- FFT for secondary schools
- IT WAN

WESCOM, the Council school's online portal, contains the full SLAs for each of the services. A new website has gone live and phase 2 is under development.

Overall Wirral Traded Services generated income in 20/21 of just under £4 million and the level of annual buyback for schools has held up across most of the traded services with some services winning back school customers. This is partly down to increasing the range of products with new services for schools. This retention of income has been achieved despite increased competition and also greater financial challenges for schools with their budgets. Three services were down significantly on their income for 2020/21 compared to 2019/20:

- Distribution services – this is mainly due to schools moving away from cash collection
- IT Services – principally due to the loss of three schools including one large secondary which became part of a Multi Academy Trust
- Health & Safety – primarily due to a new local competitor setting up and taking business.

A financial analysis of the services that rely mainly on annual SLAs from schools for their income has indicated that most of these break even comparing income versus expenditure. Only one of the services needed a significant subsidy from the Council for it to continue trading for 2020/21.

Because the buyback was finalised in Feb 2020, pre-Covid, the buyback rates were not affected by Covid. There have also been very few occasions since lockdown of schools

wishing to come out of services. In fact many have commented favourably on many of the adapted services they have received during challenging times:

- *“A big thanks to MEAS for their continuous support during these difficult times.”*
- *“Please thank Graeme and Sharna from ICT and Software Support - both have made me feel very welcome and have helped a lot. I have a school Gmail and Office 365 account now.”*
- *“The Payroll service you are all providing is great - much appreciated and take care.”*
- *“Thank you for the Wirral Safeguarding Partnership Newsletter. I found it very useful and reassuring as a checklist of our current necessary actions.”*

The new offer for 2021/22 has gone out to schools in December which included three new services in the brochure and pricing schedule. A virtual launch event has been rearranged for January 22nd 2021.

One of the Council budget proposals for 2021/22, that are currently out for consultation, included a review of school traded services:

*A review is currently being undertaken to assess the effectiveness of Council delivered traded services to ensure they provide value for money. This option represents a target to deliver improved commercial activity, which could be realised through a variety of different approaches including cost efficiencies, modifying or ceasing services or marketing services in a revised manner, for example with package deals to improve take-up rates. This could result in a **saving of £270,000.***

The Council will work and consult with schools as part of the review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Forum notes the report.

Paul Boyce
Director of Children, Families and Education