

20th July 2020

For the attention of:

Karen McIlwaine (Cheshire West and Chester Council)
Steven Krempel (Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council)

Dear Karen and Steven

This is my application to become the Chair of the Edsential Company Board. I hope that the following information helps you, and the shareholders, in making your decision.

Summary of my Career

- Appointed as a secondary-age teacher of mathematics and science at Wednesfield High School in Wolverhampton (mixed comprehensive, 11-18, approximately 1000 on roll) from September 1981 until December 1988
- Appointed as Scale 4 for mathematics and IT and then Senior Teacher at Blake High School in Cannock (mixed comprehensive, 11-18, approximately 800 on roll) from January 1989 until December 1993
- Appointed as Deputy Head Teacher at Arthur Terry School in Birmingham (mixed comprehensive, 11-18, approximately 1450 on roll) from January 1994 until August 1998
- Appointed as Inspector for CPD with Staffordshire LEA from September 1998 until January 2001 leading on professional development, leadership and management development, governor services, etc. This involved designing, marketing, selling and delivering a range of workforce development programmes to primary and secondary schools
- Appointed as Senior Adviser and then Principal Manager with Cheshire County Council from February 2001 until August 2008
- Appointed as Deputy Director for Learning and Achievement with Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council from September 2008 until July 2012, responsible for education in the borough
- Appointed as Head of Service (Achievement and Wellbeing), later re-titled to Director of Education and Inclusion with Cheshire West and Chester Council from August 2012 until the present. I am formally retiring from this post on 31st August 2020.

Regional and Sub-Regional Connections

During my tenures being responsible for education in both Wirral and Cheshire West and Chester Councils I have taken a significant lead role in developing effective regional and sub-regional partnerships. This has enabled me to influence and share approaches to education across the Liverpool City Region and the Cheshire areas. I have also been involved in wider North West work and I believe that all of this will enable me to use these links to support Ian McGrady and Edsential to further develop local markets.

In particular:

- Whilst in Wirral I was heavily involved in the Learn Together Partnership across the Merseyside Local Authorities and lead on several school improvement groups as part of that partnership.
- With the changes to education in 2010/11 following the election of the coalition government, the expansion of the academy programme, the introduction of teaching schools and the development of a school-led model for education, I was on the steering group to develop Learn and Lead, the successor to the LTP. This was a partnership between the Merseyside and Cheshire LAs, the dioceses, academy trusts and teaching school alliances.
- Until last year I chaired the SILLA group (School Improvement Leads in Local Authorities) which was put in place when Learn and Lead ceased with the introduction of Regional School Commissioner and Teaching School regions. This is a partnership across the Merseyside and Cheshire Local Authorities and through this I helped to develop mutual support, common strategies and sharing good practice across the nine LAs. This group has also been able to influence sub-regional and regional thinking and development.
- I have been part of the North West School Improvement Group. I have also supported the annual Peer Challenge process across the North West Local Authorities, providing an educational challenge to the self-evaluations of several NW LAs. This has included a peer challenge to Wirral MBC around school improvement and special educational needs for the past two years. Wirral have equally been involved in the challenge back to CW&C.
- Whilst the School Improvement Fund programmes existed (these finished just over a year ago), I was involved in sub-regional working with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Authorities, alongside the existing close working with Cheshire East.
- I have also provided consultancy work in Halton for several years, which has only just ceased as a result of my retirement.

Setting Up Edsential

I have been involved in the creation and implementation of Edsential right from inception. The journey started with changes in Wirral arising from the education policies of the 2010 coalition government. The expansion of the academy programme, the development of teaching schools, the move from nationally funded but locally delivered school improvement programmes resulted in significant changes to funding streams for Local Authorities. These potentially threatened the range of services provided previously by Local Authorities. Stuart Bellerby and I (Stuart was working for me as my senior manager at the time) redesigned a range of school improvement services to develop EQ, in the process of which aiming to retain the customer base in Wirral as well as ensuring we continued to deliver quality services to support Wirral's education strategy. In the autumn of 2012, following my move to CW&C, there were discussions between the Leaders and Chief Executives of the two councils around a range of joint services. Joint services for schools was one of

the workstreams and I was a lead for that. Working with David Armstrong, Julia Hassall, Stuart Bellerby and Andrew Roberts (from Wirral) and Andrew Finnegan, Richard Harrison, Cheryl Carr (from CW&C) we designed and then created Edsential. I was successful in securing a £100K grant from the DfE to support the project. I also presented at the LGA conference in July 2014 and exhorted Phil Davies (Leader for Wirral at the time) to support the project. Mike Jones (Leader for CW&C at the time) was also supportive. Clearly there was an immense amount of work to get the company set up but I am very proud that Edsential was the one project that came to fruition and I believe that it has lived up to its expectations for both councils.

The principles behind the design of Edsential have stood the test of time. These have largely been:

- Statutory services being largely delivered by the Local Authority teams because of the statutory duties and accountability systems but complemented by the traded services of Edsential
- Support to schools through corporate services (e.g. HR, legal, health and safety, etc) but these being delivered on a stronger business-like basis in line with education strategy and complementary to Edsential's services
- School-to-school support delivered through teaching schools but complemented by the traded services of Edsential
- Edsential delivering a range of high-quality services, key to the successful delivery of education in schools and in keeping with the ambitions of schools and of the two councils, not least given that schools make up the client base
- Edsential being the provider of choice, valued by schools not because it is necessarily the cheapest (though certainly competitive) but because of the added value from being a trusted council-owned company, linked to other parts of the two councils and with the values of the councils (e.g. the "green" agenda)
- Edsential, where most of the funding comes from income from schools, being responsive to its clients but able to compete in the private marketplace
- The ability for Edsential to trade beyond the boundaries of the two councils
- The ability for Edsential to attract funding that LAs may not be able to
- Edsential, as a Community Interest Company, delivering services in the best interests of children, and where profits are fed back into supporting children, but not making profits from schools to then fund other non-education council services
- Edsential to have the freedom to compete effectively against private sector competitors

As the Chair of the Board I would support Edsential to maintain and further develop its mission in line with these principles. The aim has been to have a private-sector company based on public-sector values. As a non-Executive Director of the Board I am confident that I have contributed to the delivery of these objectives in the interests of both councils. I am pleased to have the support of the head teacher representatives from both Wirral and CW&C in making this application. I believe that

my reputation with the head teachers and governors of both councils means that I would be able to continue to gain their support for the company. I commit to continued working with key officers within the councils, with head teachers, with politicians and with other stakeholders to support Ian to help the company to grow and develop further.

Shareholders

In my current and previous role, I have had significant involvement in working with elected members. More recently this has involved not only my regular reporting on educational issues to elected members but also wider as supporting director for People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, influencing practice across the whole of the council. I believe that I have an excellent track record of supporting elected members and I am very well-skilled in managing the political arena. I am respectful of the political processes and, as the chair, I believe that I would command the respect and confidence of both shareholders moving forward. I am very aware of appropriate governance arrangements and the implications of Edsential being a company owned by both councils.

The Future

No company, not least Edsential, can survive without being forward looking, responsive to changing markets, delivering what customers need, anticipating government policy, designing products that customers did not even realise they needed, being competitive, efficient and effective. Pre-Covid-19, Edsential was in a strong position. Covid-19 has been an immense challenge for councils, schools and businesses. The company is immensely grateful to both councils for the continued support. I also believe that both councils have benefitted from Edsential too: the Holiday Activity and Food programme being but one example. Much would be lost in the long term if Edsential were not to thrive and grow. Many councils no longer have the high-quality services that Edsential delivers (e.g. catering, residential, music, governance services to name but a few) and these services are essential for a well-rounded educational experience for children, not least the most disadvantaged. Edsential also adds significantly in terms of social value. Much work will be needed to re-establish income streams, clients and markets in the coming months. There is the opportunity to expand further into new markets across the sub-region and I hope that my links will enable that to happen. In the end, as the chair, I would continue to support the company and both councils to achieve the ultimate goal: better support for children, young people, their families and carers. This has always been my driver through my leadership in both councils and this will continue to drive me should my application be successful.

I am happy to provide any further information should you needs it.

Yours sincerely

Mark Parkinson