

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30 January 2013

Warwickshire Education Services (WES) Trading Update

Recommendation

To note this update report, as requested.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Cabinet recently recommended that Warwickshire Education Services (WES) continue to be offered to schools on the proviso that they do so on a flexible basis underpinned by sound economic principles.

The Overview and Scrutiny chair has asked for further information on services under the following 4 headings:

- Future service offer
- Value for money
- Gaps in provision
- Reshaping existing services

In providing this update we have also commented on the continuing core role of the Local Authority, as that role and the provision of traded services are complimentary parts of our total contribution to education in Warwickshire.

1.2 Future service offer

Schools and academies continue to face budgetary challenges that may impact on support service spending in future. WES will, in the forthcoming financial year, continue to re-model offers to schools to account for changing economic circumstances. At this stage, this remains a 'work in progress' and each individual Service is currently considering the exact form and shape of the future offer.

1.3 Value for money

WES performs an important strategic role for Warwickshire County Council, underpinning the Council's relationship with schools. Service continues to be subject to financial assessments to ensure that schools are offered a commercially competitive service in accordance with the Council's overall trading approach. A particular issue at the current time is fully understanding the changing needs of academies.

1.4 Gaps in provision

The overwhelming number of upper-tier authorities provide trading operations to schools a number of authorities seek; these operations do however vary in nature and scope. Known areas traded by other local authorities, not currently traded by Warwickshire, but offered on a non-traded basis by the Learning and Achievement (L&A) Business Unit in the People Group include:

- Provision of Intervention Boards to Academies: L&A creates these where there is concern in a maintained school. Where a sponsored academy gives cause for concern, the appropriate body would be responsible and might approach the LA, though that is unlikely in a secondary school, given the sponsor's motivation to be autonomous. The Governing Body of a convertor academy might ask for help when they realise they cannot improve provision without support (L&A spent roughly £500,000 over two years to bring an academy from special measures to satisfactory).
- Ofsted 'health checks': In maintained schools causing concern, L&A conducts a process of action planning and review which uses Ofsted judgement criteria for all aspects of the school's provision to ensure it is on a trajectory to 'good'.
- School improvement packages: In maintained schools causing concern, L&A brokers support for the action plan referred to above, which includes National and Local Leaders of Education, and school-to-school support.
- Data intelligence and analysis: At several points through the year, L&A analyses public attainment and progress data as it becomes available, and at other points when schools have agreed to share their data with the LA before publication. L&A incorporates other intelligence (e.g., exclusions, parental choices) and the evaluation determines the level of intervention in individual schools as well as systemic intervention priorities.
- School leadership support: Working closely with secondary leaders, L&A provides a termly development opportunity for headteachers, deputies and key subject leaders at no cost. The latter will cease and be traded via the Teaching School from the coming year, brokered by L&A. Nine Local Leaders of Education, trained by the National College and briefed and co-ordinated by the L&A, positively influence the development of leadership capacity by working outside their schools leading projects, mentoring and coaching. The regular sharing of professional principles and practice with the Learning Improvement team is an important factor in maintaining a strong sense of trust and moral purpose across the head teacher cadre.
- Out-of-school hours study support: L&A commissions alternative providers for those learners on the alternative census for whom the LA is responsible.

It is important to understand the context within which we deliver these services. Recent changes in education legislation have defined a new role for LAs and education providers in exercising their functions in relation to schools and learning. The strategic role of Warwickshire LA and its relationship with schools, and other providers of education and training, has changed

significantly over the past 18 months, prompted by policy changes at a national and local level and the growth in the number of academies.

The ISOS Report commissioned by Government and the LGA "*Action into the evolving role of the local authority*" discusses both the implications of the duties and the progress being made by a number of LAs in response to the new requirements. The role of the LA is described as:

- Convenor of partnerships, able to facilitate discussion, provide information and empower schools
- Maker and shaper of commissioning, with schools and the LA as commissioners
- Champion of children, parents and communities

The ISOS Report cites examples of best practice in Warwickshire in relation to school improvement and alternative provision for vulnerable learners at risk of exclusion.

Through the school improvement strategy, the LA acts as champion for excellence and challenges schools and a range of education providers to do their best for their population. The strategy demonstrates the commitment to enabling schools to lead their own improvement, in line with the Ofsted framework which provides further impetus for school-to-school support. There is a statutory duty for the LA to intervene in maintained schools causing concern.

Schools that wish to collaborate with the LA will be supported to improve educational performance; L&A will participate in collaborations led by schools to secure a more diverse range of professional development providers, and will provide opportunities for teachers to get together in formal and informal ways to promote improvement.

LAs have a role to play in challenging under-performance in settings across all phases and will act promptly where there are concerns about the performance of individual schools or other providers. L&A will support and challenge those schools that fail to reach floor targets to improve rapidly or to effect transition to academies. We will also collaborate with sponsors who take over weaker schools and use local knowledge of potential partners arising from responsibilities for regeneration, employment and community development.

L&A recognises that strong partnerships between schools, and between schools and the LA are central to securing improved outcomes for all children and young people. The LA cannot fulfil its statutory duties without close collaboration with all schools based on a shared moral purpose and shared values. L&A recognises its changed role and the new responsibilities of academies, and has produced a Memorandum of Understanding which clearly articulates respective roles and responsibilities.

There is scope to investigate these areas for provision by WES once business cases have been developed and tested by WCC officers, but we must proceed

on the basis that we are clear about the role and purpose of the LA. Current purchase of similar services from private sector providers across Warwickshire is unknown.

1.5 Reshaping existing provision

The new roles for LAs and education providers are built upon a premise that improvement is the responsibility of every individual provider irrespective of status and, if it is to be self-sustaining, is best led by professionals within schools sharing expertise and supporting each other as they work together to secure improvement. L&A has a role in facilitating this system change, working in collaboration with headteachers to develop a system that is mature enough to drive its own improvement. The LA retains statutory responsibility for challenging schools in relation to their capacity to narrow the gap in achievement for the most vulnerable children and young people and also retains statutory intervention powers for maintained schools and colleges causing concern.

L&A is working pro-actively with the leaders of all schools to promote appropriate structures and mechanisms, and offer facilitation and quality assurance of the key elements of this new approach while the system is maturing.

1.6 Providing competitive traded services

In the short term, for existing traded services, it is felt that WES can improve their competitiveness in the market by proactively improving customer satisfaction and providing quicker, more responsive services that add value to customer operations.

There is a clear indication that traded services need to respond to the needs of academies, with loss of revenue from academies being significantly higher than in maintained schools. As 92% of existing WES revenues come from Primary schools, yet approx 80% of known future Warwickshire academy conversions are in the Primary sector, WES will need to develop discrete service offers to trade with existing and future academies. There are opportunities to continue to explore and develop innovative offers to support improved outcomes and life chances for children and young people, which recognise our statutory responsibilities and our decreased capacity but also our role as Champion of the Learner.

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