

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROPOSAL – EDUCATION AND LEARNING BUSINESS UNIT

Abstract

This paper gives an update on the position regarding the potential of providing a traded service for school improvement.

Summary

- Additional resources are required to support the delivery of the School Improvement Strategy. (WCC team is only 1.6 FTE).
- The proposal is to introduce an Approved Providers List of quality assured external consultants, who, in addition to undertaking WCC funded school improvement activity, could then be available to all Warwickshire schools as a “pay as you go” Traded Service.
- Based on current buy back rates for pupil related services a financial modelling exercise has been undertaken which suggests a modest return of between £2,500 and £4,000 per annum for the traded service (including CECs but excluding management and admin costs – as the workload would be absorbed by existing staff).
- The service has limited permanent resource to develop and shape a traded service and this is leading to slow progress.

Recommendations

1. That the board gives any feedback/comments on the proposed way forward and resourcing moving forward.

Background

WCC’s position in terms of % schools achieving good or outstanding, as compared to other councils, is lower than would be expected of a Shire County (see following table which gives position as at December 2014):-

Table 1: Percentage of primary and secondary pupils attending good or outstanding schools by local authority in the West Midlands

Primary schools				Secondary schools			
Rank*	Local authority (education)	2014 %	Change from 2013 (%points)	Rank*	Local authority (education)	2014 %	Change from 2013 (%points)
24=	Worcestershire	89	▲ 6	26=	Telford and Wrekin	89	▬ 0
60=	Solihull	84	▲ 1	46=	Worcestershire	83	▲ 2
60=	Dudley	84	▲ 12	46=	Herefordshire	83	▼ -6
68=	Herefordshire	83	▲ 11	59=	Solihull	80	▬ 0
74=	Sandwell	82	▬ 0	59=	Warwickshire	80	▲ 10
79=	Shropshire	81	▲ 7	77=	Shropshire	75	▲ 1
79=	Telford and Wrekin	81	▲ 7	88=	Birmingham	73	▼ -5
91=	Birmingham	80	▲ 1	92=	Staffordshire	72	▲ 4
103=	Warwickshire	78	▲ 5	109=	Wolverhampton	67	▼ -4
107=	Staffordshire	77	▲ 6	111=	Coventry	66	▼ -22
119=	Coventry	74	▲ 10	123=	Walsall	57	▼ -20
141=	Walsall	68	▲ 8	127=	Dudley	55	▬ 0
141=	Stoke-on-Trent	68	▼ -3	132=	Sandwell	53	▼ -21
141=	Wolverhampton	68	▲ 11	134=	Stoke-on-Trent	52	▲ 18

Warwickshire’s approach to school improvement (as defined in the School Improvement Strategy) is “to strive for excellence, recognising individual school autonomy and being committed to working in a professional partnership with providers”. The strategy aims to achieve this by providing an increased level of Learning Improvement support, funded by WCC for maintained schools. Depending on the school’s Ofsted rating they will receive more or less of this free service, ranging from 1.5 days to 20 days per school year.

The service is aware, that many schools purchase advice from the external market place to help them with school improvement, but has concerns that this advice is not always based on up-to-date experience.

Business Requirement

To establish a pool of Quality Assured people who can be called upon to carry out the role of Learning Improvement Partner. Depending upon the position of the school, the way in which their services are commissioned would vary:-

- By WCC, as set out in the School Improvement Strategy
- By schools, via a new WES service on a pay as you go.

The service currently uses a number of external consultants to provide this service.

In order for schools to access the Approved Provider List, a new WES traded service has been proposed.

Process maps have been developed for the use of the Approved Provider list for WCC funded work and a traded service.

Market Review

Schools do currently procure this service from the external market place from a variety of providers. Research undertaken shows that schools currently pay between £400 and £670 per day for this service, but the service is aware of schools who state that they pay up to £1000 per day.

WCC currently pays between £450 and £600 per day.

Feedback from schools via the School Improvement Panels is that they would welcome a service which has been quality assured by WCC, as it would help them to feel confident that they were obtaining the right advice.

Different councils approach the provision of school improvement advice in a variety of ways:-

1. Many Councils provide a service using in-house staff with a free service to maintained schools and a charge for Academies
2. Hampshire's service is part of a more comprehensive offering and they have different rates depending upon subscription status ranging from £585 to £650 per day.
3. Oxfordshire County Council offer a very similar service to that planned by WCC and this has been operating for approximately 18 months. They have shared their tender documentation, and this has been adapted to form the basis of WCC tender documentation. A conference call between Oxfordshire and WCC in early January 2015 established that:-
 - They have a much larger internal team than WCC
 - They provide a much high level of Council funded advice
 - They, as WCC intend, did not increase their administration resources when the Approved Provider List was established.
 - They maintain a separate list of consultants for traded work to the list that they utilise for inhouse work.

A visit to Oxfordshire has been arranged for 23rd January 2015.

An existing ESPO contract is in place and this is currently being renewed. A competitor analysis based on those companies who currently work within Warwickshire and the ESPO contract has been developed.

Current Situation

In order to provide the current service, WCC employs 1.6 FTE Learning and Improvement Officers, along with a Manager (currently an interim) and a number of consultants. The

revised School Improvement Strategy provides an increased service to maintained schools funded by WCC.

WCC has received feedback from a number of Head Teachers that they would welcome a service from WCC which is quality assured, i.e. the advice received is up-to-date and correct. In addition, as part of Ofsted visit preparation, WCC staff have become aware that some of the advice, currently procured by schools direct is of poor quality and out of date.

The service is aware that Maintained Schools may also wish to receive more support than WCC funds and many of them already procure services directly from external suppliers. In addition, Academies do not receive a service from WCC but some are procuring a service directly.

Proposed Service Offer

Currently WCC provides a number of days free service to maintained schools. The plan is to offer an additional service to schools, which would be charged on a day rate “pay as you go basis”. The day rate will be reduced for multiple days purchased. The prices will be determined by the rates secured by WCC as part of the overall procurement exercise.

Ideally, the new service would be available from the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year (September 15).

The service anticipates that they will be able to manage the administration of the new service with their existing administration team, who already process the invoices for the consultants currently employed. It is also assumed that the overall quality assurance and management of the service would be undertaken by the Senior Learning and Improvement Manager. However, this post is currently held by a part-time Interim Manager and this assumption is reliant on a permanent successor being appointed in the near future.

Financial Model

A financial model has been developed in relation to the setting up of an Approved Provider List. The model has calculated the number of days required by WCC as per the School Improvement Strategy, plus an estimation of the demand for the proposed WES service.

The financial model makes a number of assumptions:-

- Maintained schools rated inadequate or requiring improvement will not purchase the service due to the level of WCC funded support they will receive.
- Other maintained schools will purchase 5 days support
- Academies purchasing 3-5 days support.
- Using the WES figures for penetration of pupil services a low trading and high trading figure has been used. At the low end the assumption is that 38% of schools will buy and 52% of academies/68% of maintained schools at the high end (excluding inadequate/requiring improvement maintained schools).

- The model assumes that, following a procurement exercise, WCC will be able to procure services at £500 per day and will recharge them out at £550 per day for single days or £2600 for blocks of 5 days.

As the main demand for the approved list, at least in the initial periods, will be WCC funded, it has been assumed that no additional management or admin resource will be required. The only costs deducted from the income, therefore, are an estimate for CECs and a proportion of the cost of an increased number of google accounts for the Associate Consultants.

Based on this model, the estimate of surplus generated is £2500 per annum (low penetration) to £4000 (high penetration). As can be seen the likely surplus is modest. However, the work to set up the Approved Provider List is required, regardless of the provision of a traded service and, therefore, the traded service would provide potential benefits for schools, with limited impact on workloads within the Education service.

If a higher price were charged, the profitability would be increased accordingly, but this would potentially limit its attractiveness to schools, given that the prices they are currently receiving from the market place.

Proposed Benefits

1. Low levels of external Income from the traded service
2. Fulfilment of WCC duties as per School improvement Strategy
3. Through the use of quality assured consultants, more schools in WCC to be good or outstanding thereby moving WCC to a higher position in Ofsted ranking.

Risk Analysis

The key risk of not establishing the Approved List is:-

1. WCC costs will increase due to ad hoc employment of consultants, at varying rates, to fulfil the requirements of the school improvement Strategy.

The key risk of not establishing the WES traded service:-

2. Schools will continue to procure services from consultants who are not quality assured and do not give up-to-date advice
3. Schools will seek no advice, as they are not confident in the quality of advice available to them.

As there are no additional running costs associated with the establishment of the service no significant risks have been identified.

Next Steps

For the service to be in place to trade from September 2015, a procurement exercise would need to commence in March 2015. Given the projected volume of days for both the WCC funded work and the traded service, Portfolio holder sign off will be required to approve the contract.