

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE
PANEL

DATE: 17 DECEMBER 2009

RE: PROPERTY SERVICES WORKING GROUP – FINAL REPORT

Purpose

To receive the final report of the Property Services Working Group established by the Panel in 2007/08 and which concluded in the following municipal year, 2008/09.

Background

The Panel identified the importance of ensuring that the Council was achieving value for money in its investments in property services and buildings within education and Children's Services. The Working group agreed a number of objectives with the Panel which are set out in the report and included, seeking to ensure that major work was undertaken during school closure periods and the achievement of value for money in the procurement of building work.

The working group's final report sets out its key findings. The Panel are asked to consider the report and approve the recommendations.

Recommendations

That:

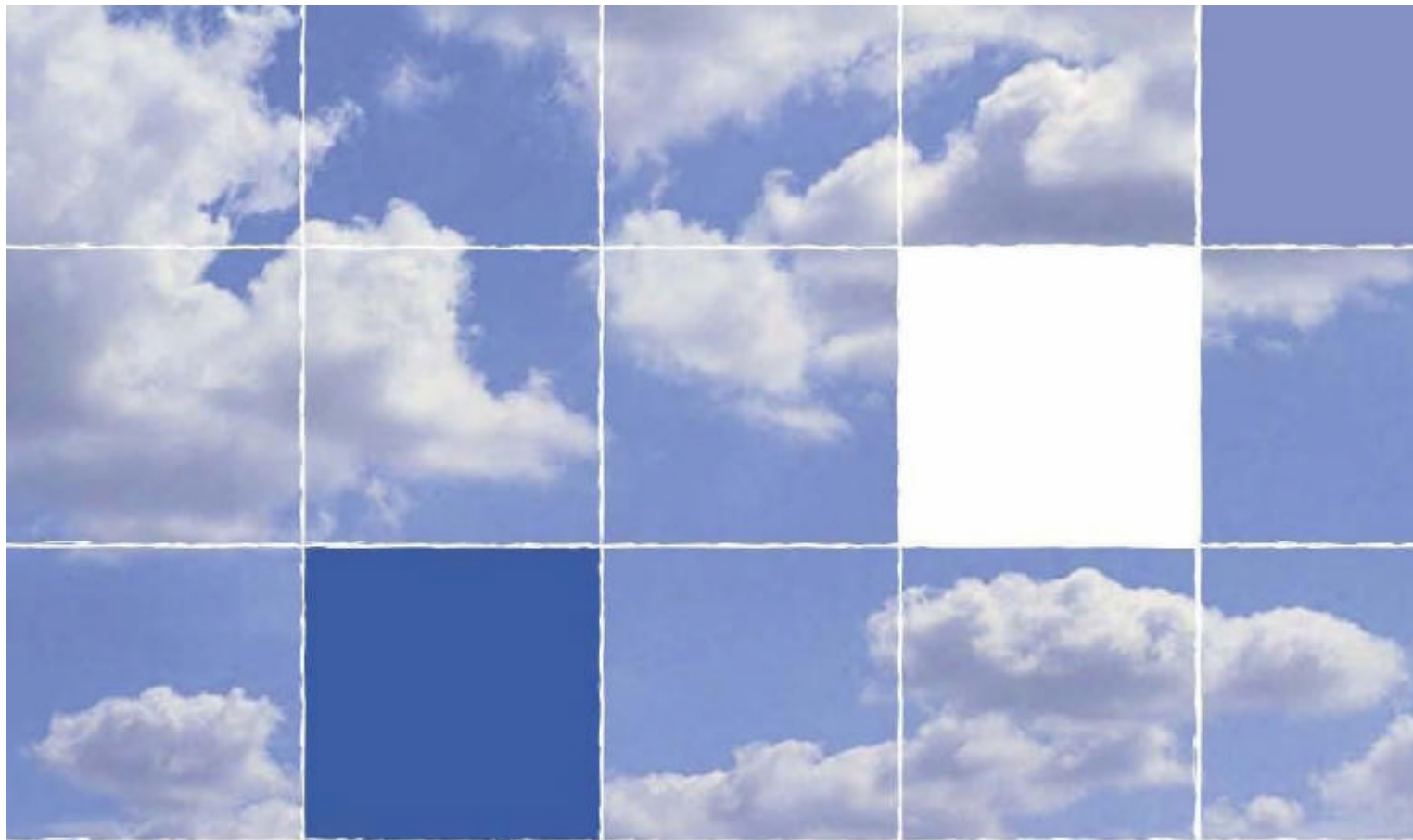
the Working Group recommends that its report be shared with Members of both the Children and Young People's and the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panels to support their activity in relation to Property Services.

Author

Matthew Underhill

Scrutiny Officer

☎ 01922 652087 or underhillm@walsall.gov.uk



Property Services Working Group

October 2009

**A Working Group of the Children's and Young People
Scrutiny and Performance Panel**



Walsall Council

Introduction

The group was originally set up during 2007/08 and continued in the 2008/09 municipal year. Its principle objective to ensure the Council was achieving value for money in its investments in property services and buildings within education and Children's Services.

Objectives

The Working Group agreed its objectives with the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel:

- To ensure that the Council has a process in place that ensures that the council achieves value for money in the procurement of building work for Children's services;
- An independent quantity surveyor ensures that the bidding process is fair and equal for all bidders;
- To ensure that processes are in place to allow major work to be done during the school closure period;
- To maintain improved communication between property services and elected Members;
- To receive update on capital programmes for major works in schools;
- To monitor the education and Children's Services building capital projects via the project register;
- To receive quarterly updates on the performance of the framework contracts.



Membership

The group consisted of the following elected members:

Councillor M. Bird, Working Group Lead Member, Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor K. Chambers, Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor C. Towe, Children's and Young people Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Work completed

The Work Group met on a number of occasions including during September and November 2008 and January and May 2009. To assist in meeting its objectives the activity of the Working Group included regular consideration of the Property Services' risk register, the Council's framework contract process as well as school capital programme building projects. This activity is detailed below:

Activity of the Working Group

During its regular meetings the Working Group received guidance from a senior Property Services officer.

Property Register

In support of its overall objectives the Working Group monitored progress, including seeking guidance where delays had occurred and associated costs, on a number school construction, development and improvement projects and associated issues with regular updates from the Property Register.

These included:

- Development work at Bentley Drive Primary School;
- Completion of construction of Mary Elliott School;
- Disposal of former Mary Elliot School site;
- Commencement of a fifty-two week construction project at Joseph Leckie Comprehensive School;
- Approval for work to begin at Barcroft Primary School with the new school due to open at the end of 2010;
- Elmwood (Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties) SEBD School;
- This activity also included site visits made by the Working Group in early 2009 to both Mary Elliot School and Joseph Leckie Comprehensive School.

Darlaston Academy

In addition to this Members monitored and sought guidance regarding the proposed Darlaston Academy. This included concerns regarding the use of part of George Rose Park in the new school development for sports pitches. Officers advised the Working Group that the pitches would be available to the public outside of school operating hours.

Framework Contracts

The Working Group has positively influenced the operation of the recently introduced framework contracts. For example, Members stressed the importance of ensuring all bidders were given a satisfactory reason for not being awarded a contract. Members also encouraged officers to ensure value for money was delivered in the use of disabled facilities grants. The procurement process led to the appointment of MITIE Property Services (UK) Ltd. The Working Group stressed the importance of the associated workshop held by MITIE for potential suppliers being well publicised to ensure all interested parties had the opportunity to attend. Members were also informed regarding specific instances, for example Barcroft Primary School, where the Framework Contract would not be used. Instead an Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) notice for a contractor would be placed due to the value of the contract.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and the Primary Capital Programme

The Working Group maintained a strong interest in the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) scheme from inception and other significant programmes. The group learned of the significant positive impact of the BSF and the Primary Capital Programme together with the development of a supporting procurement strategy. To assist in the success of the BSF scheme Members invited officers to alert them should capacity issues emerge during the process as the Property Services Team undertake their technical support role. The Working Group also sought and were provided with further guidance regarding the sale of a number of school playing fields within the borough, the future use of the sites and the likely use of proceeds.

Other issues

- Members monitored a review of Community Association (CA) buildings as well as more specific issues, including repairs to the Collingwood Centre. Progress reports on the construction of Children's Centres were also received by the Working Group.;
- Members asked officers to investigate which properties the Council was paying void rates on in the borough and the cost of those rates for each property.

Project Management System (PMS)

The Working Group also received a demonstration of the Project Management System (PMS) designed as a checklist for project managers to complete. Members expressed the view that where practicable documentation, including drawings and project plans, were stored electronically. Officers confirmed that it was a contractual requirement for architects to use Microsoft Project given its compatibility with PMS and Mantix. The costs of integrating PMS with Mantix was estimated at £50,000. However it was estimated that at least £50,000 of efficiency savings would be generated over the life of the system. Members were also guided that support is provided to a school by a designated officer from Serco for the duration of a project.

Key Achievements

The Working Group successfully met a number of its objectives:

- An independent quantity surveyor is now used to ensure that the bidding process is fair and equal for all bidders capital projects;
- Processes are in place to allow major work to be done during the school closure period;
- Continued improvement in the communication between the estates and asset management office and Members.

The Working Group undertook other activity including receipt of quarterly updates on the performance of the framework contract and the monitoring of education and Children's Services building and capital projects via the risk register. This assisted the Working Group in positively influencing the achievement of value for money in the procurement of building work for Children's Services.

Conclusion

The Working Group concluded two years of activity where it has been able to positively influence the activity of property services in relation to schools.

Recommendations

The Working Group recommends that its report be shared with Members of both the Children and Young People's and the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panels to support their activity in relation to Property Services.

Signed



Councillor Mike Bird, Leader of the Council

Working Group Lead Member, Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel, 2004 – 2009.