

Cabinet – 13 March 2013

Future arrangements for the provision of Education Support and related services

Portfolio: Councillor Rachel Andrew, Children's services

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on progress with the Education Transition programme, following the Cabinet decision in July 2011 to terminate the contract with Serco by August 2013 and the subsequent approval by Cabinet on 12 September 2012 of an early transfer, meaning all remaining services will transfer to the council on 01 April 2013.
- 1.2 To seek approval, as set out in recommendation 2.2, for the next stage of the transition programme to undertake the redesign and implementation of education services following the final transfer of staff from Serco to Walsall Council will take place on 01 April 2013.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet to delegate to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for children's services, powers to oversee the redesign and implementation of the necessary changes to education services, in order to meet the future challenges arising from Government changes and to ensure services are fully integrated within children's services and consistent with the requirements of the improvement notice.
- 2.2 Cabinet to approve the next stage of the transition programme which will ensure redesign and implementation as detailed in section 4 below.
- 2.3 Cabinet are asked to note that a new Ofsted inspection framework – 'A good education for all: inspection of local authority services', is to be introduced.

Report Details

3.0 Transition Programme

- 3.1 The transition programme was established in September 2011, following the termination of the education contract. Three work streams were created as part of that programme to cover business as usual, exit and new relationship with

schools. The new relationship with schools covered a number of activities including consultation with Headteachers, governing bodies and stakeholders.

Members made the decision to agree to develop option 3 – in addition to statutory requirements, the council would create a robust framework agreement with key partners to achieve educational excellence for Walsall children and support young people into employment.

This will require the council to provide additional capacity to school improvement beyond statutory requirements in order to address with schools the raising of pupil attainment in Walsall. The council will provide clear strategic direction working closely with education leaders for robust school improvement to include focused activities within the areas of leadership development, succession planning, governance and effective school to school collaboration. The principle of a 'learning consortium' to engage all educational providers in Walsall has emerged from the feedback following a series of engagement activities with Headteachers, Governors, local business representatives, college leaders, senior officers and Councillors.

The transition team have maximised the work of part-time Headteacher Advisers to support the development of the new relationship with schools focussing on developing trust and confidence between Walsall schools and the council, sharing and learning from effective practice, supporting special educational needs developments, particularly in relation to government changes requiring local implementation and ensuring a smooth transfer of services.

This illustrates Walsall Council's firm commitment to developing a constructive working relationship with all schools in order to improve the opportunities for all of the young people of Walsall, supporting the provision of the best education and training with appropriate and successful pathways to employment.

3.1.1 Development of trust and confidence between Walsall schools and Walsall Council

The council has operated at a distance from its schools working through a third party contractor to deliver educational services over the past 10 years.

The transition team have introduced a number of initiatives to develop stronger professional relationships with educational providers across Walsall to create new ways of working which embrace change and offer greater local responsibility for continuing to raise aspiration and attainment for the children and young people of Walsall. The team have also introduced a range of activities to allow the opportunity to enhance communication through a series of thinking suppers, Headteacher and Chairs of Governor Network, Portfolio Holder and Director of Children's Services visits to schools, etc. These new activities have allowed the opportunity for Headteachers and key partners to work with the council to shape future provision to support the needs of Walsall learners

Working with Headteachers and other key partners, a strategy for school improvement will be in place for the education service following final transfer on

01 April 2013, together with clear protocols and expected leadership behaviours. The school improvement strategy will be directly informed by the new inspection framework 'A good education for all: inspection of local authority services', to ensure that Walsall's education service is fit for purpose going forward.

A shared understanding of respective roles and responsibilities is needed in relation to support and challenge between educational providers and the council to improve outcomes for children and young people. The school improvement strategy will be used as the foundation to direct the work of the education service after transfer and will provide a basis for the induction and training for the new education team in the values, behaviours and ways of working that will be expected.

3.1.2 Sharing and learning from effective practice

To support the local authority's role as a facilitator, broker and 'champion of children', the transition team have created a range of new opportunities for sharing effective practice. These include the piloting of 'learning community' projects to address key local issues focussed on improving pupil outcomes, for example raising attainment in numeracy and improving attendance across a cluster of schools. The first Walsall Education Show was held in October 2012, to share expertise and develop schools as commissioners of services. School cluster networks have been created as a platform to discuss and resolve potential barriers to Walsall children's progress. A series of visits to and from local authorities with both officers and Headteachers have generated discussions over a wide range of issues and helped to develop a shared basis to ensure improved outcomes for children and young people in Walsall.

3.1.3 Special educational needs

As part of government changes the transition colleagues are supporting the development of Walsall's 'local offer'. This is a key part of the Government's Children and Families Bill 2013. All local authorities must publish a 'local offer' for education, health and social care, the partnership working between members of the transition team and CS Serco has ensured that Walsall is on track to meet this requirement. This essentially sets out what parents/carers can expect to be available for children with special needs and disabilities within mainstream provision and how to access additional support.

The transition team have worked with Headteachers to introduce early adopters, developing a multi agency 'team around the school' approach which will help to improve multi-agency collaboration when working with schools; focussing on a pro-active approach in identifying and meeting the needs of vulnerable children and their families. The team are currently working with a number of clusters of schools in an early adopters programme which will develop the model on the ground and in a way of working that provides positive impact to the most vulnerable children. This also addresses the emerging requirements in the Children and Families Bill (February 2013).

3.1.4 Ensuring a smooth transition of services

In addition the transition team have taken on the role of Business Readiness Coordinators (BRC's) working with the core Education Transition Project team to ensure everything is in place for transfer on 1st April 2013. The Business Readiness Co-ordinators were chosen as senior officers within the council or educationalists, who are specialists in their allocated team's activities. These BRC's have been engaging with Serco staff to affect a knowledge transfer in order to prepare the council to receive the services.

The Headteacher advisers have actively engaged with a wide variety of educational settings within Walsall. The purpose of this engagement has been to gain a clear understanding of the current organisation of schools/academies across Walsall, services used by schools and academies and how currently statutory duties are carried out. During this time, the advisers have clarified with Headteachers the 'direction of travel' the council have taken in their approach to transferring education services.

4.0 Redesign and Implementation Phase

4.1 It is recommended that a redesign of services is undertaken to ensure that the local authority is well placed to fulfil its roles and responsibilities;

- to act as 'Champion of Choice' in the context of an increasingly diverse range of schools, including Academy/free schools
- to support vulnerable children, including children with special educational needs and children in alternative provision
- to provide school transport arrangements which promote fair access and independence
- to implement a school improvement strategy
- to develop appropriate traded support services to assist schools in providing high standards of education trading to schools –
- to ensure every child has a place in a good or better school;
- to work with schools and governors to narrow the attainment gaps of children

4.2 It is recommended that this activity takes place after the final service transfer. It is proposed that any resulting changes to the services are brought back to Cabinet for final approval before implementation. Given the inevitable sensitivity around the transferring staff and potential for unfair dismissal claims it is proposed that a small "ring fenced" team from within the current transition team is used to undertake this piece of work; this will include the following key areas of activity:

- Review of all transferring sub-contracts (100 plus) including the procurement of the SEN transport contract (approx value of £2 million per annum)

- Redesign of all transferring services to ensure they are fit for future education provision.
- Refocus of school improvement function to ensure clear focus on narrowing the attainment gaps of children and ensuring every child has a place in a good or better school in Walsall.
- Review of special education needs support and provision to ensure robust, high quality support service for vulnerable learners

4.3 In addition it is proposed that this team undertakes a re procurement of the SEN home to school transfer service together with a review of over 100 transferring third party contracts to ensure these are purpose and in particular an improved commissioning and transport service is required.

5.0 Risk management

5.1 Risks will be mitigated by the risk and project management process and securing expert advice and capacity as required.

5.2 The council's corporate audit function has conducted an extensive audit of the transition programme's processes and budget monitoring arrangements and has given it a rating of overall significant assurance with the risk management element being given full assurance.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 Savings made from earlier phases of the transition, plus anticipated savings from the final transition will self fund the transition programme and where these savings are Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) these funds are being returned to schools.

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 Legal advice on new models of working and any matters relating to the current contract has been sought as appropriate and will continue throughout the termination period.

8.0 Property implications

8.1 As part of the Smarter Workplaces programme, the EDC buildings based at Pelsall Lane, Rushall and Field Road, Bloxwich are identified as buildings which will be reviewed for future use. This review may result in the current uses no longer operating from these locations and ultimately building closures. The date of any exit from these buildings is however yet to be agreed but will not be before 1st October 2013 to allow time to consult with staff on future locations of work that meet the needs of the service and customers.

9.0 Staffing implications

9.1 The transfer of services is designed to provide excellent services to schools so as to promote the attainment and success of our young people.

10.0 Equality implications

10.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed for the overall transition, further EQIA's will be completed for each service as applicable as and when transfer takes place that involves any change to staffing or provision.

11.0 Consultation

11.1 Throughout the transition process (from September 2011 to date) engagement has taken place with all key stakeholders. Thirteen briefing notes have been issued (approximately one a month) which are available to all involved, i.e. to Walsall Children Services (Serco) employees through the WELL intranet system, as well as being published on the council's website and circulated to all Headteachers via the Chairs of Forum.

11.2 Stakeholders are also kept up to date through a variety of meetings such as the stakeholder group, the Transition Board, as well as primary, including special schools and secondary school forums.

11.3 Engagement takes place with relevant union representative through range of consultation processes, including WRG (working relationship group) meetings and Schools JNC.

Author

Louise Hughes
Assistant Director, Children's Services
Extn. 2895



Signed:
Interim Executive Director
Date: 20 February 2013



Signed:
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rachel Andrew
Date: 4 March 2013