Herefordshire Council

MEETING:	SCHOOLS FORUM
DATE:	7TH DECEMBER 2009
TITLE OF REPORT:	PURCHASE EDUCATIONAL DIGITAL CONTENT FOR ALL SCHOOLS TO "PRIME" THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (VLE)
ICT ADVISOR	MARK SANDERSON

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide – All Schools

Purpose

To request one-off funding allocation of £354,932 for the purchase of digital content to "prime" the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and to secure best value through county wide purchase for all schools (2 year license)

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation

> **That School Forum Approves the funding request of £354,932 from DSG under-spend 08/09 to facilitate the purchase of online digital educational content as outlined below.**

Key Points Summary

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure pupils have access to learning outside the classroom through a VLE. The purchase of high quality online digital educational content available for all schools will:

a)   Incentivise schools to fulfil their obligations with regard to the provision of learning outside their classrooms.

b)   Make the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) irresistible for all pupils and teachers

c) Provide them with high quality resources - that have been chosen for their suitability for learning at home as well as at school- fully embedded and functional within their particular learning platform (LP).

d) Bring huge financial savings for schools compared with individual purchases (currently made by 98% of primary schools)

e) Enable a more effective whole LA approach to training and support with excellent integration into the learning platforms across the county.

f) Further background can be found in the accompanying document *A Possible way forward for a Virtual Learning Environment in Herefordshire Schools (November 2009)*.

Alternative Options

1. That we continue to leave the purchase of digital content to individual schools. This is not the preferred option as it is not cost effective and does not encourage schools to meet their obligations regarding extended learning

Reasons for Recommendations

2. We need to take positive steps to ensure that a VLE is a highly useful tool used by all schools to facilitate extended learning opportunities

3. The government has invested substantially in such technologies and there is an expectation that all schools will have such an environment in place. Providing high quality digital educational content, properly embedded in the VLE is a key way in which we can achieve this.

4. The majority of our schools already subscribe individually to much of the content outlined below. Switching to a bulk, county-wide purchase brings considerable savings for all schools (more than £260,000 see costings below).

5. A bulk LA purchase of this content also means that we can expect total compliance from the providers to ensure that their content works effectively within our preferred VLE.

Introduction and Background

6. **National Background** We are in the middle of a 3 year DCSF / Becta programme (supported by £639.5 million of standards grant funding) entitled *Harnessing Technology*. The DCSF has allocated over £3.6 million across three years (2008-11) to Herefordshire Schools to ensure key priorities are addressed in using and applying technology to help support personalisation, closing the attainment gap and the move towards universal access to technology.

7. Local authorities have the responsibility (and the funding) to ensure that a learning platform is made available to their schools. The Government's e-strategy sets the expectation that:

   - by spring 2008 every pupil should have access to a **personalised online learning space** with the potential to support an e-portfolio (provided by their local authority)

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Mark Sanderson – ICT Adviser. msanderson@herefordshire.gov.uk 01432 383040

2

- by 2010 every school should have **integrated learning and management systems** (a comprehensive suite of learning platform technologies).

8.   DCSF requirements of schools / LAs further states that this learning platform should include:

- **tools** - for monitoring and assessing, communication and collaboration, eg email, forums wikis, blogs, and for creating, developing and managing digital content

- **an individual area** for each learner (and member of staff) where they can store their work and personalise its layout to meet their needs

- **safe and secure**, anytime / anywhere access to learning resources.

9.   Virtual learning environments, such as the It's Learning solution are specifically specified by Becta and designed to provide this functionality.

10. **Local Background (Herefordshire)** There is a need to take positive steps at LA level to provide greater opportunities for every child to access learning outside the classroom. All schools are at different stages of this development with many smaller schools not having the resources to populate their VLE effectively. The content provided will enable all schools to give access to their pupils to first class learning resources.

Key Considerations

11. **Digital Content:** A learning platform, whilst it has many tools to help learning,, it does not include very much stimulating content. Some can be found for free eg from the BBC, but most of the really exciting and desirable content must be purchased separately. All publishers of quality content have been working hard to ensure it is ready to be embedded into the VLE. It is far more accessible and flexible that way.

12. Many authorities have used some of the 25% retained funding recommended by the DCSF to make bulk purchases on behalf of their schools.

> *Local authorities are able to retain up to 25 per cent (or more with the explicit agreement of their Schools Forum) of their allocation centrally to undertake collaborative purchasing on behalf of all schools where improved value for money can be achieved. ... With the agreement of schools in their area, local authorities can retain a further proportion of the funding where there is evidence that this will achieve efficiencies from collaborative approaches to procurement such as regionally or local authority wide deployed learning platforms where the majority of local authorities have secured improved value for money.*

> *(Becta guidance)*

13. The decision was taken 18 months ago in Herefordshire to devolve the entire grant to our schools. This has given schools greater autonomy but it has not resulted in best value for money. The county has very good infrastructure to all the schools, but it is not used to support learning as effectively as possible across the LA. At present, it is planned for the final year of the grant (2010/11) to be devolved as well. An effective use for some of the under-spend would be to purchase subscriptions to high quality digital content for all schools. This will both serve to "prime the pump" making the VLE irresistible to schools and enable us, as an

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Mark Sanderson – ICT Adviser. msanderson@herefordshire.gov.uk 01432 383040

3

authority, to secure substantial discounts on the prices that schools would be paying (and in many cases already are paying) for this content if they purchase individually. (See costings below: **a total LA spend of £336K brings a net saving of £264K**). Notes on proposed individual content follow:

14. **ESPRESSO:** All but 3 primaries already subscribe to this. It is excellent quality and includes a vast quantity of video based content, generally regarded as the best of its type. We have negotiated the best discount we can with Espresso over the last few years; a county purchase will give a better deal still. We have met with Espresso and they have agreed to refund all remaining individual school subscriptions if we take out a county wide implementation of the product. This will be a substantial selling point with primary schools for the VLE. Again, the content will be much more versatile once embedded in the VLE (children can only get home access that way).

15. **CLIP BANK:** This is Espresso's secondary solution. Very similar to the above it style but obviously with content appropriate for KS3 & 4. Currently only one high school subscribes. Others have held off over the years because of cost and we have tried (at their request) several times to find a way to a county wide implementation of this for. Considerable savings would be achieved through a LA purchase (see below). Almost all secondary teachers who see this resource want it, the cost has always been the prohibiting factor at management level. It will be possible to integrate this content into all the VLEs already in use in our secondary schools.

16. **EDUCATION CITY:** We are currently working with this company and schools have a free trial of the product which has now been extended to the end of the autumn term pending a decision from Schools' Forum. The idea behind the trial is to try to coordinate a bulk purchase and so achieve a discount for schools (in reality we will only manage 25% - a county wide purchase will bring 50%). This is a vast collection of 10 minute "games" covering English, Maths, Science and PMFL. It is aimed at primary, early secondary and secondary SEN. One of its great strengths will be as a homework resource: it is very engaging for children. There are considerable advantages to using this product embedded in a VLE, most especially that the product will then track individual progress and allocate reinforcement activities where appropriate (precisely what a VLE is about). Schools are already giving very favourable feedback to the trial and many have already placed orders (now on hold).

17. Again, we have held negotiations with Education City and we have an acceptable way forward for reimbursing schools that already subscribe. Our relationship with the company, and therefore the support we can expect from them will be considerably enhanced by a bulk purchase. The terms of the contract we propose with Education City include free full integration into the VLE - this work would normally cost £5000 (no payment for the content until this is achieved), free training for schools, and several other benefits.

18. **E GADGETS (Lancashire Digital):** Teaching content in the form of readymade interactive whiteboard files that run in ActiInspire (the whiteboard software in all our primary schools). We demonstrated these at the last ICT coordinators' conference.

19. **MY MATHS (mymaths.co.uk):** a well respected and established platform that extends any VLE by giving access to structures quizzes, games and activities to improve the numeracy of all pupils and students. This is highly regarded by secondary schools at the moment and many primary schools are beginning to use this resource to boost the attainment of all KS2 pupils. Again, this is a resource that engages children and will therefore be of benefit for out of school learning.

20. **The Future:** The proposals for content above are for 2 year licenses. It is not possible at this

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Mark Sanderson – ICT Adviser. msanderson@herefordshire.gov.uk 01432 383040

4

stage to know what funding will be available to schools for ICT beyond the life of the current funding stream, (the *Harnessing Technology Grant).* There has been a constant succession of standards funding for ICT to schools since 1997 and such funding streams have always included an element of retained funding by LAs or the ability to "top-slice". Given the uncertain future of public funding streams it is particularly difficult to predict what might happen. If the possibility does not exist in the future for LA purchases then the next best thing will be for us to revert to purchasing on schools' behalf. Hopefully the "pump priming" will ensure that schools wish to continue using the resources in question. They all have a very good returners rate with schools.

Community Impact

21. A VLE is about "any time any where learning" it means that students can access work started in school, out of school and that teachers can produce content (electronic) to extend children's learning more effectively to anywhere outside school. It is also about parental engagement with children's learning and improving communication between school and home. All of this will only happen if schools and teachers engage properly with this new and exciting technology.

Financial Implications

22. The table below is based on costings provided by the content providers and includes a comparison between schools purchasing individually and a bulk LA purchase.

23. Special schools have been deemed primary, this is not actually the case for all of the content below, this will not have a significant impact on the costings.

24. Many schools already subscribe to some of the content below and a refund will be due to them for the remaining time on their contracts. This will be dealt with on an individual basis by the content providers.

25. All licences are for 2 years to overcome potential revenue / capital issues.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Mark Sanderson – ICT Adviser. msanderson@herefordshire.gov.uk 01432 383040

5

		Primary + Special (85)		Secondary (14)
NOR	£	12,373	£	9,208
Education City (2 year)				
LA purchase *	£	100,251	£	13,034
School purchase *	£	200,502	£	26,068
Difference	£	100,251	£	13,034
Espresso (2 years)				
LA purchase *	£	132,984		
School purchase *	£	163,755		
Difference	£	30,771		
Clip Bank (2 years)				
LA purchase *			£	84,000
School purchase *			£	128,100
Difference			£	44,100
E-gadgets				
LA purchase *	£	3,000		
School purchase *	£	78,540		
Difference	£	75,540		
MyMaths (2 years)				
LA purchase *	£	16,632	£	5,031
School purchase *	£	18,480	£	5,590
Difference	£	1,848	£ 559	
Total LA spend (prim / sec)	£	252,867	£	102,065
Total LA spend (all phases)	**£**	**354,932**		
Total school spend	£	621,035		
Total Saving	£	266,103		

* **LA purchase** = central purchase for all school, **School purchase** = the same purchase by schools individually

26. Training and support for the above for primary schools will form a part of the general offering to them under the *Hands on Support* SLA. We are already working with Espresso to bring the annual training that schools currently receive for this product from free lance trainers "in house".

27. Secondary school training and support for Clip Bank will be provided by Espresso. Three two

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Mark Sanderson – ICT Adviser. msanderson@herefordshire.gov.uk 01432 383040

6

hour training sessions per school (in school) for the two years of the contract are included in the price above.

Legal Implications

28.   None known.

Risk Management

29.   There are no known risks at this stage

Consultees

30.   Meetings have been held with Espresso, Education City and It's Learning. Proposals and costings in this document are based on the outcomes of those discussions.

31.   A number Head teachers and ICT coordinators have been consulted directly.

32.   The attached document *A Possible way forward for a Virtual Learning Environment in Herefordshire Schools* has been circulated to all schools and to members of Schools' Forum.

Appendices

A Possible way forward for a Virtual Learning Environment in Herefordshire Schools – November 2009.

Background Papers

None

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Mark Sanderson – ICT Adviser. msanderson@herefordshire.gov.uk 01432 383040

7