

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>SCHOOLS FORUM</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>7 DECEMBER 2009</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS - UPDATE</b>
<b>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR PLANNING, PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>CHRISTOPHER BAIRD</b>

## Wards Affected

County-wide

## Purpose

To update Schools Forum on the progress in developing Herefordshire's use of service level agreements and buy-back between schools and Council services.

## Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

## Recommendation(s)

**THAT Schools Forum notes the progress thus far and comments on the proposed developments over this financial year**

## Key Points Summary

- In 2008/09 officers worked with a group of head teachers to update the information contained in Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between schools and a range of Herefordshire Council corporate and Children and Young People Directorate Services. A revised SLA booklet was issued to all schools in 2009 to enable schools to be clear about what services were being provided, the standards to which the services should operate to, and the contacts for schools to use. The SLA booklet also set out school responsibilities from a service perspective.
- Schools Forum were consulted and made recommendations about the work, the proposed timetable and next steps. These next steps included taking into account any feedback from schools regarding the first year of the new SLA booklet being in place and also the introduction of a revised charging process to cover 2010/11 financial year.
- This report updates Schools Forum on the work of officers and the proposed process in

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
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readiness for the 2010/11 financial year.

## **Alternative Options**

- 1 The requirements of the DCSF for Councils to delegate money to schools include the ability of schools to buy back a number of services that are often provided by Councils. Schools can choose to buy some services from other organisations. This alternative is currently in place and it is a matter for individual schools to decide on the most appropriate use of their delegated funding, whilst also ensuring that they fulfil all statutory requirements.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2 Progress has been made over the last year to make the SLA process more useful to schools and to the services that operate them. There is still work to be done, in sharpening the process, including more services within the SLA booklet; developing the charging mechanism and promoting the SLA process within schools so that it operates effectively and in a timely way. The proposals in this document continue the development of the SLA system in Herefordshire.

## **Introduction and Background**

- 3 SLAs had not been updated in Herefordshire for many services since 2000, neither had the charging mechanism. Work in 2008/09 renewed SLAs for services that are required to be delegated to schools. A new booklet was issued to all schools that included up to date information in a completely new format. A group of head teachers provided a “touchstone group” to advise whether the new information and format would meet school requirements.
- 4 Feedback received has stated that the work thus far is an improvement and gives schools and services a clear picture of what is required, what is provided and to what standards and timescales. This could be refined and individual services are committed to responding to schools feedback on their individual service areas.
- 5 The following services were covered in the SLA booklet 2009/10:
  - Facilities Management
  - Human Resources
  - Legal Services
  - LMS Budget Support
  - Occupational Health
  - Payroll
  - Property Maintenance and Improvements
  - Risk Management and Insurance Services
  - Schools Library Service
  - Staffing and Appointments
- 6 A number of services including ICT and the Music Service issued their own SLAs alongside this booklet. It is the intention that as many services as possible can be included in the one booklet and also one process to make this aspect of business easier for schools to consider, administer and respond to. Work is taking place in a number of services to develop a delegation and charging mechanism, including the offer of support for a Virtual Learning Environment and ICT curriculum support. Proposals for the delegation of learning and behaviour support are being prepared for consultation with schools in spring 2010.

- 7 The development of the SLA system in Herefordshire proposed that a charging mechanism would be put in place for the 2010/11 financial year. Officers responsible for different corporate services have been working to assess whether the current charging model provides a reflection of true costs. It is clear from the work that some services are recouping costs that reflect the amount required to provide the service to schools. Other services, such as Human Resources and Payroll believe that the money received from schools does not cover the costs of providing the service. However it is proposed that the current formula for establishing charges to schools be continued for 2010/11. For most services this uses a fixed element and then a per pupil charge. Services such as ICT will continue with their existing charging mechanism.
- 8 In addition the Council, Primary Care Trust, and Herefordshire Hospital Trust are currently exploring a "Shared Services" initiative. This is looking to bring together a range of "back office" functions such as HR, payroll, property services together across the organisations. The aim is to provide an efficient and effective service that also makes the most of the resources available. The target to reduce costs is at the moment between £3.4 to £5m across the three organisations. This could have implications for services to schools and the costs when the new service arrangements come into effect. It therefore seems prudent to continue with the charging formulae in operation and review this for services and schools once the Shared Services programme implications are clearer.
- 9 The intention is therefore to issue schools with a revised SLA booklet in early spring 2010 with a form for schools to send back to Herefordshire finance indicating which services schools wish to buy back for 2010/11. This will need to be signed by both the head teacher and chair of governors. It will also be important that returns are completed and sent back promptly so that services can organise their business accordingly for the new financial year.

## **Key Considerations**

- 11 The above paragraphs establish the key considerations. The head teacher touchstone group did discuss the varying understanding and use of SLAs amongst schools. Schools Forum may wish to advise how schools in general can be made aware of the developments that are taking place.

## **Community Impact**

- 12 The SLA system affects the whole school community. A separate booklet will be produced for the two Academies since all services received by Academies must be charged. For all other state schools in Herefordshire some services are received at no direct charge.

## **Financial Implications**

- 13 Current services subject to SLAs cover approximately £2 million worth of business. The developments of the SLA system in Herefordshire will increase schools awareness of the system and also enable schools to make positive choices about what they purchase.

## **Legal Implications**

- 14 Delegation, buy back, service provision and the actions of schools should conform to statute and guidance.

## **Risk Management**

- 15 The timetable for the revised SLA system places the burden of risk on the services since for 2010/11 schools will be informing of the services they wish to purchase at the end of spring 2010 right before the beginning of the financial year. This timetable will be revised in future years, coinciding with a development of the system and understanding of it that should enable schools to make informed decisions more confidently earlier in the preceding year.

## **Consultees**

- 16 A head teacher touchstone group has provided advice at different points in the development of SLAs. Schools Forum has also previously been consulted.

## **Appendices**

- 17 None

## **Background Papers**

- None