

MEETING:	SCHOOLS FORUM
DATE:	10 JUNE 2011
TITLE OF REPORT:	UPDATE ON SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS
REPORT BY:	Assistant Director: Planning, Performance & Development

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To provide an update to Schools Forum on service level agreements

Recommendation

THAT:

Schools Forum comment on any aspects of the developments that were put in place for 2011/12, including comments that can lead to improvements for 2012/13.

Key Points Summary

- Herefordshire has developed its approach to service level agreements (SLAs) over the past two years. The pace of development was accelerated for 2011/12. Services from the Council include services provided by the new Shared Services Partnership, as well as services contained within the People Services Directorate, Children Services. Schools were presented with a wider range of services that they could choose to purchase, and revised costs.
- The developments in national government policy, including the Academies Act 2010 have built upon the existing freedoms of schools to directly manage and purchase services that cover statutory responsibilities and enhance teaching and learning. The developing approach to SLAs in Herefordshire has placed the relationship with schools and the purchase of services in this context. Services are looking to increase quality, flexibility and reduce costs. These aims will be aided by schools entering into formal collaborative arrangements that enable costs to be reduced.
- The provision of services will change in response to the buying back by schools and other purchasers. There will also be the development of new services to meet changing demand and national and local priorities.
- The processes surrounding SLAs will be built upon and improved for 2012/13.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Chris Baird, Assistant Director, People Services (01432) 260 264

Alternative Options

- 1 None applicable.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 This meeting of schools forum in June provides a timely opportunity to influence the arrangements for 2012/13 and also review the position for 2011/12.

Introduction and Background

- 3 The development of SLAs in Herefordshire has gathered pace and been put on a much more professional footing. This was done to enable schools to have a greater understanding of the services which are available and to recognise the move to all schools acting as commissioners of services. The local authority has worked with schools to develop the approach in Herefordshire, and responded to school views throughout the process for 2011/12. This work is set to continue for 2012/13.

Key Considerations

- 4 Revised arrangements were put in place for 2011/12 and were broadly welcomed. These included:
 - Revised materials for schools to review service specifications, content and costs
 - A market place event to enable schools to ask questions of services, all in one place.
 - Visits to individual schools to discuss the range of services
 - Individual service responses to school and groups of schools queries
- 5 Schools were provided with information and a return form. The results of the buy back in terms of number of schools are indicated in Appendix A. This was the information received as at 19 May 2011 and at the time of writing 12 responses were still to be received. There is a variation in the buy back of services, and some services have been established to offer spot purchase arrangements rather than a commitment for a whole year.
- 6 Some schools wanted to explore joint purchase arrangements across a number of schools, discounts, and specified services. The local authority is at an early stage in developing this approach on a systematic basis. Local school formal collaborative arrangements can enable costs to be lowered by the local authority. For example, dealing with one point of delivery of a service for a number of schools would enable costs to be reduced, but dealing with the same number of contacts, meetings and delivery sessions for the individual schools across one group does not enable savings to be achieved. It is intended that the approach is developed for 2012/13 to enable savings to be achieved for groups of schools and schools can support this development by clearly identifying how work can be streamlined across groups of schools, though becoming better at specifying their requirements.
- 7 There are improvements that need to be made to the process. Schools were presented with information at a late stage in the process and this should be avoided in future. In part this was due to the changing picture at a national level in terms of funding and the responsibilities of local authorities. However, it also reflected the information received regarding insurance claims for 2010/11 and the subsequent need to revise costs and information for schools. In addition, late changes reflected the position of some services in terms of revising costs and

arrangements. This included the library service, once clarification was given on the position of funding and delegation. It would have been more helpful to the Council and to schools to have the information earlier and for this information not to change.

- 8 Some schools have suggested that the local authority should act as a broker for services, using the size of the local authority and its ability to represent a number of partners including schools to achieve value for money. This was discussed at the Schools Strategic Planning Group as part of an approach to the development of educational provision in Herefordshire using the Rising to the Challenge approach. This kind of approach could be used in relation to insurance, for example, and is something that will be investigated in the coming weeks for 2012/13 SLAs.

Community Impact

- 9 The services that schools purchase enable them to fulfil their statutory duties and enhance the teaching and learning experiences within their schools, benefiting local communities.

Financial Implications

- 10 Under the scheme of delegation schools have the ability to purchase a range of services, not all of them statutory. It is up to schools how they use their resources, within the requirements for balanced budgets and fulfilling legal and statutory responsibilities. The local authority has an underlying aim to provide highly valued, locally delivered, cost effective services that are competitive on the open market.
- 11 If sufficient schools do not buy back services, then the local authority would not be able to supply these services. Work is taking place to review the position of some services and arrangements will be put in place to ensure costs are covered whilst at the same time services are delivered to the schools that have bought them back, and the statutory functions of the local authority are fulfilled.

Legal Implications

- 12 Schools and the local authority must as a minimum ensure that statutory responsibilities are met. For schools this can be achieved either by purchasing services from the local authority or from other providers.

Risk Management

- 13 Services offered through service level agreements offer direct cover for risk also indirectly, for example legal services. In a number of areas schools must have appropriate services in place, whether they be provided by the local authority or not. Governors should assure themselves that they are appropriately covered in terms of risk.
- 14 The local authority is working to offer high quality and valued services to schools, so that services are viable to run across the range of schools requiring them. Judgements will have to be made whether some services continue, are reshaped, or prices alter for the future and the local authority wishes to involve schools in the shaping of this, ideally by having a working group of representative heads to develop services.

Consultees

- 15 Some schools have provided feedback on the work regarding SLAs for 2011/12 and these have been broadly reflected in this report.

Appendices

16 Appendix A indicates the level of buy back by type of school, by service as at 19 May 2011.

Background Papers

N/A