

**Report of the rapid scrutiny exercise:
Traded Services for Schools**

Purpose of report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the rapid scrutiny exercise and seek endorsement for them.

Background

2. During 13 June 2017 meeting of the Children's Select Committee, Cllr Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills asked if the Committee would consider looking into Traded Services for Schools.
3. The Council trades a number of services with schools, and the aim is to bring these services under a collective traded services umbrella, develop income streams and maintain a strong relationship with Wiltshire schools. Given the significant changes in education, the operating environment and the potential impact on Council services, it is considered that it would be beneficial for the Select Committee to be a part of the design of this new service.
4. The membership of the RS comprised Cllrs Anna Cuthbert, Trevor Carbin and Jon Hubbard, as well as Mr John Hawkins, a co-opted member of the Children's Select Committee. The RS met on 13 September 2017.
5. The RS received evidence from: Cllr Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills, Cllr Philip Whalley, Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills, Nick Cave, Interim Traded Services Manager and Grant Davis, Strategic Financial Support Manager. Unfortunately due to a last-minute conflict, Julia Cramp, Associate Director Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness, was unable to attend the meeting.
6. The RS considered the following documents:
 - A report on the draft scope for review of Outdoor Education;
 - A confidential PowerPoint presentation on the review of Outdoor Education;
 - A short report originally written for the Corporate Leadership Team in January 2017 on the Traded Services Review and recommended next steps;
 - A PowerPoint presentation on the Traded Services Update.

Summary of Discussions

Review of Outdoor Education

7. It was agreed by the Group that the Rapid Scrutiny exercise would be split into two halves. The first 30 minutes of the meeting would focus on the review of Outdoor Education and the final 30 minutes of the meeting would focus on the Traded Services for Schools.
8. The outdoor education sites under review required considerable capital investment, in order to continue providing their current level of service, and the recruitment of staff was difficult, due to the seasonal nature of the job. The sites under review were currently operating with a small revenue deficit.
9. All of Wiltshire's schools have the option to utilise the two outdoor education sites within Wiltshire. The vast majority of usage is from Primary Schools with the highest amount of income derived from 3-day, 2-night residential programmes. There is limited use of the centres during the summer holidays and Christmas period, with the peak period being around the warmer months.
10. The review found that despite the best efforts of staff to market the facilities, the sites under review tended to generate the same amount of income year on year. It is also worth noting that over this period there had been an increase in prices and a corresponding decrease in take-up. This was attributed to the fact that funding for outdoor education has diminished over the years – for example, grants that were previously available are no longer accessible for schools and parents are now required to pay for school trips.
11. As outdoor education is not a statutory function of the Council, schools are free to choose any provider of outdoor education either in county or out of county.
12. There is substantial provision of outdoor education facilities in the surrounding area provided by both Local Authorities and private sector operators. It is not yet clear whether other authorities would also be reviewing their outdoor education. Therefore, the Council is unable to rely on the continuing provision of facilities that are not managed by Wiltshire Council; further research would need to be undertaken of other neighbouring authorities approach to Outdoor Education.
13. Options for examining and further modelling of the pricing structures and take up for the sites under review were discussed, and the Executive signalled that they would return to the RS with the relevant figures.
14. Officers have explored alternative delivery models and providers for the sites. Due to the size of the sites the private sector do not have an interest. Community Interest Companies (CIC) do not make the sites more commercially viable, as the Local Authority would still be tasked with the capital costs associated with the site. There has also been engagement with the voluntary sector, Community First have expressed an initial interest in the Oxenwood site only.

15. Anecdotal and usage evidence suggests that Wiltshire Secondary schools prefer outdoor education centres outside of Wiltshire and they do not use the Oxenwood and Braeside sites.
16. The RS group were supportive of the work that had been undertaken as part of the review of Outdoor Education but felt that they needed the opportunity to consider the further information discussed, in order to come to an informed conclusion.

Traded Services for Schools:

17. The Education Support Grant (ESG) is being removed and over a number of years the Education System has undergone a series of changes, challenging the nature of the Council's on-going relationship with local schools. A key element of this relationship is the traded services that have been provided by Wiltshire Council.
18. Given the financial challenges that the Council faces and following the recommendations from the Schools and Local Authority Task Group, the Council is developing a more commercial and coordinated model for trading with schools. In order to develop income streams and services that are more relevant to Retained and Academy schools, a more consistent approach to marketing needs to be adopted, to ensure that those services are provided to meet the on-going needs of schools. Current traded services for schools include those such as: Human Resources, Payroll, Governor Services, Accounting and Budget Support, Health and Safety, Property Services and School Improvement Services and are sold through a range of brands. The figures provided to the RS were inaccurate and would be updated.
19. Wiltshire Council is currently working on creating a team designated to 'Traded Services for Schools' and there is momentum behind marketing traded services for schools. Areas such as customer relationship and management (i.e. the organisations that schools are currently trading with and their needs and interests) were being considered, as part of informing a marketing strategy. The Council is working on consolidating a digital platform for traded services; which would help to develop transparency and the more timely fulfilment of services. This approach could also make effective efficiencies and provide a more joined up service to schools.
20. The Agendas and Minutes from the 'Schools and Local Authority Task Group' would be useful background information for the RS. The final report of this Task Group was received by the Children's Select Committee on 27 January 2015.
21. It was agreed that the RS group needed to have full and unfettered access to the full-length review report of Traded Services for Schools, in order to appropriately and effectively carry out scrutiny of the topic. If necessary, certain segments would be redacted in the interests of confidentiality; as it is vital that the RS group have the opportunity to view and understand any potential amendments to the service area during their scrutiny exercise.

22. As the Council would be potentially commencing trading additional services with schools following the removal of the ESG from April 2018, it was felt that scrutiny input into the new model of operation could add value. The RS group therefore felt that, as the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) would be meeting sooner than the Children's Select Committee (CSC), this report and its recommendations should be first circulated to OSMC and then to CSC, as opposed to being considered first by CSC and then OSMC.
23. The RS group were supportive and understanding of the work that the Council was inevitably having to do around traded services for schools, yet in order to truly add value to the decision-making process, they would need further information and accurate data.

Conclusions

24. The review of outdoor education would, inevitably, have an impact both on Wiltshire schools and their associates, as well as on the staff attached to the sites under review. A greater level of detail was needed to be able to sufficiently conclude the size of this impact.
25. , The result of the removal of the ESG and the potential for the Council now needing to trade additional services with schools required a large piece of work to be undertaken and this new arrangement would follow a transitional process. As this project is so vast, a Rapid Scrutiny exercise was unable to perform effective scrutiny and this would be more suited to a Task and Finish Group.

Recommendations

The Rapid Scrutiny Group recommends that:

- 1) The Group reconvenes to continue the Rapid Scrutiny into the Review of Outdoor Education before Cabinet on 10 October 2017 (where the item would be considered).
- 2) The Children's Select Committee should establish a Task and Finish Group to consider Traded Services for Schools and this should run parallel to this Service's transition period.
 - The Task Group should consider the following:
 - The cost of services that are currently traded;
 - Full and unfettered access to the full-length review of Traded Services, which commenced at the beginning of October 2016 and was then extended from March 2017;
 - The services that are currently provided and the model for the delivery of services moving forward;
 - The explanation of the model on the centralised trading unit;
 - How services will progress in terms of marketing;
 - How traded services will be future-proofed;
 - The agendas, minutes and final report of the 'Schools and Local Authority Task Group' overseen by the Children's Select Committee in 2015;
 - A review of the current policy and position taken.

Cllr Anna Cuthbert (Chairman, Rapid Scrutiny – Traded Services for Schools)

Report Author: Natalie Heritage, Senior Scrutiny Officer
01225 718062 natalie.heritage@wiltshire.gov.uk