

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

7 September 2021

Subject: Traded Services Team Structure and Governance Arrangements

Director: Helean Hughes, Director, Education and Skills

Executive Summary

To propose a reporting timetable to be presented to the Children's Select Committee which will provide a Schools Traded Services report on an annual basis in November, covering the trading period, operational team structure and satisfy the governance for the service following the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) recommendations.

Proposal(s)

The South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) recommended that the Council review the position of Traded Services with Schools and the roles and responsibilities of the service itself to ensure clear accountability & governance at all levels to include oversight, scrutiny and decision making.

To provide Children's Select with a proposal to submit future traded reports to the committee reviewing all traded services, purchases and income with early years settings and school sites on an annual report in November, and half-yearly interim report in May.

To gain Children's Select Committee support for future report submission with the appropriate oversight and scrutiny.

Reason for Proposal(s)

To ensure that our Traded Services offer is delivering the solutions to give our children the best possible chance to achieve the highest possible attainment through excellent services delivered in a timely and relevant manner to all education settings.

To safeguard there is clear accountability and transparency for all our Traded Services, supported with a framework of governance including oversight, scrutiny and decision making going forward.

Helean Hughes
Director, Education and Skills

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. To propose a reporting timetable to be presented to the Children's Select Committee which will provide a Schools Traded Services report on an annual basis in November, covering the trading period, operational team structure and satisfy the governance for the service following the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) recommendations.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. Strong Communities
By providing a wide variety of fee-based services to improve children's attainment in early years settings and school sites, educators can give their children the best opportunity to improve their outcomes and contribute positively to the wider community.
3. Growing the Economy
Wiltshire Council has vast experience in delivering specialised services to educational sites and a wealth of expertise that can be offered competitively priced across Wiltshire. Our offer ensures that there are opportunities for all early years settings and school sites to utilise these excellent services whilst re-investing back into education services.
4. Protecting those who are most vulnerable
Many traded services are created and designed around children and young people that need greater support to enjoy education. Delivering traded services provides valuable income to secure resources and support opportunities to deliver services to those most in need and provide educational settings with valuable expertise and guidance in areas facing hardship.
5. An innovative and effective council
Traded services continue to find innovative ways to design and deliver training opportunities keeping ahead of delivery across the sector. With a blended offer of face to face and virtual delivery developed during the COVID period, presenters and training hosts are constantly finding new ways to deliver our offers.

Background

6. The South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) recommended that the Council review the position of Traded Services with Schools and the roles and responsibilities of the service itself to ensure clear accountability & governance at all levels to include oversight, scrutiny and decision making.
7. The appointment of the Head of Traded Services in February 2019 has enabled a small team structure to be created that will support the Traded Services priorities. These are:
 - i) For our customers, to deliver competitively priced services that our early years and school sites want and purchase from us.
 - ii) For each of our Traded Services, to pro-actively promote and communicate the value and offer of each service direct to the customer, whilst providing platforms and opportunities to engage with new customers and every educational site in Wiltshire.
 - iii) For Wiltshire Council, to ensure there is a year-on-year increase in traded services income by cultivating a business-like culture within each of the traded services teams.
8. The events with COVID-19 have delayed the development of the proposal due to the demands on education sites and Department for Education initiatives launched across the country in response, that have been actively managed and delivered by the Traded Services Team.
9. Traded Services have continued to support and respond to enquiries from early years and school sites throughout the COVID period and delivery has continued throughout by way of innovative virtual offers.

Considerations for the Committee

10. The committee have already played a very active role in shaping the transfer of ownership for our outdoor education venues during 2019 to third party providers.
11. The committee have demonstrated a keen understanding of balancing the professional and expertise education sites need, with the necessity and pressure for sites to balance their finances, whilst purchasing competitively priced services.
12. The collaborative work already undertaken with the Children's Select Committee regarding the outdoor education centres in 2019 and 2020, has illustrated the understanding and sensitivity of the committee when making decisions and offering advice, by balancing the impact on the children, families, and education sites.
13. The committee's guidance and oversight proved invaluable in delivering the successful outcomes for outdoor education provision in Wiltshire to third party providers during 2019/20.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

14. If the proposal is accepted for an annual report delivered in November, followed up by an interim report in May, it would be anticipated that there would full overview and scrutiny of these reports. This would enable more thorough examination and discussions about the overall traded delivery and its individual elements.

Safeguarding Implications

15. No implications identified at this time.

Public Health Implications

16. No implications identified at this stage.

Procurement Implications

17. No implications identified at this stage.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

18. No equalities impact identified.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

19. No further environmental and climate change considerations identified.

Financial Implications

20. Due to the statutory duties Wiltshire Council delivers to support education in Wiltshire, work is progressing to identify a financial strategy to evidence cost recovery for the traded services element of these valuable resources.
21. There is a balance that needs to be maintained that enables Wiltshire Council to support schools that are financially vulnerable or located in areas of financial hardship, to ensure they can draw on resources to improve the attainment of their children and teacher development. Failure to do this because of price, could have more costly long-term implications for both the school and the Local Authority.
22. Wiltshire Council's education response throughout the COVID pandemic has strived to make resources and services available to all schools across the County, to make sure that disadvantaged and vulnerable schools are not left behind and that the attainment gap does not increase.
23. The impact of COVID will be felt financially for the next twelve months due to contract renewals at different times in the calendar year for Local Authority maintained schools and Academy/Multi-Academy Trusts. These are constantly reviewed, and updates will be reported in the annual Traded Services report in November.

Legal Implications

24. No impact identified at this time.

Workforce Implications

25. No impact identified at this time.

Options Considered

26. A monthly reporting model drawn from SAP which would need constant data manipulation between two different platforms to analyse data and purchasing trends from schools. This would involve manual intervention across every traded service income line to validate purchases and create an unnecessary cottage industry of data processing. A quarterly report could then be produced for submission to the committee. The compilation time will take 3 to 4 weeks each time to ensure the data is robust and meaningful which will have an impact on the resource delivering support to schools and services daily.

27. A termly report that analyses purchasing trends and activities across all education sites and traded service offers by drawing the data from our primary data source on the Right Choice platform. This would provide insight into purchasing and income generation, whilst tracking trends from previous years. With the use of data dashboards for traded service areas and reliable data direct from the purchasing portal education sites use, Right Choice, the data can be extracted with minimal officer intervention and can be shaped to provide information that the committee may ask for as part of the oversight and scrutiny process.

28. A combination of:

- i) the termly report, outlined in point 27, delivered regularly to the Performance and Outcomes Board for Children's Services, for challenge, direction, and further analysis.
- ii) a half yearly traded services report in May presented to the Children's Select Committee, following the purchasing window closing for Local Authority schools.
- iii) A full year traded services report in November presented to the Children's Select Committee focussing on school purchasing and reports from each traded service on their trading period.

Conclusions

29. To recommend that the committee agree to provide overview and scrutiny by supporting the reporting option set out in point 28, with the first annual report due for submission at the Children's Select Committee in November.

30. This will provide a clear structure for reporting and transparency for our Schools Traded Services in Wiltshire.

Helean Hughes (Director - Education and Skills)

Report Author: Paul Redford, Head of Traded Services, Education and Skills
Paul.Redford@wiltshire.gov.uk,

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None