

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Early Years, Children & Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	19 March 2012
TITLE:	School Partnerships
WARD:	ALL
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 - Summary of messages from schools survey (December 2011)	

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 To provide an update on the dialogue between the Department and local schools, regarding future collaborative arrangements and the delivery of services.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to:

2.1 Note the report and receive a further update in due course.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no direct financial implications from the work at this stage. The capacity to support the dialogue has been funded through the Council's Change Programme.

3.2 The external drivers that have led to this dialogue stem from national policy and legislative changes which promote schools becoming academies. There will be financial implications from that policy and the resultant changes that we will eventually need to make to our services. These will be reported in future when the work has progressed to the point where they can be more explicitly identified.

4 THE REPORT

4.1 The Department has been working with schools and staff to consider our future roles, ways of working together and the potential impact on the delivery of services to schools arising from recent policy and legislative change, including the development of academies.

4.2 Following a series of conferences, workshops and discussions, we asked all schools to complete a survey during December 2011, letting us know:-

- their current thinking about academy conversion
- which potential models of service delivery they would support (with a long list of 10 potential options described) for the 'core' educational services we currently provide
- what support the authority can best offer to enable schools to adapt in the changing context

4.3 Schools and governors engaged fully with this request and we had an excellent response rate (47 primaries, 3 secondaries and 1 special school). A summary of schools' responses is attached at Appendix 1.

4.4 Having looked at schools' views alongside a brief assessment of other factors that might impact on the options for future service delivery models, such as strategic fit for the Local Authority, deliverability (how straightforward would it be to achieve), value for money, viability and sustainability, we developed the following outline proposal:-

- a) The Local Authority to commit to continuing to provide the broad range of current services for a minimum of two years; In doing this
 - the authority would seek to ensure the services it provides are providing the quality, value and flexibility that schools require, so that the services are in a position to remain viable and sustainable in the longer term;
 - the proposed minimum period of two years should not be interpreted as a maximum period. We do however recognise that this may not be a permanent solution. We will begin, in collaboration with schools, an ongoing programme of individual service reviews to assess market position, cost effectiveness and potential longer term delivery models, including the potential for some services to be shared with another LA, or commissioned from alternative providers;
 - we will produce proposals for ongoing 'insurance' scheme arrangements (eg for services where the requirements for a small school may fluctuate significantly from year to year);
 - we will provide further information about services and their costs to enable schools to be 'informed consumers'. Similarly, in our new role we will offer more information to parents to help them to be more informed consumers;
 - we will seek some reciprocal commitment from schools, eg in the form of a memorandum of understanding.
- b) The Authority will offer schools further information about what is involved in establishing social enterprises;

- c) The Authority will work with schools to develop proposals for collaborative commissioning and will offer opportunities for skills development in commissioning;
- d) The Authority will continue working closely with Teaching Schools to ensure that there is clarity of what is on offer from each agency.
- e) The Authority will continue to seek dialogue with all schools, academies, our own staff, and other stakeholders to inform the way in which services are delivered.

4.5 We shared with staff and schools (via the head teachers' conference and a governors' workshop) both the results of the survey and the proposed way forward, to ensure we had interpreted the messages correctly. There has been positive support for the outline proposals and for the Authority's constructive approach to working with schools to address these issues.

4.6 We are now developing detailed plans for implementation of the outline proposal.

4.7 In parallel with this work we are considering the future role of the Authority in the sphere of Education, other than as a direct provider of services. This includes strategic oversight of the system across Bath and North East Somerset and securing the delivery of its substantial range of ongoing statutory responsibilities. This work will feed into the overall design of the People and Communities Department.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

6 EQUALITIES

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed at this stage as it is too early to assess the impact. This will need to be undertaken as we start to firm up how the department's proposed approach will be implemented.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 *Cabinet Member; Trades Unions; Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Schools heads and governors; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer*

7.2 School governors and heads have been consulted through two recent head teachers conferences, dedicated briefings for governors and a school survey.

7.3 Staff have been briefed on the developments and service managers (including some from wider Council services) contributed to the options appraisal.

7.4 Unions have been engaged through routine and specific meetings with the Joint Consultative Forum.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Young People; Impact on Staff; Other Legal Considerations*

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	

Appendix 1 - Summary of messages from schools survey (December 2011):

Some of the messages we have taken from the responses are:-

(a) On Academies:

- To date, seven of our secondaries, one special and 1 primary school have become academies
- None of the schools responding are in a hurry to become academies
- Some are taking active steps to investigate the pros and cons in more depth
- Many are maintaining a watching brief and an open mind
- Many have decided that it is not for them, at least at present, or unless there is a change in context that pushes them in that direction
- A significant number believe they would only consider becoming an academy in partnership with other schools
- There may be emerging options for some sort of collaborative approach supported by the Diocese. (Of our maintained schools, 2 secondaries and 9 primaries are voluntary-aided and 25 primaries are voluntary-controlled).

(b) On future models for service delivery:

- The best supported option was for the local authority to continue to provide services
- The least favoured option was to 'disband' services and leave it to the market
- There was a mixed response to the various potential forms of social enterprise, private sector or joint venture provision, or school 'hubs' with roughly equal numbers for and against
- Sharing services with another LA had good support, though not from everyone.

There was a wealth of useful narrative feedback in support of these views, including:-

- Positive support for some specific services
- Interest in collaborative commissioning of services and a need for commissioning skills
- Systems needed to enable quality standards to be monitored for new providers
- Schools who are becoming increasingly aware of potential alternative providers will only 'buy back' into the LA if services offer high quality and value for money
- Schools want more information about services and their costs
- Schools need a better understanding of the potential role and offer from Teaching Schools
- Smaller schools in particular will continue to look to the LA for key services
- Some of the current 'pooling' arrangements can provide a useful 'insurance' scheme for small schools
- Some concerns that the LA was 'giving up' on providing services (which is not the case)
- It would be helpful for the LA to confirm that it will continue to provide services for at least a minimum period.

(c) On further LA support to schools:-

There was generally a positive response to the LA offering further support during this period of change, particularly on the development of formal collaborations and social enterprises.