

Agenda Item 5

**EXECUTIVE
5 JULY 2016**

DECISION REFERENCE: I011422 – DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR THE CHARGING OF LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES TO SCHOOLS

Introduction

On 30 June 2016, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered a report to the Executive on *Developing a Model for the Charging of Lincolnshire County Council Services to Schools*, which is being considered by the Executive on 5 July 2016.

Conclusions of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee wishes to record its qualified support for the proposals, on the basis that the Committee would have wanted more information in the decision report on the financial support for small schools, especially those in rural areas; which services might be discontinued as a result of the introduction of charges; and the overall costs and the charges for individual services. The Committee would like to see a further report, in particular covering the charges for individual services.

The Committee has concluded that it supports recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. In relation to recommendations 6, 7 and 8 the Committee wishes the Executive to note the following comments:

- (1) The Committee believes that the report should be seen as dealing with the principles of charging, but the Executive should ensure that there is a business plan before services are finally offered. Any business plan should be based on the following principle:
 - Prices should be based on market rate and affordability with costs adjusted to match; it cannot be based on the existing cost divided by an unknown number of users.
- (2) The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee also wishes the following concerns to be evaluated by the Executive:
 - There should be risk assessments of viability of services for schools that wish to buy services, if other schools do not purchase those services.
 - Monitoring should take place of the effect of the new policy on children (including safeguarding and equality of opportunity).

Additional General Comments

Individual members of the Committee also raised the following additional comments.

- Everyone involved in the process should bear in mind there should not be any detrimental effect on pupils as a result of the implementation of the charging arrangements.
- It is important that the information available on services to schools should be of high quality, particularly as other local authorities and providers issued brochures of the services offered.
- It is also important to prioritise the proposed e-commerce arrangements, so that schools can easily opt into the services.
- In the case of very small schools or other appropriate instances, the model could include the waiver of charges in specially defined circumstances.
- Some services, such as the advice service on energy efficiency, were of high quality and were likely to thrive.
- It was quite likely that some of the services offered, which were non-essential, would not be bought by schools, and these services would as a result be discontinued.
- Where a school opts for an alternative provider, and the alternative provider fails or offers poor service provision, the County Council would not be exposed to additional risk beyond its statutory obligations.
- The context for introducing charges at this time should be borne in mind, when several schools have experienced difficulties with a certain contractor, which is also used by the County Council.
- There should be further consideration of this topic by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee at future meetings, regarding the business plan and level of charges.

Additional Comments on the Content of the Report to the Executive

Individual members of the Committee made several observations on the level of information contained in the report:

- The report should have included information on the proposed level of charges, supported by case studies for certain types of school; and the sorts of services they would be expected to purchase.
- Ideally the report should have included feedback from a sample of schools, particularly small rural primary schools, with their views on the proposed charging arrangements, and possibly the level of charges.
- The report could have included information on the approaches of other local authorities and providers, for example, with information on the sorts of charges they were making and the level of their charges.

Points of Clarification by Officers at Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

- (1) The purpose of the programme is to recover the costs of services from schools. It is not possible for the Council to make a surplus on any charges to schools. The provision of services on a commercial basis could only be achieved by the creation of a commercial entity and there is no intention to create one as part of this programme.

- (2) Where a statutory duty falls to a school or academy, it is the responsibility of the head teacher and governing body of the school or academy to deliver that duty. Similarly it is the responsibility of the local authority to deliver its own statutory duties. The local authority's liability is limited to the delivery of its own statutory duties, although it would seek to assist schools where services purchased from elsewhere led to difficulties.
- (3) In relation to "Education Support – Free School Meal Eligibility Checking Service for Schools" [*page 24 of Executive agenda, seventh item listed*], the officers stated that the indicative charge would be 50 pence¹ per eligible pupil, with no charge made to the school for those pupils found not to be eligible for free school meals. The justification for this charge would be that schools would receive additional funding as a result of the identification of each eligible pupil.
- (4) In relation to the "Domestic Abuse MARAC Training for Staff in Schools" [*page 24 of the Executive agenda, final item listed*], this item related to bespoke training for schools on safeguarding matters, in addition to the website training already available, which would meet the statutory duty for schools and academies.
- (5) The proposed flat rate charge of £6,500 for schools converting to academy status, if adopted, would be applied in all instances and related to the local authority's own costs. It did not include the advice that schools might need to access to facilitate their conversion to an academy.
- (6) The additional funding for academies through the Education Support Grant was gradually being removed. The same level of charges would be applied to schools and academies, except for instances where there was a duty for the local authority to support schools.
- (7) As schools prioritise their activities based on their own individual needs, which differ from school to school, a case study of a typical primary school, for example, would not be representative.
- (8) Thorough monitoring service activity and finances, as well as tracking website activity, management reports will be compiled to demonstrate the viability of each service offered. Based on this information, service leads can decide whether to continue with the delivery of a service.

¹ Following the meeting it was clarified that the actual charge for checking the eligibility of pupils for free school meals would be £3.52.

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