

REGULATORY AND OTHER COMMITTEE REPORT

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| NAME OF COMMITTEE: | Schools Forum |
| DATE OF MEETING: | 26 June 2013 |
| SUBJECT: | Lincolnshire County Council Repairs and Maintenance Buyback Scheme for maintained schools and academies – scheme review |
| REPORT BY: | Tony Warnock (Head of Finance – Children’s and Specialist Services) |
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| IS REPORT CONFIDENTIAL? | No |

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to brief the Schools Forum on the Local Authority’s (LA) plans to review the revenue repairs and maintenance buy back scheme for schools.

DISCUSSION

The present Repairs and Maintenance Buyback scheme has been in place for over a decade. A number of problems have arisen and the time is now considered right to conduct a thorough review.

The information set out in Appendix 1 has been written by Richard Hardesty, Account Director for Mouchel Business Services. It outlines the background to this issue, the work undertaken so far and the plans for further work. The LA hopes that a revised scheme will be introduced in April 2014.

Individual schools will be consulted on the planned changes over the coming months. It will be for each school's governing body to decide whether it wishes to buy back in to a revised scheme and, if so, at what level.

The Schools Forum has no formal role in this process, but this report is provided for information purposes.

Conclusions

The Repairs and Maintenance Buyback scheme is being reviewed and the LA hopes to introduce a scheme more suited to all schools needs in April 2014.

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| RECOMMENDATIONS |
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The Schools Forum is asked to note the contents of the report.

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| APPENDICES (If applicable) - these are listed below and attached at the back of the report. |
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| Appendix 1 - Lincolnshire County Council Repairs and Maintenance Buyback Scheme for Maintained Schools and Academies – scheme review |
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| BACKGROUND PAPERS | | | |
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| PAPER TYPE | TITLE | DATE | ACCESSIBILITY |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| None | | | |

Lincolnshire County Council Repairs and Maintenance Buyback Scheme for Maintained Schools and Academies – scheme review

Introduction

The existing Repairs and Maintenance Buyback scheme has been in place since 1st April 2001, when the funding mechanism for repair and maintenance was split into “capital repair and maintenance” and “revenue repair and maintenance.”

Schools and academies are currently able to ‘buyback’ into the scheme, by transferring their delegated revenue repair and maintenance sum to Lincolnshire County Council who arrange for the money to be pooled in to a central fund to be used to deliver services to participating establishments. Charges are calculated on a per pupil basis.

It is recognised that schools and academies are under increasing budgetary pressures, and therefore it is increasingly important that such schemes provide consistent value for money.

It is also important that such schemes are designed in order to provide services which meet the changing needs of schools, and more importantly provide a level of service which allows school colleagues to focus on the education of pupils and students.

Lincolnshire County Council is looking to develop a new repairs and maintenance scheme, and hopes it will be attractive to all schools and academies.

Details of the existing scheme are included within the County Councils Repairs and Maintenance Handbook – copies can be made available.

Customer Perspective

In July 2012, all Lincolnshire based schools and academies were asked to complete a survey on Lincolnshire County Council’s Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) scheme, which is delivered by Mouchel. Responses generated a wealth of constructive feedback, and the results and comments are being used to shape what the service looks like in the future.

A total of 119 surveys were completed by representatives from Nursery, Infant, Primary, Secondary and Special School sectors from around Lincolnshire, 15 of which were Academies. Respondents said that 93 of them currently buy into the full buyback package, 8 buy into the advice package and 18 managed their own repairs and maintenance.

24.7% of the establishments that currently buy into the full R&M package did not believe that it provides them with value for money. However, 80% of those said that the scheme provides them with peace of mind.

Of the schools within the advice package, 50% indicated that it gives them peace of mind. One respondent commented that a “pay as you go approach” for advice may have proved more economical for them.

Focusing on the establishments not in the scheme, over 70% commented that they did not buyback as they do not believe it would provide them with value for money, whilst 57.1% also indicated that they prefer to deal with their own repairs and maintenance in-house.

In terms of whether the scheme covers everything that schools would like it to, the vast majority of respondents indicated that it did not, and many comments related to 'grey areas' relating to responsibility. 83 of the 119 respondents said that they would be interested in a revised service offering.

When asked about what an improved service should include, all of the suggested services – including proactive building maintenance, energy efficiency support, handyman services, pest control and waste management - attracted positive responses, with further additional services also being suggested.

Respondents indicated that they would like to choose how they contacted this support service, with 73.6% saying their preferred method would be email. Several people passed comment on the importance of local support provided by people who know the site.

Asked what the aim of any new service should be, 94.5% remarked that the principal aim should be 'to provide schools with a value for money service, whilst meeting all statutory requirements'. 55 schools also stated that the service should be designed to enable schools' staff to concentrate on the education of their pupils.

Further face to face discussions with schools and academies have also suggested:

- One size does not fit all
- A need to provide a 'cover all' service where scope is concerned
- A menu of services would be welcomed
- Frustration with the whole process (revenue, capital, AMP), rather than just the R&M scheme itself.
- Schools like the 'insurance' aspect of the scheme, but don't like when they pay in more than they get back.

Next Steps

Lincolnshire County Council is working closely with Mouchel, considering ways to improve the scope of the current service offering provided by the Repairs and Maintenance Scheme.

Mouchel continue to liaise with a selection of schools and academies, on behalf of the County Council, in order to develop a service that meets the needs of all establishments.

It is currently proposed that services will be aligned from a customer perspective, under the headings of 'Comply, Maintain and Repair'. The purpose of each of these services would be to enable that school buildings can comply with safety requirements, can be maintained to best practice, and in the event of an emergency, can be repaired with minimal inconvenience.

The range of services which would be included under each of these headings is currently being developed, but is likely to include services which currently sit as a 'schools responsibility' under the existing scheme.

A fair and equitable pricing structure is also being developed, with a view to ensuring value for money for those whom wish to utilise the new service. It is currently expected that specialist services would be provided through a network of mainly Lincolnshire based Small and Medium Enterprises.

Schools and academies will continue to be consulted with throughout the development of this revised service, which will be available to them from 1st April 2014.

(A copy of the current Repairs and Maintenance handbook is available from Mouchel, should Schools Forum members wish to see it).