

## CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM – SCHOOLS’ BUDGET WORKING GROUP

### Notes of the meeting of the Schools’ Budget Working Group held on Monday 7 February 2005 at Penrith Rugby Club.

**Present:** Mr R Alston, (Foundation Secondary), Mr S Bowditch (Special Schools), Ms J Farebrother (Nursery Schools), Mr S Halfpenny (Carlisle Primary), Mr C Rafferty (Allerdale Primary), Mr R Rogers (Eden Primary), Mr A Rutter (Teacher Associations), Mr B Thomas (Cumbria Early Years Partnership), Mr A Hodge (LEA), Mr C Stewart (Corporate Procurement) and Ms N Shiels (LEA).

**Apologies:** Mr C Clarke, Mr T Hobson, Mrs M Pickthall, Mr D Southward

#### 1. Notes of the Meeting held on 13 October 2004

The notes of the meeting of the Schools’ Forum Budget Working Group held on 13 October 2004 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### 2. Matters Arising

Supply List – there continued to be concerns relating to the Supply List. It had been issued to schools in October 2004. There was an intention to review the list, and the use of it, in April. It was suggested that this should be included as an item for consideration by the Schools’ Forum on 20 April 2005.

#### 3. Monitoring of Support Services to Schools, Including Capita Contact

At the meeting of the Schools’ Forum held on 17 November 2004 it had been reported that during recent months the LEA had been in negotiation with CAPITA to draw up a framework contract for schools to begin in April 2005. A number of meetings had taken place involving LEA officers and CASH and PHA representatives. The Chair of the Schools Budget Working Group had also been involved in the discussions and had agreed to progress the development of a system to monitor the contract via the Schools’ Forum Budget Working Group.

The purpose of this meeting was, therefore, primarily to discuss the development of an appropriate monitoring group to oversee issues relating to the Capita contract. The Chair felt that it was important to record the background that had led to these specific discussions.

#### **Background**

Four years ago, Capita and CCC had entered into a 7 year contract. One year later, pressure from schools had resulted in the addition of a ‘mini contract’ with schools that was due to end on 31 March 2005. This was known as a ‘call-off’ contract ie. it was available to schools if they wished to buy into the services. In recent months Capita had begun negotiating with various school representatives, CASH and PHA and more recently with a representative of the Schools’ Forum regarding a new contract.

There was some concern that Capita had not responded adequately to feedback and comments that had been made and the negotiations had resulted in only minor amendments being made. Although not endorsed by the Schools’ Forum, CASH or PHA a final draft contract had been issued to schools in January 2005.

A second strand to this process involved Corporate Procurement establishing a quality check for alternative suppliers. The process had begun by looking at payroll and finance but unfortunately there had, to date, been a limited response from

**Action**

NS –  
agenda

suppliers. This was a rigorous process involving a range of pre-qualification questions ie. obtaining references from customers, credit checks and the production of method statements as well producing a statement of services actually provided. All the organisations that had applied had passed the checks outlined above.

Conway Stewart, Corporate Procurement went on to report that, based on existing key performance indicators, they were reasonably satisfied with the services that Capita were supplying and pointed out that, in terms of pricing they had generally continued to operate on a lower quartile range across various functions. The exception being payroll that was increasing in price.

CEM, the largest supplier of services, after Capita, had also been invited to participate but, as yet, had not completed the questionnaire. There were concerns expressed relating to the perception of a Capita 'monopoly' in Cumbria and that this may discourage other suppliers from doing the necessary amount of work required to appear on the approved list.

Regardless of the existence of the approved list, Standing Orders would need to be followed dependent upon the value of the contract per school or grouping of such. The Teachers' Association representative explained that it was very often difficult to obtain the required number of credible suppliers to submit a bid.

Work to extend the approved list would need to continue and there were issues regarding the LEA capacity and capacity to deal with such. AH explained that the Corporate Procurement Unit would be commissioned to continue the work and this would have to be funded from schools' delegated budgets.

### **Other Related Issues**

Following the negotiation of the 'schools' contract a monitoring arrangement had been established but this had gradually fallen away in terms of school interest/input. It was important to maintain consistent monitoring and establish a mechanism to respond to difficulties that might be experienced with the contract.

On a number of previous occasions concerns about SIMS had been raised and discussed. The concerns remained and the group felt that they should be discussed fully. It was therefore suggested that SIMS be a separate agenda item for discussion at a future meeting of the Schools' Forum Budget Working Group or the monitoring group when established.

NS –  
agenda

Members of the group felt that schools needed to establish a 'bargaining' position and the group discussed at length the possibility of schools 'signing up' for one year only rather than the desired three years. It was reported that some schools that had indicated a wish to sign up for one year only had been quoted a higher rate which may deter them from pursuing a one-year agreement. The group agreed that a higher proportion of schools opting for a one-year deal would improve the negotiating power relating to the contract. There was also a general view that schools found that taking such decisions was very difficult but that the more informed they were the easier the decision.

The Schools' Forum Budget Working group agreed that schools should be aware that they were able to request a one-year contract with Capita. In the meantime, however, the Schools' Forum would continue to work with Corporate Procurement to secure as many alternative suppliers for inclusion on the approved list.

### **Establishment of Monitoring Group**

Discussion moved on to how to effectively monitor the contract, the possible composition of the group, remit and cost implications. It was suggested that the group should meet each half term and there would need to be a simple process to allow schools to feed into the group. In discussing possible representation on the

group attention was drawn to nursery and special schools and the fact that they might have different circumstances that affected them. It was however pointed out that members of the Schools Forum had to take all circumstances into account when making recommendations and that if these specific sectors were not represented on the monitoring group there would be an expectation that their views would be represented by an appropriate representative. The group discussed the role of Corporate Procurement in the monitoring process and agreed that they should be involved to deal with and respond to technical issues. It was also emphasised that written evidence relating to concerns would need to be provided. The development of an evidence base would be supportive to future negotiations with Capita. A suggested membership for the group of 2 primary and 2 secondary members of the Schools' Forum together with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Forum was proposed. It was also suggested that it may also be useful to involve a School Finance Officer or Bursar from time to time, or co-opted if necessary.

A report that summarised these discussions and set out proposals for the establishment of a monitoring group would be presented at the next meeting of the Schools' Forum on 20 April 2005. The report would ask members to:-

- i) consider membership of the Monitoring Group, Chair and Vice-Chair of Schools' Forum to bring proposed nominations
- ii) agree a remit for the group
- iii) determine how information was shared and collected – specific website or e-mail address
- iv) consider the cost implications to the Schools' Forum of these additional meetings.

#### **4. Summary of Actions Agreed relating to the Monitoring of Support Services to Schools, including the Capita Contract**

- i) A report dealing specifically with issues and concerns related to SIMS be presented to a future meeting of the Schools' Forum Budget Working Group of the monitoring group when established.
- ii) Schools to be made aware that they were able to request a one year agreement
- iii) Schools' Forum to continue to work with LEA/Corporate Procurement to secure as many alternative providers for inclusion on the approved list.
- iv) A report to be prepared for consideration by the Schools' Forum on 20 April 2005 which summarised previous discussions and set out proposals for the establishment of a monitoring group (further detail regarding content set out above).

#### **5. Any Other Business**

- i) Workforce Reform – the Carlisle Primary Schools representative expressed concerns about the funding arrangements relating to the implementation of workforce reform proposals. This issue had been discussed at a number of previous meetings of the Schools' Forum and its working groups. The intention of the proposals was to help teachers and all teachers' associations (except NUT) had signed up to the proposals. Whilst there were some general concerns relating to the delivery of the proposals it was felt that the Schools' Forum could not make any representation but that it would need to be done through professional associations.
- ii) PHA Letter – the Chair had received a letter from PHA offering to fund supply cover for preparation for meetings. He assumed colleagues had received similar correspondence. The Chair sought the view of the group regarding take up of the offer. The group felt that if there were any

- queries, the individual should be advised not to take up the offer.
- iii) School Portal/E-mail – the Carlisle Primary Schools representative requested clarification regarding the use of the school portal/e-mail to communicate with his constituents. He was advised that he should have previously received contact details for his constituents but an up to date list of all members of the Schools Forum including e-mail addresses would be forwarded to him to enable him to update his records and communicate with constituents. NS
- iv) Status of Recommendations – The Chair referred to the close voting on some recommendations at the recent meeting of the Schools’ Forum and asked if the recommendations as agreed on 14 January 2005 had been taken forward. He was advised that the Cabinet member could take their own view, taking into account of the debate content, context of discussion, etc. Cabinet had now agreed all recommendations that had been put to them with the exception of that relating to the nursery AWPU. It was agreed that, in future, a series of bullet points summarising the recommendations agreed at meetings of the Schools’ Forum would be issued immediately following the meeting with full minutes at a later date. This information would be sent to all schools and members of the Schools’ Forum. NS
- v) Federation – The Chair asked for clarification regarding whether there was any funding available to ‘encourage’ federation. The Schools’ Forum had previously not agreed £10k for such a use. It was explained that funding may found from elsewhere within the LEA budget.

P&R/NJS  
23 March 2005