

SCHOOLS FORUM
28th January 2010

BROADBAND AND INTERNET SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS
(Acting Director of Children, Young People and Learning)

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 All schools have previously chosen to participate in the Bracknell Forest Council contract for the provision of broadband and internet services, and in aggregate pay approximately £176,000 per annum towards the cost of the service from their delegated budgets. A contribution towards the costs of the service of £71,000 is also made within the Schools Budget, the amount set aside for the former match funded Standards Fund grant. This contract expires at the end of August 2010, and during 2009 extensive work has taken place related to procuring a new service for schools.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to update and consult the Schools Forum on the arrangements for the procurement of the broadband and internet service for schools.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the arrangements for the procurement of the broadband and internet contract for schools are agreed.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Bracknell Forest Council is committed to ensuring that schools have access to a cost effective, secure and robust broadband and internet service so that they, in turn, are able to provide the best possible service to pupils in terms of teaching and learning. There is therefore a business need to procure broadband and internet provision for schools at a similar level of service (or better) but with enhanced bandwidth, in a cost-effective solution, using the South East Grid for Learning (SEGfL) framework.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Whilst it would be possible for each school to procure their own broadband and internet service provision the additional costs incurred in terms of specifying, tendering and managing such a large number of individual contacts would result in a less cost effective solution.
- 4.2 The current centrally organised and managed contract has delivered a good service and no schools have indicated that they wish not to be included in the new arrangements.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 Bracknell Forest Council currently has a contract with RM for the provision of broadband services to schools which ends on 31 August 2010. The Council therefore needs to procure suitable broadband and internet provision for schools at a similar level of service (or enhanced) with no loss of service continuity. There is also a need to enhance the bandwidth available to schools to enable full use to be made of on-line resources and the new learning platform.

- 5.2 Bracknell Forest is a member of and host Authority for the South East regional broadband consortium, the South East Grid for Learning (SEGfL). SEGfL has undertaken extensive work on behalf of all the LAs in the consortium related to the provision of broadband internet services, including producing a buyer's guide and a Framework Agreement. By using this framework, which has been established in accordance with EU procurement legislation, Bracknell Forest Council will save the very considerable cost of undertaking their own procurement exercise in accordance with OJEU procedures.
- 5.3 The LA is working to procure a new broadband service for schools from a list of approved providers on the recently updated 'SEGfL Framework for Broadband and Other Related Services' and will undertake a mini-competition issuing an invitation to tender to the four approved providers: Synetrix Ltd, Easynet Ltd, RM plc and Redstone Converged Solutions. The current provider is RM plc.
- 5.4 A key part of this process has been the formation of a stakeholder group representing a cross-section of schools within Bracknell Forest, with membership comprising varying roles, e.g. headteachers, network managers and IT coordinators. This group will inform the selection of an appropriate broadband provider and service.
- 5.5 The actual costs within the new contract are heavily influenced by the local telecommunications pricing structure (accounting for some 60% of the total cost), and the commitment to provide all schools in Bracknell Forest with a single user dedicated line, unlike those offered to domestic users which are shared between up to 50 houses.
- 5.6 Whereas the costs to BFC are very much on a "per school" basis, and related to distance from a telephone exchange etc., the charging system operated by the Council is one where schools are charged on a "flat rate + per pupil" basis. This evens out the postcode lottery effect and ensures a broadband access entitlement for every BFC pupil.
- 5.7 A Service Level Agreement exists between all schools and the LA for the provision of a broadband internet service.
- 5.8 The current network topology is a single 'hub and spoke' model that may not be suitable for the new system with an increased bandwidth offer from 10 Mbs to 100 Mbs for each secondary school and from 2 Mbs to 10 Mbs for each primary school.
- 5.9 The bandwidth available to each school is limited by the type of connection (i.e. copper cable or fibre optic) to each site. Fourteen primary schools do not have a fibre connection and additional capital costs will be incurred in order to provide such a connection.
- 5.10 The contract will be let for a period of three years with an option for two one year extensions (3+1+1). The new costs will not be available until completion of the tendering exercise but at this stage are estimated to result in revenue costs of £250k per annum plus one year initial capital costs of £150k which can all be met from current and future anticipated funding sources. The total estimated value over the five years of the contract is expected to exceed £1m, and under the Council's Contract Standing Orders will require Executive approval.
- 5.11 The invitation to tender were issued in December 2009 and will be evaluated in February 2010. A further paper will be prepared for the Schools Forum with details of the outcome of the procurement exercise, the levels of service provision, costs to schools and other relevant matters.

ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The SEGfL framework complies with the Public Contracts Regulations, and the proposed contract, if procured through that framework, will be procured in compliance with those regulations.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise at this stage.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The provision of high speed, reliable, filtered internet service to all learners in all schools provides equality of access to on-line resources for all learners.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Should the Council fail to procure a new service for the provision of internet services to schools then the quality of education provision for children and young people will be affected adversely and the efficient and effective use of IT to communicate with schools and transfer management information will be severely curtailed. There is a high reputational risk to the council should the newly procured service prove to be unreliable and inappropriate to the needs of schools.
- 6.5 Whilst it would be possible to each individual school to procure its own internet service provision, in addition to the additional work required to ensure that all service requirements, including those related to safeguarding and filtered access are met fully, the costs could be considerably higher for some schools. If all schools do not wish to subscribe to the new SLA then there is a risk that the contact costs for other schools will increase significantly.

Other Officers

- 6.6 Discussion with members of the Council's procurement team has identified that the procedure proposed would be fit for purpose.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 Headteachers will be consulted throughout the procurement process.

Representations Received

- 7.2 N/A

7.3 Background Papers

South East Grid for Learning: Procurement Guide.

Contact for further information

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