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Oxfordshire Schools' Forum  
Services & Contracts Sub-Committee

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2017

1030 - 1230

Unipart House, Cowley, Oxford

**Present:** Michael Dennison (MD), Ian Jones (IJ), Laura Reineke (LR),  
Carole Thomson (CT), Sue Tomkys (ST), Brenda Williams (BW) (CHAIR),  
Jo Clarke (JC)[Co-opted member]

**In attendance:**

Nick Baggett (NB), Education Finance Manager, Corporate Services, OCC

Fred Dryden (FD), OCC Fire Risk Assessor (*Items 5 & 6 only*)

Sandra Higgs (SH), OCC (*Item 4 only*)

Andrew Taft (AT), Carillion (*Item 5 only*)

Gail Witchell (GW), OCC Property & Facilities (*Items 5 & 6 only*)

Jeff Woodall (JW), OCC (*items 5 & 6 only*)

Kit Howells (Clerk) (KH)

*The meeting was quorate*

	ACTION
<p><b>1. Welcome to new members and Apologies</b> New Members LR and MD were welcomed and introduced.</p> <p>Apologies received from Kathy Ethelston (KE) and Kevin Moyes (KM), and accepted. Damian Booth (DB) was absent.</p> <p>Jolanta Lis had stood down as Special School Governor representative of Forum at the end of the Summer Term 2017 and had been replaced by LR. MD is a new Secondary Academy Governor representative on Forum and DB is a new Maintained Secondary Head representative on Forum.</p>	
<p><b>2. Minutes of meeting held 24 May 2017</b> The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2017 were approved and signed as a correct record.</p>	
<p><b>3. Matters arising from 24 May Minutes, not on the Agenda</b> <b>3.1 (Item 4):</b> ST reported that there had been no further developments in relation to the complaint to Carillion about floor work in a school.</p>	
<p><b>4. IBC Update</b></p> <p>SH attended for this Item, having been invited to update the Committee on improvements to IBC service to schools and Traded Services to schools. The Committee had also invited Derek Hall from Hampshire County Council to attend; he had accepted the invitation, but had sent apologies this week via SH.</p> <p>SH is now responsible for secondary school improvement (Maintained Schools, of which there remain 3 in the County) in addition to Traded Services (and IBC).</p> <p>SH had not provided a paper and briefed the Committee orally on IBC update and Traded Services update, as follows:</p>	

***-Improvements to IBC portal and customer support model by HCC to schools  
-Processes to continuously improve the services from HCC***

OCC has been in partnership with HCC for two years now. This had been a difficult transition period with many changes for Directorates and schools to work with. The partnership is led by HCC which is responsible for improvement of services, the OCC plays its part and shares costs of delivery of service. The partnership is not a contract delivered at a price with penalty notices and conditions. The partnership has governance arrangements and OCC has a seat on partnership management group and if there are changes requiring increased resourcing, or changes to structures these issues are fed through. Lorna Baxter sits on that group supported by Ian Dyson. The group has sub groups, including an Oxfordshire focus group.

- There is now a training offer delivered by HCC which schools can access for all new starters in School Offices, which is part of the service package with no added charge. --There are now improved guidance and work instructions to aid self-service, and additional guidance in form of flow charts from SH to understand sequence of actions, particularly in relation to HR, that schools manage themselves.
- HCC has worked to improve its customer contact model following much criticism from all partners, through workshops held with a wide range of staff which resulted in recommendations for improvements and action plan. This included surveying 2500 staff and 80 staff attending workshops in Winchester. The first stage of changes in customer support model started this month.
- Customer support office is now relocated alongside back office staff (including payroll) in Winchester which has resulted in much improved communications between sections as no longer isolated.
- Improvement to customer relationship management system to allow the same person to 'own' a query who will be responsible for reaching a solution, and drop-down boxes improved to better direct the enquiry to the right place in first instance. A prioritisation system is in place. A feedback facility has been introduced, responses to which will be scrutinised each time HCC and OCC meet to review and discuss the IBC. The feedback report goes to HCC.
- Improvement to management system to allow extraction of performance monitoring data so that areas where difficulties are being experienced can be seen more quickly and addressed more easily.
- The Schools HR & Finance User Group (school representatives; JC is a member) continues to meet six times a year to discuss issues and feed concerns to other groups, ie IT, technical, payroll issues.

Members were pleased to hear about the improvements being made, following the long period of registering serious concerns which had seemingly been simply brushed aside with acknowledgement of problems only becoming apparent in December. However, members feel that schools continue to have little ability to voice their concerns or obtain improvements.

Also, although a prioritisation system for queries is now in place, technical issues may take months to resolve due to the size of the system, within which even testing takes time and causes unintended impacts.

The Committee asked for a cost benefit analysis of the HCC-OCC Partnership, recalling that the reason OCC went into this partnership was to save costs. SH suggested

<p>inviting Rob Finlayson to answer this question as he is responsible for financial side of the partnership, but noted that while some new expenditure was necessary, eg a SAP system for Oxfordshire, there had been saving on staff costs and office accommodation costs and needs were being met in new ways to reduce expenditure. The Committee agreed that, while the LA may have reduced its costs, schools' budgets now have to meet increased costs, mainly in staffing (including employment of new more expensive staff and the increased use of Headteacher time). The Committee agreed to invite Rob Finlayson or Lorna Baxter (Head of OCC Finance, providing overview and steering) to the next meeting to discuss the costs of the partnership.</p>	<p><b>BW/ KH</b></p>
<p>While acknowledging members' frustrations, including increased costs to schools, the lack of voice for schools, the inflexibility of the package of services, and the perceived lack of accountability (noting Derek Hall's absence as an example), SH confirmed that the LA is not seeking to change its partner, but to ensure continuous improvement in the work of the current partnership. It was noted that the outcome of the Unitary proposals awaited from Central Government may impact and result in contracts and partnerships being reviewed.</p>	
<p>The Committee remains concerned about the lack of accountability and the lack of OCC time for resolving issues now that SH has added responsibilities. SH confirmed that work is being done to resolve these issues, and a different business delivery team structure (explained in the next section of this Item) will help.</p>	
<p>JC noted specific improvements which had been made, especially in customer care, and applauded the training in place. She emphasised the need for schools to allow administrative staff to be released for training as this was a worthwhile investment. SH will email a question for governors to ensure that staff are released.</p>	<p><b>SH</b></p>
<p>SH was reminded that a Paper was required prior to Forum/Committee meetings.</p>	<p><b>SH to note</b></p>
<p><b>-Simplification around Traded Services to schools including creation of a single - point of contact for enquiries</b>  <b>-Traded Services Offer and future charges</b>  SH reported that Traded Services and the Business Delivery Team were now moving back to Children's Services and there will be a central point of contact for all traded services to schools, with booking systems and charging processes aligned wherever possible (similar to the way QuEST had operated in the past). The Team will be managed by SH, whose aim is to streamline and simplify all systems.</p>	
<p>The current Offer is set until August 2018 for services, and agreed prices are being honoured. SH indicated that business services will have a maximum 2% price increase from March 2019 and for March 2020 (depending on RPI but with a maximum of 2%). Members emphasised the need to inform schools of increases in time for inclusion in their budget planning.</p>	<p><b>SH</b></p>
<p>Members reminded SH of the need to bring the proposals for the services and their costs to this Committee to ensure members had the opportunity to scrutinise and discuss before the Offer is sent out to schools so that members could assure schools of the good value of the services or otherwise. Since the demise of QuEST this has not happened and the Offer has simply been presented as a <i>fait accomplis</i>. SH agreed that it should be possible to do this now that the services are located in one place under one</p>	<p><b>SH</b></p>

<p>team, and to present the Offer to this Committee for comment, before it is issued to Schools. There is in any case a reduction in services being offered.</p> <p>Thus, to ensure enough lead time for the new Offer due to be in place from September 2018, it was agreed that SH will bring the intentions to the next meeting of this Committee, in January, as schools will be required to budget for, and then sign up to, services by end of April 2018 (for the September start), their budgets being due for submission at the beginning of May, having been approved by their governing bodies.</p> <p>The Committee thanked SH for her update.</p>	<p><b>SH</b></p>
<p><b>5. Carillion’s contract for Schools services – monitoring &amp; performance – update report (<i>Standing Item</i>)</b></p> <p>Andrew Taft, Carillion’s local Lead for Catering, attended for this Item. GW and JW also attended. Carillion’s Paper, being update report, had been previously circulated and AT briefed members on the highlights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-New menus are out for the new year, and due diligence in relation to special dietary needs. There have been good parental responses to the menus.</li> <li>-Recruitment in Oxon continues to be challenging, related to rates of pay and working times, with further risk likely in October as the new Westgate shopping centre opens in Oxford, although jobs in schools suit people who want to work term time only due to having children in school. .</li> <li>-Discussions are being held prior to introduction of new system for ordering meals. Members emphasised the need to ensure that schools want a new system although it is acknowledged that reduction in wastage is welcome.</li> <li>-Uptake of meals is dependent upon strong buy-in from the Headteacher, who can explain clearly to parents the importance of taking up a healthy free meal to which their child is entitled.</li> <li>-There is an increase in uptake across all Year Groups.</li> <li>-Safeguarding issues have been addressed quickly, with the majority of staff now properly trained with certificate evidence and every staff member will have completed all necessary training by the end of September, including new staff. While difficulties in accessing the online training persist, Carillion staff have responded well and solutions are being found.</li> <li>-Every school now has a menu option, whether it has a servery or has meals delivered, with menus adapted as necessary.</li> <li>-Cleaning patterns are being reviewed to look at whether it would be possible to have a cleaning team move from one school to another, as one of the possible solutions to the recruitment issues that might be possible working with the smaller schools.</li> </ul> <p>GW noted that the uptake of Infant Free School Meals is always slightly lower in the summer due to school activities and children taking packed lunches to eat outside. Members discussed whether packed lunches should be trialled by Carillion as part of a summer offer, but agreed that the importance of children sitting down together, eating a hot meal at a table with cutlery should be retained in order to ensure that all children have at least one hot meal a day and learn how to interact and use cutlery, if this is not an experience they have at home.</p>	
<p><b>6. OCC view of Carillion’s Schools Contract (<i>Standing Item</i>) – monitoring &amp; performance, KPIs, penalties</b></p> <p>Gail Witchell, Jeff Woodall and Fred Dryden (newly-appointed Fire Risk Assessment</p>	

<p>Officer) attended for this Item.</p> <p>JW provided an update on the Carillion contract. This is the subject of a Confidential Minute, available only to members and separate from these Minutes.</p>	
<p><b>7. Items referred by</b></p> <p>(i) Schools &amp; High Needs Committee – None (not met since)</p> <p>(ii) Early Years Working Group – None (Group now suspended).</p>	
<p><b>8. Items for referral to Schools &amp; High Needs Committee – None.</b></p>	
<p><b>9. Date of next meeting</b> 23 January 2018 – 1030-1230 (venue to be confirmed). [to feed into Forum meeting on 6 March].</p> <p>Agenda to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Business Services Offer from September 2018 - inc prices (Sandra Higgs to attend)</li> <li>-HCC-OCC Partnership cost benefit analysis (Rob Finlayson/Lorna Baxter to be invited)</li> <li>-Changes to water services provision for schools (Inga Doherty).</li> </ul>	<p><b>KH to inform members and book venue</b></p> <p><b>KH</b></p>

*Meeting closed 1230  
Minutes/kh/22.9.17*

Signed.....

Date .....

**Separate Appendix for Committee members only: Confidential Minute for Item 6.**