

Agenda Item:

Meeting: Schools Forum
Date: 8th March 2010
Subject: 'Securing our future: using our resources well'
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning
Summary: The DCSF discussion paper '*Securing our future: using our resources well*' sets out achievements linked to investment in education over the last twelve years. It also sets out the challenge of ensuring improved value for money through efficiency savings at the same time as raising levels of achievement by working together. This is particularly relevant in a time of fiscal constraint and limited economic growth.

Contact Officer: Patrick Shevlin (Assistant Director, Learning and Schools Support)
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Reason for urgency (if appropriate)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. For the Schools Forum to consider and make recommendations about how schools and the Council can utilise all resources effectively to maintain progress through: procurement and technology; resource use and financial management and partnership and shared services.**

Background



Securing-our-future.
pdf

1. The attached DCSF paper outlines current expenditure in education and improved achievements in schools.
2. It provides a range of case studies which show how schools can work with each other and learn from each other to secure greater value for money.
3. It points to improved financial support in schools and the introduction of the Financial Management Standard in Schools as providing an improved level of expertise in many schools.

4. The paper sets out a framework for discussion to generate ideas as to how resources can be used to best effect particularly to secure value for money whilst focussing on raising achievements further. The three areas for discussion are:
 - Procurement and technology;
 - Resource use and financial management; and,
 - Partnership and shared services.

Key areas and questions for discussion

5. Procurement and technology
6. Central Bedfordshire is already working with the DCSF on establishing an e Procurement system for schools using the OPEN online procurement platform.
7. There is good potential to achieve improved buying power by schools working collectively to secure contracts for energy, photocopiers and other areas.
8. The use of technology in to improve outcomes and efficiency is also seen as less well developed.
9. The document poses three areas of questioning for discussion
 - How can schools best be encouraged and supported to improve their procurement for example through collaborative buying to achieve savings? How can the use of electronic purchasing systems such as OPEN be increased?
 - Are there further examples of how schools can use technology more effectively for the benefit of their pupils or their own administrative efficiency and what practical steps are necessary to share this best practice and increase the benefits from better use of technology?
 - Energy saving, reduces costs while also reducing carbon usage. How can schools learn from best practice in realising energy efficiencies?
10. Resource use and financial management
11. In recent months there has been an increase in the number of schools in Central Bedfordshire applying to have a deficit budget. In such circumstances schools need to produce a recovery plan and this needs to be based on a strategic analysis of the school's needs and how resources (human and material) can be utilised to meet these most effectively. In many circumstances this involves difficult decisions around staffing and delivering learning in different ways.
12. Central Bedfordshire has also had a sub group which has looked at schools' surplus balances and it has made recommendations to support current budgets being spent on current pupils.
13. The paper highlights the need for some schools to improve their approached in both areas. Schools needing to take a strategic view of how they can deliver outcomes and the use of business managers in particular to ensure improved financial planning and lower year on year balances. The paper also outlines the role of the school improvement partner in brokering support and ensuring there is appropriate investment in improvement priorities.

14. The paper focuses on these areas of discussion:
- Schools need good internal financial management skills or the ability to share them with other schools. How best can schools access the skills they need?
 - The White Paper places an emphasis on schools, either individually or in groups, appointing school business managers (SBM) and the National College has an energetic training programme for them. Does anything more need to be done to enhance the supply of good managers?
 - Many schools use benchmarking as a way of checking their performance and supporting their business planning. Is there scope for a wider application of benchmarking techniques and are the available tools as helpful as they can be?
 - Should local authorities be more active in recycling excess school balances to support their schools?
 - How can SIPs be most effective in helping schools make better use of resources?
15. Partnership and shared services
16. The draft Educational Vision for Central Bedfordshire emphasises the importance of schools working closely together in strong, governed partnerships to, for example, improve continuity of learning and achieve better outcomes, increase opportunities around recruitment and leadership and achieve economies of scale including developing shared posts.
17. The paper reflects these aspirations for improving partnership working but it also emphasises the revenue savings which can be achieved and goes on to look at the benefits of working more closely with a range of stakeholders.
18. The discussion points raised are:
- How can schools be encouraged to collaborate and share services so as to cut their costs and improve outcomes for pupils?
 - What additional help do schools need to support and facilitate shared services and the creation of federations?
19. Conclusion and next steps
20. The paper concludes by looking at the role of the national partners, the DCSF, the local authority and schools in making improvements.
21. The consideration for Schools Forum is what areas should be supported and how best can this happen using training and development; models of best practice and local and LA support. Is there a need to develop a specific area of work within the Children and Young People's Plan to ensure that these developments are properly planned and improvement is monitored or is this a role for the Schools Forum? If the latter then how do we progress this?
22. Is there a direct link with the Council's initiative to ensure that Every Penny Counts? This aims to raise awareness of working efficiently and to encourage colleagues to share their ideas and experience of doing so.