

REPORT TO: Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 20 May 2013
REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director, Learning and Achievement
PORTFOLIO: Children and Enterprise
SUBJECT: Aspire
WARD(S) N/A

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update Children, Young People and Families Performance and Policy Board members on progress since the Aspire core team was restructured in the Summer Term 2012.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

2.1 Members note the contents of this report and the implications for future delivery of school improvement services.

2.2 Members note the proposed changes to secure the viability of the service.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Since the cessation of grant funding for National Strategies consultants and School Improvement Partners, Halton re-structured its school improvement services in September 2011.

A small core team school improvement officers was retained at the centre. This team has statutory role in monitoring, supporting and challenging schools to improve as laid out in the Education Act 2011.

3.2 Apart from the statutory role outlined above, local authorities can choose to trade services that are not statutory. Where this is not possible, local authorities will broker or commission services to meet their identified needs.

3.3 In September 2011 Halton and Warrington entered into a partnership with Serco. The partnership was named Aspire. Aspire's role is to sell school improvement services across the two local authorities but with plans to expand across the North West area.

3.4 The Aspire core team consisted of 19 staff previously employed as

National Strategies consultants. Grant funding for these posts ceased at the end of March in 2011.

- 3.5 Aspire was losing money; the income generated was not sufficient to meet the fixed costs. In July 2012 outline proposals put forward by Aspire to reduce the central core team. This led to a restructuring of the core team.
- 3.6 The Aspire core team of 19 staff was reduced to a team of just 6 staff.
- 3.7 The reasons for the low levels of buy-back were given as follows:
- There was a mismatch in the skills and expertise of the Aspire core and what schools need.
 - The school improvement landscape has changed and continues to change. Examples include development of Teaching Schools and school to school support. Competition in this sector of the market is tough.
 - Pricing – feedback from schools indicated that the cost of school improvement services from Aspire was high compared to competitors.
 - Schools prefer a Pay as You Go service as opposed to annual subscriptions.
- 3.8 The key driver for the restructuring of the core team was to reduce fixed costs and generate more income from schools by revising the offer to schools across Halton and Warrington.
- 3.9 In addition members of the Aspire core team were given opportunities to update their skills and knowledge through a programme of professional development. This has included Ofsted training on the new framework.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The following options were considered by the Strategic Board at its most recent meeting:
- Continue current model;
 - Reshape the business model;
 - Determine to end the Partnership agreement.
- 4.2 The Strategic Board agreed to continue with the current model but this will be evaluated on a regular basis to ascertain whether the model is 'fit for purpose'.
- 4.3 Some preliminary work has been carried out. The pricing policy has been revised. The cost has been reduced to reflect market rates. A revised offer for 2013-14 has been distributed to schools. Aspire is now selling its services to 12 schools in Knowsley.

4.4 The revised school improvement offer was sent to schools at the start of term. The professional development opportunities on offer focus on five areas as follows:

- Improving teaching and learning;
- Developing leadership;
- Using data;
- Building capacity for inclusion and
- Preparing for inspection.

The Aspire course timetable can be accessed through the following links:

Lbenquiries@serco.com;

<http://www.facebook.com/aspirepartnership>

Twitter @aspire_sip

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Halton has one ex-employee in the core team. If the Aspire core team is reduced any further this will have financial implications for Halton.

5.2 The sliding scale for sharing redundancy costs between Halton and Serco comes into force in August 2013. Financial liability for both Halton and Warrington reduces to 50% in August 2013 and to 35% in August 2014. This will have implications for both authorities if the Aspire core is reduced further in the future.

5.3 Halton has paid £65k into the Partnership as agreed in the contract. This arrangement expires at the end of August 2013.

5.4 Halton will continue to buy school improvement services from Aspire but this will be on a Pay as You Go basis. This gives Halton the opportunity to buy or commission school improvement services from other organisations.

5.5 As schools have indicated that they prefer Pay as You Go, there is no surety of income against fixed costs.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

6.2 Securing high quality school improvement services will ensure better outcomes for our children and young people. The chances of Halton children and young people attending good or better schools will be increased.

6.3 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

6.4 Improved educational provision will lead to better outcomes and thus prepare children and young people for higher and further education

6.5 **A Healthy Halton**

N/A

6.6 **A Safer Halton**

N/A

6.7 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

N/A

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 N/A

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 N/A

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Executive Board Report – Traded Services 16/12/10	Rutland House	Steve Nyakatawa