

Education: Learning Development Joint Venture Partnership

Report of the Head of Education and Learning

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the option for a three year extension, within the Devon County Council and Babcock LDP contract, be approved.

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#### 1. **Background/Introduction**

In 2012 Devon County Council entered into a Joint Venture Partnership with Babcock LDP. Through this Partnership, Devon County Council commissioned all of its school improvement, learner support, safeguarding, education psychology and school attendance service. The original contract was taken for 7 years with the option to extend for a further 3 years. The time has now arrived for the three year option to be considered.

#### 2. **Main Text/Proposal**

Education and learning would like to propose that the option within the contract for the three year extension is approved. The case for this is provided below:

- **Inbuilt flexibility.** The basis of the contract has inbuilt flexibility for the LA with agreed reduction of the LA financial commitment over time staged over the time of the contract, with annual determination of KPIs and in the ability to adapt at short notice within year to challenges of national policy and local concerns related to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Low risk financial reduction.
- **Provides a high performing quality service** – a key feature of the contract is that it is focused on the outcomes for children and this means the provider can be held to account for their impact rather than the council pre-determining activity. Within the current contract the KPIs have been delivered to a consistently high level this is particularly notable around school improvement where 93.5% of children are in an Ofsted rated good or better schools and pupil attainment measures mean that Devon has been recognised as a high performing local authority. Similar success is evident in relation to Closing the Gap for vulnerable groups, supporting the work of Missing Monday, the Virtual School and Children in Care and particularly around safeguarding.
- **Delivers an effective and responsive working relationship.** One of the strengths of the contract is the effective working relationship between LA staff and Babcock LDP, which enables swift action to be taken where concerns around providers or children arise. Responsiveness is effective from senior management through to front facing staff. Babcock teams significantly contributed to the recent SEND Peer review and the improvement in LA Ofsted rating.

- **Allows LA to benefit from innovation and sharing of good practice.** The broader partnerships within the Babcock contract and their work in supporting other LAs of Surrey and Worcestershire, their work with federations, academy trusts, schools and other LAs beyond Devon's borders, allows Devon to benefit from the sharing of good practice and innovation and cost savings on joint projects.
- **Financially low risk** – due to the flexibility built within the contract, the risk to the LA in taking the option to extend is low risk as it provides for annual change in both the value of the contract and the manner in which it is delivered with no penalty to the commissioner. It should be noted however that this contract delivers the LA statutory duties in relation to schools, education, SEN and safeguarding and therefore cuts would have other risks.
- **Security of ongoing quality service.** The intention of the extension will be to secure Babcock's ability to retain high quality staff so ensuring the ongoing quality of service. Staff engaged by Babcock in response to this contract are highly skilled and well qualified, and in some cases nationally renowned. By taking the option of the three year extension we will be providing long term security and stability of staff.

In addition the national picture around education is still in a period of significant change that is likely to continue for some time. This extension would provide the LA with the flexibility, financial agility and security to be assured that educational provision in Devon continued to be of good quality enabling the LA to continue to champion all Devon's children.

### **Options/Alternatives**

The below are provided for completeness and would present significant risk to the Local Authority.

1. End the contract with the 18month period – in the current national climate of education it would be very difficult to determine the exact requirements for a new contract which may not guarantee the quality of service and flexibilities of the current provider.
2. Shorter term contract. Whilst providing some opportunity to have a clearer idea of the future of education, this is unlikely to be stable within a lesser timeframe and additionally it may raise concern about precariousness of employment of Babcock staff

At the end of the three year period, based on timescales, we are likely to have clearer view of the likely direction of the LA role and therefore will be able to specify service requirements with confidence.

### **Financial Considerations**

Details of the financial considerations are the subject of a Part II report

### **Equality Considerations**

The contract is central to the ability of the LA to support SEND and vulnerable groups, any gap in the provision would disadvantage these children disproportionately.

### **Legal Considerations**

There are no specific legal considerations as the proposed extension was included in the original contract.

### **Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations**

This is a secure, low risk way of delivering statutory responsibilities to children in school. As part owner of the LDP there are financial returns to LA accruing annually as dividends which will continue for the period of the proposed extension

Dawn Stabb

### **Electoral Divisions: All**

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

Chief Officer for Childrens Services: Jo Olsson

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

#### ***Contact for Enquiries:***

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