

SCHOOLS FORUM AGENDA ITEM

For Action



For Information

**Brief Description of Item** (including the purpose / reason for presenting this for consideration by the Forum)

To ask the Schools Forum to endorse the collaborative approach to re-procuring the next iteration of the Bradford Learning Network (BLN) internet and learning provision.

Date (s) of any Previous Discussion at the Forum

The current contract (BLN3) runs from April 2016 to March 2019. The Schools Forum endorsed this collaborative approach in February 2015 and received a further status update provided in October 2015.

Background / Context

The Bradford Learning Network (BLN) is the name for the internet and learning resources network used by in excess of **80% of Bradford Schools, Academies and Free Schools**. The BLN was initially established in 2001 following a school-led procurement process, aimed at providing all Bradford schools with access to fit for purpose and cost effective broadband connectivity. The BLN provides schools with access to a fast, filtered and secure internet connection. The BLN have also worked with schools to achieve substantial discounts on collaborative purchases relating to online content such as EducationCity, where schools have made significant combined savings over the length of the various BLN contracts.

BLN1: The original costs for the first iteration of the BLN service were previously subsidised under Central Government funding. This subsidy ceased in March 2012.

BLN2: The second iteration was procured in 2012 through the Central Government Managed Telecommunications Convergence Framework ("MTCF") with endorsement and partial funding from Schools Forum - the Schools Forum agreed to allocate a sum of £1,133,000 (on a one-off basis) from available DSG balances to support the costs of the renewal. This cost would have normally fallen to school / academy delegated budgets. However, "up front" payment from the DSG for the 3.5 year contract enabled the District to make a £956,000 saving on the total contract cost. At the same time, separately from the BLN, the Forum agreed to make provision from the DSG for the introduction of ESAFE software into all schools and academies across the District, at a cost of £250,000 for a 3.5 year contract.

BLN3: The third, current, iteration was procured in 2016 as a 3-year contract under the regional Yorkshire & Humber PSN (Public Services Network) framework with endorsement and agreement from Schools Forum, including the use of £400,000 of remaining reserves carried forward from BLN2 at the time, and covering the costs of capital investment in key central infrastructure to enable monitoring, firewalling, and protection of internal services. On average BLN3 delivered a 15% saving to individual schools on their broadband connection charges.

The BLN3 contract expires at the end of March 2019 and, with the approval of the BLN's **School Reference Group** (SRG) and **Technical Reference Group** (TRG), the BLN Team are proposing to undertake a re-procurement exercise to allow Bradford schools continued access to the BLN provision through the creation of BLN4, which is currently forecast to produce savings in the region of £0.5m when compared to the £3.6m spend under the current 3-year BLN3 contract. These savings will be directly passed on to schools in the form of further reductions to their broadband connection charges and a reduction in the per pupil per annum subscription charge.

Details of the Item for Consideration (continued)

The BLN is **NOT** requesting any direct or additional funding for the next contract (BLN4), but is seeking the continued endorsement of the Schools Forum – as with the previous iterations of BLN – to the established collaborative approach for internet and learning provision across Bradford Schools.

Re-procurement of the BLN provision from April 2019

The BLN School Reference Group (SRG) consists of representation of Headteachers, Deputy Heads, Business Managers, School Governors, School Governor Services. The Technical Reference Group (TRG) consists of network managers from both Primary and Secondary settings. The role of the TRG is to ensure the BLN solution meets the needs of schools from a technical perspective. The SRG provides governance to the BLN to ensure the BLN is delivered in a cost-effective way meeting financial and operational objectives outlined in SLAs with third party organisations and contracts with schools. Through feedback from surveys to schools, consultation with TRG and an independent assessment of the current market, SRG approved the initiation of a re-procurement of the BLN in the form of BLN4.

To maximise the full potential of school funds, the procurement will either be run through the successor to the Yorkshire & Humber Public Sector Network (YHPSN) Framework, or via the Crown Commercial Services Network Services Framework (“NSF”). These are both pre-competed frameworks and remove the need for the BLN to run a costly and time consuming open tender/procurement through the EU.

As part of BLN3 the SRG and Schools Forum approved the use of remaining reserves (£400,000) to support the continuation of the BLN2 contract beyond March 2016. Similarly the BLN team and SRG are applying the same mechanism for the transition from BLN3 to BLN4, with BLN3 generated and earmarked reserves currently forecast at approximately £270,000 (subject to the final account at the end of the current, final year of BLN3).

These earmarked reserves accumulated over the BLN3 contract term will be used to allow on-going support and maintenance of the central infrastructure (extending the return on investment made at the start of BLN3), and also refresh of devices at school locations. This will ensure that the BLN infrastructure continues to deliver its objectives through the next 3 year contract. This will include on-going support and maintenance of core firewalls, the DNS solution and a replacement of the schools’ edge filtering and firewall devices to those schools who subscribe to BLN4.

The TRG continue to input to, and review, the technical design of BLN4 and will continue to support the BLN team with the implementation plan. The BLN4 contract will continue to be designed in such a way as to enable schools to create a bespoke solution that meets their individual needs and will be designed and priced accordingly.

The SRG will meet on 7 June 2018 to approve the final charging model to schools for BLN4. Under BLN3 this was a lump sum depending on the connection size and £6 per pupil. The proposed BLN4 model is based on the same principle with an anticipated reduction in the lump sum for connections and a further reduction in the per pupil annual fee. The model still allows for some earmarked reserves to be accrued by the end of the BLN4 contract, and the value of this will be dependent on the final supplier pricing through the chosen procurement route (largely based on value for money and provider capability assessments). All income and expenditure lines have been scrutinised by SRG to ensure they continue to offer value for money for schools.

Full information on the BLN4 offering will be with schools starting from 21 June 2018. The BLN will also provide information on the current contract including usage statistics and a recommendation for their future provision to assist their decision making.

Schools will be required to sign their new 3-year contracts by 12 October 2018 to enable the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (CBMDC) to sign the associated supplier contract for those schools subscribing and to guarantee a smooth transition from BLN3 to BLN4 by the end of March 2019. These contracts will commence 1 April 2019 and expire on 31 March 2022. The individual School contracts will be approved by SRG, individual Academy Trusts, and the CBMDC legal team to protect both schools and CBMDC. There are no fundamental changes from the contract signed by schools for the current BLN3 provision, other than the acknowledgement of a more robust arrangement between CBMDC and Academy Trusts (now being separate legal entities).

In the unlikely event of a school not wishing to continue with their BLN subscription, these timescales will enable schools to run their own procurement process and arrange for their new service to be installed before the end of the current contract.

Implications for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) (if any)

None

How does this item support the achievement of the District's Education Priorities?

BLN4 will continue to provide schools with secure access to the Internet, email and online storage and enable them to quickly and safely access and utilise any online learning content, learning communities and collaborative spaces relevant to their needs. The ability to share and access reliable and quick online content will support schools to improve literacy and teaching and learning across all phases, support effective communication and collaboration, raise achievement in underperforming groups and develop school to school capacity. BLN4 will support schools with their safeguarding agendas to ensure that the use of connected technologies in their school is done safely, reliably and legally making use of suitable filtering / monitoring technology and enabling schools to identify strengths and areas of development with regard to whole school (e)Safeguarding.

Recommendations

The School Forum is asked to endorse this collaborative approach to the procurement of fast, filtered and safe internet provision for schools enabling equity of access for all students across the District regardless of location, type (Maintained, Academy, or VA) or size of school. This also reflects the on-going delivery of value-for-money and achievement of year-on-year savings to individual schools/Trusts through an aggregated, volume-based procurement undertaken by CBMDC, and continuation of the BLN service into its next iteration up to 2022.

List of Supporting Appendices / Papers (where applicable)

(None)

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