

Learning From Experience

Schools commissioning by local authorities



Contents

Foreword	3
Summary of schools commissioning Pathfinder projects	4
About this guide	5
What is schools commissioning?	7
The process of schools commissioning	8
Establishing demand	10
Planning	30
Implementation	51
Support and challenge	79
Annexes	87
Annex A: Cross-cutting resources	87
Annex B: Useful sources of data for school place planning	89

Foreword

We all want the best outcomes for children, young people and their families. But in order to make a significant difference to their lives, we must first understand what they really need and then do our utmost to meet those needs. Commissioning is a range of activities focused on doing just that.

This guide draws on the experience of 16 local authorities which engaged in different kinds of commissioning activity concerned with school places and services. It gives practical examples, and the lessons they learned.



As commissioners of school places, you as local authorities lead the local school system. You are responsible, for example, for making sure there are sufficient places, promoting choice and diversity, helping schools to be strong and innovative, and facilitating partnerships and collaboration which will strengthen schools. You also need to monitor school performance, and must judge when and how to intervene to prevent failure. From 2010, you will take on responsibility for post-16 provision, giving you overview of the full range of outcomes for all children and young people from 0–19. And because schools themselves need to commission services, you also need to enable them to do this well.

Schools commissioning is not an end in itself. It is a means to making life and learning better for children and young people. As the strategic leaders of the local school system, local authorities are ideally placed to act as champions for children, young people and their families. You can provide a sharp focus on improving outcomes, harnessing the commitment and expertise of a wide range of partners to achieve that. You understand your own local context, and know how best to commission services tailored to the needs of your communities. This guide gives you the benefit of other local authorities' experiences, so you can take their learning, and adapt it for your own circumstances.

I hope you find it useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Knight".

Jim Knight

Minister of State for Schools and Learners

Summary of schools commissioning Pathfinder projects

Local Authority	Pathfinder project	Contact
BOLTON	Engaging with potential new school providers	Margaret Asquith margaret.asquith@bolton.gov.uk
BRENT	Community consultation to shape future schools strategy	Carmen Coffey carmen.coffey@brent.gov.uk
DEVON	Securing an arm's length education service for Devon schools	Sarah Aggett sarah.aggett@devon.gov.uk
EALING	Assessing commissioning knowledge and skills in schools and the local authority	Maggie Wilson wilsonm@ealing.gov.uk
ESSEX	Commissioning to improve school performance	Graham Ranby graham.ranby@essexcc.gov.uk
GLOUCESTERSHIRE	(1) Engaging with parents and measuring parental satisfaction (2) Supporting parent promoters for a new school	Lynn Morris lynn.morris@gloucestershire.gov.uk
KENT	(1) Using a market segmentation tool to support fair access (2) Using a market segmentation tool to help schools understand the communities they serve	Ella Hughes ella.hughes@kent.gov.uk
KINGSTON	Preparing for Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital Programme	Anne Redparth anne.redparth@rbk.kingston.gov.uk
KIRKLEES	Supporting a Muslim school to join the maintained sector	Ann Likeman ann.likeman@kirklees.gov.uk
LEICESTERSHIRE	Improving the effectiveness of School Improvement Partners	Stephen Gleave sgleave@leics.gov.uk
LEWISHAM	Exploring the scope for federations	Chris Threlfall chris.threlfall@lewisham.gov.uk
LINCOLNSHIRE	Exploring commissioning in the context of selective education	Rob Mayall rob.mayall@lincolnshire.gov.uk
NORTH TYNESIDE	Planning a Trust model to bring in new partners and raise local skills levels	Steve Rutland steve.rutland@northtyneside.gov.uk
POOLE	Commissioning SEN services, linked to creation of a Trust Special School	Stuart Twiss s.twiss@poole.gov.uk
SHEFFIELD	(1) Using Neighbourhood Commissions to consult the community on school diversity plans (2) Planning for changes in 14–19 responsibilities	Alena Prentice alena.prentice@sheffield.gov.uk Nick Duggan nick.duggan@sheffield.gov.uk
SHROPSHIRE	Undertaking a review of primary school places	Norrie Porter norrie.porter@shropshire-cc.gov.uk

About this guide

This guide looks at the practical aspects of the local authority role as strategic commissioner of school places and school services. It is based on the experiences of Pathfinder local authorities.

In 2007–08, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funded 16 local authorities from around the country to explore a variety of schools commissioning activities, such as engaging with parents about a new school, and planning for the new responsibilities for 16–18 provision. This guide is largely based on their experiences, but also draws on some other related projects.

In this guide, you can read about each Pathfinder project, seeing what the local authority did, how it did it and what it learned along the way. It describes the journey each local authority made, rather than setting out a definitive guide to all aspects of schools commissioning. So while there is much good practice among local authorities, whether Pathfinders or not, the focus of this guide is on learning from experience rather than highlighting exemplary practice. But there is much to be learned from other authorities' experiences; you have many challenges in common and it is helpful to see how others have met them. Some of the projects include case studies, templates and tools which other authorities may find useful. The case studies and

other materials are based entirely on the local authorities' own experiences and learning.

This guide should be read alongside other information from the Department for Children, Schools and Families and others on schools commissioning and related activity. See Annex A for a list of other related guides and where to access them.

Who is the guide for?

The guide is for local authorities, as it focuses on the local authority role. Some of the projects are particularly strategic in their scope, and those with a strategic overview of schools commissioning may find it particularly useful. There is, however, considerable detail in some projects, which will be helpful to those working at an operational level. It may also be useful for head teachers and you are encouraged to share the guide where you think it will be relevant.

What is the best way to use the guide?

The guide is best viewed electronically. For each project, there is a summary of the project, how it was achieved, some key reflections, and other useful learning such as top tips and case studies. Some Pathfinders provided documentation and templates which can be adapted by other authorities to suit their own needs. The full

reports, and other documentation and tools, are available on the Every Child Matters website at <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning/schoolsguide>.

The guide can also be printed as a useful reference document. As it is long, please try to use recycled paper.

Commissioning Support Programme

While we hope this guide is helpful, it is nevertheless limited in its scope, and we recognise that you may need more support as you develop your capacity for strategic commissioning. The Department is setting up a programme of support to be delivered over the next three years (2008–9 to 2010–11). The programme will develop communities of practitioners, enabling you to share knowledge,

skills and emerging practice. We will provide ways in which to capture the developments in commissioning happening in all local authorities, in addition to the Pathfinders, and enable you and your peers to build your combined expertise and experience into a valuable knowledge-based resource. The programme will also deliver bespoke support to commissioners, such as training, tailored support on specific issues, and peer-to-peer support.

You can find more information about the Commissioning Support Programme on the Every Child Matters website at <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning/commissioningsupport/> or by emailing childrens.commissioning@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



What is schools commissioning?

Local authorities all want to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people in their area. Good schools commissioning puts the needs of children, young people and their families at the heart of the school system, designing the organisation and services around their needs.

Commissioning is the overall process by which services are planned and delivered. To be effective, good commissioning requires

- A sophisticated understanding of the needs and aspirations of the communities which local authorities and Children's Trusts serve, based on rich, quantitative and qualitative evidence and informed by engagement with children, young people and their families
- The strategic planning of services to meet those needs and aspirations with the involvement of children, young people and their families, and existing and potential providers
- An objective view of the potential of all providers to offer the best services, including encouraging new providers to come forward
- Robust monitoring, support and challenge functions which focus on outcomes.

Local authorities are uniquely placed for strategic commissioning, having an excellent overview of their area, understanding the local context and being able to involve the local community. They have a long history of planning school places to meet demographic need, and of supporting and challenging schools. But the landscape has changed in recent years. Following the Children Act 2004, local authorities have the lead role with local partners in setting up Children's Trusts, focusing on improving the well-being of children and young people and integrating services around their needs. Following the Schools White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, 2005, and the Education and Inspections Act 2006, local authorities are now expected to be powerful champions of parents and pupils, commissioning rather than directly providing education. The provision of new schools is now open to greater competition, and local authorities are under a duty to promote choice, diversity and fair access. They have new powers and duties to help them undertake their commissioning role. The National Challenge brings together work on school improvement for the highest priority group of schools. Local authorities are at the heart of the solution and will provide the support and challenge to drive up standards in your schools.

The process of schools commissioning

You may already be familiar with the nine stage commissioning process developed for commissioning services:



In discussion with a group of Pathfinder authorities, the Department adapted this cycle, following the same principles, but reflecting more closely schools commissioning activity. This is illustrated in the cycle below:

Schools commissioning cycle



This guide has been structured to follow this cycle, with sections on each of the four stages, and examples of local authority activity in these areas. It does not seek to cover every aspect of every stage, but to relate useful experience and insight on some of the key activities explored in Pathfinder projects. Some Pathfinder projects cover more than one stage in the cycle, although the guide aims to place them in the most appropriate section.

Many of the projects in this guide are focused on the commissioning of school places (e.g. provision of a new school, review of existing school places), although some are also related to educational support services to schools (e.g. educational consultancy, SEN services), and some to helping schools commission a range of services themselves (e.g. related to extended schools). The principles of commissioning are the same, even where the object of commissioning differs.

Establishing demand

Good commissioning is about focusing a service around the needs of the user. To do this effectively, you need to establish what the likely demand for services is going to be; in other words, undertake a needs analysis. As a strategic commissioner of school places and services, you will need a strong grasp of relevant data, from a wide variety of sources, in order to plan strategically. This will include local population projections, so you can determine the number of places you will need, for what age ranges, and where those places will be needed. But further information will give you a richer picture still. For example, data on the health and social issues affecting children and families in your area may enable you to provide for their needs more effectively.

You will need to establish what data you need, and who has it. You will want to put robust data checks in place to ensure validity of the data; make sure that data requirements are clearly understood and that protocols on sharing data, both within and outside your own authority, are established and recognised. You will want to analyse data carefully, so you have an up-to-date and accurate understanding of what it tells you.

But establishing demand is about much more than number crunching. As a strategic commissioner of school places and services, you need to understand the needs, aspirations and

motivations of different groups of children and their parents. This goes beyond the requirements of statutory consultation, and is an attempt to really find out and understand what parents and their children want and need from the school system, so that you can design it around them. By involving parents at an early stage of your thinking, you will be able to plan with better knowledge, and your plans are more likely to be well received. Some groups of parents are less likely to come forward with their views, and it is important to encourage them to do so.

Both **Brent** and **Gloucestershire** explored ways of engaging with parents in their Pathfinder projects. **Devon** has provided a case study on open consultation around a school reorganisation, including some good ideas on engaging with pupils. **Kent** used a market segmentation tool to build profiles of its schools' communities, which is useful for the local Children's Trust partners in serving those communities, and for the schools themselves in interpreting their own outcomes, and in planning what services they want available at the school.

As a strategic commissioner, you will find it helpful to monitor levels of parental satisfaction in the local school system, and support parents and children in articulating their needs and wishes. **Gloucestershire** explored ways of gauging levels of parental satisfaction.

You are a leader too, so as well as being responsive to need, you also have a role in leading the community, and in raising aspirations rather than just monitoring them, and stimulating demand for higher standards. For example, if a school is doing poorly, and has not improved despite strong efforts to raise its level, then you might engage with parents on how to improve the standards. This could include, if relevant, school structure solutions, explaining the implication for children and young people of continued poor performance of a school.

Using data in school place planning

The Department commissioned consultants Steria to work with some authorities in developing practical advice and guidance on gathering and using data for school place planning. They looked at some useful sources of data on demographics, for example the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Of course, the number of places you need will also depend on parental decisions about

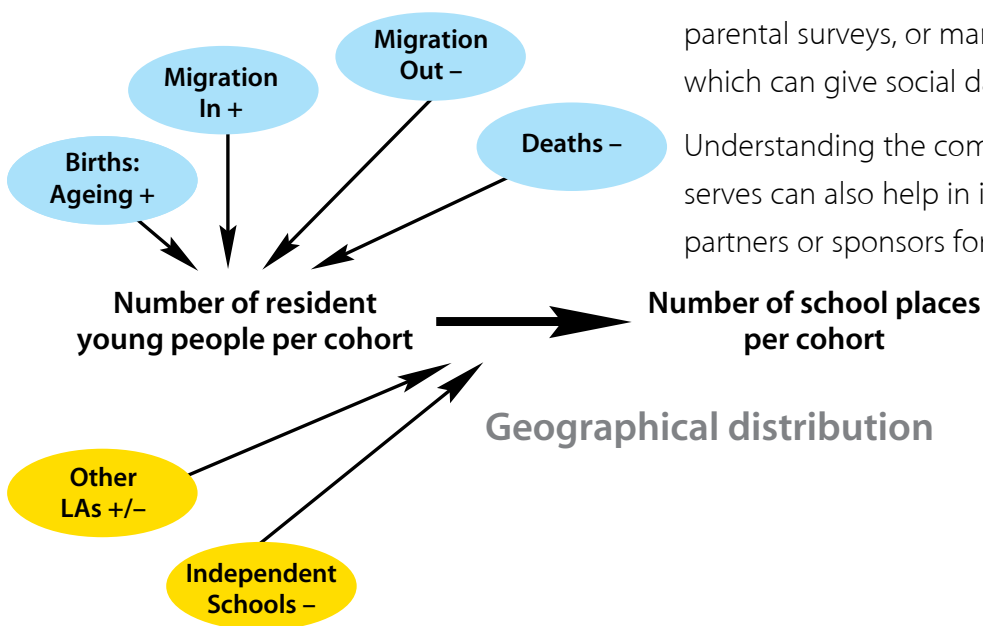
schooling and migration patterns, as the diagram, below left, illustrates.

The Steria project identified some emerging themes from conversations with local authorities:

- Reliance on traditional data can divert local authorities' efforts away from exploring ways to develop a richer understanding to inform planning
- Sharing information and data between Children's Trust partners will be beneficial for schools commissioning; formulating agreements early on may help extend the benefits of joined-up working
- Skills attrition is a big issue for data managers; a graduate entry scheme is one way of improving continuity
- Collaborative work between neighbouring authorities can improve the overall approach to using data for commissioning.

Using data for commissioning is about much more than just getting the numbers right. Understanding the needs of the local community is central to good commissioning. Useful qualitative data can be obtained through local health, crime and housing statistics, for example, and there are other rich sources of data, such as parental surveys, or market segmentation tools, which can give social data based on postcodes.

Understanding the community that a school serves can also help in identifying potential partners or sponsors for the school.



Top tips on data sources

- GP patient registers can be used to indicate the relative densities of the population in neighbouring areas and the relative changes in populations from one year to the next
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) Sub-national Population Projections can be used to check or constrain the totals of the population projections summed over an authority
- ONS geographic regions known as Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) seem particularly suited to school place planning
- ONS small area population estimates can be used to check or constrain the totals of the population estimates for 0–15 year olds in an LSOA.
- Use local knowledge and Patient Registers to disaggregate ONS birth rates for small areas
- Obtain migration rates for small areas by using local knowledge and Patient Registers to scale the propensity to migrate chart
- Use Departmental statistics to project movements of learners across authority boundaries and to the independent sector
- Support and challenge schools in making their own census returns
- If preparing bespoke projections, be clear that it will have some uncertainty
- Use surveys and/or neighbourhood committees to provide general information about the community
- Explore the use of socio-economic data to inform the approach in considering the demand for a particular type of school or school partnership.

For more details of where to find useful data, see Annex B.

Commissioning snapshot: Using data – Patient registers

Sheffield City Council maintains projections of pupil numbers on a citywide basis, and for individual schools, including sixth form forecasts. Projections are obtained by applying historical patterns of change to the patient registers data and numbers on roll.

Forecasts for individual community and voluntary controlled schools (i.e. those schools with a catchment area), and for areas (such as clusters) use the patient registers as an indicator of the number of young people by year of age living in the area. These data, with the numbers on roll, enable a percentage 'uptake' figure to be calculated for each age group and for the school as a whole. Applying the 'whole school' uptake figure to the reception and pre-school patient register data enables a forecast to be produced of potential reception intakes for the next few years.

From one year to the next, forecasts for primary and secondary sectors are very accurate, almost always within 1%, and frequently within 0.5%. Longer term, forecasts tend to become less accurate but the 2001/2 forecasts were still within 2% five years later.

Further information

Sheffield School Organisation Plan, Appendix 5
www.sheffield.gov.uk – search "School Organisation Plan".

Contact Jim Watkin
 (jim.watkin@sheffield.gov.uk)

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Kent

Kent County Council's Pathfinder project was focused on data collection and analysis. It aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a commercially available market classification tool in modeling demand and supporting fair access. As strategic leader, Kent wanted to help schools to understand their community better, to help them serve the needs of pupils at schools and their families.

Education Facts and Figures – Kent

- Mixed urban and rural
- 452 primary, 104 secondary and 24 special schools
- Primary school governance: 250 Community, 14 Foundation, 109 Voluntary Controlled, 79 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 35 Community, 1 Academy, 5 Voluntary Controlled, 50 Foundation, 13 Voluntary Aided, 1 City Technology College
- 197,493 pupils
- 11.1% primary and 7.9% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Using postcode profiles to commission school places and services

As part of its aim to strengthen its strategic role in the integrated planning and commissioning of children's services, Kent decided to explore the role of data analysis in enabling it to better understand the needs of children and young people living in the county.

The authority's existing consultation with young people already provided it with a great deal of useful information, but it wanted to develop a strategic overview of its pupil profile. It looked to the use of readily available market research data to enable it to develop a pupil profile for a number of schools, to support those schools in planning and commissioning places and services, and selected 16 schools to take part in a pilot project.

The authority used a commercially available market classification system designed to profile the characteristics of the UK population, according to criteria including socio-economic status, educational attainment, health, views on crime and the type of recreational activities they engage in.

Each pupil attending the pilot schools was allocated to a population segment on the basis of their postcode and this was built up to give a profile of the school. The authority considered that this type of postcode-based analysis would be particularly useful where pupils were drawn from a wide geographical area. The local education advisers and the schools themselves were involved in shaping the look and content of the profiles.

The anticipated benefits of the profiling were:

- To enable head teachers to have a better understanding of their community to help interpret outcomes and plan services
- To assist head teachers to shape their extended services
- To encourage head teachers to work collectively with their Local Children's Services Partnerships to support their local community.

The results of the profiling were shared with the schools involved, to evaluate how useful the process was in achieving the anticipated benefits. Despite a mixed reaction from head teachers at first, the profiling was rolled out to all schools within the local authority's pathfinder clusters, but with the addition of an evaluation process alongside to collect the views of the wider group of head teachers.

The evaluation questionnaire elicited 27 responses and, although there were again mixed assessments of the benefits of the profiles, many head teachers found the profile reports very useful and had already made use of the data. As well as providing an additional tool that could be used to increase understanding of the school catchment, heads pointed out that they provided a useful way of identifying similar schools, which were not necessarily neighbouring schools.

Key challenges

Overcoming a lack of understanding of the purpose of postcode profiling was a key challenge. Some head teachers, particularly primary heads, felt the profile did not accurately reflect their school population, given that they felt they knew the children and parents very well. For example, the mixed socio-economic status of families living in new housing developments, due to housing association properties included in the development, was not picked up by the profiling, which showed the area as affluent. This could lead to wrong assumptions about levels of need and access to services, so the project reinforced the message that that this type of profiling needs to be considered alongside other data.

With hindsight, Kent considers that one to one meetings with head teachers would have helped to communicate how this sort of data analysis could benefit their own school and community, bearing in mind different schools have a different understanding and starting point. Individual meetings would also have helped to ensure that the reports produced were more closely tailored to the needs of each school.

Kent's approach – step by step

Set up and scoping

- Data gathering – pupil postcodes
- Analysis and application of segmentation tool
- Set up project steering group – including local education officers, Advisory Service, LSCP development manager, data analysts
- Identified and involved pilot schools to shape the profile reports

Sharing initial findings

- Meeting with all key stakeholders including pilot head teachers and project steering group
- Outlined 'what' and 'how' the classification tool could be used
- Detailed the variations of profile in each cluster
- Listened to challenges from heads who were unsure of the benefits
- Developed approach to further roll out to include feedback mechanism for head teachers
- Roll out to all pathfinder schools

Next steps

- Continuation of the project
- One to one meetings with head teachers to look at how the data could be used and address concerns or irregularities thrown up by the profile (head teachers selected on the basis of their feedback)
- Meeting between larger group of heads and project steering group to explore whether the profile can have a direct impact on the kind of services they commission locally
- Feedback to Kent Children's Trust Pathfinder Reference Group

Kent – Additional Materials

- Evaluation form questionnaire
- Primary school profile
- Technology college profile
- Project report

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Parental Engagement

So that they can commission provision which meets the needs of children, young people and their families, local authorities need to engage with parents. The Department commissioned a consultancy, Hedron, to work with local authorities to identify good practice, explore how further parental engagement can be facilitated and explore what kind of organisational or cultural change might help to embed it more firmly in local authorities' practice. The project built on work conducted by Opinion Leader last year which sought views from parents about how they wanted to be engaged with. Their report provides 25 case studies on parental engagement from a range of authorities, and examines the organisational and process issues. It also includes a parental engagement diagnostic tool for local authorities.

Current good practice

There is a lot of good practice among local authorities. In the Pathfinder authorities, for example:

- Neighbourhood Commission model in Sheffield, which brings stakeholders, including parents, together as a commission of inquiry to consider an Academy proposal
- Gloucestershire is using a parental satisfaction survey to establish a baseline
- Brent has a 1,600 person strong virtual "citizens' panel" which can be called upon to give their views on issues, and a Youth Parliament
- Essex is developing a multipurpose *Talk Essex* website geared to the needs of commuting parents who are seen as a seldom heard group

- Gloucestershire placed an external researcher in the playground of schools to capture their views about a reorganisation
- Kent makes use of its network of Parental Support Advisers and Family Liaison Officers to engage on both on-going and specific issues, often in the school playground
- Lincolnshire organised a multi-activity programme especially for fathers and their children of primary age.

Hedron found some techniques which seem particularly effective:

- Meeting parents on their own ground, e.g. in the playground, or in a place they feel is part of their community (e.g. local Catholic church used as a place to meet incoming people from Poland in Lincolnshire)
- A well-facilitated and structured forum where parents have time to express their views and feel they are really listened to (e.g. Kent invited some seldom heard parents to meet the Chief Executive and provided transport for them to get there)
- Various tools used in a coordinated way as part of a joined-up initiative.

Barriers and issues

Hedron identified the main barriers to effective parental engagement in local authorities as:

- Silo working – different departments are not always joined up, and sometimes internal tensions can impeded effectiveness
- Lack of confidence in deploying engagement tools, where training may be needed
- Tactical, rather than a strategic, approach.

In many cases parental engagement has developed around specific issues (e.g. falling rolls,

school reorganisation), but you could consider consulting across your whole remit, to avoid confusing stakeholders with multiple contacts. You might also consider developing on-going engagement processes so that you can understand parental wishes and tap into their views, rather than wait until you really need to know something quickly, or there is a crisis, before you establish a consultation process.

Hedron observed the following issues as particularly useful in developing parental engagement in local authorities:

- Making the local authority as a whole more effective – joining up between different areas
- Optimising resource development and deployment (and funding)
- Engagement around specific school place issues can be seen as an opportunity to engage with parents in a way which can lead to longer term engagement
- Establishing good on-going processes
- Addressing different audiences (e.g. parents in school transition phases, secondary school parents, and new immigrant groups).

Commissioning snapshot: Involving parents in commissioning

Poole was interested in involving parents in commissioning decision making. An opportunity was presented as Montacute Specialist School, a special school for children with severe learning disabilities, was entering a consultation phase with parents as part of the application process for becoming a Foundation Trust. It was decided to run a funding prioritisation exercise with a group of parents.

Parents were involved in an interactive session in which they were asked to evaluate options for spending £5,000. It was an important feature that this money was actually committed, and the parents' decision would be taken forward. Props, including visual representations of the service options, as well as coloured bricks to represent the money, were used to make the session engaging and facilitators encouraged negotiation between parents with different views.

The exercise was very successful. Parents perceived it as a fair way of looking at resource allocation. They engaged in commissioning discussions using common sense criteria, for example which option would get the most service delivery to the largest number of families, and considered that those children with the highest level of need being able to access the service would be an important success criterion.

Poole's project has demonstrated an alternative approach to engaging parents. Some processes for involving parents in planning (e.g. representation on planning groups) are not always empowering and require a high level of understanding of technical planning processes. However, there are other more creative ways of involving parents in commissioning decisions which, while simple, require difficult decisions to be owned and are easily understood by parents.

Further information

Contact: Stuart Twiss (s.twiss@poole.gov.uk)

Nick Wharam (n.wharam@poole.gov.uk)

Commissioning snapshot: Parent forums

In Kent, parent forums have been set up as a vehicle to support the development of a partnership between parents, local authorities and those involved in education. The forum is a group of parents who work together with head teachers and local authority staff to influence the way services are developed within schools and the community. Eventually the forum will link with the local Children's Trust.

Until parents are confident enough to manage the forums themselves, they are initially being coordinated by Extended Schools and Partnership with Parents (PwP), which is funded by Kent County Council but operates at arms' length from the local authority. Its role is to inform and empower parents and carers on all aspects of educational needs to help make decisions that are right for the child.

The parent forums usually meet once a term. There is flexibility in the number and coverage of each forum due to the diverse nature of education provision in Kent. Themes of common interest are identified to enable parents to work alongside schools on a particular development task in equal partnership.

Other services also support the forums. For example, parent support advisors and family liaison officers encourage parents to attend – this is particularly important to ensure seldom heard parents are represented at these events. In addition, there has been strong support from groups such as local housing associations, an important element in their on-going success.

Further information

Contact: Wendy Mann, Project Manager, Parent Support Advisers, wendy.mann@kent.gov.uk

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire County Council's Pathfinder project evaluated the use of market research techniques to measure parent views on local schools and the education system. As commissioner of school places, Gloucestershire wanted to ensure that its school system met the needs of children, young people and their families. It tested a range of methods for engaging parents, and learned a great deal about their needs. This will help the authority be more responsive, and lead to improved outcomes.

Education Facts and Figures – Gloucestershire

- Largely rural with urban centres in Cheltenham and Gloucester
- 249 primary, 42 secondary and 12 special schools
- Primary school governance: 120 Community, 16 Foundation, 64 Voluntary Controlled, 49 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 6 Community, 1 Voluntary Controlled, 30 Foundation, 5 Voluntary Aided
- 83,500 pupils
- 9.4% primary and 6.2% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Parental engagement – measuring satisfaction and identifying unmet needs

Gloucestershire has developed a set of consultation tools and measures to enable the local authority to consult effectively with parents to identify unmet parental demand, or parental

dissatisfaction with local schools. Initially the focus was on the parents of primary and secondary school children, but this has now been extended and widened to include pre-school children and post-16 students, to inform the future provision of places and children's services from 0–19.

The authority worked with market research experts to employ the sorts of techniques that would normally be applied in a commercial setting. It wanted to find out whether market and social research techniques could be used effectively to measure dissatisfaction and unmet needs, both within the education system and in individual schools.

A previous study in Gloucestershire had shown that surveying parental opinion is important as it provides an early warning system, identifying dissatisfaction before it becomes apparent through the demand outcomes of parents' choices, such as over-subscription or low rolls.

In order to develop a full picture, Gloucestershire needed parents' views on the education system as a whole, to ensure that it was delivering the forms of schooling that met their requirements, and also views on the individual schools their children attended, to measure levels of satisfaction and identify any problem areas.

The core objective for the Pathfinder study was to carry out a series of full-scale pilot surveys to determine the best methodologies for gathering parents' views on a wide range of indicators.

Although simple parent surveys had been carried out previously, for example by local schools and Ofsted, the surveys in this study were far more detailed and were structured to answer the local authority's specific requirements for both system and school level information to inform commissioning. This meant two different approaches.

Parental views on the education system

An area-wide survey was designed to establish parent satisfaction and the current and emerging needs of parents.

This survey required a wide sample of parents, including those living in the county and not using Gloucestershire schools. Parents who live in the county, but whose children attend state schools outside, are an important audience since their choice may provide initial evidence of dissatisfaction with schools within the county. Likewise, parents whose children are educated in other ways (at home, or who attend independent schools) may provide evidence that the local authority is failing to meet parents' needs.

The pilot area-based survey used telephone interviews, considered to be the most cost effective method that would deliver sufficient response rates. Interviews were carried out amongst a random sample of just under 1,200 parents from Cheltenham and the Forest of Dean with children aged between 0 and 19.

In addition, a series of focus group workshops was held with parents of pre-school children in a number of locations across the county where gaps in provision were thought to exist. The workshops examined parents' general satisfaction with pre-school childcare and the ways they thought that provision was inadequate or lacking. The workshops also examined issues concerning parental engagement with pre-school provision.

Parental views on individual schools

The second survey was school-based, and aimed to identify any problematic issues at the school that concerned parents enough to generate dissatisfaction – and which might lead them to take their children out of that school. Such issues

might include poor discipline, bullying, or declining academic performance.

This survey was piloted in three primary and two secondary schools that had volunteered to take part, and took the form of a concise self-completion questionnaire, which was sent to all parents and carers in the pilot schools.

The response rates for this survey varied greatly between the primary and secondary schools, with just under half of the primary surveys returned (a good response rate), but with the two secondary schools a more disappointing 25% and 18% return rate. The low response rate at this last school appeared to be linked to socio-economic factors and prompted an additional, small-scale study to identify barriers and enablers to consulting with seldom heard groups.

As well as the parental surveys, there was a small survey of pupils in one secondary school. This was done via a short web-based questionnaire that was designed to be completed as part of an ICT lesson. The questionnaire was broadly based on the one used for their parents, but used far simpler language and graphics to make it more 'pupil-friendly'. It also examined a number of issues relating to the school that would have more of an impact upon them (such as cleanliness), rather than on their parents.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the project are two-fold. The surveys themselves have elicited a great deal of useful information about parents' (and some pupils') unmet and emerging needs, and have therefore shown that market research techniques can be applied usefully to this issue. However, as the project was designed to identify the most effective methods for engaging parents, it gave the local authority the opportunity to test a number of methods to establish which should be employed in future to maintain the level of parental consultation required.

Although the pilots were designed and delivered by external consultants, a key requirement was that they should provide training and toolkits for authority staff to build capacity in-house and ensure that the process was sustainable. This meant that members of the authority's Access Commissioning Team were involved throughout the process, working alongside the consultants. The lessons learned from the pilot research studies have been incorporated into a toolkit, which includes a questionnaire for area-based telephone surveys, a questionnaire for schools-based surveys and a questionnaire for use with secondary-aged pupils. It also includes step-by-step instructions for the administration of the questionnaires. Training sessions have been undertaken for the local authority's officers who will administer the research in the future.

Case study

Engaging seldom heard communities

Gloucestershire used part of its parental engagement pilot to explore how it could engage more effectively with seldom heard communities, specifically those who are seldom heard because of a combination of socio-economic factors (low income groups) and the fact that they live in relatively isolated communities. This research was triggered by two factors: first, the lack of response from a local community to consultation about changes to their school provision, and secondly a low response rate to the schools-based survey in one school. The common factor appeared to be the socio-economic and cultural factors at play in both communities. Further research with those involved has suggested ways in which these factors can be overcome and effective consultation might be achieved.

At the time of the Pathfinder projects, Gloucestershire was consulting on the proposed merger of Lynworth and Whaddon primary schools in Cheltenham. In this particular case, the low income community concerned had a history of low-level engagement with any issue concerning 'authority'.

Interviews carried out at a consultation open day revealed a community that was very nervous, isolated, and mistrustful of any ideas put forward by the local authority. This was indicated by those who were interviewed (who although participating in consultation had views on why others were not) but also by the absence of the general public at the open day. However, there were a number of useful suggestions put forward for how consultation could be made more effective with this and similar communities.

It was highlighted that consultation should start early and be regular – maintaining a constant drip-feed of information over a period of time was thought to be an effective approach. Informal methods of consultation would be more acceptable to some than formal; but some people showed a preference for more

formal approaches. This indicates that a variety of consultation methods should be used.

Ideas suggested included:

- Using local and trusted people as conduits for engagement rather than 'outsiders'
- Asking local representatives to go door-to-door with information rather than try to get people to attend a public meeting
- Backing up written communications with verbal ones (e.g. informal face-to-face meetings) in case literacy was a problem
- Building on the trusted relationship with the school e.g. parent/teacher meetings; letters, leaflets or newsletters from school; notice boards in the school grounds
- Supportive parents acting as champions and talking informally to others when dropping off or picking up their children from school
- Communicating via local community groups or at community meetings in the local community centres

- Using local focal points, such as the community newsletter, church magazine, local pubs, the chip shop, hairdressers and all local shops
- A website with the plans on it.

Meanwhile, the response rate from parents at one of the Cheltenham secondary schools chosen to pilot the school-based survey on parent satisfaction was extremely low, at 18%. Not only this, but the profile of those parents who had returned the survey did not appear representative, as it did not reflect the profile of the school's catchment area. The local authority decided to use different methods to capture the views of these parents, consisting of a series of in-depth interviews in the school's catchment area using face-to-face methods. Parents were recruited and interviewed on the street (outside local shopping centres, churches and community centres) or in their homes, door-to-door.

The core role of this survey was to ensure these parents' views were included in the overall satisfaction findings – interestingly their levels of satisfaction were very similar to the original

respondents'. But it also provided an opportunity to try to understand why parents hadn't responded to the initial survey sent to them earlier in the year. Most of those interviewed said that they weren't interested, couldn't be bothered or did not have the time. But further questions gave an insight into ways in which they might be more likely to engage, for example over the telephone, or if they were invited into school to complete a survey. They would also find it most convenient to be approached on weekday afternoons or weekends, and thought an incentive would make them more likely to respond.

The conclusion of this study is that any seldom heard community is going to be difficult to find and expensive to research, but the study recommended that Gloucestershire do so in all cases where fewer than 20% of parents respond to any schools-based survey. Based on the preferences expressed by these parents, a telephone survey would be an appropriate way to do this, and would be quicker and cheaper than the method used in this case. But, as all seldom heard communities are different in their characteristics, the method chosen should reflect the particular circumstances.

Lessons learned by Gloucestershire

There were a number of lessons learned during the project that have now been fed into the design of future questionnaires and survey methodologies:

- Wholly random surveys have a low hit rate of 'in-scope' interviewees – increases time and costs. Use commercially available parent lists as a source of the sample
- An initial benchmark survey will enable experts to determine the ideal sample size to get statistically significant results – in this case a sample size of 400 interviews per district would be sufficient and will save money
- Ensure interviews take less than 15 minutes – five minutes for pupil surveys
- Publicise the survey in the press and the website so that people contacted know it is genuine
- All front-line staff must be briefed – parents approached may check with the LA or school that the survey is bona fide
- Postal surveys require significant administration – both the direct costs and time implications should be fully understood and planned for
- Costs could be reduced by using an email survey for those parents that do have access, retaining a postal survey only for those that don't (20% parents did not have access)
- Surveys posted out by schools or sent home with pupils have a slightly higher response rate than those sent out by the local authority
- Where there is a less than 20% response rate, some other form of study should be carried out to ensure that there are no biases in the results [see 'Engaging seldom heard communities', page 22].

Gloucestershire – Additional Materials

- Parental satisfaction survey toolkit
- Parental engagement report
- Consultation over school merger case study
- Consultation feedback report
- A new primary school vision leaflet
- A new primary school questionnaire leaflet
- Community consultation open day case study
- Project report

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Brent

The London Borough of Brent's Pathfinder project set out to develop a consultation process with parents and carers to shape future schools strategy. As strategic commissioner, Brent must ensure there are sufficient school places, and that local schools meet the needs of children, young people and their families. It wanted to engage with parents, pupils and the local community so that it could ensure that any new school would meet their needs effectively.

Education Facts and Figures – Brent

- Urban
- 59 primary, 14 secondary and 5 special schools
- Primary school governance: 35 Community, 4 Foundation, 20 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 1 Academy, 9 Foundation, 4 Voluntary Aided
- 37,541 pupils
- 27.3% primary and 22.5% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Consulting with parents to shape schools strategy

Brent has experienced pressure on secondary places for some time, and is now seeing this spreading to the primary sector. The local authority predicts a significant shortfall in places over the coming years, and has taken a range of measures to increase capacity, including the development of Academies.

It has produced a strategy for the development of school places, key elements of which will be expanding existing schools and building new ones, whilst at the same time ensuring that the new built environment is conducive to raising standards of achievement year on year.

In order to inform any proposals for expansion, set the terms for school competitions and take overall decisions relating to school organisation, the local authority wanted to carry out a major consultation with all of its stakeholders. The purpose of the consultation was to establish the demand for particular types of provision, and therefore it focused in particular on parents, pupils and community groups.

The Pathfinder project was designed to identify a range of consultation activities with these stakeholders. Brent especially wanted to develop a model of consultation with parents, children and young people and community groups within a diverse setting. This diversity includes variations in language, culture, experiences of formal education, expectations of the role of schools and other settings and the role of the family and community in the learning and teaching process.

Community survey on Brent's vision

The local authority produced a document setting out its vision for developing school places and published this on its website. Its consultation unit was commissioned to carry out research to gather residents' views and launched a survey which was included as an insert in the *Brent Magazine*, which is distributed to 95,000 households in Brent, and was also available on request from council offices. An online version of the survey was also available on the local authority's website, and the survey was promoted through advertisements in the local press, at bus stops and on the website.

This resulted in 811 postal responses and 75 surveys completed online. Although this was only a 1% response rate, it gave Brent sufficient evidence to work on. The majority (56%) of respondents to the survey were aged between 35 and 54, and their ethnicity broadly reflected the diverse composition of Brent's population. Over three quarters of those who responded were parents or carers of pre-school, primary or secondary school children and around two thirds were women. This was seen as particularly interesting and reflected the levels of contact made by mothers with schools. School governors were also asked to take part in the survey and were given an extended deadline to reply by –

but only one response was received from a governing body. Brent is continuing to pursue this issue with governing bodies at their schools, to gain greater engagement.

Almost 70% of participants agreed with Brent's vision for providing school places, and over two thirds of participants supported each of the three proposed options that Brent was considering to increase the number of school places. The most popular option was to rebuild schools on existing sites (70% agreed), followed by building new schools on new sites if they could be identified (68% agreed) and finally expanding existing schools (66% agreed). Participants were also asked their opinions on where new places were needed, and other issues such as the impact of expanding schools and the extent to which extended schools provision had a positive effect on their community.

Alternative approaches

As well as the survey, Brent sought views through focus groups. Two sessions were planned – one in the morning and one in the evening – but were postponed when fewer than six people confirmed their intention to attend each one. The focus groups were rescheduled in June and these were better attended, but those attending had selected themselves through the survey, and tended to be well-educated professionals, so they did not represent the general population. Brent then used existing Children's Centre parent forums as a focus group, which was more representative. This gave them richer information about what lay behind some of the survey responses.

Brent also used existing forums to establish the views of specific groups. For example, it went to its Youth Parliament to consult on the site of a

proposed new secondary school [see separate case study, page 28].

A different approach was taken when Brent proposed an expansion of a primary school, which was greeted with concern from local residents about the size of the proposed new school and how that would impact on teaching, learning and the emotional needs of the children. Brent produced a regular newsletter to update key stakeholders and organised a community open day at which more than 100 participants heard a presentation from the project architects and took part in workshops where they expressed their views. The event was organised by the council to give parents, teachers, pupils and local residents, an opportunity to help design the new school. One of the features which made this event successful was joint working between school place planning, capital and communications staff. Parents enjoyed the event, and it was considered a turning point in acceptance of the new school.

Outcomes

Through the Pathfinder project Brent has explored a number of different approaches to consultation, some with more success than others. It has learnt that, due to the nature of the community, some parents have considerable barriers to overcome in engaging with schools and the concept of commissioning school places. Many parents are struggling with the basic needs of housing and employment or lack of these things. Using services that have direct contact with parents, such as Children's Centres, as a consultation and engagement base may be a way of engaging with these parents. Brent has also commissioned school gate consultation and plans to develop an engagement model with parents through extended schools.

Top tips from Brent

- Ensure you capture participants' contact details in consultation documents – Brent didn't and discovered this was a significant mistake, as participants could not be followed up to take part in further consultation
- Always ensure you have lined up many more people than you think you need for attendance at focus groups – the drop-out rate is high
- Set realistic timelines for completion of activities – don't be over-optimistic
- Timetable regular meetings with project members and insist they happen
- Spend time at the outset to research and analyse your borough profile
- Find out about existing or established methods/forums that could be used rather than having to start from scratch
- Involve colleagues in other departments – not just Education or Children and Families.

Case study

Engaging young people

Brent organised a participation event for children and young people to consult them on proposed sites for a new Academy. There was significant controversy over where the new school should be built. Options were limited, due to the cost and availability of suitable sites across the borough. Brent wanted to ensure that children and young people had a say in which of three proposed sites would be best for a new school, and also consulted them on whether the Academy should be an all age school.

They were involved early in the process, and briefed on the three options. Twelve young people, all aged between 10 and 16 visited the three sites. They were asked to consider the size of the site, the location, the loss of priority (i.e. what the site is currently used for), the accessibility of the site, impact on the local community (e.g. noise), availability and cost. Site visits were followed by a facilitated discussion group where the pupils debated the advantages and disadvantages of each site.

The young people were also given the opportunity to share their views about developing an all age school.

The young people all approached their task maturely, and with a level of knowledge which surprised the adults involved, asking pertinent and searching questions of the architects and planners involved.

At the final session of the day, the young people were asked to vote for their preferred site option. The most popular site had more scope for facilities, and good amenities nearby. Most young people voted against an all-age

school, as they thought younger pupils might feel safer in a primary school, and that a change at secondary level would be a positive fresh start.

Brent went on to develop its engagement with young people through its Youth Parliament, begun in 2007. Primary, secondary and special schools, local youth groups and voluntary groups are all represented. In a short time, it has become a well-established part of the local democratic scene, involving young people in a wide range of decision making, including decisions which, in the past, have been taken by adults alone.

The Youth Parliament will play an active role in the designing of the new Wembley Academy. It will be forming a design panel that will work closely with the architects in ultimately designing a "pupil friendly" school. This is seen as a stepping stone to engage young people in other building projects.

Brent – Additional Materials

- School places survey report
- School places focus group
- School places consultation
- Primary school expansion case study
- Parent forum case study

Establishing Demand – Other Materials

- Parental Engagement in Schools Commissioning Report (Hedron)
- School Commissioning – Data Management (Steria Limited)
- New school build community consultation case study (Devon)
- Pupil Q&A over new school build (Devon)
- Engaging parents in SEN commissioning (Poole)

Reflection on establishing demand

Parental engagement goes way beyond the traditional consultation model, and presents significant challenges for you as local authorities, particularly in reaching out to parents whose voice is seldom heard. Better parental engagement calls for being open to new ways of doing things, and trying imaginative ideas. It also seems to call for persistence; you may need to try different approaches to get the best response.

Both the reports by consultants looking at parental engagement and the use of data refer to the dangers of silo working. Parental engagement and strategic use of data need a joined-up and strategic approach within local authorities, so that different departments can share information and ideas, and coordinate their efforts effectively.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Planning

School place planning has long been a traditional role of the local authority. You have had to plan the organisation of schools in your area to ensure sufficient school places in the right areas; you have planned for new schools, securing land for new build where necessary; you have concerned yourselves with surplus places and have sometimes had to face the potentially fraught issue of closing a school.

But the context of school place planning has changed in recent years. Planning now needs to be undertaken in partnership with your local Children's Trust. Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and the Primary Capital Programme (PCP) bring opportunities for major capital investment, which require significant planning in consultation with partners such as dioceses, schools and also parents. You might even want to think about a 0–19 capital investment strategy, including the school estate, with your Children's Trust partners to look holistically at the needs of all children and young people in your area so that you can identify the most effective ways to improve their outcomes. Preparation for BSF and PCP was the subject of the **Royal Borough of Kingston's** Pathfinder project. **Shropshire** carried out a review of primary places in the county, in preparation for PCP. In drawing up your plans, you need to explore a diverse range of options which could engage additional expertise and

introduce fresh approaches, to raise standards and improve outcomes, and provide greater choice for parents. These options include Academies, Trusts and Trust clusters, federations of schools, and expanding successful and popular schools. **North Tyneside** planned a model to secure the involvement of new Trust partners to raise local skills levels, and **Lewisham** explored ways of building school partnerships, by looking at the barriers for schools to federations and other partnerships, how those barriers might be overcome and how they, as local authority, could support them. **Lincolnshire** has areas of selection within the county, and its project explored the challenges of commissioning in the context of selection.

You also have new opportunities for raising skills levels and outcomes for young people through recent changes to 14–19 provision: the delivery of Diplomas from this September and responsibility for commissioning post-16 provision from 2010. This will require joint working and sharing of ideas and expertise with a wide range of partners, and you will need to plan carefully for this with those partners. **Sheffield** has undertaken strategic planning for the expected transfer of these responsibilities, and has prepared a toolkit to help other local authorities.

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Shropshire

Shropshire County Council's Pathfinder project focused on developing and implementing a vision and strategy for primary school provision. As strategic commissioner, it wanted to put children and their families at the centre of its policies. It wanted to ensure that all children had access to good quality primary schools, and that that access was sustainable in the longer term. Given falling rolls in the context of small primaries, this meant looking at school viability. A new Vision for Primary Schools of the Future was adopted, and the way was then open for consultation to begin on specific proposals.

Education Facts and Figures – Shropshire

- Rural
- 141 primary, 22 secondary and 2 special schools
- Primary school governance: 53 Community, 3 Foundation, 64 Voluntary Controlled, 21 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 17 Community, 4 Voluntary Controlled, 1 Foundation
- 37,900 pupils
- 8.9% primary and 7.0% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Providing access to primary places and extended services in rural communities

As a rural and sparsely populated county, Shropshire faces particular challenges when it comes to primary school provision. It has a high number of small and very small schools (56 with less than 100 pupils and 16 with less than 50) and many require subsidy well above the average cost per pupil in order to employ sufficient staff to operate.

With declining pupil numbers, the financial and service provision implications of this situation, together with new commissioning opportunities, prompted the local authority to launch a wholesale review of its primary schools organisation strategy.

The Primary Schools for the Future project was designed to develop and implement a vision and strategy for provision that would ensure that every child and family had access to a primary school in their community as a focus for local services, but that this was sustainable given the falling rolls and dispersed communities. The strategy also needed to address the challenge of modernising schools.

Policy review

The first task was to review the council's Primary School Organisation Policy, which did nothing to protect access to schooling for pupils in rural areas. Under the existing policy, if a rural school roll were to be forecast to drop below 20, it would be reviewed with a view to closure, regardless of the effect on home to school travel distances. The existing policy also operated against most infant/junior amalgamations, making it more difficult, rather than easier, to bring schools together into primary schools.

The council was keen to move to a policy that put the needs of children, families and the wider community at its centre and to take advantage of the new opportunities created under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to look at alternative models of schools organisation which might make some schools more viable in the longer term.

Shropshire set about consulting on an outline for the policy, based on the principles of access to education within a reasonable time from home, continuity of education through the primary phase, and high quality of provision for all. The

policy and its implementation were designed to protect a viable network of rural schools which would guarantee a place in a rural primary school for all children living in rural areas.

Challenges of consultation

However the consultation process proved challenging, with a number of local campaigns mounted against the proposals, which were rooted in fears that rural schools would close, but without an understanding of the commitment to ensuring local access and better facilities.

Although it had predicted some resistance to change, the local authority was not prepared for the level of opposition in the early stages of consultation, and the influence of some local opinion formers and the media in this. Lobbying also led to national political involvement in the anti-campaigns. The original plan was to consult in stages, starting with education professionals, but the local authority was forced to broaden the consultation to the wider community earlier than planned. It launched a multi-pronged campaign to counter rumours by ensuring that accurate information was available, including letters to parents, meetings, and a leaflet and website.

The project also demonstrated aspects of successful stakeholder engagement. For example, a reference group of heads, governors (including parents), Diocesan and local authority officers and trade unions was formed to develop the draft policy from the principles and to consider detailed and technical evidence which was not suitable for wider publication. The council saw the involvement of this group as very effective in ensuring a stronger vision and a more robust policy.

In addition, as the process started to include draft proposals for individual schools, each school was allocated a key contact group consisting of a senior elected member, an assistant director, a

member of the council's project team, a human resources officer and a finance officer. This personalised the approach and gave both a human face and a focus for queries and concerns.

The challenging start to the process had a knock-on effect when it came to putting forward an implementation plan for formative consultation. The draft plan contained proposals to consult on 22 schools with a view to closure, on eight pairs of schools (mainly infant and junior pairs) with a view to amalgamation, on one infant school for expansion to full primary age range and on one expansion of a faith school.

In addition, a lack of understanding about the range of options led to reluctance by some schools and elected members to consider new modes of organisation such as Foundation status. Federation was initially only seen as a way to avoid closure, without other positive benefits. There was a tendency to consider models that were already known, and local communities were most positive towards the traditional school organisation options of community, voluntary controlled or voluntary aided schools.

The council's Scrutiny Panel decided to proceed only with the formative consultation on the eight pairs of amalgamations, and all eight were approved for progression.

Shropshire – Additional Materials

- Amalgamation of two schools consultation report
- Council meeting to consider school amalgamation
- Primary school organisation terms of reference
- Vision for a school of the future
- Project report

Lessons learned by Shropshire

- Involving key stakeholders is essential – stakeholder engagement has continued to be positive and strong even through controversies on individual proposals
- Stakeholder involvement and external verification creates a stronger case
- Provide for dedicated communication with and support for schools
- Ensure regular briefing for elected members, particularly those from the administration back benches who may not be directly involved
- Early briefing of politicians, the media and other opinion formers can prevent later misunderstandings
- Start early – a longer development period may have meant less immediate concern about the effect on individual schools. Time and information is required to enable schools, elected members and others to become more familiar with alternative commissioning models
- A comprehensive documentation scheme supports effective consultation and communication – comments and questions can be quickly answered
- Don't underestimate the emotional aspects of change
- Consider media communications and lobbying strategy carefully.

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Kingston

The Royal Borough of Kingston's Pathfinder project focused on preparing for Building Schools for the Future and the Primary Capital Programme. As commissioner of school places, Kingston wanted to ensure that these major capital investments delivered real improvements in outcomes for children and young people. It worked with its strategic partners and consulted children, young people and parents, to develop a holistic strategy. Benefits have included closer working, in school clusters, between primary and secondary schools. It hopes to use this to tackle the dip in performance which children often experience at the transition point between the sectors. It also reports that its holistic approach has led to a closer relationship between the local authority and the schools in the area.

Education Facts and Figures – Kingston

- Urban
- 34 primary, 10 secondary and 3 special schools
- Primary school governance: 20 Community, 1 Foundation, 13 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 4 Community, 3 Foundation, 3 Voluntary Aided
- 19,614 pupils
- 8.7% primary and 7.4% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Planning for the Primary Capital Programme and Building Schools for the Future

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and the Primary Capital Programme (PCP) are not primarily about buildings, but about transforming educational opportunities. Kingston wanted to maximise this opportunity and launched a combined BSF/PCP programme to enable it to develop a more strategic vision encompassing

the outcomes of both. Kingston used the Pathfinder project to involve stakeholders in developing this vision for transformation. In parallel to this activity, it also set up a working group to explore the implications of new governance models and developing diversity of providers to support its transforming education agenda.

Kingston introduced cluster working in 2006 – the borough is divided into four clusters, each of which has at least one secondary school, primaries and co-located Children’s Centres. Clusters have their own budgets and are the commissioners of extended services, special education needs and preventative and early intervention services. These well-developed partnerships provided a strong foundation on which to build a dialogue and consensus about the programme’s strategy.

Prioritisation for the programme

First of all Kingston developed a set of priorities for the programme, which drew on the borough’s Children and Young People’s Plan and its prevention strategy. It had already agreed five major themes across education, which became the reference for thinking about BSF/PCP:

- Schools as community hubs, with cluster-based facilities
- Ongoing focus to raise attainment for all and close the attainment gaps
- New learning styles and flexible learning provision
- Improving access and choice for parents, including greater diversity and the ambition that all schools are at least good, working towards outstanding
- Design, including using the building as a curriculum tool and multi-purpose buildings.

At this stage the local authority embarked on a consultation process with key stakeholders, including heads, governors and the relevant diocese. This was initially through briefings and discussions at existing meetings, and was developed further with more formal briefings of heads and governors. These were externally facilitated and offered local stakeholders the chance to hear about approaches elsewhere in the country and in sectors other than education, which was important in helping participants to appreciate the broader context and potential of BSF/PCP. In addition, a conference was held to launch the visioning stage of the programme, which involved a wider group of stakeholders including Children’s Trust partners and elected members. This activity was designed to stimulate thinking, which was supported further with the use of an online visioning tool.

The output of the consultation was a draft vision for education in Kingston, and this provided the basis upon which each school was asked to develop its own vision, both in terms of what their school wanted to achieve in the future, and also what they could offer to the cluster and the wider community. An important aspect of this process was to manage expectations as not all schools would directly benefit from the investment programmes, but at the same time the local authority was clear that all schools would gain from the process as much could be achieved before the building programme.

Importance of data

Kingston recognised that any strategy must be based on accurate data, and a key part of the programme was to ensure that the local authority had a thorough and up-to-date picture of demographic data, parental preference and patterns of travel, as well as the performance

strengths and weaknesses of individual schools and surplus places. It also mapped land availability and created an integrated asset management database to record the condition of the building stock across the borough.

In spring 2008, Kingston appointed design consultants to conduct feasibility studies for all secondary and special schools and a number of high priority primary schools. This work considered a range of options for individual sites including development of existing buildings and new build. The studies also provided the opportunity to consider the creation of a campus approach in two locations, one including a primary school, special school and recently rebuilt secondary school, and the other to explore the potential of co-locating separately governed church schools with a shared playing field.

Based on all of this evidence, Kingston has issued a draft Strategy for Change to stakeholders for consultation, and is planning a major consultation with parents to further validate the plans for secondary provision in the future.

Kingston – Additional Materials

- Schools of the future PCP & BSF
- Preparing for capital programmes guide
- Vision and strategy for SEN
- PCP BSF consultation strategy
- Project report

Kingston's approach – step by step

- **Set priorities** – these will vary according to local authorities' individual circumstances, but should align with the Children and Young People Plan and related strategies
- **Identify stakeholders and start to engage them** – this should start as early as possible. Existing relationships and meetings are a good starting point
- **Engage stakeholders in creating the vision** – Stimulate thinking about what they want for education and children's services in the area, and how new buildings could achieve that
- **Ensure continued involvement of schools and dioceses** – use existing groups to maintain dialogue and ensure they understand the process
- **Understand your data** – make sure you have an up-to-date and accurate picture of all aspects impacting demand for school places and the location and condition of buildings and other resources to support supply
- **Explore governance and diversity** – BSF/PCP and school organisation strategies should be integrated
- **Look at feasibility** – this will help you to establish sensible working parameters for strategic planning.

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

North Tyneside

As strategic commissioner, North Tyneside Borough Council wanted to ensure that the local education system enabled young people to gain the essential skills they need in the 21st century. It drew in a wide range of partners who would be able to contribute to improving standards, and ensure better outcomes. It explored a Trust model which would ensure the sustained involvement of key partners. This led to shared understanding among strategic leaders in the area of the socio-economic context and the economic and educational pressure for change. It anticipates that most of the community schools in the area will transfer to Trust status, with universities and employers legally bound in, supporting education-to-employment pathways. In the longer term, it is hoped that this will turn North Tyneside from a low skill to a high skill area.

Education Facts and Figures – North Tyneside

- Urban
- 56 primary, 15 secondary and 5 special schools
- Primary school governance: 44 Community, 12 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 13 Community, 1 Foundation, 1 Voluntary Aided
- 27,402 pupils
- 16% primary and 10% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Developing a model for effective stakeholder engagement to deliver strategic change

North Tyneside's focus on education commissioning is a key strand of a strategy to achieve its vision for social and economic transformation of the borough. The decline of the area's traditional skilled industries and their replacement with low paid, low skilled jobs has

had a major impact on the aspirations and achievement of children and young people.

Now the emergence of a global, knowledge-based economy in the region is increasing the demand for higher skills, with the number of new jobs in the region requiring NVQ level 4 or 5 expected to grow by 43 percent by 2010.

Whole system solution

The council recognised that meeting this challenge would require a whole system solution to the transformation of education and successful regeneration, and decided that it should lead the creation of a sustainable strategic alliance of schools, businesses, further and higher education and work-based learning providers to develop diverse and specialised curriculum pathways linked to growth sectors in the regional economy.

It wanted to test the hypothesis that the creation of school Trusts as formal, legal vehicles would provide an effective way to frame these partnerships, and set up the Pathfinder project to test the business case for formalising collaboration through the strategic development of school Trusts.

There were already highly effective, though largely informal, collaborative arrangements in place, as well as the formal Children's Trust arrangements delivering children's commissioning across education, health and social care.

Building on this collaborative foundation, the authority set up a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the role that Trust schools could play. Head teachers and chairs of governors covering each of its four localities and every phase and school type were invited to sit on the Commission. They were joined by the local authority's Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services.

Because Commission members were volunteers, all members were interested and committed.

A very broad range of views was brought to the table and there was no perceived preference for, or barriers to, any particular viewpoint. The mix of head teachers, chairs of governors, lead politicians and council officers meant that a strategic view was developed.

Crucial to the project's success was the appointment of an independent chair, who was seen as a credible honest broker with the professional experience to manage a complex set of interdependent issues in a clear and non-partisan way. It had emerged at the start of the project that some key stakeholders were fundamentally opposed to Trust developments. There was also a great deal of confusion about the nature of school Trusts and the legal and organisational relationships between Trusts and the schools they are aligned with, as well as lack of clarity about the tangible benefits that Trust status brings.

Evidence-based recommendations

The Commission was tasked with making recommendations based on evidence that it would gather from a number of sources. Creating the time and space for informed debate amongst the leaders of learning in the borough generated a powerful and inclusive sense of purpose.

The outcome of the Pathfinder project is that North Tyneside now has a highly effective engagement model for evaluating strategic options, and a clear, shared understanding among strategic partners of the options, issues and context of their decision making.

In the short term, it is anticipated that a majority of community schools will become Trust schools. The local authority intends to create a strategic commissioning framework comprising area-

based groupings of self-governing schools that will provide a range of services for their communities. In addition, formal, legally binding partnerships with universities and employers will support a range of specialised education-to-employment pathways.

The ambition is that this will lead to improved attainment among pupils, with more of them progressing to higher education and higher skills programmes, particularly those from vulnerable and economically-disadvantaged groups. Ultimately this should enable the local economy to a shift from its current a low-skill/low wage equilibrium to one characterised by high skills and high wages.

North Tyneside Commission of Inquiry – Step by step

1. The starting point was not an evaluation of structural diversity, but to establish 'what are we trying to fix'? This was a crucial distinction as it created a boundary for the Commission such that even those vehemently opposed to system reform were able to engage. This process identified the key problems that needed solutions.
2. A set of key principles was established against which all possible all possible system solutions could be tested. Any option had to demonstrate a positive outcome against the identified principles, so models were not "competing" against each other (e.g. Community school versus Trust school). This was another key success factor.
3. The Commission carried out a review of earlier work completed by North Tyneside Council in developing an outline business case for area-based school Trusts, as well as an overview of Foundation schools from a financial, HR and legal viewpoint.

4. This was followed by a series of formal interviews with expert witnesses to try to understand further the factors behind the educational and socio-economic context of the borough. Those interviewed included local service commissioners and providers from education and health, regional office and central government officials, employers, academics and trade unions. The quality of witnesses gave a highly credible set of inputs that were challenging in both impact and intellectual rigour.
5. Once this extensive evidence was gathered, a summary synoptic meeting was held at which the Commission considered its recommendations. This was an active meeting in which members conducted a high level SWOT analysis of each option, and debated the issues raised in an open forum. Options reviewed included:
 - Soft governance federation
 - Hard federation
 - Academy
 - School Trust
6. The outcome was that the Commission felt that the case for the formalisation of partnerships had been made and that the best framework for this was the Trust school approach.

Top tips from North Tyneside

DO

- Be as open and inclusive as possible in any engagement activities undertaken
- Focus on the impact on the lives and life chances of children, young people, their families and communities as the motivation for any initiative, rather than the structural or policy impacts that the initiative may have
- Ensure there is a high degree of challenge as well as support for any initiative that is being proposed
- Communicate widely and frequently amongst all key stakeholders – it's not what you say so much as the number of times that you say it!
- Don't rely on the circulation of minutes – provide direct briefing for head teachers and especially governors
- Engage with elected members at an early stage to ensure political buy-in
- Try to commission ethos and impact as much as procedure and outputs
- Seek governor representation directly from governors rather than through head teachers
- Engage Voluntary-aided schools as proxies for Trust schools to remove some of the perceived anxiety and threat around the change from community to Foundation with a Trust status.

Top tips from North Tyneside

DON'T

- Underestimate the capacity for misrepresentation and/or misunderstanding of the purpose of the initiative!
- View commissioning as another version of procurement and contracting; it needs to be more than that (see 'Do' list above)
- Forget to ensure that professional associations and unions are briefed and consulted from the start of the initiative.

North Tyneside – Additional Materials

- Support services transfer case study
- Commissioning of service template
- Service level agreement for support services contract
- Area-based Trusts inquiry terms of reference
- Project report

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Lewisham

The London Borough of Lewisham wanted to explore its commissioning role in brokering partnerships and enabling collaboration, to help it to share best practice and expertise, and raise standards. Its Pathfinder project explored barriers to partnerships among its schools and how it might, as commissioner of school places, facilitate more effective partnership working, including through federations. It saw practical benefits from this, such as improved strategic planning, sharing of best practice, improved curriculum development and economies of scale.

Its Pathfinder project helped Lewisham to develop a strategy which will encourage schools to work closer together, and improve outcomes for pupils.

Education Facts and Figures – Lewisham

- Urban
- 68 primary, 14 secondary and 14 special schools
- Primary school governance: 47 Community, 1 Foundation, 20 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 7 Community, 3 Academy, 4 Voluntary Aided
- 30,034 pupils
- 26.4% primary and 25.2% secondary pupils eligible for free school meals

Building School Partnerships for the Future

Effective collaboration will be essential to achieve Lewisham's vision for the future of education in the borough, and the diversity of governance models that will be required to deliver it. The local authority wanted to probe into the barriers and challenges for schools in developing partnerships, including hard Federations and Trust status, and commissioned a research study to establish what these barriers and challenges were, as well as to develop a strategy for overcoming them.

Lewisham is already operating in a partnership environment, with a number of federations in place or planned across the primary, secondary and 14–19 sectors. Primary school collaboratives have been established, involving between five and seven schools in each, which have devolved funding for special education needs and extended school provision and for their own development. There are currently no formal partnerships between secondary and primary sectors, although there are advanced plans to incorporate a primary school into one of the hard federations to become an all-age Academy.

Consultation on partnership

The consultation on partnership, which was undertaken by external consultants, included three elements in two stages: structured interviews with a range of stakeholders; a survey of schools to gauge attitudes towards partnership and their views on the barriers to it; and a series of focus groups to develop a vision of what the future of partnerships in Lewisham could look like and achieve. A literature review was also completed to establish examples of good practice and thinking on effective partnerships.

The structured interviews were conducted with 17 stakeholders including secondary and special school heads involved in both hard and soft federations, primary heads, local authority officers and external partners. The purpose was to explore attitudes, understandings, and experience of partnership, as well as the possibilities and challenges this holds in the context of future development needs within Lewisham.

In addition, schools were invited to complete an on-line questionnaire. This was completed by 29 people, with a further 26 people contributing views to some of the questions. About a quarter

of responses came from the secondary sector, and a quarter were from faith schools. Just over 50% of the responses were from school governors.

Although the samples for the first stage of the consultation were not of sufficient size to be representative, the final numbers who contributed in some way represented a significant proportion and mix of Lewisham schools. The study gave the borough a useful insight into the views of education service providers in particular.

Research findings

The findings indicated that many schools were unconvinced of the benefits of partnership, possibly because there also appeared to be a fairly limited understanding of the range and levels of possible partnership activity, both between schools and with external partners.

Attitudes towards federation were often negative, with hard federation often seen as some form of take-over, although those who had been involved in federation saw its benefits. There was almost no awareness of Trust status within the primary sector, and an absence of cross-phase linking and thinking, with some suspicion between the sectors cited as a reason and a serious weakness.

The findings pointed to examples of partnership that respondents viewed as successful, in particular the development of 14–19 provision including the strategic forum which represents all 14–19 stakeholders and which has developed a commissioning function.

A large majority of schools reported significant difficulty in finding or engaging with external partners. Those external partners who took part in the survey were able to give some interesting

perspectives on this, suggesting a strategy for working with small and medium sized enterprises could be developed to trigger more partnerships. It was also suggested that the business connections of many governors could be exploited more effectively.

The focus groups, which formed the second phase of the study, were designed to test out earlier findings, but also as a visioning exercise, and used scenarios to encourage participants to explore possible future outcomes and identify strategies to achieve them.

Themes emerging from a range of suggested strategies included clear leadership and vision from the authority; better communication and stakeholder engagement (by the authority and by schools); providing resourcing to support collaboration, but also encouraging collaboration to share resources (specialist teaching and support services and physical resources such as transport, playing fields etc); developing a strategic approach to partnerships with employers; and reformation of school governance to support professionalisation.

Recommendations for practical steps

These stakeholder views were used to develop recommendations for practical steps which might be taken to create a climate in which closer partnerships between schools and other partners could be cultivated, including encouraging formal and informal networks, creating real opportunities for school leaders to influence strategic decision-making, and reviewing partnership and support structures. For example, it was proposed that the local authority develop a more systematic support structure from the centre for schools seeking and engaging with external partners, using joined-up approaches across the council. These might

include higher education, the voluntary sector, and potential employers including networks of small and medium sized enterprises and their supply chains. As part of this, it would encourage schools to work with governors to harness their cumulative knowledge, experience, qualifications and skills, as well as their employment links, which could be made more widely available for the benefit of schools in general and the borough as a whole.

The local authority has developed a position paper, which has been submitted to its Children and Young People Select Committee.

Top tips from Lewisham

- Allow time for trust to build up
- Partnerships cannot be imposed from the top down
- Identify shared goals and ethos
- Ensure that shared information is used to inform joint decision making
- The local authority must be an effective facilitator
- All partners need to be willing to share core resources, not just add-ons
- Partners will be ambitious in seeking better outcomes from shared resources

Lewisham – Additional Materials

- Building School partnerships for the future report
- Policy on school collaboration CYP committee report

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire County Council's Pathfinder project explored how it can carry out its role as strategic commissioner of school places, particularly in ensuring fair access, in the context of partial selection in the county. It was able to identify some ideas they could explore with their schools which would help ensure fairer access to good provision for children and young people.

Education Facts and Figures – Lincolnshire

- Rural
- 283 primary and 63 secondary schools
- Primary school governance: 137 Community, 27 Foundation, 86 Voluntary Controlled, 33 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 27 Community, 4 Academies, 3 Voluntary Controlled, 28 Foundation, 5 Voluntary Aided
- 98,665 pupils
- 7.3% primary and 6.3% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Exploring commissioning in the context of selective education

Lincolnshire has a mixed system of selective and comprehensive areas, and conducted a research study to establish the key challenges and opportunities for commissioning within this system. The purpose of the study was to identify how to commission effectively in a county where considerable numbers of children take selection tests.

The project looked at the way in which the commissioning system was working in the context of a selective area, how this might present challenges for equitable commissioning and the legal issues around parental choice. Crucially, it considered how to address the issues involved and drew on the experience of other selective local authorities – Kent, Buckinghamshire and Essex – to identify good practice that could be applied to its own circumstances.

Lincolnshire is committed to securing a diversity of education providers to give choice to parents and young people and reflect the diversity of needs.

New options for school governance have presented opportunities for schools and the local authority to work together to develop partnerships to address the impact of selection on the non-selective schools in the county. Although there are large secondary modern and comprehensive schools that are able to offer a wide curriculum and range of opportunities to their pupils, some of the smallest schools face an annual struggle to maintain or increase numbers, to attract quality staff or to offer a broad curriculum. There are eight secondary schools with rolls below 400 pupils, and a number of these schools are in areas of serious social deprivation. The situation is made more challenging by the relative sparsity of the population and resulting high transportation costs for the local authority. In contrast, most of the grammar schools are oversubscribed, and those on the outskirts of Lincolnshire attract pupils from outside the county boundaries.

Addressing the challenges

Lincolnshire is addressing these challenges through establishing Federations and Academies. In the City of Lincoln, three Academies are being set up under the umbrella of one Federation. These will involve three secondary schools and two primary schools, and will create one Academy for pupils aged 3–18 and two for pupils aged 11–18. Two secondary moderns in Gainsborough will become an Academy in 2008. There will also be development of one Academy in Sleaford based on three sites.

In addition, the Learning and Skills Council is funding the establishment of a Wolds cluster – a vocational college covering the ages 14–19. A Federation between a technology college and two local schools has also been formed, which has given students access to better facilities and

wider opportunities, and in addition has enabled the Federation to attract higher calibre teachers.

These initiatives are going some way to addressing the challenges facing the non-selective schools, and the local authority is planning to continue this strategy on school organisation in the years ahead. As part of the review of other authorities' practice, Lincolnshire identified Kent's cluster model as a potential way forward for the county. Kent has 23 clusters where schools work closely together, each with a cluster plan, which supports and encourages the work of the schools in raising standards. Grammar schools work more closely with high schools than they have done in the past, to deliver the 14–19 agenda. The clusters have increased autonomy and receive funding from the local authority to manage the cluster plan.

Review of admissions arrangements

The Lincolnshire Pathfinder project also examined the way in which selection could make year-on-year planning for supply and demand of school places more complex, as decisions on grammar school places were subject to assessment and appeal.

One of the key issues highlighted by the project was the lack of consistency in selection procedures between different schools, which the authority recognised could lead to inequality of access and the legislative requirement to ensure "equity and fair access in school admission arrangements". The authority works with its Foundation schools to help ensure their admissions arrangements are compliant with the Admissions Code. Where this breaks down, they will challenge any admissions policy which they believe is illegal.

In Lincolnshire, the 15 grammar schools have joined together in a consortium for the purposes

of selective tests, but some use additional tests, for example in maths and English, in their considerations. Also, some schools relax the pass mark to fill surplus places, and some raise the standard in the case of over-subscription. Primary heads can appeal the results, prior to these being published to parents (who then could exercise their right of appeal), which the report pointed to as a weakness in the system due to the subjective and complex nature of the process. With some grammar schools receiving pupils from as many as 46 feeder primaries, the study suggested that it would be hard to guarantee consistency.

Lincolnshire was interested to see how admissions worked in the other selective authorities studied. It found a number of differences, such as the absence of primary heads from the process, and Buckinghamshire's system of separating appeal on test results from the admission appeal was particularly highlighted as good practice. The report also noted that none of the authorities appeared to have a system of filling surplus places through relaxation of the pass marks, and Lincolnshire felt adopting a similar approach would lead to a clear, fairer system.

In the light of this research, the local authority is now working with the heads and chairs of governors of the grammar schools to discuss the way forward to explore changes to their admissions processes. Among the ideas it is may explore with both Foundation and Community grammar schools are:

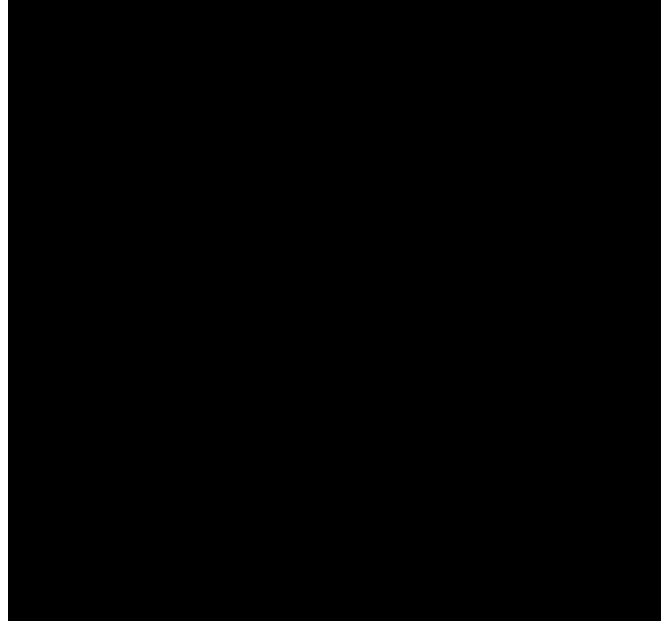
- Ensuring all grammar schools use the same tests
- Whether over-subscribed schools should raise the qualification level
- Whether to continue to involve primary heads in the appeals process

- Separation of test and admissions issues
- Continuing to work with all Foundation schools to ensure they are compliant with the Admissions Code

Lincolnshire – Additional Materials

- Commissioning in a selective area report

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Sheffield

Sheffield City Council's Pathfinder project was in two parts (1) Planning for changes in 14–9 responsibilities and (2) Using Neighbourhood Commissions to consult the community on school diversity plans. The second of these projects is described on page 63. Sheffield developed a route map and range of tools to help it, and its partners, to develop their strategic commissioning of provision for 14–19 year olds, so that young people would benefit from an excellent offer, which would help them achieve better outcomes. Their project included preparation for the commissioning of post-16 provision.

Education Facts and Figures – Sheffield

- Urban
- 132 primary, 22 secondary and 11 special schools
- Primary school governance: 111 Community, 1 Foundation, 2 Voluntary Controlled, 21 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 22 Community, 2 Academy, 1 Foundation, 2 Voluntary Aided
- 66,973 pupils
- 16.8% primary and 15.5% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Towards excellence in commissioning 14–19 learning

Sheffield City Council, together with the 14–19 partnership has developed a model and operational framework for commissioning 14–19 learner services. This is based on its existing commissioning framework, and on best practice in strategic commissioning identified through research and consultation.

The local authority's aim was to create a single, coherent strategic commissioning framework that would enable it and the 14–19 partnership to take full advantage of the 14–19 reform programme to deliver a personalised approach to learning. In addition, it identified an urgent need to prepare for the proposed transition of responsibilities for 16–18 planning and commissioning from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to local authorities.

Commissioning toolkit

This strategy and methodology developed has been captured in a guide and toolkit – *Towards Excellence in Commissioning 14–19 Learning* – which Sheffield has created to share its learning with other authorities and their 14–19 partnerships which are developing 14–19 commissioning strategies and practice. Although the toolkit is based on Sheffield's specific needs and experiences, it also draws on experience from education providers, other local authorities, central government departments and bodies such as the LSC and other key stakeholders.

Sheffield was keen for its thinking to build on existing good practice where this was available, so an important first step of the project was a substantial review of recent literature on the subject of strategic commissioning (a summary of findings and bibliography is included in *Towards Excellence*). This enabled it to identify the key principles that underpin excellent commissioning, and the issues it would need to consider in developing its approach.

Building on this desk research, the project team held discussions with key players both within the local authority and with key 14–19 partners at a local, regional and national level. The team visited other local authorities in the region to see how they were approaching the strategic

commissioning of 14–19 provision and their preparedness for the new sets of responsibilities being transferred to local authorities in 2010.

Investigatory visits were also made to Sheffield's secondary schools and the local further education college, to ensure that the commissioning model would meet the requirements and secure the engagement of learning institutions involved in delivery. This provided insight into the operational details of planning and managing post-16 provision at the institutional level and the policies and procedures that the local authority would need to put in place to fulfil its additional post-16 commissioning responsibilities.

Sheffield concluded that the model should be based on the Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework (JPCF) for children, young people and maternity services published by the Government in March 2006, which its research showed is accepted as the 'standard' guide to best practice in commissioning, even though different organisations have introduced minor modifications to suit their own needs. This had the advantage of ensuring that the approach to the 14–19 area would dovetail with the approach likely to be developed as the local authority's overall approach to commissioning. The JPCF was adapted and combined with the four stage commissioning cycle for schools commissioning, which was developed by the Department with local authorities to reflect the specific features of commissioning school places. In addition, the Sheffield model adopted the terminology used by PA consultants in their *Review of Best Practice in Commissioning* (2007) as it was felt it provided extra clarity on what was expected at each stage of the process.

Underpinning the model, the Operational Framework was developed to set out the operational considerations needed to implement it. The framework covers what is required to ensure local authorities and their partners have both the capability and the capacity to commission 14–19 provision. In terms of capability, this means having the appropriate policy and procedures in place, including planning, protocols and quality assurance systems. In terms of capacity, appropriate infrastructure, including internal and external partnerships, and adequate resources (staffing, budget, accommodation and management information systems) are required.

Practical tools

This Framework then formed the basis for developing the various practical elements of the toolkit. The project concentrated on developing a set of products that would be of immediate use in preparation for the transfer of 16–18 responsibilities. All of the potential users who were consulted agreed that what was needed most urgently was a combination of a general roadmap which would provide an overall indication of the nature and scope of the 14–19 commissioning context, combined with some detailed checklists and self-assessment tools which could be used in individual local authorities to start preparing for the major changes ahead. So the following resources were included in the toolkit:

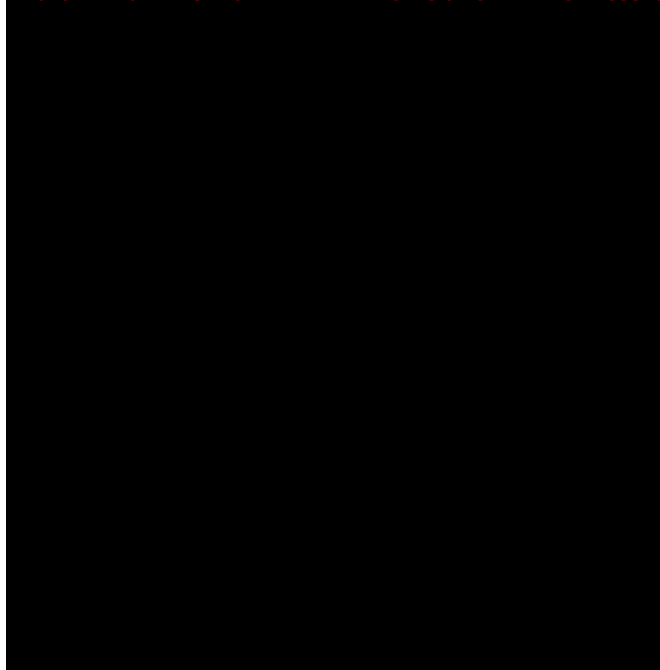
- A guide to first steps towards commissioning 14–19 learner services including a self-assessment tool-kit for prospective commissioners
- A checklist for assessing readiness to apply to be recognised as a commissioning agency
- An action plan for commissioning agencies

- Commissioning roadmaps
- A guide to 16–18 Funding Methodology
- A guide to predicting 14–19 supply and demand
- 14–19 Planning and Commissioning Structures: the Sheffield model

The toolkit was intended to be a starting point which could be further developed in the context of any local authority's, or cluster's, sub regional grouping, local characteristics and particular stage of development in relation to strategic commissioning and which would be flexible enough to allow for further refinements in the light of new policy and legislation, such as the raising of the participation age in education and training.

As a result of this project, Sheffield now has a roadmap and a range of tools that will provide the authority and its partners with a strong foundation for developing excellence in the strategic commissioning of the 14–19 learning offer, and it hopes that other local authorities will benefit from this work.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Top tips from Sheffield

In order to move towards excellent commissioning, local authorities need to:

- Ensure you have the appropriate capacity and capability for commissioning (see main article)
- Appreciate the fact that commissioning and procurement are not synonymous
- Understand the dramatic changes which will result from your role as commissioner
- Develop a much higher profile and status for commissioning than it currently enjoys
- Ensure leadership on commissioning at the highest level in your local authority
- Make significant investment in data collection and analysis
- Further develop your expertise in consultation techniques so that the voice of all 14–19 stakeholders, including learners, providers, employers and staff, can be heard
- Put in place significant training and development of staff involved in commissioning.

Sheffield 14–19 – Additional Materials

- Commissioning 14-19 learner services toolkit
- Commissioning capability self assessment toolkit
- Project report

Reflection on planning

Planning school places involves working with an array of partners, and ensuring that the school system really puts the needs of children and young people at the centre. This needs to be done as part of your local Children’s Trust. As local authorities, you are ideally placed to ensure that schools are integrated into the Children’s Trust arrangements.

In planning school places and services, the importance of planning for school improvement is greater than ever. As strategic commissioner, you want to raise attainment and skill levels for children and young people in the area, and will be factoring that into your school place and service planning. Some schools will be in need of rapid improvement, especially where they are in danger of falling below the floor target. In such cases, you need to consider whether planned structural solutions would provide a better basis for success.

Implementation

Once you have planned local school places and services, you will need to secure their sustainable delivery. The changed role of local authorities as strategic commissioners gives you a new role in bringing new partners into the school system. You can play a role in seeking out partners or sponsors for new schools, or broker partnerships for existing schools. **Bolton** explored ways of engaging with education and business partners, resulting in sponsorship of an Academy; **Gloucestershire** encouraged a group of parent promoters and helped them prepare for taking on a new school; **Kirklees** responded to parental demand for greater diversity of faith provision by supporting an independent Muslim school towards maintained status.

As the strategic commissioner, your leadership is important in encouraging schools to be innovative in their approach to their own development, including looking at different governance options where appropriate. You will need to establish clear processes for implementing school organisation plans which involve the schools, partners and the community. **Sheffield** set up a Neighbourhood Commission system, which is a process for looking at schools' plans for changing their status, and gaining local understanding of the issues. **Poole's** Pathfinder project included supporting a Special School through its move to Trust status, and exploring its

commissioning role particularly in respect of services for children with complex needs. Running a competition is a form of procurement, and is a new local authority role. It gives you an opportunity to set out criteria for the kind of school you want, and gives partners an opportunity to present what they can contribute. It also gives you an opportunity to judge the best school to meet local needs and raise standards. Although not a schools commissioning Pathfinder, **Cambridgeshire** presented to some Pathfinders its experience of running a competition. **Kent** also explored its role as the commissioner of school places in ensuring fair access for children and young people.

As you establish your role as strategic commissioner, you may need to review your relationship with schools. They are, of course, crucial delivery partners, who have a direct impact on the outcomes for children and young people. As the champion of children and young people, your focus is on ensuring they receive the best possible service from the schools. Your role will be more of an enabler, or broker, rather than direct provider; this includes encouraging schools to look beyond the local authority to other partners and stimuli, to bring in expertise, or new ideas, which will help to raise standards. You will develop more of an arm's length leadership role with your schools, giving them the freedom to

innovate, and giving you more freedom to champion the pupils and their families, and hold schools to account. As part of its Pathfinder project, **Ealing** explained its commissioning role to its schools to help them understand the new relationship.

Just as local authorities are best placed to commission whole schools to meet the needs of children and young people, schools themselves are often ideally placed to commission specific services which best meet the needs of their own pupils and their families. Because schools are so close to their own pupils, they can make sure services are tailored to their particular needs. It can be a good idea for schools to cluster together to give themselves more buying power, too, and commission services which meet the needs of children and young people in a locality. As part of its Pathfinder project, **Ealing** also developed ways of helping schools themselves to be more effective at doing that. As commissioning is not a well established skill set among schools, the role of the local authority in enabling them to use commissioning as an effective tool for improving outcomes is an important one. **Devon's** Pathfinder project explored new ways of commissioning, rather than directly providing, education services, such as education welfare services and curriculum advice.

Developing the market for school places

Local authorities have a strategic role in engaging with potential school partners and providers. The Department commissioned DTW (one of the consultant groups offering support to competition entrants in the north of England on its behalf) to prepare a report on the range of perceptions and experience among local

authorities of developing partnerships, and provide some practical advice.

DTW found extensive examples of strong partnerships between local authorities and other organisations which can provide support for school improvement. But building relationships with a view to encouraging new providers is less familiar territory for local authorities. Some authorities are nevertheless taking a positive approach to stimulating support for schools through sponsorship and partnership arrangements, believing that to achieve a step-change in outcomes, they need to be open to innovation and external providers.

DTW also spoke to organisations which represented potential partners – higher education, further education, business and others. Among potential partners themselves, there is a virtually unanimous desire for more information about the policy and process of engaging with the school system, and about competitions in particular. They would welcome approaches from local authorities. Potential partners can be in higher education, further education, independent schools, business, the voluntary sector, or other public or private organisations.

One of the keys to developing new partnerships is understanding their motivations for being involved. These can stem from wanting to close the skills gap, to equip future graduates or employees, to achieve better community cohesion or make other improvements to benefit the local community, or simply just wanting to “put something back”.

It takes time to develop partnerships. It is better to engage partners at an early stage, rather than wait until you announce a competition. Local authorities can raise the possibility of potential

competitions as part of ongoing discussions with partners and potential partners, to gain initial interest.

Key learning points:

- Relationships and partnerships are proving very beneficial to authorities
- It takes time to grow productive relationships. Engage potential partners early – don't wait for a competition
- A list of organisations who are interested in participating in competitions is available from the Department.
- To gain awareness of what is happening in other authorities, especially in competitions, go the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC) website: www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolscommissioner/index.shtml
- Assessing attitudes to potential providers can be tested by informal or formal opinion research
- Consider an audit of your relationships with local and regional organisations across business, HE, FE, independent schools, church, and other faith groups, and the voluntary sector
- If you are holding a competition in the future, consider working with local media to raise awareness
- Consider holding a forum on competitions for parent promoters to look at capacity and capability issues
- Your Chief Executive's Department, or Economic Development office, will have contacts with the business community.
- Where good relationships exist with business already, place school involvement on the agenda
- Consider working with other local authorities in developing regional approaches, e.g. a seminar based on a specific sector.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Case study

Gloucestershire – Parent promoted schools

Plans for a major new housing development in Gloucester and the associated emergence of a new community led the local authority to identify that a new primary school would be needed in the locality within the next two to three years. As this would mean running a school competition, Gloucestershire looked at how it could increase the diversity of providers by exploring how parents might be encouraged and supported to bid to run a new school.

The project centred on identifying and developing activities, resources and support that would strengthen the skills and confidence of parents and community groups to take on the role of school promoters, and a methodology that could be carried forward to future school competitions.

Interviews and focus groups tested methods of engagement with stakeholders in the development and adjacent community areas. The local authority sought insights from those who had run school competitions, and representatives of two existing parent promoter groups were interviewed to learn from their experiences. The study identified a number of barriers to parents becoming involved as promoters, including a perceived lack of need for a new school as current needs were being met, a lack of understanding of what's involved in the process and concern about the level of responsibility. Ways of addressing these issues included the key recommendation that potential parent promoters should be given access to experiential advice, for example from local authority officers on issues such as admissions, local catchment policy and setting up governing bodies.

Based on this research, Gloucestershire adopted a two-stage approach. First, it informed parents of their rights, the issues at stake and how they could affect them; this was a basis for then encouraging them to get involved. It launched a series of engagement activities including

drop-in sessions where parents could speak to local authority officers on a one-to-one basis, as well as an in-depth workshop evening for potential parent and community providers. It also set up a web-based forum (www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/coopersedgeschool) for interested parents and community members.

One of the challenges was that as the community was not yet established, it was difficult to identify potential parents to take part in the consultation. This was addressed through a publicity campaign using leaflets and posters in the area surrounding the housing development, and media coverage.

To get children involved, the local authority launched a 'Design a Primary School' competition for primary school children in the area, to see how they imagined their ideal school would look, through paintings, drawings, poems or descriptive writing. It planned to use this to inform the project and all future school planning in Gloucestershire.

Gloucestershire has developed this learning into a Toolkit for Engagement, which it will be using in future consultations but which it hopes will also be useful to other local authorities.

Gloucestershire – Additional Materials

- Parent promoted schools toolkit

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Bolton

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council wanted to move to a more ambitious model of school improvement, to raise the skills of local young people. It linked this closely with its regeneration plans. It involved new partners in the school system, securing a local Asian business consortium as sponsors for an Academy, and engaging other businesses, the local university and an independent school in planning educational projects.

Education Facts and Figures – Bolton

- Urban
- 97 primary, 17 secondary and 3 special schools
- Primary school governance: 52 Community, 8 Voluntary Controlled, 37 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 9 Community, 1 Voluntary Controlled, 1 Foundation, 6 Voluntary Aided
- 41,978 pupils
- 16.4% primary and 17.2% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Partnerships to build choice and diversity

Bolton wanted to explore how a range of commissioned partners could be encouraged to be involved in the process of educational development. The project focused on how local businesses, higher education institutions and independent schools might be engaged and how they could contribute to developing choice and diversity within the system. The aim was to generate deeper understandings of the process by which such partners could be commissioned.

The local authority was keen to move to a more ambitious model of school improvement, making very close links between the regeneration of the area and the educational and capital needed to achieve this. Bolton hopes to have between 15,000 and 20,000 new jobs in the next 20 years and many of these will be at NVQ Level 3. This will require significant educational change if the system is to deliver as many as possible of those workers locally.

In order to achieve its aims, Bolton decided to look beyond the traditional boundaries and seek ways to involve a range of partners in educational development, who would bring wider expertise and experience into the system. This meant

actively seeking out new partners and exploring ways of developing new educational opportunities. Bolton's linked vision for education and economic regeneration meant that the authority could be clear on which potential partners would be assets to the education system within this context.

The local authority took a structured approach, starting with a review of its secondary provision and using this to baseline its existing position in respect of choice and diversity. It then identified possible areas where involvement of partners could be beneficial, for example as education partners or Academy sponsors, and examined the local business community and education providers to identify potential partners.

Engaging potential partners

The next step was to hold informal discussions with potential partners, who were invited to consider involvement in schools through a menu of possible approaches at different levels, ranging from attendance and involvement at head teacher meetings to individual partnership agreements with particular schools, to sponsorship of an Academy. These discussions required high levels of sensitivity and confidentiality. It was important to be able to approach potential partners without prejudice and explore ideas with them knowing that it might lead to nothing, so the local authority aimed to develop these relationship over a period of time to build trust. Where individual schools were potentially affected then they too were consulted to secure their full engagement.

The new approach was a fundamental shift for Bolton's education governance, and therefore it was important that any involvement of wider partners had political approval, and that this was

secured throughout the process. This was time-consuming but vital to success.

Outcomes

There have been several successful outcomes of Bolton's new approach. For example, the local authority has secured an Asian business consortium as sponsors of a new Academies, which is also sponsored by the University of Bolton. Hayward School had already obtained £12m targeted capital funding and had reached design stage for a new build school. However, the community and governors of the school were clear that they wanted to see a more radical shift in the school, and with the involvement of the local business consortia, the governing body agreed that the Academy would offer better opportunities for young people and their communities. The Academy received Expressions of Interest approval in April 2008 and is due to open in existing buildings in December 2008.

As well as building relationships with local businesses, the authority has used a similar menu-based approach to develop options with Bolton School, an Independent school, which is now interested in joining the Academies programme. All of these partners have been involved in wider planning of new educational projects, for example Bolton's Building Schools for the Future preparations.

Through the Pathfinder project Bolton has developed the cultural conditions for more radical approaches within the system with wider partners seen as natural choices for its ambitious plans. It has begun to develop a wider community of educational interest in the borough as a resource for future involvement.

Top tips from Bolton

- Take time to plan and prepare for the project, including a risk assessment
- Think carefully and spend time developing the educational aims of the project
- Recognise the potential sensitivities of both old and new partners in the process
- Spend time building trust and confidence with all partners, including the political will
- Don't try to rush processes – allow each partner to move at their own pace wherever possible
- Be clear with partners about the expectations of the project and what it is intended to deliver
- Be aware that discretion and transparency can compete and agree what is confidential at the beginning of the process.

Bolton – Additional Materials

- Engaging with local business consortium case study
- Working with local independent school case study

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Kirklees

As commissioners of school places, and champions of children, young people and their families, local authorities need to be responsive so that the school system reflects the needs and aspirations of the community. Kirklees Metropolitan Council wanted to respond to parental wishes for a Muslim maintained school in the area, so it could widen the choice available to parents. Its Pathfinder project developed ways of supporting an independent Muslim school to join the maintained sector, making significant progress towards this.

Education Facts and Figures – Kirklees

- Mixed urban and rural
- 151 primary, 32 secondary and 7 special schools
- Primary school governance: 95 Community, 33 Voluntary Controlled, 23 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 25 Community, 2 Voluntary Controlled, 3 Foundation, 2 Voluntary Aided
- 58,938 pupils
- 15.8% primary and 14.8% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Developing the market – supporting a diversity of suppliers

Kirklees wanted to develop its skills in brokering partnerships with new providers of schools and helping bring independent schools into the state system. The local authority in its role as a strategic commissioner worked with Madni Muslim Girls Independent High School and the Saville Town Muslim Parents Association to help the High School join the maintained sector as a Voluntary Aided school.

The local authority established a formal project to plan and manage the intensive support and challenge that they were able to offer the school to help it to achieve the structure and standards required. The dedication of a large amount of officer time to the project was made possible by the Pathfinder funding, but in the process the local authority identified lessons that will assist other authorities and has created guidance to disseminate this learning.

The formal project structure and documentation provided clarity and proved to be a valuable tool in managing partners' expectations. The project board members represented a wide range of stakeholders. Project meetings provided a rich and diverse forum for debate about the implications of various aspects of the project plan.

The Board of Trustees of the school agreed the need to establish a temporary governing body to oversee the transformation process and mirror the constitution and function of a governing body in a maintained school, and The Saville Town Muslim Parents Association managed the process of appointing the 16-strong body. The role of the governing body is still developing, but members have engaged in training to explore their role in developing the strategic direction of the school, as well as in specific actions and monitoring activities of the project.

Audit of current provision

An audit of the school's current provision for curriculum, teaching and learning and leadership and management was undertaken by two school improvement officers who were allocated to work with the school. This provided a comprehensive baseline assessment at the beginning of the project which enabled Kirklees to target and prioritise the support. Subject and aspect school improvement officers were

brought in to work with the head and relevant staff on curriculum development, and continuing professional development sessions were delivered to all staff including various approaches to teaching and learning.

As well as having the close support of the senior project leader, the Madni school head was allocated a mentor head teacher who provided developmental opportunities through meetings, visits and shadowing. The mentor head teacher provided valuable advice as a critical friend in reviewing existing approaches to leadership, management, policies and curriculum.

Support for formal processes

Kirklees also supported the Board of Trustees in preparing its consultation and statutory proposal, including input from the School Planning and Admissions and Asset Management teams to ensure that all technical advice and requirements for the process were accurate. It has also engaged councillors and executive members through regular briefings and meetings.

The school is currently preparing for a consultation process in Autumn 2008 and hopes to submit its statutory proposal in January 2009. Kirklees is currently supporting the school to plan for its consultation, including the need to evidence demand for a 400-place school, and for the statutory proposal process. The local authority envisages that it will be able to offer some more definitive suggestions and guidance in this area and in supporting the development of educational provision in the context of a Muslim faith maintained school.

Kirklees developed strategies and support mechanisms during the project that could be transferred to other contexts including:

- Ways to build relationships with an Independent Muslim faith school and the community it serves
- Scoping and resourcing an audit and review of current provision for curriculum, teaching and learning, leadership and management
- Working with a Board of Trustees to consider the implications of becoming a Voluntary Aided Muslim faith school
- Building a team approach across the Children and Young People Service to support and challenge an independent school in moving towards the requirements of a maintained Voluntary Aided Muslim faith school
- Ways to support and challenge the proposers in interpreting and meeting the requirements of the Statutory Proposal process

Top tips from Kirklees

- Commit to a relentless focus on effective project management – strategic leadership by a project leader is essential; use a range of experts to maximise capacity
- Demonstrate a commitment to securing an appropriate relationship between the stakeholders involved, where all views and perspectives are valued and considered
- Work in partnership with the school to review educational provision and agree a realistic timescale for moving towards the requirements of leadership and teaching and learning in a maintained faith school
- Establish and train the temporary governing body at the outset so that they can develop a deeper understanding of the role by engaging in all stages of the project

- Secure agreement that the school will focus firstly on an action plan to develop and enhance educational provision to ensure clear expectations and enable planning for the consultation and statutory proposal processes
- Review of progress on the educational action plan will allow the local authority to provide a view on readiness before advising the proposers to begin the specification, consultation and statutory proposal processes
- Ensure sufficient lead time before implementation to enable the school and local authority to work together on various aspects of educational provision, induction to the local authority, human resource management, financial management and any issues related to the building and facilities
- Agree an approach to monitoring and intervention for the early stages of designation as a Voluntary Aided school to ensure sustainable impact on teaching and learning experiences for the pupils.

Kirklees – Additional materials

- Independent school joining the maintained sector
- The project board remit
- Mentor head teacher brief
- Audit of educational provision framework
- Commissioning staff to support school
- Evidence of educational provision
- Project report

Competitions for new schools

Cambridgeshire gave a presentation to Pathfinders on its experience of running competitions. With new housing developments and a rapidly rising population, the local authority needed 17 new primary schools and five new secondary schools. It developed a framework for running competitions, which addressed, for example, issues about social inclusion. We have included some of the lessons learned below.

Commissioning snapshot: Lessons learned for schools competitions

Forward planning

- Allow for a lack of knowledge about the competition process from elected members, local authority officers, school staff and parents
- Allow three years between identification of need for the opening of a primary school and longer for a secondary school
- Avoid undergoing the competition at the same time as the developer is seeking approval for the homes that would produce the pupils
- Avoid running more than one competition at a time

Launching the competition

- Notify the Department as soon as a competition looks likely, and arrange to meet a DCSF-appointed consultant well before the competition launch
- Provide the DCSF-appointed consultant with contact details of potential promoters – local trusts, businesses and not-for-profit organisations already working with local schools
- Allow time for the Department to comment on the draft notice

During the competition

- Provide potential promoters with background information to supplement the school specification and encourage them to make an early decision on whether to bid or not

- Provide the promoters with a copy of the decision makers guidance as well as the guidance for promoters
- Provide the promoters with a template for a summary of their proposal – in the format required for the second notice
- Let promoters know what is expected and acceptable during the consultation period – copies of proposals, marketing material

During the consultation

- Hold more than one public meeting if a number of bids is received
- Consider holding a ‘closed’ meeting for elected members, officers and heads and governors of neighbouring schools (where applicable)
- Agree a meeting protocol with the consultant to avoid one promoter taking more than their share of time

Other issues

- It is not possible for an external promoter to have total control of design and build unless the competition process is completed before any planning application
- The admission arrangements won't be known until the outcome of a competition process. Allow time to publish these in a composite prospectus the autumn before the school opens
- Consult on and determine any catchment area changes before the competition is launched. The area should be in the specification
- Prepare to spend lots of time talking to local schools.

Further information

Contact: Hazel Belchamber,
hazel.belchamber@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Case study

Neighbourhood Commission – community consultation

Sheffield, as part of its commitment to its commissioning role, looked into ways it could join the need to increase parental involvement in school organisation decisions, with its duty to promote choice and diversity. It piloted a model called the Neighbourhood Commission. It found that allowing a parent panel to make a recommendation based on evidence from a variety of sources was a powerful way of de-politicising the issue, allowing greater focus on which option would raise aspirations and improve learning and employment opportunities.

Sheffield piloted a model for community consultation through a Neighbourhood Commission, to give parents a genuine voice in implementing its diversity review, which is aimed at delivering better learning outcomes for the city's children and young people.

The local authority adopted a bottom-up approach to diversity, inviting schools to take the lead in identifying governance arrangements appropriate to their individual circumstances. A number of schools came forward with proposals to pursue Academy or Trust status. As part of its strategy, it made a commitment to ratify these proposals through early community consultation, at the point at which a sponsor or Trust partner had been identified, but ahead of any formal proposal and statutory consultation process.

Adapting a model it had successfully used in its Decent Homes Programme, the council decided to trial the use of Neighbourhood Commissions as an effective way of engaging the community in the decision making process. Under this model, a panel made up of parents, representative of the family of schools, scrutinise the proposal and supporting

evidence in detail and form an opinion on behalf of the community.

Community endorsement was vital if the proposals were to gain wider acceptance, as diversity in Sheffield had been controversial. The city's secondary system has traditionally been very homogenous, with the vast majority of secondary provision delivered by community schools. The change to a more diverse system in which a range of organisations are involved in running schools is significant.

Due to these sensitivities, a cross-party group of elected members was set up to advise on the structure and management of the Neighbourhood Commission process and to take an active role in reviewing the outcomes of each commission. However, the process was designed to ensure that there was still significant leeway for participants on each Neighbourhood Commission panel to decide the detail of how they would run the Commission and what evidence they would consider. This balanced the need for political sensitivity with creating a process that was empowering for the parents and other stakeholders involved.

The first Neighbourhood Commission took place to establish whether Parkwood High School should enter the Academy programme. The commission panel was made up of parents and governors from Parkwood school and its feeder primary schools, as well as a parent from the local Children's Centre and a governor representing the 16–19 sector. It met weekly during the six-week consultation period to hear evidence from a range of stakeholders – the sponsor, head teachers and governors from Parkwood and its feeder primaries, staff and trade unions, representatives from an existing Academy, other parents and young people. Members of the panel also visited a school that was in the process of entering the Academy programme with the same sponsor, to provide independent verification of the sponsor's suitability.

Alongside the detailed scrutiny being given to the proposal by the Commission Panel, the council carried out a wider consultation with the local community. It circulated a consultation document to parents and carers of pupils at Parkwood, the feeder schools and the Children's Centre, which included a questionnaire. There were also two public meetings as well as more informal drop-in sessions for parents and other stakeholders to find out more and express their views. At least two members of the panel attended each of these meetings and fed back to their colleagues, and the panel also reviewed the results of the questionnaire.

There were some important lessons learned during this wider community consultation. The response rate to the questionnaire was disappointing, at less than 5%, and it appeared that the complexity and length of the consultation document had put many parents off. For future consultations, Sheffield will use a simple leaflet outlining the key points and signposting sources of further information, which will have the added advantage of being cheaper and easier to circulate more widely. The style of public meetings has also been reviewed, following feedback from attendees that they felt they were too authoritarian with overly long presentations leaving little

opportunity to provide feedback. New ideas to be tried include splitting attendees into small groups for round table discussions, with the key stakeholders (school, sponsor, local authority) circulating to give information and answer questions. External facilitation is also being considered, to increase the sense of it being an independent process.

The final strand of consultation was with young people. The authority commissioned CHILYPEP, a voluntary project specialising in empowering young people, to carry out a consultation on the Academy proposal. CHILYPEP organised a series of focus groups based on School Councils, at Parkwood and some of the feeder schools. The outcomes were written up as a report to feed into the final decision-making process.

After considering all the evidence and the outputs from the various consultation strands, the recommendation of the Neighbourhood Commission was a firm endorsement of the Parkwood governing body's desire to move ahead with an Academy proposal. The cross-party members group also supported the proposal. The final link in the decision-making chain was the City Council's Cabinet, which received the recommendations from the Neighbourhood Commission Panel and the Members Advisory Group and, as a result, gave approval to the submission of an Expression of Interest for Parkwood.

The Neighbourhood Commission pilot successfully engaged parents and other stakeholders in the decision-making process. The process of seeking evidence resulted in the panel making a detailed evaluation of the proposal, something that would not necessarily have happened in a standard consultation format. Most significantly, the recommendation of the panel cut through the difficulties of political sensitivities and provided a clear steer to elected members in their final decision. The Neighbourhood Commission also achieved a positive reaction from the media, which had previously accused the council of not taking the views of local people into account.

Sheffield City Council is now committed to using this method to appraise Trust and Academy proposals in the future, in addition to the statutory consultation required during the feasibility process. In addition, the local authority is looking to develop a

generic process for parental engagement, over and above consultations on individual school reorganisations, which will provide an understanding of parental needs and aspirations and drive a commissioning strategy for schools.

Top tips from Sheffield

- Do ensure that you hold a transparent process for seeking nominations to a parent group
- Don't assume that the group is familiar with how a meeting is conducted or the background to your proposals
- Do empower the group to make their own decisions about how they conduct their business
- Do keep your general communication simple and straightforward
- Do avoid looking municipal and heavy handed at public meetings
- Do make sure the media and other key stakeholders understand your genuine intention to engage with parents.

Sheffield Neighbourhood Commission – Additional Materials

- Diversity of governance structures in schools report
- Analysis of responses to Academy proposal
- Young people's consultation on Academy proposal
- Neighbourhood Commission recommendation
- Project report

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Case study

Implementing fair access to school places

Kent's Pathfinder project was focused on its strategic role in ensuring fair access. Kent wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of a commercially available market classification tool in modeling demand and supporting fair access, and one application it explored was to determine who was using its Choice Advisers Service and how access to this could be improved.

Kent employs three choice advisers who provide support and advice to parents and carers during the time they are choosing a secondary school and after the places have been offered. They are available via a telephone helpline or at school meetings and at drop-in sessions for parents. The aim of this part of the Pathfinder project was to use market segmentation data to analyse the types of parents who were using the service to see whether it was reaching the types of parents who were most likely to be in need.

The postcodes of parents contacting the service were profiled and this profile was compared to the profile for all children attending schools in Kent. The results of the profiling of the clients of the service showed a consistent pattern of over-representation amongst the affluent and better educated parents and carers, and a lower representation from the less affluent and less well educated. This suggested that there might be a lack of awareness of the service among certain groups and/or that these groups were less motivated to identify or investigate alternative school options.

This was reinforced by the findings of an earlier analysis of school preferences, which concluded that children from particular social and economic backgrounds tended to gain their first choice of school more frequently than other groups, which suggested an acceptance of the nearest, most accessible school.

The profiling data was used to identify where children from these most under-represented groups contacting the Choice Advisers Service were concentrated, by ward of residence and by school attended. The aim was to provide the service with a tool with which to compare current provision of support to families and potential changes to this support to increase access.

This project provided the first formal understanding of how the Choice Advisers Service was being taken up and the results gave a very clear indication of who uses the service. Future analysis of service data over the next year or years will allow for assessment of whether any changes have led to improvements in levels of under representation.

Kent Choice Advisers – Additional Materials

- Choice advisers and fair access report
- Choice adviser case study

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Poole

The Borough of Poole wanted to clarify its role as a local authority, in commissioning, and increase its understanding of the relationship local authorities and Trust schools can develop to benefit children and improve outcomes, especially for those with statements of special educational need. This was part of a broader ambition to provide better integrated services for children, whose needs are never solely educational, in partnership with the local Children's Trust. This led to some immediate benefits, such as swimming and drama activities for the young people, and greater engagement of parents, especially in identifying unmet need. It also drew in partners so that their full range of skills and services could benefit children and young people.

Education Facts and Figures – Poole

- Coastal
- 28 primary, 9 secondary and 3 special schools
- Primary school governance: 22 Community, 3 Voluntary Controlled, 3 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 4 Community, 4 Foundation, 1 Voluntary Aided
- 18,640 pupils
- 5.4% primary and 4.9% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Commissioning school places and services for children with special educational needs

Poole clarified its local authority role in commissioning, focusing on special educational needs, linked to the development of Trust status for schools for children with complex needs.

As a result of consultation with parents of children with special educational needs, Poole identified that there was a demand for better integration and support in education and health services, as well as easy access to leisure activities, child care and short term breaks. Parents also wanted to be involved in every aspect of planning and service design.

The local authority adopted this ambition and saw that effective commissioning could provide the route to achieving it. However, it also recognised that this was not without its challenges, especially as Poole is a small unitary authority and therefore aligning adequate resource and capacity to develop commissioning could be difficult. A review of its current practice showed that commissioning was dispersed across agencies and services and more development of infrastructure was needed to manage priorities across the borough and between client groups and their needs. An example of this was the need to develop common use of commissioning terminology. In addition, the different statutory responsibilities of the key agencies providing services to children with complex needs and their families meant that there were different priorities and spending patterns among Children's Trust partners.

There was a need for a greater strategic alignment between Poole's Children and Young People's Plan and commissioning programmes, as well as a consistent focus on the outcomes and not the outputs of commissioning decisions.

Developing an SEN Trust

The Pathfinder project focused on the commissioning of places and services for pupils with special educational needs in the borough and regionally. The project was linked to the

development of a Trust school, Montacute Specialist School: Cognition and Learning.

Montacute was already commissioned by the local authority to provide education and healthcare to children with complex needs, both within the school and through its outreach service (with the Primary Care Trust). The project aimed to explore how the commissioning relationship with a Foundation Trust could enable the authority and PCT to capitalise on the school's leadership and its existing partnerships and services. Trust status would bring additional opportunities to build on these to increase the diversity and appropriateness of arrangements for individual children and their families and to maintain the quality of that provision through to further education and adulthood.

The project to move to a single Trust incorporating both Montacute and Langside Specialist Schools was based on work already underway to develop a new-build Complex Needs Campus on the current Montacute site which would enhance the environment and facilities including provision for specialist therapy areas, secondary curriculum teaching rooms and access for out-of-hours use by the community (these plans were submitted for Building Schools for the Future capital investment and have been allocated to Wave 6 of the programme).

Poole supported Montacute School in following the step-by-step guidance in the Department for Children, Schools and Families' Trust Schools Toolkit. Careful consideration and engagement of partners was a key foundation of the process, and meant that all prospective partners approached agreed to proceed with the Trust. Trust status has enabled the school to acquire new partners and to strengthen links with existing partners, bringing together business, further and higher education, and statutory and voluntary bodies

that have not previously worked closely with such a shared aim.

Planning and supporting Montacute's move to Trust status also gave the local authority the opportunity to review its commissioning approach. In parallel to supporting the school in working through the toolkit, a multiagency group of key stakeholders was established to inform the development of a commissioning framework for the local authority and its partners.

Shaping the commissioning framework

Learning from the Montacute project was fed into this group for inclusion in the commissioning framework planning, particularly in relation to the role of schools. As the school worked to develop governance arrangements and engage a range of partners in the development of the Trust, it was ideal timing to explore the commissioning relationships between the Trust school and the local authority.

For example, a consultation evening organised by the school to discuss Foundation Trust status was run alongside a commissioning exercise with parents to engage them in planning services. Needs analysis is particularly difficult in relation to children with very complex needs, as there are fewer of them. The project developed an engagement methodology, which included imaginative consultation techniques, as well as providing care support to enable parents to take part in events. This meant that the local authority was able to gain a good level of information and understanding about what range of services these parents, children and young people expected the local authority to commission (see case study on page 17).

The parent consultation was also used to test a simple commissioning cycle, which had been developed as a key part of the new commissioning framework and was designed to be easily understood by all agencies. Testing the understanding of stakeholders in this collaborative process identified training needs, for example a common understanding of terminology around commissioning. This has been partly addressed very simply through the production of a glossary of terms that has been shared with partners. A lack of understanding of contracting and procurement in relation to commissioning also emerged and is being addressed through a joint workshop.

The production of a commissioning framework was supported by an analysis of functions required to support commissioning. This triggered a review of the governance and joint commissioning arrangements for children's services in Poole as partners realised their current arrangements were not sufficiently ambitious to deliver the new framework. There have also been developments such as the creation of service brokerage and additional contracting capacity. Montacute school is now involved in direct commissioning of services from identification of need through to procurement of external providers.

Top tips from Poole

- Commission for the whole child (and their family)
- Think about *who* you are commissioning *with* rather than *what* you are commissioning
- Plan for parental and pupil engagement at the outset
- It doesn't need to be complicated to be do-able – get the money closer to people who need to benefit – supply their needs using your broader knowledge of partnerships that can deliver
- Have a small strategic group to project manage the change process in a real context
- Start from where you are; build on existing local direction for meeting young peoples' needs
- Effective commissioning depends on partnership, for SEN identifying the wider range of partner organisations that can contribute to and help lead the process
- The commissioning process at the micro level should inform strategic commissioning but this approach can take longer.

Poole – Additional Materials

- CYP Services Commissioning Framework report
- Developing a multi-agency commissioning model case study
- Developing a special school to Trust status case study
- Commissioning terminology
- Project report

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Ealing

The London Borough of Ealing's Pathfinder project involved assessing commissioning knowledge and skills in local schools and within the local authority. It did this to develop better understanding about the changing relationship between the local authority as commissioner and schools as providers. It was able to gain a clearer understanding of how schools could develop commissioning skills. Because schools are often best placed to commission services to suit the needs of their own children and young people, Ealing explored ways of helping them do so.

Education Facts and Figures – Ealing

- Urban
- 64 primary, 13 secondary and 6 special schools
- Primary school governance: 49 Community, 4 Foundation, 11 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 5 Community, 1 Academy, 5 Foundation, 2 Voluntary Aided
- 38,732 pupils
- 22.7% primary and 26.3% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Developing the role of schools as commissioners

The London Borough of Ealing has organised its children and young people's services to support its role as strategic commissioner of schools and recognised the need to ensure understanding amongst all stakeholders of this changed and evolving role. A key part of this is to ensure that schools are supported in their role, both as providers and commissioners of services. Developing an understanding of, and structures

around this new relationship was a central focus of Ealing's Pathfinder project.

The authority has identified a number of strengths in relation to its commissioning role, including its strong track record in planning school places, a stakeholder partnership approach to Building Schools for the Future and the Primary Capital Programme, and a robust extended schools structure, which it sees as an essential building block for schools taking on an expanding role as commissioners. It has developed a children's commissioning structure across the local authority and the primary care trust, comprising a joint post of Head of Children's Commissioning and a shared Children's Commissioning Strategy.

However, it was recognised that there were weaknesses that needed to be addressed if commissioning was to be developed successfully:

- Not all relevant staff and stakeholders had a good understanding of how the role of the local authority has changed in relation to schools
- Insufficient resource in schools, or available to schools, to support them in their expanding role as commissioners
- Lack of tools to assist local authority staff in honing their provider relationship with schools.

Ealing decided to prioritise the further development of local understanding amongst key stakeholders of the role of the local authority as a commissioner and the role of schools as both provider and commissioner, and to develop the skills base of staff so that they could deliver on their changing roles. Ealing also wanted to develop understanding and local planning structures to enable schools to contribute to

whole system planning – for schools and for other services.

The local authority undertook a programme of research, including a skills and knowledge needs analysis within schools and a further study with key members of its staff to identify key issues.

The study has given the local authority a clear understanding of what a development programme needs to include, and awareness at senior level that there is a need to invest further time and resources into a longer-term implementation programme, which has now been established. It has also contributed to a growing awareness in schools of commissioning, what the term means and how the roles of schools and the local authority are changing.

Attitudinal change

The project reinforced the view that the development of commissioning requires an attitudinal change as well as knowledge and skills development and appropriate delivery models. Local authorities and schools are used to providing services and this has been at the core of their ethos and skills. Becoming a commissioner of services is, for many staff, a new area of activity and involves not only the need for new knowledge and skills but also, for some, new ways of thinking and possibly a new mindset.

The necessary cultural change requires a longer-term structured programme of development that effectively engages stakeholders and covers a number of key strands.

There were also some immediate, practical outputs from the project to help build shared understanding and practical skills, including an easy-to-read guide to commissioning and a needs analysis tool, which is a simple questionnaire to identify training needs of senior

school staff. A commissioning toolkit for schools is being developed which explains every stage of the commissioning cycle and provides templates to support the process.

Some key findings

- 5% of schools reported that staff had a good personal understanding of what commissioning means; 49% had little or no understanding
- 25% of respondents didn't see commissioning as part of their role
- Many keen to develop their understanding through training, guidelines and other documents

The consultation indicated that the local authority could work better with schools in the commissioning process and ensure appropriate accountabilities by:

Communicating better

- Developing working groups and workshops to share information and expertise
- Open and transparent documentation/ conversations
- Setting up Service Level Agreements (SLA)
- Clear definitions of roles and responsibilities

Mind your language!

The Ealing study revealed a key issue in developing commissioning understanding and practice within schools – the need to ensure a common use of terminology. The low percentage of school staff who believed they had a good personal understanding of what commissioning means could be because the language used is unfamiliar. It is probable that the processes are already being used, but the language of commissioning obscures this.

Linked to this is the need to highlight existing good practice which is not currently associated with 'commissioning'. For example, methods used for school improvement planning include what can be recognised as many of the elements of effective commissioning.

Ealing's recognition of this issue led the council to produce an easy to read Guide to Commissioning that sets out the principles in simple terms.

Poole has also developed a glossary of commissioning terms, listed under their additional materials on page 70.

Ealing – Additional Materials

- Strategic commissioning of schools by LAs guide
- Good practice in commissioning services toolkit
- Strategic commissioning analysis report
- Project report

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Devon

Devon County Council's Pathfinder project focused on securing an arm's length education support service for Devon schools. In the context of moving from being a provider to a commissioner of services, Devon explored the best way to commission school improvement and related services. It developed some delivery models. At the heart of this was its commitment to inclusive education, and to ensuring schools were able to commission the best services, to enable them to raise standards and improve outcomes, including those for vulnerable children and young people.

Education Facts and Figures – Devon

- Rural and coastal
- 316 primary, 37 secondary and 10 special schools
- Primary school governance: 194 Community, 64 Voluntary Controlled, 58 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 30 Community, 1 Voluntary Controlled, 4 Foundation, 1 Voluntary Aided and 1 Trust
- 93,905 pupils
- 9.9% primary and 9.0% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Organising for effective commissioning of school improvement services

Devon has been examining how to strengthen the commissioning and service delivery arrangements for school improvement services, supporting the Enjoy and Achieve outcome area of Every Child Matters.

Over the past three years, working with school representatives, the local authority has responded to the requirement to generate a market by developing an Alternative Portfolio of Services to Schools. The Alternative Portfolio kite-marks suitable providers, after a full European Union application process, so that schools can have confidence in the quality of service. Devon County Council wanted its own services to be of the highest quality, so that they are governors' first choice, but rather than resist competition, it saw competition as helpful to continuous improvement. The natural next step for the local authority was to investigate whether it could find a better way of securing the most vibrant, responsive and effective services to support school improvement in the future, and to accelerate a move to strategic commissioning.

In this context, the Pathfinder project developed a vision which was not simply about externalising curriculum services but a radically reorganised approach which would pull together a number of services which were operating separately to add value, particularly for vulnerable and underachieving groups.

Devon Curriculum Services (now trading as Devon Education Services) was already an independent trading unit within the county council. However it was clear that the model needed to be a larger entity as it would be more likely to be viable, and it could make overt the links between universal educational services and those that improve life chances for vulnerable children and young people.

The local authority agreed criteria against which every service and function of the directorate could be assessed. A great number of services could eventually be included in the new delivery model, but a pragmatic approach was taken to focus on what was immediately achievable.

Based on an initial options appraisal, the following services and functions were proposed for inclusion in the new model:

- Devon Education Services (the curriculum advisory service)
- Educational Psychology Service
- Devon Governors Services
- Education Welfare Service
- Exclusions/Reintegration Service
- Traveller and Gypsy Education
- English as an Additional Language
- Support and Advisory Teachers
- Education Other Than at School.

In terms of business models, maintaining the status quo was not considered an acceptable option and there was no obvious advantage from extending the in-house trading model. Nor did the authority want to turn to total outsourcing. Consideration was given to the following business models:

- Local authority controlled company
- Joint venture company with a private partner in which the local authority is a majority shareholder
- Joint venture company with a private partner in which the local authority is a minority shareholder.

The local authority has made full use of project management methodology to ensure delivery and manage risks, including using external project management support to increase its capacity. A commitment to dialogue with stakeholders, including key decision makers, and staff who will be affected by the changes and their union representatives, has been a central feature of the project, and a communications plan was developed to ensure that this commitment was upheld.

At the time of writing, the project was still progressing, with further work planned to engage staff in finding an option that everyone is comfortable with and the preparation of a detailed business case. At the same time, work is being taken forward on the commissioning core, ensuring that the right level of capacity is retained.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Top tips from Devon

- Follow a tight project management methodology to ensure that the project remains on time and within budget
- Ensure political commitment is established
- Have a high profile project sponsor to act as a champion and enabler for the project
- If the timescale for the project is tight, a commitment to building the necessary organisational capacity to deliver it is essential
- If the outcome of the project will lead to major structural change, ensure that staff are engaged early in the process. They need to understand the rationale behind any changes and see the potential advantages and benefits the changes will bring to them as well as for the organisation and children and young people
- Communication is critical. Ensure that the communications strategy and plan identifies all stakeholders, their interest and influence, and a range of communication channels
- Hindsight really is a wonderful thing – use it! At the end of each stage of a project it is important to draw out the learning, reflect and move on.

Case study

Building schools' capacity and understanding of commissioning

Devon consulted with the Kingsbridge Local Learning Community (LLC) to explore how best to build capacity and understanding of commissioning by individual schools or groups of schools. The local authority also aimed to find out what infrastructure, enablers and tools were needed to ensure that locally based school clusters could mature into well-informed, autonomous and effective partnerships.

Kingsbridge Local Learning Community is made up of ten primary schools (only three of which have more than 100 pupils) clustered around a secondary school, which is in the final stages of the process of acquiring a Trust. It covers a largely rural, geographically isolated area with a declining pupil population. The impact of falling rolls has created many surplus places, resulting in schools being uncertain about pupil numbers and budgets, which has the potential to undermine local partnership work. Despite this, schools share a strong commitment to working collaboratively, although informal (and therefore variable) processes, few shared infrastructures and scarce resources have hampered the LLC collectively in making significant changes or reshaping services for children and families.

The consultation found that headteachers within the Kingsbridge LLC were interested in commissioning to:

- Generate efficiencies, releasing leadership to focus on raising achievement
- Use centralised purchasing arrangements
- Access school improvement services better matched to their requirements

- Explore opportunities for providing services within the LLC itself. The LLC schools had a clear desire to commission services for themselves but no tools to make this happen.

Through this project, the local authority aimed to work towards a common understanding of the difference between commissioning and procurement. The consultation sought to identify gaps in data, support or other blocks to the commissioning process, as well as to reach a common view about what should be commissioned and an assessment of whether the market was there to meet the schools' needs. Headteachers were also asked to identify particular areas of Devon County Council-funded work that they would feel confident in organising locally if funding were devolved for this purpose. Finally, the local authority wanted to agree a set of local learning priorities and identify material which would be useful for Devon to use in a local commissioning handbook.

Headteachers were invited to take part in an away day which featured interactive sessions on a range of key topics, such as defining terms and processes for commissioning, shaping the new model through identifying service satisfaction and additional sourcing, and the role of governors. A follow up session with head teachers and chairs of governors gained more formal input into shaping the local authority's approach.

The consultation has given Devon a good insight into the steps it can take to build schools' capacity and understanding of commissioning, and the attitude and needs of those schools. Three areas of work were identified for initial focus – further development of datasets to promote local needs analysis and identification of common areas; business management and joint purchase arrangements (later to be linked to the DCSF online programme; and an audit of continuing professional development need and expertise within the LLC.

Top tips from Devon

● Ownership

- Establish a 'what's in it for everyone' starting point. What are the gains for all parties? How will local commissioning improve leadership capacity and services for children and families?

● Partnership

- Set out the big picture showing the symbiotic relationship between a strategic core and strong autonomous local partnerships

● Commitment to local capacity building

- Provide practical and accessible tools to develop a shared understanding about commissioning and strategies to prioritise actions
- Encourage the LLC schools to look at wider issues and data so they have a better understanding about their community, and knowledge of each others' schools and communities
- Define terms and link actions to overarching commissioning process e.g. data set as needs analysis part of commissioning cycle

● A reflective organisation

- Take time out to think properly and for the local authority to facilitate progress
- Learn from practice; apply elsewhere.

Devon – Additional Materials

- School clusters commissioning services case study
- Effective school partnerships case study

Reflection on implementation

Much commissioning activity depends on developing good relationships. You will need to allow time and resources to do this well, especially when developing relationships with potential providers.

But as some Pathfinders have shown, it can be done, and can produce valuable benefits. Start building relationships early – don't wait for a school competition. Evidence from the DTW report (page 52) and some Pathfinders suggests you may be pushing at an open door, as many potential providers seem keen to know more and want to be involved in raising ambition and attainment among young people.

In implementing change, experience from the Pathfinders shows that local community ownership of school organisation issues can be powerful, particularly in taking some of the heat out of contentious issues.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Support and challenge

Local authorities are, of course, experienced in supporting, and challenging, schools in their areas. Your role is to agree challenging but realistic targets for your schools, agree a system with your schools for monitoring school performance, provide infrastructure for supporting schools and challenge underperformance. The Education and Inspections Act gives you new powers to intervene where schools are causing concern.

You may direct a school to take a partner, which may be another school, college or another organisation. Collaboration has been shown to be an effective way of strengthening leadership and developing teaching and learning through sharing of good practice. It may be particularly important to have this power where a school is in denial about the scale of its problems. You also have a power to issue warning notices to schools where you judge pupil progress to be unacceptably low. There is greater emphasis than ever before on your role in preventing failure, identifying and notifying schools which cause concern. You will need to address issues, including the attainment of a group of pupils whose slow progress may be masked by otherwise reasonable results, before problems manifest themselves in formal school failure.

As the commissioner, not provider, of schools, your role in holding schools to account is very clear; you commission schools to provide education and other services, and are accountable for outcomes for children and young people in your area. Schools provide the education, and you must hold them to account for how well they do this. The National Challenge, introduced in June 2008, sharpens the focus yet further on underperforming schools – although it was introduced after our Pathfinder projects were underway. **Leicestershire's** project examined ways of helping schools to improve, by helping School Improvement Partners to be better at brokering support for schools, and facilitating school collaboration on school improvement themes. **Essex** has developed a traffic light system for monitoring school performance, agreeing triggers for intervention.

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Essex

Essex County Council's Pathfinder project examined how, as strategic commissioner of school places, it could improve school performance. It links the planning of school places, with the important role of supporting and challenging schools. To do this effectively, local authorities need to monitor school performance and identify where support and challenge is most needed. Essex's project identified a tool to do this, and it has already used it to identify schools which cause concern and take action.

Education Facts and Figures – Essex

- Mixed urban and rural
- 470 primary, 80 secondary and 20 special schools
- Primary school governance: 273 Community, 55 Foundation, 66 Voluntary Controlled, 76 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 23 Community, 1 Voluntary Controlled, 49 Foundation, 7 Voluntary Aided
- 192,267 pupils
- 9.9% primary and 7.5% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Improving school performance through strategic planning and monitoring

Essex wanted to move towards more proactive commissioning of school places across all four strands of the commissioning cycle. It had been developing its commissioning role in a number of ways, including the establishment of 25 Local Delivery Groups of networked schools with

devolved responsibility for coordinating provision and ensuring best outcomes for children and young people. Multi-disciplinary Teams Around the School, Child and Community were set up in the communities to provide support to the Local Delivery Groups.

To build on these developments, Essex worked with schools and other stakeholders to develop a strategy for commissioning diverse school provision to improve school performance. The strategy covered current and predicted educational developments by school and area, including school performance. It looked at all options to improve education, for example Trusts and Academies, sharing of resources and federating, and using the powers available to Essex as a local authority to mandate change and improvement. It also established a Schools Organisation Board with responsibility for implementing the strategy and undertaking Area Reviews.

Transparent guidelines

As part of its role in supporting and challenging schools, Essex thought it was important to develop a set of guidelines on when it would intervene, and the solutions available, to make the process transparent to all parties involved. An important part of this was the development of an interactive planning tool for tracking school performance and context, which would be available to the local authority, schools and other partners. Open sharing of information to identify and resolve issues was a central strand of Essex's strategy, and the tool provides a way of consolidating and analysing the large amount of data available to local authorities and head teachers about the character and performance of individual schools.

It is based on a spreadsheet that uses a traffic light system to highlight each school's position, bringing together both new and existing data in a single, comprehensive data set, setting out the context and performance of schools.

The Red Amber Green categories cover deprivation levels, school capacity, school popularity, surplus places, attendance, GCSE results, Contextual Value Added, and the condition and suitability of the buildings. These areas were agreed in consultation with the schools. The triggers for moving from green, to amber, to red were also agreed with schools. Some triggers are absolute, e.g. a school below the floor target (and which is now a National Challenge school) would be Red. Others relate to being in a particular quartile of performance.

The spreadsheet can also roll up information for Local Delivery Groups, i.e. clusters of schools, and for the whole local authority.

The tool can now be used by the local authority's School Organisation Board to review performance at individual schools, for Local Delivery Groups, or at strategic partnership level.

This is a simple model that could be easily adapted by other local authorities, and Essex has produced a guide to help them to do so. Local authorities adopting the model would need to consider the factors that are relevant to performance in their area, and consult on parameters and trigger points with their own schools.

Step by step guide to the Red Amber Green (RAG) tool:

- Determine the school grouping or hierarchy e.g. clusters
- Consider the areas you want to cover in the analysis e.g. social context and deprivation indices, school popularity, surplus places, academic performance, value for money, and other indicators relating to the five Every Child Matters outcomes.
- Identify and collect data
- Agree the judgement criteria which trigger a change of status, and document them clearly
- Consult schools throughout and agree all aspects with them.

Top tips from Essex

- A strategic approach to school performance in this way allows schools to think creatively and find solutions at an early stage
- In establishing local accountability, the sense of responsibility held by head teachers is axiomatic. Essex believes the establishment of the Local Delivery Group before the teams around them meant that head teachers saw themselves, not the local authority, as having direct responsibility
- Design a traffic light system in discussion with schools, to gain common acceptance.

Essex – Additional Materials

- School performance traffic lights toolkit
- School performance traffic lights explanation
- Local Delivery Groups addressing school performance case study
- Federating to address school performance case study

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PATHFINDER PROJECT FOCUS

Leicestershire

Leicestershire County Council's Pathfinder project explored improving the effectiveness of School Improvement Partners (SIPs), and collaborative working between schools to share ideas and good practice on tackling common challenges. Its commissioning role includes finding ways of supporting schools to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. It has developed a brokerage website so that SIPs can identify the best support for schools, and schools have collaborated to develop their expertise in nine different areas. Leicestershire is already seeing positive benefits to pupils.

Education Facts and Figures – Leicestershire

- Mixed urban and rural
- 225 primary, 54 secondary and 6 special schools
- Primary school governance: 122 Community, 70 Voluntary Controlled, 33 Voluntary Aided
- Secondary school governance: 43 Community, 4 Voluntary Controlled, 4 Foundation, 3 Voluntary Aided
- 94,104 pupils
- 7.2% primary and 5.6% secondary pupils eligible for free schools meals

Improving the effectiveness of School Improvement Partners

Although the Leicestershire is rated as outstanding for its implementation (secondary) and preparedness (primary) for the introduction of School Improvement Partners (SIPs), the least developed area of its work is in brokering

support. Both internal and external SIPs are at present fulfilling two functions very effectively:

- Helping the school analyse its priorities and needs
- Identifying the range and type of support required to meet those needs.

Functions that require development are:

- Working with the school on its choice of sources of support from the local authority – traded services, private consultants or suppliers, National Strategies resources support from other schools or a range of other sources
- Feeding requests to the local authority where the SIP judges that resources controlled by the local authority are relevant.

In response to this, the local authority developed a website www.leics.gov.uk/sips-brokerage to provide SIPs, head teachers, teachers and support staff with comprehensive details of the support available for improvement and development within their schools.

The website also documents emerging practice in schools. Nine Leicestershire schools are developing a structure for collaborative working. The ultimate aim is to set up networks of locality based groups or 'area learning partnerships' so SIPs can help broker and facilitate support between schools.

In addition, Essex produced an easy reference guide (A4 sheet) for SIPs to use on school visits. This keeps their brokerage role at the forefront of their minds to facilitate instant on-site commissioning of support for schools. It lists areas of support provided by the local authority, independent consultants or educational companies. All providers that appear in the guide are quality assured by the local authority.

Another key area to develop is that of school-to-school support. Much of the expertise for school improvement lies in schools themselves. At present this occurs on an ad-hoc basis with SIPs referring one school to another through local intelligence. Their aim is to systematically set up networks of locality based groups or 'area learning partnerships' whereby SIPs can help broker and facilitate support between schools.

Head teachers were also able to share principles of collaborative working with other schools at the Pathfinder Conference, which took place in April 2008, and the project was highlighted with a view to encouraging other schools which might benefit to consider a similar approach.

A structure for the development and evaluation of collaborative cross-phase working for groups of schools was established. Four head teachers (two primary, two secondary) managed this aspect of the project. As a result nine collaborative groups are working together and early evaluations indicate that they are enjoying a high level of success in working in this way.

Raising standards through school collaboration

Leicestershire has developed a model of school-to-school support and a way of helping schools to become more autonomous in brokering their own support. The local authority has supported and promoted collaborate working across schools to increase their capacity to be self-sustaining in supporting each other's learning and development needs.

One project aimed to strengthen provision for children and young people with needs related to language, cultural adjustment, learning barriers and other complex needs associated with their status as new arrivals in the UK, as asylum seekers or as children with English as an additional

language (EAL). It aimed to help them to raise attainment and achievement.

This gap was initially identified by a head teacher and flagged as a growing issue among a group of schools. A specific need was identified in providing continuity of support for pupils moving between schools and included:

- Greater continuity of support for target groups of pupils across the whole phase of their education
- Improved specialist professional skills for teaching and support staff
- Improved wellbeing and mental health of target groups of pupils, for example asylum seeker children
- Reduced EAL issues as a barrier to achievement, resulting in raised attainment in all schools
- Enhanced progression of learners from FS-KS4.

Leicestershire developed a partnership between five schools – a community college (14–19) into which the pupils of the other schools will eventually feed, one high school (10–14 years) and three primary schools (4–10 years). A linked special school and not attached church aided primary school were also involved to ensure continuity and progression for pupils.

It appointed a project coordinator, seconded from within the high school and established a steering group to ensure an effective communication system for the schools. An important early step was to share information about current numbers and needs of pupils across the schools within the specified groups. A further needs analysis was carried out, and extra funding was made available to schools on the basis of this.

There was also an audit of specialist expertise across the schools to identify what was available and what needed to be improved through training. The partners agreed to share specialists and commission additional expertise where required, for example from the local authority Ethnic Minority Achievement Support Service to provide language support for the group of schools. A home-school liaison officer employed by one primary school would be deployed for one day per week to the high school.

The project identified that support for parents and carers was also important and now this is being offered in a range of ways: through an experienced parent liaison officer from one of the primary schools; targeted support for complex cases, for example asylum seeker families and foster carers; and adult literacy courses offered by the high school.

Leicestershire – Additional Materials

- Brokerage resources for SIPs guide
- Brokerage website: www.leics.gov.uk/index/education/support_for_schools/sips
- Collaborating on standards case study

Reflection on support and challenge

Collaboration between schools opens up exciting possibilities. The local authority role in stimulating and brokering arrangements is an important one, particularly where schools may be used to seeing each other as competitors.

The National Challenge intensifies the spotlight on schools which are underperforming. As the champion of children and young people, the local authority's role is to do its utmost to ensure that they receive the best possible education. That means giving schools the support they need to succeed, but it can also mean having difficult conversations with underperforming schools. In some cases, you may need to give warning notices. Between April 2007 and June 2008, only 14 warning notices were given to schools by local authorities. In the same period, over 200 schools went into special measures. A shared understanding between schools and the local authority on how school performance will be judged will help both commissioner and provider.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Annexes

Annex A: Cross-cutting resources

Additional sources of information

Schools White Paper 2005

Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – More choice for Parents and Pupils

www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/schoolswhitepaper

The Education and Inspections Act 2006

The Education and Inspections Act gives legal force to many of these proposals, and to some additional measures that were not included in the original White Paper. It received Royal Assent on 8 November 2006.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/educationandinspectionsact

The National Challenge: Raising standards, supporting schools

The National Challenge will support schools with the lowest GCSE results, so that by 2011 at least 30 per cent of pupils in every secondary school will leave with five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalchallenge

Parenting Support: Guidance for Local Authorities in England

This guidance will be relevant to those involved in the development of Children and Young People's Plans and those responsible for the process of commissioning and/or the delivery of services for parents.

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00169/>

Tackling Falling School Rolls

Many areas are facing a serious decline in their primary school population. Local authorities and primary schools faced with falling rolls need to take action to ensure they are equipped to deliver the best possible quality of education with the resources available to them.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/>

Setting up new schools

Advice on setting up a maintained school in England

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=2>

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolscommissioner/current-competitions.shtml>

School Admissions

The School Admissions Code (28 February 2007) applies to all maintained schools and Academies when setting their admission arrangements for September 2008 and subsequent years. The Department recently launched a consultation which outlines proposed changes to make the admissions process for parents as fair, transparent and straightforward as possible.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode

Choice Advisers

Choice Advisers will make the school admissions process clearer, fairer and more equitable by supporting those families most in need of help.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/choiceadvice>

Schools Capital

Local authorities, as strategic commissioners of education in their areas, have a key lead role in working with schools, dioceses, parents and other school providers to drive the modernisation of the school estate at local level.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/resourcesfinanceandbuilding/capitalinvestment/guidance/aims/>

Extended schools

This section of TeacherNet provides advice on setting up extended services. It is aimed at schools and LAs but it will also be useful for local providers.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/>

Extended schools case studies

www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling.aspx

The School Organisation website contains guidance on

- opening a new school (by competition or otherwise)
- closing a school
- expanding a school
- changing school category
- proposals for Trust schools

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/>

The Schools Commissioner

The Schools Commissioner has a wide remit focused on promoting four key themes – choice and diversity in schools, fair access, parental involvement and the new role of local authorities as commissioners.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolscommissioner/>

Setting up an Academy

Local authorities and other potential partners who are interested in the Academies programme should contact The Office of the Schools Commissioner.

http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/academies/setting_up/?version=1

Supporting Trust and Foundation Schools

The Trust schools toolkit outlines the process that schools need to go through to acquire a trust. It also provides information on the local authority role.

<http://www.trustandfoundationschools.org.uk/>
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations

School Improvement Partners

Advice and guidance to local authorities on the National Strategies

www.sipsweb.org.uk

14-19 Education and Skills

This website explains how we are transforming learning for 14-19 year olds. To do this we are working with local authorities, the Learning and Skills Council, schools, colleges and work-related learning providers.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19

Annex B: Useful sources of data for school place planning

Title of data	Content	Contact
Patient Registers	Numbers of people currently registered with a general practitioner disaggregated by age within academic year and full postcode.	Primary Care Trust See www.pctdirectory.com
Sub-national Population Projections	Numbers of people within a local authority district disaggregated by 5-year age group and sex. The following tables are relevant: 04: London boroughs 05: Metropolitan districts 06: Non-metropolitan districts within counties A-G 07: Non-metropolitan districts within counties H-N 08: Non-metropolitan districts within counties O-Z	Office for National Statistics 01329 813865 or 813913 www.statistics.gov.uk , click on Office for National Statistics and search for "SNPP"
Small Area Population Estimates	Mid-2005 LSOA estimates by broad age group and gender. Mid-2006 estimates planned for July 2008, and Mid-2007 estimates planned for early 2009	Office for National Statistics 01329 813753 www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14357
Students and Qualifiers Data Tables	Numbers of students attending higher education institutions disaggregated by institution, gender and domicile (UK, other European, non-European)	Higher Education Statistics Agency 01242 211153 www.hesa.ac.uk , click on "View Statistics Online" then "Students and Qualifiers Data Tables" and scroll down to "Institution level"
SFR Additional Information	a) Numbers of learners crossing LA borders for school disaggregated by each pair of local authorities. Separate tables for primary, secondary, special and 16+ b) Table 30: numbers of pupils attending independent schools disaggregated by year of age and home local authority	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/ and click on Publication Type "Statistical First Releases"
Neighbourhood Statistics	Provides a large number of datasets on a variety of topics at LSOA level	http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk
Data for neighbourhood renewal	Provides links to other websites that hold neighbourhood data	www.data4nr.net



ISBN: 978-1-84775-224-6

PP/D16(7747)/08/08/

© Crown copyright 2008

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial research, education or training purposes on the condition that the source is acknowledged. For any other use please contact hmsolicensing@opsi.x.gsi.gov.uk