

**Call-in of the Cabinet decision on Review of Essex Education Services
(FP/102/03/18)**

**Notes of informal meeting held at 9am on Monday 4th June 2018 in C120,
County Hall, Chelmsford**

Present:

Councillor R Gooding (Cabinet Member - Education)
Councillor J Baker - (member calling-in the decision - also Vice Chairman of People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor J Chandler (Vice Chairman of People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor M Maddocks (Chairman of People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee)

In attendance:

A Boey (Cabinet Office)
G Hughes (Senior Democratic Services Officer)
P Randall (Senior Democratic Services Officer - observer)

Background:

The Cabinet had made the decision on the Review of Essex Education Services (FP/102/03/18) on 22 May 2018. The decision related to Essex Education Services, a traded part of the County Council, which provided services to schools and proposed to conduct a sale of EES. The decision was published and then called-in by Councillor Baker (with support from Councillors Deakin, Mackrory, and Robinson) on 25 May 2018.

Councillor Baker - summary of call in

In opening the discussion, Councillor Baker outlined his reasons for call-in.

- He stressed that he had not been lobbied by anyone on this and had called it in on his own volition.
- He had no issue with the actual decision-making process followed.
- He had concerns about the impact of the decision on democratic accountability and whether it would be undermined and so deny school governing bodies from being able to decide how they wished to continue to receive services from the County Council.
- He also had doubts whether the proposal was in the best interests of the school children and families and how that could be assessed?
- Discussion in full scrutiny committee would facilitate greater transparency of the issues and decision being proposed.

Cabinet Member response:

Councillor Gooding stressed that under the proposed decision the majority of services provided to the Education sector by the County Council would remain provided from within the Council.

- The Target Tracker software developed by the County Council was marketed and purchased by approximately 80% of Essex schools and also sold around the country. Some limitations with it had now been identified such as incompatibility with I-pads. The software was coming to the end of its current developmental cycle life and now needed significant further development and investment. Consideration had been given as whether to keep it in-house and commit to significant development and investment but it had been decided seek an external specialist company to do that instead.
- Included in the service being proposed to be sold were HR consultancy which was already traded, financial support for school (some of which has also been traded), and some educational visits. SEN provision would remain provided by the County Council.
- He had been advised that the value of any sale of the software would be much enhanced by including those other consultancy services although it was possible that there could be some companies who may solely look at the IT package as an investment, develop it and then sell it on - this would become clearer during the bidding process.
- The prospective market value of the software product further devalues as time passes.
- As now, schools would be free to choose whether they wished to continue to use any of these services and/or seek their provision from elsewhere.
- Democratic accountability lay with the school governing bodies anyway as they would make the purchasing decisions for these non-mandatory services and would presumably make them in the best interests of their own pupils, parents and staff.
- Councillor Gooding would be meeting Head Teacher representatives to further discuss the proposals (particularly around HR services) and was willing to report back on this to scrutiny colleagues if that was requested.
- Retaining a proportion of the business had been considered. This in effect would mean retaining a shareholding which would be difficult bearing in mind the service would need significant future investment (particularly around the further development of the Target Tracker software) and so the County Council would still end up being responsible for a proportion of this.
- The decision paper enabled the County Council to further progress discussions and procurement intentions.

Members then discussed possible options for further scrutiny of the proposals during the refinement of the procurement process. No conclusion was reached on that.

Conclusion:

Councillor Baker was advised on the process for continuing the call-in process should he wish to continue to do that. He agreed to consider the matter further and advise the Democratic Services Officer on how he wished to proceed over the course of the next day or so.

Councillor Baker subsequently confirmed that he wished for the call-in to proceed to formal committee. The matter would be considered at the next scheduled meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 14 June 2018.