

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

22 October 2020

Report by Director of Education

UPDATE ON CLEANING SERVICES IN PFI SCHOOLS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update the Cabinet of the current position of cleaning services at the PFI schools (St Ninian's High School and Mearns Primary School) provided under the PFI contract and agree to consider at the next service review period due August 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Cabinet is asked to note this report and approve that the cleaning service is considered at the next review period due August 2021.

BACKGROUND

3. The Council has a contract with East Ren Schools Services Ltd (ProjectCo, the provider Bellrock) for the provision of services under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for Mearns Primary School and St Ninian's High School.

4. In November 2019, following the concern over standards of cleaning and the outcome of a benchmarking exercise of the cost of this service, Cabinet approved that officers undertake the next stages to bring cleaning services in-house to be delivered by the Council's Facilities Management Service.

REPORT

5. A short-term working group comprising officers from Education, Legal Services, Accountancy and HR was established to conclude this as soon as was practicably possible. Tasks for the group included agreeing an exit timetable, progressing legal matters, considering the transfer processes, agreeing the benchmark price with Bellrock and thereafter backdated payments due to them as required under the contract and ultimately establishing the service in-house.

6. Progress had been made on taking this brief forward but has stalled due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic from the early months of 2020, which has inevitably required the Council to focus on delivering essential services.

7. As noted in the original Cabinet report, Bellrock, whilst acknowledging the poor standards were keen that they retained cleaning and advised they would adopt additional measures to improve levels of service.

8. Acknowledging that the Council had approved that officers progress the next stages to take back cleaning services, Bellrock made some changes which included the appointment of a new Senior Facilities Manager in January 2020. Whilst officers remain cautious there has been an improvement in the cleaning standards at both schools from the early months of 2020 prior to the lockdown period.

9. As a consequence of the pandemic there remains the need for the Council to focus its efforts on delivering essential services with priority to keep schools and early years settings open and safe and to do so, which requires enhanced cleaning.

10. The Education Department is able to report that, since the return to school as normal in August, at this stage Bellrock have engaged well with the department ensuring that their cleaning and janitorial services are enhanced to meet the increase demanded to help mitigate the effects of the virus. Locally schools have noticed the improved standards and to date the head teachers have been pleased with service levels.

11. Officers are aware that improvement in standards at the two PFI schools, whilst most welcome particularly at these times of increased awareness and expectations by all service users, may well be short-lived or indeed down to specific personnel, possibly questioning sustainability. However members can be assured that cleaning standards in Mearns and St Ninian's are currently of the enhanced standard Facilities Management are working to across the remaining educational estate; officers continue to closely monitor.

12. Given that progress on removing the contractual obligation with Bellrock has been unavoidably delayed, noting that with the current improved standards there is not an immediate need to change this arrangement and recognising that there is an opportunity to formally review the service for August 2021, it is recommended that matters continue to proceed according to contract setting the benchmark price with a review in 2021.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

13. In agreeing to pause the need to cease the contract as a pragmatic response in these unprecedented times, there will be an increase in the price for the service. Bellrock has advised that they are prepared to remain by their original offer and limit the increase to 5% over the 2016 price, and limit the backdated payment due to November 2018 as they originally offered. This is considered fair and reasonable in the circumstances. The price increase for the base contract would have been limited to 3.7% if the Council had been able to take over the service as originally planned in the terms of the 2019 Cabinet report.

14. Provision had been made in budgets to reflect the financial impact of the original plan and the increase can be met within existing resources.

15. The cost effectiveness of the service will again be reviewed within a year in 2021.

CONSULTATION

16. Consultation has taken place with Legal and Accountancy Services, reflects discussions with Bellrock and views from the two schools on cleaning and janitorial standards particularly ensuring adherence to satisfactory levels to help mitigate the effects of the virus.

IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSAL

17. A price will be agreed for the service as highlighted in paragraph 13 and the service will be subject to a review in 2021; otherwise matters continue according to contract with continued close monitoring.

CONCLUSIONS

18. Unfortunately the actions of the working group established to conclude the next stages of the removal of the cleaning service from the PFI contract were impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown and preparations, and the continued focus to keep all schools and early years' facilities safe and operational following the resumption of full-time education in August.

19. However the standards of cleaning at the two PFI schools have improved in 2020 and Bellrock has engaged well with the Council in their response to the impact of COVID-19. Time will tell if this is sustainable but it is positive and helpful in these unparalleled times.

20. These cleaning services will be reviewed in 2021 and in the interim will be closely monitored. The outcome of this review will determine whether cleaning services are ultimately removed from the services provided by ProjectCo. There is a pause on the progress of the original plan to take over this service. It should be noted that there remains the prospect that cleaning be removed from services provided by ProjectCo (Bellrock).

RECOMMENDATION

21. The Cabinet is asked to note this report and approve that the cleaning service is considered at the next review period due August 2021.

Mhairi Shaw
Director of Education
22 October 2020

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Background Paper:
Report by Director of Education, Options for Cleaning Services in PFI Schools, Cabinet, 28 November 2019

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