

## **Aspire Learning Trust**

### **Theme 10: Improved outcomes for pupils through a new facility or service, for example, catering or UIFSMs**

In March 2014, contractual changes resulted in a large number of schools needing an alternative supplier for catering services. A number of schools opted to use an established private local contractor, as there was insufficient time to complete an extensive tendering process. With the appointment of a cluster SBM an opportunity presented itself to generate some value in negotiations for schools.

The cluster consists of 8 primary schools that have entered into a formal Trust arrangement, although the group contains a mixture of maintained schools and academies. The schools serve an urban area of high social and economic deprivation in Redcar and Cleveland, in the North East of England and the provision of a high quality catering service is seen as being a major benefit for its children.

The Trust had identified joint procurement as a key objective and the opportunity for reviewing the catering service was seen as a good project to test this approach. This project also provided an early opportunity for Sue the cluster SBM to work with all of the schools on a significant issue that could have a major operational impact across the Trust.

Seven of the schools were able to participate in the procurement exercise, while one was not able to join in, due to its existing commitment to a PFI contract. In addition to the Trust schools, a further five local schools who had previously collaborated on school improvement initiatives were keen to participate in the joint tender approach.

Although the current catering provider was satisfactory, we wanted to test the market to see what other options were available and in particular to see if we could obtain better value through joint purchasing, as well as improving the quality of the catering provision for our children. We also were keen to ensure that the management of the contract would be done professionally as this was seen as an area of current weakness.

Sue worked together with two Headteachers and a SBM from one of the other schools to write the tender specification and it was advertised in late 2014. She then managed the process during the period of advertisement, liaising with interested parties and seeking legal and professional procurement advice as necessary. In total, 5 tenders were submitted and these were evaluated with the same group that had been involved in compiling the tender. The winning bidder was a supplier that had not been heard of before the process began. They submitted an extremely high quality tender, which offered a significantly higher service level and at a much better cost than the other suppliers. Confirmation of the suitability of the contractor was obtained with client references, which were all highly positive.

The new contract is starting in April 2015 and so far the new contractor has been very professional in its approach to making this process happen as smoothly as possible. Our current expectation is that the new contract will save the schools in excess of £113,000 over the three years of the contract and that there will be a significant improvement in food quality for the children.

The standard of food being offered is very high, containing a high proportion of fresh ingredients and meals are cooked from scratch on the premises. The contractor offers additional benefits, such as the

promotion of healthy eating through a range of activities and sponsorship of a kitchen garden in each school to enable children to grow food that can be used in their meals.

The running of such a large tender, with a total contract value approaching £2m has been both a challenge and great learning experience. Getting advice on how to write a good specification, handling contractor enquiries and deciding on the most appropriate criteria to evaluate the tender submissions has been particularly useful. It was also really valuable in being able to get a group of people to work together in devising the specification and evaluating the tenders. We also found it helpful to meet with the suppliers and perhaps the best part of the process was being able to sample some of their food!