

South Lakes Rural Partnership

Theme II: Management of existing contractor(s) leading to savings / improved service

The South Lakes Rural Partnership consist of a number of schools working as part of wide ranging partnership with a focus on many areas associated with school improvement, Service Provision, Staff development, training, governance and leadership. The schools in the partnership cover all phases and include academy and non-academy schools. The partnership was established in 2012 as a limited company.

The appointment of Cluster Business Managers (the Cluster SBM role has been split between several members of staff) has provided the opportunity to develop specialist skills amongst the Business Manager community, whilst continuing to provide general business management support.

The Cluster Business Managers work collaboratively as part of the partnership and local school structure. Being a rural area geography plays an important part in the day to day operation of the schools. Sustainability and access to professional services to support schools can be a real challenge.

Stephen Holmes is the driving force behind the creation of the business support model, in some ways he is looking to create a model based around the concept of Hub and Spoke. This concept allows for the centralisation of key functions, but still permits delivery of vital services within rural schools. The challenges are significant but the benefits of efficiency and professionalism have a major impact for the schools.

The current area of focus is the development of financial systems to assist schools in their budget management. Stephen is leading work with external providers in the development of software to support schools. In many schools existing systems do not provide the schools with access to timely budget and financial information. This presents a problem when it comes to accurate financial management, it also means that systems in schools for making payments and processing transactions is cumbersome. Most significantly it means that schools face some real challenges in their financial management if they are to take advantage of new leadership models available to them.

Stephens focus to address this problem has been through this Hub and Spoke methodology. It is allowing the creation of technical competence on a central basis, which schools can access when they need it. It provides a cost effective solution to professional financial management, and it also means the school can recruit, train and retain skilled people to work effectively.

The partnership is currently working with a small primary school which has converted to an academy, and through this model they are accessing the professional support they need. Stephen is very clear that the model is not designed to remove ownership of financial management. He is clear that this is, and should remain, the responsibility of the school.

The partnership has secured specific financial deals with a range of suppliers. The terms of these arrangements are made available to the schools in the partnership, and as and when existing arrangements come to an end, the schools have an opportunity to access new suppliers at the terms

agreed by the partnership. It means schools can benefit from collective purchasing, but it also means they have ownership of the decision in selecting the new supplier.