

Village Academy

Theme 6: Joint procurement savings from purchase or renegotiation of a contract

Theme 9: Financial, audit and management control improvements leading to savings or improved reporting and compliance

Theme 12: Income generation – grants bid / income strategy

The Village Academy is a MAT of 6 primary schools based in Kent. The MAT has plans to expand to incorporate 4 more schools, therefore meaning 10 schools will sit under the Trust.

The Cluster Business Manager has been responsible for a number of improvements across several areas of the MAT, and this case study highlights some of the larger projects which have relied on their input and expertise.

The MAT took the decision to centralise the Finance services across the 6 schools. This was in order to remove the time consuming processing of invoices and payments from school offices, to develop consistency in Ledger and Cost Centre allocation and to identify opportunities for bulk purchasing and shared services across the Trust. This also presented an opportunity to create a Central 'Head Office' budget for shared services and personnel following a number of years spent charging one particular school for shared goods and services and then having to cross-charge in order to share the costs. The CBMs role has been to define the exact requirements of the MAT and research financial software providers who could provide the required systems to the MAT - carrying out full analysis of cost, product specifications and procedural efficiencies. On settling for a particular system, the financial savings have been substantial. Where individual schools would pay £12-13,000 per year for the required system licences and service with the existing provider, the new solution is costing just £3,000 per year as a shared cost for all six schools. Based on these savings, and the reduced cost of adding further schools, the CBM and CEO have jointly estimated savings of £88,000 with expected growth to 10 schools (and £50,000 for the 6 schools currently operating under the MAT). It is anticipated that the new centralised systems will also support improved reporting and compliance and deliver time-saving efficiencies.

The work involved in researching, costing and then implementing the new financial system has led the CBM to consider the charges for accountancy contracts. With more sophisticated reporting and analysis available, accountancy and audit work is less manual and labour intensive and the CBM plans to negotiate lower cost accountancy services.

The CBM has also overseen the research and development of 3 successful CIF bids with a combined worth of £364,000, in partnership with a local firm of Architectural Consultants who provide technical input into the CIF bid writing on a 'no win, no fee' basis. Their project management costs are also built into the bid cost, and therefore do not represent an additional cost to the MAT. Examples of two of the CIF funding outputs have been a boiler replacement in one school, and the installation of a boiler and roof insulation and convector systems for heating for another. These improvements will lead to reduced energy costs in the long-term, and therefore further savings

which have not yet been defined and realised in addition to the other savings in other areas and the grant funding itself. The third CIF bid, which amounted to £154,000, has led to critical building repairs and improvements including roof repairs, removal of asbestos, and reduction of legionella risk, electrical works and supporting greater security around the school gates.

An additional area of work has meant the successful bid for sponsored capacity funding of £50,000 which is supporting a number of additional projects to increase efficiency. Part of the funding will support the centralisation of HR and Payroll administration, with the appointment of a central HR and Payroll officer who will adopt a single best practice approach to ensure consistency and across all 6 schools. The CBM is now looking to provide a web-based solution for health and safety, which will track, manage, and report health and safety checks and issues within one centralised system. A number of different IT solutions are being considered for this, with an allocated £8,000 of the £50,000 provided in the Sponsor Capacity Funding grant.

To support strategies for teaching and learning, the CBM has deployed the SQL programming skills of one of its in-house IT Support Team members to develop systems for the collection of pupil assessment data from teaching staff and a database to produce query reports and detailed analysis. Using the database, teachers and school leaders are able to plot changes and interventions against pupil results to see the impact. It is also possible to manipulate results to include / exclude specific groups or individuals to validate any assumptions around the impact on cohort average statistics. The system is capable of producing formatted Pupil Assessment (Data) Reports for entire cohorts at the click of a button which show progress throughout their school career to accompany teacher written reports. The systems are being further developed with £2,000 of funds from the Sponsor Capacity Grant to reflect the removal of 'levels' in assessment.

These projects are bringing efficiencies that will prepare the MAT for its expected growth to 10 schools over the next few years.

It is clear that the CBM is taking significant strides in supporting procurement savings, financial systems improvements, and income generation and is a driving force in the implementation of new processes to drive efficiencies.