

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	School Improvement Procurement
Meeting / Date	Cabinet, 13 January 2026
Cabinet portfolio	Councillor Kizzy Gardiner, Portfolio Lead Member for Children and Young People
Report author/ Contact details	Mary Jarrett, Corporate Director for Education Children's Service Directorate Mary.jarrett@walthamforest.gov.uk
Wards affected	All
Public access	Open
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Equalities Screener
1.	Summary
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to progress with external procurement for a School Improvement Partner and a direct award to the current provider to allow for the procurement process to be carried out
2.	Recommendations
2.1	Cabinet is recommended to:
2.1.1	Approve the procurement of an external School Improvement Partner via a procurement process.
2.1.2	Note that the contract should be in place for 5 years (1+1+1+1+1) to align with Annual de-delegation vote from schools.
2.1.3	Approve that a direct award should be made to the current provider Haringey Education Partnership for the period 1 April 2026 until 31 March 2027 whilst the procurement process is undertaken to allow for continuity of service.
3.	Proposals
3.1	Background to request: In Summer 2024 Maintained School Heads raised a number of concerns with the council about the lack of an appropriate school improvement offer. This concern impacted negatively on the relationship between the council and its schools and on the Local Authority's ability to improve school standards and ensure inclusive practice to support increasing numbers of SEND children in local schools.

- 3.2 In order to resolve the situation it was agreed that monies which had been de-delegated for this purpose be diverted to purchase an offer from a neighbouring borough in the absence of an existing resource in Borough. A one-off sum was identified from Council reserves at that time to top up the de- delegated pot and support a proposal to identify an external solution.
- 3.3 Following due diligence by Maintained Schools Heads, it was agreed that the Local Authority would fund Haringey Education Partnership (HEP) for the academic year 24/5 and this was further extended until March 26 to align with budget cycle and allow for due diligence to be undertaken in advance of any further changes.
- 3.4 From May- July 2025 a group of Heads and School Leaders met together to consider options, costs and impact of the HEP contract. During these meetings the following issues emerged:
- High levels of satisfaction with HEP offer.
 - Reported alignment of HEP values with Waltham Forest values
 - Concerns that HEP offer needed to become more Waltham Forest facing, with recognition that longer-term contractual relationships would be required to facilitate this.
 - Concerns that without leadership and co-ordination this could quickly become a fragmented offer with some maintained schools buying in and others feeling excluded.
 - It was noted that the HEP membership includes an allocated School Improvement Partner, plus access to additional school improvement work (curriculum resources and 'deep dives', specific subject matter expertise and access to leadership support and collaborative working). It does not include access to the CPD offer, although this has been heavily discounted for schools in Waltham Forest.
 - It was noted that the HEP offer in Waltham Forest has been restricted due to lack of longer-term engagement and more bespoke local offers and ways of working could be co-produced if a longer-term and financially sustainable partnership arrangement is made.
 - It was noted that the new Ofsted Framework and potential changes in SEND legislation presented a variety of risks to Education Delivery and the creation of a cross-Borough Education Partnership would create resilience and shared learning.
- 3.5 The consultation group considered statutory duties in relation to school improvement, which sit in the main with schools as funding is allocated directly to schools for this duty. However, the Local Authority retains a number of statutory duties in relation to School Standards and these will need to be reflected in the quality and standards of education

partnership work. A joint commissioning contract co-ordinated by the Local Authority and overseen by a borough-partnership would allow for scrutiny and quality assurance of the offer to be maintained and supported by the relevant data (outcomes for children at the end of each key stage.)

- 3.6 The schools were advised that they could choose to buy individual membership of HEP which is costed at £19 per pupil but capped at £12.5k pa for the larger schools and £13k for secondaries with a sixth form. The minimum annual cost for smaller schools is £6k (to cover costs) there is a reduction in costs to £3k each as a special arrangement for the nursery schools and AP these reductions are managed as part of a collective commissioning arrangement but would need to be negotiated separately should schools choose to commission their own packages of school improvement.
- 3.7 In advance of the Schools Forum vote, the Local Authority issued a Planned Procurement Notice via the e-tendering system. With the intention to provide the market with early information in relation to the external delivery of the School Improvement Partner service. The Planned Procurement Notice resulted in over 40 companies or individual registering interest in the service. Due diligence in relation to this list indicates very little challenge to the authority should a direct award be made (as only one of the providers, Haringey Education Partnership) had the experience and size to deliver a contract on this scale; other registrations were from school-related providers who offer therapies or individual School Improvement Consultants.
- 3.8 Advice has been sought both from procurement and legal colleagues and the preferred direction of travel is to protect the authority and schools by undertaking a public procurement process. This option allows for the award of a contract up to five years, creating stability and the opportunity to align school improvement delivery with the development of the Waltham Forest Education Strategy. The oversight and governance for this contract will come from the newly formed Waltham Forest Strategic Education Board. To allow for this procurement process to be carried out it is proposed to make a direct award to the current provider, Haringey Education Partnership, for 1 year from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027.
- 3.9 in October 2025 the options in relation to funding a School Improvement Partner i.e. de-delegation and create a collective Waltham Forest Education Partnership or withdrawing de-delegated funds and each school commissioning its own package were discussed at Waltham Forest School's Forum, and in accordance with Schools Financial regulations, the maintained schools were issued with a vote, with the secondary maintained schools being unanimous in (100% in

favour) of creating a Waltham Forest Education partnership via de-delegated funding and the Primary Schools voting at 70% in favour. .

4. Options & Alternatives Considered

4.1 The Local Authority would have the option of developing and delivering its own school improvement offer; however, having had no such service for a number of years, this option was rejected due to the delay it would cause to providing improvement services and because the Local authority simply doesn't have the capacity to develop as broad an offer as the HEP offer (comprised of School Improvement Partners who operate across the Haringey and Enfield Local Authority Areas).

4.2 The option of creating a Direct Award to Haringey Education Partnership was rejected as this did not offer sufficient protection to the Local Authority or the Schools in the event of commercial challenge.

5. Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)

5.1 The investment in School Improvement is one part of the work in children's services undertaken to ensure that every child has the best start in life and is supported to achieve their potential within their local school.

6. Consultation

6.1 A full consultation in relation to the proposals was undertaken with schools, in accordance with School's Financial regulations during October 2025 and the vote was undertaken during November with the majority of schools agreeing the de-delegation of monies and joint funding between the Local Authority and Schools creating a 'Waltham Forest Education Partnership'.

6.2 The January Scrutiny Committee will consider the issue on 20th January 2026. A reference from the committee will be appended to this report setting out their comments/recommendations and responses from the service.

7. Implications

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

7.1.1 The funding for the School Improvement contract will come from schools who have agreed via Schools Forum and a vote that this money will be de-delegated from them, this is at present £350k p.a. based on numbers of pupils and with capped amounts to ensure equity of provision for smaller schools.

7.1.2 Additional monies of £35k p.a. from the General Fund to cover Local Authority Statutory duties in relation to moderation and monitoring of SATS (which we have previously commissioned from an organisation

called 'Pobble') this is met from existing budget aligned to current delivery and does not require any new investment.

7.1.3 Additional monies of £50k from HNB as part of required transformation work to support schools in their delivery of the SEND School Standards; internal SEN reviews to support practice and the delivery of SENCO Support partners to ensure consistent delivery across the Borough.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Advice has been sought from Legal Services regarding the risks/benefits to the Council of a direct award to HEP. A short-term direct award to enable a procurement process to be undertaken has a very low risk of challenge. Whilst risk of challenge from other providers for a longer arrangement is likely to be low carrying out a formal procurement process allows protection for Council, Schools and the Provider as it will be compliant with the Procurement Act 2023 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules

7.2.2 Section 13 of the Education Act 1996 provides that local authorities must secure that efficient primary, secondary and further education is available in its area to meet the needs of the population.

7.2.3 Section 13A of the Education Act 1996 provides that local authorities must ensure that their relevant education functions and their relevant training functions are exercised with a view to promoting high standards, ensuring fair access to opportunity of education and training and promoting the fulfilment of learning potential by persons under 20 (under 25 if subject to Education, Health and Care Plan)

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

7.3.1 An EQIA Screener has been completed. The School Improvement contract will address disadvantages in education for cohorts of children by improving the quality of the education services they receive. The School Improvement work will address inequalities for children and young people via a range of measures including measuring the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

7.4.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the proposals in this report

7.5 Council Infrastructure

7.5.1 No implications

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None