

Maintained Schools: Schools Information Management System (SIMS) and Financial Management System (FMS) - Contract Renewal

Key Messages

Forum members are asked to:

- Form agreement on the preferred procurement option available to Sheffield City Council for SIMS and FMS on behalf of maintained schools.

1. Introduction/background

1.1. SIMS is a Student Management Information System (MIS) fulfilling essential school functions including:

- Collecting, managing and reporting on student attendance and absenteeism.
- Recording and reporting on attainment.
- Collecting and maintaining SEN data.
- Compiling all statutory returns electronically.
- Holding staff details, qualifications, and training information.
- FMS is the module for managing financial data including orders, invoices, receipts, petty cash, cheque processing, income receipt, budget monitoring and reporting.
- Containing an automated data transfer function which sends all pupil data to the Council Education database which is used by many services that support schools.

1.2. Sheffield City Council procures SIMS and FMS licences on behalf of maintained schools. Academies procure their own licenses but can opt to take support.

- This enables us to negotiate a reduced per-pupil cost which is passed on to schools.
- The current contract with SIMS is due to expire on the 1st April 2022 and has a 90-day notice period meaning we have to inform the supplier by the 1st January 2022 with our decision regarding renewal.

1.3. SIMS has recently been sold by Capita and merged with ParentPay.

- The new management have indicated that they are investing heavily in SIMS to ensure it is developed to meet current and future school needs.

- The first updates of SIMS are due to be released to all schools in early 2022.

1.4. Sheffield City Council has experienced support teams for SIMS and FMS.

- The SIMS Support Team also provides support to a number of academy schools.

1.5. There are other schools management information systems on the market:

- Some Sheffield schools are now using other suppliers (including, but not limited to, BromCom, Arbor, ScholarPack and Advanced).
- There is not time to complete a full procurement exercise testing all other systems.

2. Options

2.1. **Option 1** – 3-Year contract with SIMS (including FMS):

- Continuity of service for schools with experienced support provided by the MIS and Finance Teams. No need to implement new system involving data migration and training users.
- The cost for schools is reduced in comparison to buying licences directly from the vendor.
- Option of signing up to SIM Hosted solution (at additional cost). This is the same version as current SIMS but hosted so upgrades / patches are completed without school / IT intervention, also enabling access to the system outside the school IT infrastructure.

2.2. **Option 2** - 3-year contract with SIMS (including FMS) including an option for schools to leave after year 1.

- As Option 1 but having a 1-year break clause enables schools and the MIS Team to evaluate the improvements to SIMS that are being released from early 2022 and test the market for other systems if needed.

2.3. **Option 3** – 12-Month waiver

- This is contingent on suppliers' agreement.
- As Option 1 but the contract would be 12-months and a procurement exercise would start soon for a contract from 2023 onwards.
- Engagement with schools to develop requirements and test the market.
- The opportunity to work with other suppliers to create a brokerage offer to schools.
- SIMS may not agree to a 12-month extension of our contract.
- Cost per-pupil could increase due to short contract length.

2.4. **Option 4** – SCC to end buying licences on behalf of maintained schools.

- Each maintained school would need to procure directly from SIMS, or another system supplier, leading to higher per-pupil licence costs than a contract covering all schools.
- Each school would need to agree their own contracts and source support.
- The Sheffield SIMS and FMS support teams might become unsustainable.

3. Sheffield City Council Preferred Option

3.1. Option 3 is our preferred option. Option 2 offers similar opportunities.

- This would enable schools to continue focussing on other important issues.
- We would have time to work with schools to evaluate other systems and procure the most appropriate system/s.
- This option is dependent on agreement to contract length with SIMS.

4. Recommendations

Forum members are asked to:

- Agree the preferred option so Sheffield City Council has a mandate for negotiations with SIMS, or time to inform schools of their need to contact SIMS / other system vendor to agree an individual contract.