

Isle of Wight Sixth Form Centre Proposal: Report on the Learning & Skills Council's Public Information Events

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Purpose:

- 1 The purpose of this paper is to provide members of the Isle of Wight Children's and School Results Policy Commission with a summary report of the LSC's six public information events held to provide the island community with information on the detail of the proposal to consolidate all island sixth form provision into a new dedicated sixth form centre

Recommendation

- 2 Members of the group are invited to note this report and to consider it in the formation of their recommended response to the LSC's proposal

Sixth Form Centre Proposal

- 3 Hampshire & IOW LSC has submitted a proposal to the Isle of Wight Council (Children's Services Department) to consolidate all post-16 sixth form provision, currently delivered in via the islands five 13-18 high schools, in to a new purpose-built sixth form centre. This dedicated centre would be co-located on the site of the Isle of Wight College and under the management and governance of the Isle of Wight College Corporation. The proposal has not been made using the LSC's powers under the Learning & Skills Act, which allow it to propose the closure of a school sixth form to the Secretary of State
- 4 The proposal has been made following a number of assessments of post-16 provision on the island, including an OFSTED Area Review (2003) and Joint Area Review (2006), both of which found the educational provision to be inadequate. Additionally, post-16 sixth form outcomes on the island have been consistently below national and regional averages, both in terms of raw exam results at Level 3 (A-Level) and value added (ALPS).

- 5 To ensure that there is a good and clear understanding of the LSC's proposal, officers from the LSC, with the support and input of the Isle of Wight College Principal, undertook a series of six public information events across the Island in November and December. These events were only modestly attended by members of the public, along with elected members of the Isle of Wight Council, the local Member of Parliament, and the local MP's agent, who expressed a wide range of views on the proposal (see below).
- 6 As a matter of courtesy, all five high schools were invited to host one of the information events. With the exception of Sandown High School, who agreed to hold an event subject to LSC agreeing that the school may also present a response to the proposal, which the LSC felt inappropriate given the establishments of the Policy Commission process, the high schools declined the offer as a conflict of interests. Subsequently the LSC sought to hold the events at accessible public venues, which included two middle schools, a primary schools, and the Isle of Wight College.
- 7 Attendance at the events was as follows:

| Venue | Date | Approx. No. Attending |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| St Boniface Primary School, Ventnor | 6 th November 2006 | 24 |
| West Wight Middle School, Freshwater | 7 th November 2006 | 15 |
| Isle of Wight College, Newport | 13 th November 2006 | 30 |
| Lake Middle School, Lake, Sandown | 14 th November 2006 | 16 |
| Royal London Yacht Club, Cowes | 16 th November 2006 | 19 |
| Ryde School, Ryde | 27 th November 2006 | 33 |

- 8 Those who spoke in support of the proposal highlighted the following points:
- Raising Standards - that whilst some schools had improving results, sixth form performance on the island is consistently below national averages affecting the life chances of a large number of young people, and a new, dedicated centre had the opportunity to drive up standards
 - Demand – whilst a number of young people had voiced their opposition to the proposal, presumably because the current system had served them well, many more young people would benefit from such a development and a broader choice of curriculum

- Curriculum – whilst the island has a developing mix of post-16 academic and vocational learning opportunities, the development of such a centre would allow young people access a broader curriculum and develop the skills and knowledge to progress to higher education and/or employment
- 14-19 Agenda – whilst the schools and the college are making progress on developing 14-19 partnership working, the proposal would allow for effective delivery of the new 14-19 Diplomas and a full 14-19 learning phase, as per government policy
- Investment – if accepted, the financial investment in the building of the sixth form centre would benefit the island economy overall. In addition, if standards are improved more professional would be attracted to move and invest in the local businesses
- Staffing – a new, dedicated sixth form centre has the potential to attract high quality teachers and managers to the island
- School Structure – the acceptance of the LSC's proposal could result in a change to the three-tier school structure and, potentially, an improvement in key stage 3 and 4 results, and this was to be welcomed
- Leadership & Management – whilst some high schools were being effectively led, management at the college had delivered significant improvements in quality over the last 3-years and as such should be entrusted with the management of the new sixth form centre

9 Those raising concerns about the LSC's proposal have highlighted the following points;

- Choice – whilst the proposal will provide for a greater choice of curriculum, it will eliminate choice of sixth form provider on the island, contrary to government policy
- Risk – whilst the IOW College has improved significantly in the last 3-years, there is a risk to entrusting a single provider, who has no relevant or successful track-record of doing so, to improve the quality and outcomes of sixth form provision (Level 3) on the island
- Environmental – whilst the new building design would incorporate the latest energy saving technology, and seek to minimise its 'carbon footprint', the proposal, if accepted, would exaggerate and already congested traffic management situation in the islands busiest urban centre
- Learner Demand – whilst there is yet to be a wider consultation of young people, a representation of sixth formers (head boys/girls) have voiced their concerns about the LSC's proposal
- Finance – although the capital investment is ring-fenced to the development of a sixth form centre, and separate to the college's capital investment programme that the proposal has been brought forward as part of a wider solution to the Isle of Wight College's financial position
- Accountability – whilst the proposal is not being made by the LSC's under its powers to recommend the closer of a school sixth form, it is being

made by a government quango that is not directly accountable to the local community

- IOW Schools Structure - the proposal, if accepted in its current form, may require the LA to reorganise the island's three-tier school system – a move rejected by the local community in the last round of local elections
- Staffing – whilst some staff may prefer a focus on either key stage 4 or sixth form teaching, many of the current high school staff have a preference for both, and it is felt this benefits both learner groups

- 10 The LSC will seek to respond positively to the recommendations of the Policy Commission to ensure that the key objective of improving the range and performance of sixth form provision on the Isle of Wight is achieved. However, we have provided assurances to the LA that, should the Policy Commission reject the LSC's proposal as it stands, we will not seek to implement our proposal by exercising our powers under the Learning & Skills Act.
- 11 Responding to a series of local advertisement placed by the LSC, and the distribution of a community newsletter outlining our proposal to the wider community, the local MP, Andrew Turner, reported the LSC to the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) as being in breach of its code of practice. We have responded to the complaint and are awaiting a final response from the ASA. This is likely to uphold at least 1 of the 4 points within Mr Turner's complaint, namely the use of the word "guarantee" was inappropriate.

Clearance

- 12 This paper has been cleared by Phillip Walker, Partnership Director, Isle of Wight & New Forest.

Legal implications

- 13 The key legal implication is: "the Learning and Skills Act 2000 places a duty on the LSC to plan and fund post-16 education and training and to work strategically with the Children's Services Authority and other stakeholders in making provision for 14-19 year old students".

Financial implications

- 14 There are no immediate financial implications. Confirmation of a decision to proceed with the building of a sixth form centre on the island will introduce a major capital investment programme for the college, substantially supported by the LSC.

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