

MEDWAY COUNCIL

CABINET

13 DECEMBER 2005

14 – 19 EDUCATION SCRUTINY REVIEW

Portfolio holder: Councillor Les Wicks, Children's Services

Report from: Rose Collinson, Director of Education and Leisure

Author: Rosie Gunstone, Overview and Scrutiny Coordinator

1 Summary

- 1.1 To outline the initial findings of the 14-19 Education scrutiny review and seek Cabinet's approval of the recommendations.

2 Decision Issues

- 2.1 The proposals are consistent with the provisions of the Education Development Plan. Recommendations requiring additional funding will need to be addressed during the budget setting process. Therefore, this is a matter for Cabinet.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed in early 2005 to establish a task group which would examine the findings of the 14-19 area inspection, carried out in March 2005, and contribute to the formulation of an action plan to address its recommendations.

- 3.2 The main findings from the area inspection were:

The inspectors:

- praised the rigour and honesty of the self-evaluation
- recognised the commitment to joint-working between the strategic partners
- called for faster implementation of the 14-19 Strategy in order to benefit all learners

- 3.3 Key issues were:

- ensuring more effective consortium working across all consortia
- improving the curriculum offer and addressing access issues
- establishing clear success criteria

- 3.4 Overall, all areas were satisfactory except access and participation, and overall provision was judged to be satisfactory.
- 3.5 Following the publication of the inspection report in June 2005 the group commenced its work. Four meetings have been held to date.
- 3.6 Sections 4 and 5 of this report contain details of the task group's work to date. It sets out the key issues which they have focused on and in their view represent the major challenges that must be addressed to secure the necessary improvements in 14-19 education. The Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee are considering the Task Group's work and recommendations on 6 December 2005 and this will be reported to Cabinet in an addendum report. The proposed recommendations for Cabinet are set out in section 8 of the report.

4 14 – 19 Education – key issues

Progress made by consortia

- 4.1 The group were extremely grateful to consortia representatives for attending an evidence session and speaking frankly about their experiences within their consortia. (The consortia are groupings of schools, working together with work-based learning providers and Mid Kent College, to offer a wide range of opportunities to Medway young people. Consortium working is now developed for 16-19 year olds, but in the earlier stages for the 14-16 group). Of particular interest to the group were views about barriers that existed which currently prevented consortia from moving towards greater collaboration. Key amongst these are distances between schools within a consortia, problems with transport and resistance from pupils (and sometimes from staff and head teachers) to access courses at different institutions.
- 4.2 The consortia have made considerable progress since they were established. Moving from a position of individual institutions competing with each other for students, to one where co-operation and working in the best possible interests of the student has been challenging but largely successful. It has required a change of culture amongst schools in forging stronger links with Mid Kent College and Work Based Learning providers.
- 4.3 However it is clear from recent inspection findings that Medway is expected to achieve far more and needs to develop its 14-19 Education offer further. These present huge challenges to the consortia. Whilst locally things have moved forward tremendously over the last few years, Medway consortia will be assessed against the performance of consortia across the whole country. The alternative stated by the Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council is that if insufficient progress has been made by 2007 they will propose a more radical change such as the introduction of tertiary colleges. Demonstrating the progress that has been made locally will not be enough.

- 4.4 We require the commitment of all stakeholders to step up the pace of change so that Medway is fully prepared for both the Joint Area Review of Children's Services in 2006 and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Strategic Area Review which will measure if we have the right model for 14-19 Education. **(Recommendation A).**

Advice and Guidance

- 4.5 One of the key areas for improvement in the 14-19 inspection report that Members have been keen to explore is the provision of clear and impartial advice and guidance. After hearing evidence from consortia representatives, there is a widely held view that support for students in Medway is inadequate. **(Recommendation B)**
- 4.6 A number of consortia representatives felt that students did not receive the level of support they required regarding post-16 options. Comments relating to Connexions referred to personal advisors being of an excellent standard but unable to provide a quality universal service due to lack of numbers. Both schools and the Council should explore ways of complementing existing Connexions provision **(Recommendations B & C).**

Funding arrangements

- 4.7 Inevitably the key to driving forward collaboration in post-16 education is ensuring that appropriate funding is in place. One example highlighted was in the Walderslade/Rochester consortium where out of 700 pupils, 107 were accessing courses on more than one site. The costs per pupil who access courses on more than one site are higher for a number of reasons and we must recognise that collaboration creates additional financial burdens.
- 4.8 Whilst post-16 funding is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council, the Council should also examine how it might be able to support its consortia to drive collaboration forward. Consortia representatives highlighted the range of barriers preventing them offering greater access to a wide range of courses. Key amongst these are difficulties in transporting students across large distances between institutions and the additional costs of staffing. During the forthcoming budget setting process, the Cabinet should explore ways in which greater support to the consortia can be provided **(Recommendation D).**
- 4.9 Given that the challenges for each consortium are varied, some clarity about the barriers that exist is required. We would suggest that each consortium provides a list of their priority needs to officers. It is absolutely crucial that the action plan targets are delivered in the timescales outlined **(Recommendation E).**
- 4.10 It is clear that consortia operate in different circumstances and as a result progress varies across Medway. Some consortia, such as Rainham, have the advantage of all schools being within walking distance of each other, whilst many others struggle to overcome the challenge of transporting pupils over

large distances between sites. The mix of Grammar, Comprehensive and High School is different within each consortium.

- 4.11 Currently funding arrangements do not take account of the ease or difficulty that respective consortia have in collaborating. We recognise that it is not a level playing field and that by reviewing funding allocations to consortia, more equal opportunities for Medway students to access courses could be provided.

Common Timetabling

- 4.12 The establishment of a common timetable within each consortium is clearly of paramount importance. Without this in place it is very difficult for students to access courses in more than one institution. We were pleased to hear that progress is being made in a number of consortia with common timetables either in place or proposed for 2006 or 2007 entry.
- 4.13 Whilst recognising how difficult it is to establish a common timetable, we feel that it is imperative that where possible common timetables are in place for September 2006 and September 2007 at the latest. In the long-term the best interests of Medway students will be served by a Medway wide timetable, although it is unlikely that this could be in place before 2009.

(Recommendation F).

September Guarantee

- 4.14 Medway has a September guarantee in place which states that all students should have a post-16 offer in either education, work or training after they have completed Year 11 (GCSE's). Whilst hard work has taken place to reduce the numbers of students who become NEET's (Not in Education, Employment or Training), in September 2005 Medway fell somewhat short of achieving this ambitious target. The data collected from Medway schools, Mid Kent College and local work based learning providers as a result of the 2004/5 monitoring exercise show that by September 2005:

- 81% of pupils (comprising 87% of pupils in selective schools and 62% of pupils in non-selective schools) had confirmed offers of places in continuing education or training at 16+
- 15% of all confirmed offers have not been taken up.

Note that there will be additional young people in education or training in schools, colleges and work based learning providers outside Medway who do not appear in these figures.

Connexions data for progression at 16+ for 2005 has not yet been published. The percentage continuing in education at 16+ in 2004 was 76%, with 7% entering employment with training, including apprenticeships.

- 4.15 For September 2006 all students need to have at the very least a conditional offer prior to the summer break and ideally also a reserve offer. There were

too many instances this year of students only deciding on post-16 options after receiving their examination results. Delivering the September guarantee must be a key priority for the Council and consortia alike (**Conclusion 5.3**).

Enhancing the offer

- 4.16 Modern technology provides opportunities to enhance the curriculum offer without the need for students to travel between different institutions. Chapter School highlighted how they are using video conferencing to enable students to access courses. Given the difficulties in moving students between institutions, this is an area which consortia and the Council should explore in greater detail (**Recommendation G**).

Entry Criteria

- 4.17 We have concerns about the consistency of entry criteria for post-16 courses. Currently individual consortia and schools within consortia set different levels at which they expect students to achieve to progress onto a level 3 course (a level 3 course is A level or equivalent). We feel that students would benefit if one set of entry criteria were applied across the whole of Medway. These would assist students in identifying appropriate pathways.
- 4.18 This issue was the subject of discussions at the recent secondary headteachers residential conference and we hope to hear of a positive outcome in this respect. This conference took place on the 3-4 November, The conference was successful in gaining a commitment to the September Guarantee, which will aim to ensure that young people are able to apply on a single electronic application form for any course in Medway post 16, and enable the Connexions service to track their progress in securing offers, so that timely help can be provided where required. (**Recommendation H**).

Vocational Options

- 4.19 We are extremely disappointed that the targeted capital fund (TCF) bid to the DfES for four vocational centres has been unsuccessful. Given the huge demands that have been placed on consortia and the local authority to deliver a better vocational offer, a successful bid would have provided a real boost to provision.
- 4.20 The Council must now with key partners, including the LSC, explore alternative sources of funding for enhancing vocational education in Medway. This is an extremely urgent matter as it is difficult to see how 14-19 education can move forward at the pace that has been demanded without significant capital investment in centres for vocational learning (**Recommendation I**).
- 4.21 We believe that the LSC in their first Strategic Area Review were right to judge that consortia had a long way to go in ensuring that the right offer was available to all young people in Medway. As the body responsible for funding post-16 education, it is our view that they should demonstrate their

commitment to consortia by exploring in partnership with the 14-19 Strategic Forum how extra support can be provided in this area (**Recommendation J (a) and (b)**).

Timescales

- 4.22 We believe that realistically for actions to be implemented for September 2006, they must be in place by May 2006. This highlights the urgency that exists for all stakeholders to drive the 14-19 agenda forward. It is our view that under the StAR LSC review in 2007, if it cannot be demonstrated that successful collaborative arrangements are in place, then the sixth form college option could be pursued. Collaboration is, therefore, in the interests of all, not least the students of Medway.

Future work of the group

- 4.23 Such is the importance of the 14-19 education agenda, the group would like to continue to monitor the implementation of the action plan during 2006 and into 2007. All stakeholders must be committed to meeting the expectations of the Joint Area Review of Children's Services in 2006 and the StAR in 2007 (**Recommendation K**)

5 Task group conclusions

- 5.1. The Task Group welcome the progress that has been made by consortia over the last few years in taking collaboration forward but would emphasise that there is a need to ensure that this pace of change delivers further improvements that will demonstrate that Medway has a good model of post-16 education.
- 5.2. Students have a right to be able to access clear and impartial advice and guidance which meets the needs of the learner rather than the interests of a particular institution. Alternative ways of complementing existing Connexions provision should be explored.
- 5.3. The September guarantee must become a reality with all students who want to access post-16 education being able to do so.

6 Financial and Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are financial implications connected with plans to expand vocational education through centres within each consortium. With the DfES bid proving unsuccessful alternative sources of capital funding need to be sought.
- 6.2 The cost of providing two additional Personal Advisers would be £60,000 per annum. (Paragraph 4.6 – Recommendations B and C)
- 6.3 Schools will be expected to meet the costs of transport, and supply cover for sharing best practice from their delegated formula budgets including their formula grant allocation from the LSC. No specific additional funding has been

reflected in the needs-led review of the formula funding for schools, which did not include in its remit funding post-16. (Paragraph 4.8 – Recommendation D)

- 6.4 An alternative to incurring transport costs would be to promote the improved use of IT. This could be done by establishing a fund, totalling an estimated £75,000, against which schools could bid for set-up costs of video conferencing. (Paragraph 4.16 – Recommendation G)
- 6.5 If these recommendations were to be pursued, an additional £135,000 would be required. This could be funded by either top-slicing an amount from the Dedicated Schools Grant, or the Council approving an addition to the overall funding for schools. The first option is only available if there is sufficient “headroom” after meeting the minimum funding guarantee per pupil for each school. This may not be possible given that the LEA had to use £835,000 from the transitional support grant to meet this target for 2005-2006 and this grant is no longer available in 2006-2007. The second option may not be feasible given the predicted budget shortfall for the Council for 2006-2007 and other competing priorities.
- 6.6 The LSC will also be contacted to ascertain what financial support is available to support the recommendations in this report.
- 6.7 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7 Director’s Comments

- 7.1 Following the 14-19 area wide inspection, the Council, the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions have produced a comprehensive action plan to address the issues raised. This plan has the full support of the 14-19 learning providers. The Director welcomes the interest in and commitment to this area and endorses the recommendations, especially the need for rapid implementation in order to secure the best possible outcomes for Medway young people.
- 7.2 However, it is important to be mindful of the financial implications set out above, and the need to ensure the most effective use of the council’s resources. The implementation of the overview and scrutiny task group recommendations can therefore only be financed if resources can be found by a re-allocation of existing budgets across the council or by securing external funding.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be asked to recommend the following to Cabinet:

Recommendation A

Instruct officers of the Council, and recommend to other educational providers, that the pace of change in taking collaboration forward be

increased to deliver further improvements that will demonstrate that Medway has a good model of 14-19 education. (Action – officers and education providers)

Recommendation B

Instruct officers to include the development of 'guidance for all' by providing an in-house service with additional Personal Advisers being appointed. (Action – officers)

Recommendation C

Instruct officers to explore alternative ways of complementing existing Connexions provision. (Action – officers)

Recommendation D

During the forthcoming budget setting process the Cabinet should instruct officers to explore ways of providing greater support to consortia to deliver 14-19 Education particularly in respect of costs in relation to transport and staffing. (Action – officers/consortia)

Recommendation E

Recommend that the consortia provides the Council with a list of priority needs they have in order to address the 14-19 Education Action Plan (Action – consortia)

Recommendation F

Recommend that all consortia move towards establishing a common timetable preferably for September 2006, and with arrangements to be in place by September 2007 at the latest. In the longer term the interests of Medway students would be best served by Medway wide common timetable (Action – consortia)

Recommendation G

Instruct officers, and recommend to all education providers, the greater use of modern technologies, such as video-conferencing be explored in order to offer opportunities to enhance the curriculum. (Action – officers/all education providers)

Recommendation H

Instruct officers to work with Consortia to ensure that more flexibility be developed in the application of entry requirements and greater clarity be provided for students to assist them to identify appropriate pathways (Action – officers/consortia)

Recommendation I

In light of the unsuccessful vocational centres capital bid to the Department for Education and Skills, officers be instructed to explore alternative sources of funding with the Learning and Skills Council, which will support the development of vocational education in Medway (Action – officers and Learning and Skills Council)

Recommendation J(a)

Instruct officers to explore how the Council can work with other providers to increase the range of vocational options, particularly at levels one and two. Medway currently has a lack of breadth in provision in this respect which must be urgently addressed. (Action – officers/all education providers)

Recommendation J(b)

Recommend that the Learning and Skills Council consider with the 14-19 Strategic Forum how extra support can be provided to demonstrate their commitment to consortia. (Action – Learning and Skills Council)

9. Suggested Reasons for Decision

- 9.1 The recommendations of the scrutiny review aim to improve the provision of high quality 14 – 19 education.

Background Papers

14 – 19 Education Area Inspection Report and Action Plan

Notes of task group meetings – 19 July 2005, 6 September 2005, 5 October 2005 and 1 November 2005

Contact for further details:

Rosie Gunstone, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator

rosie.gunstone@medway.gov.uk

01634 332715

Simon Trotter, Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning

simon.trotter@medway.gov.uk

01634 331032