

## Hastings and Rother Post-16 Review

### Cabinet meeting, 29 June 2004 – Commentary by the Director of Education and Libraries on the Project Board's revised proposal

1. The purposes of this report are

- to provide a commentary on the recommendation from the Project Board to the Cabinet and the Sussex Learning Skills Council that a final proposal should be published for changes to the provision of post-16 education in Hastings and Rother. This is contained in the Project Board's report attached as Appendix 2 to this report (Part 1)
- to provide further information on those aspects of the proposals for change to which the Cabinet made specific reference in its resolutions made at its meeting on 23 September 2003 (Part 2)
- to make recommendations

#### Part 1

2. The Project Board's report contains a summary of the consultation process and the responses received, and a set of the responses has been placed in the Members Room. The consultation exercise has perhaps inevitably become somewhat polarised around the issue of sixth forms in Hastings. There is nevertheless significant evidence of much thoughtful reflection and comment about the strategic complexity of the proposals for change, which extends across the whole secondary education service for the area (and arguably into the primary sector also), and which has major implications for economic and social regeneration.

3. The Review has sought to address a range of fundamental strategic issues. These include

- Does the present mix of arrangements for post-16 education and training offer a realistic prospect of significantly raising standards of achievement and participation in learning, and if not what alternative arrangements are more likely to achieve this?
- How do we secure choice for learners which reflects changing learning and skills needs, and progression to work or other educational opportunities, taking account of the different circumstances faced by students and their families
- How can secondary and post-16 education best be organised so that the challenges posed by the Tomlinson report for curriculum development and progression in learning from 14 – 19 are successfully met? This is fundamentally a question of how to achieve high quality collaboration and development between schools and colleges, such as is beginning to be successfully demonstrated by the Bexhill Partnership
- How are high standards in 11 – 16 education achieved and maintained, and what contribution is made to high standards by sixth forms?
- Is it important that all schools in Hastings have the same age range, or is it acceptable to have a mix of 11 - 18 and 11 – 16 schools in the town?
- How can recruitment and retention of teachers be improved, especially in the Hastings schools if they are to become 11 – 16?

- How can we ensure that accessible provision is available for students living in rural Rother, and in particular improve the choices for students in the Rye and Camber area?
- How do we achieve capital investment which will provide 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities for learning, including the redevelopment of schools through the Building Schools for the Future initiative?
- How can education and training best contribute to the economic and social renewal of Hastings and Rother?

4. Throughout the two years and more of this Review, there has been a general consensus that this range of strategic issues cannot successfully be addressed through continuation of the current pattern of post-16 provision. In order to determine a way forward, it is essential first of all to determine the strategic framework which offers the best fit for addressing these issues. The Project Board's proposals offer a framework for the future which provides the best prospect for achieving high quality education in the area fit to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is my judgement that this outweighs the issues of concern and risk that remain. These issues are considered in the rest of this part of this report.

5. Three main areas of concern have arisen through the consultation in relation to the proposed 'family of four colleges'. The first is the place of school sixth forms, and whether the aspects of sixth form provision which are valued by staff, students, governors and parents can be preserved within any new arrangements through the establishment of a Federated Sixth Form. The second is the proposal for a Rother College on the Claverham Community College site. The concerns here have related principally to the viability of such a small college, its likely close association with Claverham, its impact on curriculum and choice at Bexhill College, and accessibility from other parts of rural Rother. The third area of concern is the relationship between the overarching college corporation and the individual colleges. This is essentially about the balance between strategic leadership and planning on the one hand and local autonomy on the other.

### Sixth forms

6. The proposal from the Hastings schools (Appendix D to the Project Board's report) for the establishment of a Federated Sixth Form is most welcome. It proposes the establishment of a federated sixth form as a separate entity on a single site and operating under a tertiary board which leads and co-ordinates the overall post-16 provision in Hastings and Rother. It recognises the importance of creating greater curriculum choice, improved collaboration between providers pre-16 as well as post-16, and of seizing the opportunity to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities for teaching and learning.

7. Cllr Glazier and Cllr Simmons have participated in further discussions with the headteachers about their proposal, and it has been investigated further in discussion with Sussex LSC. These discussions have identified the main concerns of the schools as being

- i. the effect of the loss of sixth forms on the recruitment and retention of teachers, which could have a harmful effect on standards of achievement
- ii. the need to offer Level 1 programmes on school sites, which could provide a transitional year for some students who might otherwise not stay in learning, thus helping to increase participation

- iii. the ability of the Hastings schools to have significant 'ownership' of post-16 provision, through a variety of mechanisms relating to staff, students and governance

All these concerns relate directly to the key review drivers of standards and participation.

8. The revised proposal from the Project Board demonstrates how these concerns can be met by integrating some key elements of the schools' proposal within the 'family of four colleges' model. I believe this provides a sound basis for developing new and more effective arrangements within Hastings and Rother for post-16 education and training, which effectively incorporates the benefits to learners from the Federated Sixth Form thinking and responds to the schools' greatest concerns. Equally important, it provides a strong platform for collaborative work across the 14 – 19 curriculum for the whole of Hastings and Rother, which will have sufficient flexibility to adapt to new thinking based on the Tomlinson Report and other current and future developments.

9. In the further discussions with the headteachers, it has become clear that they would wish to find some way of retaining 11 – 18 status within the new arrangements. They have argued that without this status, even with guaranteed opportunities for staff to teach in the college, their ability to recruit and retain staff will be harmed. It is unlikely that this can be achieved without building fundamental weaknesses into the college model. The schools' proposal does not for example reconcile the conflicts that could arise if a school chose not to respect a decision of the college corporation or Tertiary Board. However, it is likely that models similar to that proposed by the Project Board for Hastings will become more common – two models with similar features are already in development in Bexhill and Eastbourne. The revised proposal offers numerous ways by which it should be possible to develop attractive opportunities for teachers as part of the 14 – 19 Federation for Hastings and Rye.

10. A further fundamental weakness in the schools' proposal is that it is most unlikely that it will attract capital funding from the LSC. Although there is no legislative bar, national policy is that school sixth form buildings will not be funded by the LSC. The only realistic prospect of securing the single site which is a vital element of the schools' Federated Sixth Form proposal is through the federated college being properly integrated into the overall college. Without single site operation, students in a federated sixth form will have to move between school sites, as currently takes place in the William Parker/Helenswood federation and will continue when Hillcrest joins the federation in 2005.

11. It is recommended that the Cabinet welcomes the ways in which the Project Board's revised proposal has incorporated key elements of the Federated Sixth Form paper, and that it should emphasise the following points:

- i. the 'federation schools' should be co-terminous with the planned Excellence Cluster, and should include the five Hastings secondary schools and Thomas Peacocke CC in Rye – this will provide a good basis for the development of a strong 14 – 19 Federation for Hastings and Rye. The schools and the two colleges in Hastings/St Leonard's would all be members of the federation
- ii. the federation schools must have a major role in planning for the Hastings and Rye Sixth Form College within the 'family of four colleges' model
- iii. there should be a guarantee that – subject to sufficient suitable candidates being available – a substantial proportion of the Hastings Sixth Form College

- staff should be appointed on a seconded or permanent basis from the staff of the federation schools; other staff would be appointed as permanent core staff of the college
- iv. high quality leadership is crucial to the success of the new college, and the Principal should therefore be appointed at an early date through national advertisement, this appointment being made by the college corporation, involving representatives of the federation schools
  - v. planning for the new college should include the development of transitional programmes at Level 1 to be based on school sites and operated in collaboration with the new college
  - vi. planning for the new college should include the development of rigorous mechanisms for ensuring continuity of curriculum and pastoral support for individual students, which ensures that the schools' knowledge of their students is built upon and enhanced by staff in the college; students from federation schools should be guaranteed a place at the Hastings Sixth Form College should they wish it, subject to the usual admissions processes
  - vii. funding for the Hastings Sixth Form College should be via the corporation rather than via the schools, as this is likely to create greater certainty in budget planning both for the college and for the schools; under this approach, the college would 'purchase' teaching time and services from the schools as appropriate
  - viii. the membership of the college council should reflect the major role of the federation schools in the planning and support for the Hastings Sixth Form College
  - ix. mechanisms should be found to ensure that in advertising for staff the schools may confirm the opportunity for post-16 teaching in the Hastings Sixth Form College
  - x. while it is recognised that for the federation schools there will be a particular focus on their relationship with the Hastings Sixth Form College, this should in no way diminish the importance of the schools' collaboration with other colleges in the four college model, nor their influence and involvement in the strategic leadership of the overall model through membership of the Corporation and the Tertiary Board

### Rother College

12. The concerns which have been expressed about the proposed Rother College must be seen within the context of the key drivers for the review of raising standards and improving participation.

13. Many consultation responses have argued that the Rother College will in the main provide Level 3 courses, and that these students will be likely to remain in education whether or not there is provision in Battle. A college in Battle does however provide a more local option for students in the Battle/Robertsbridge area, which may build on the high standards which have for some time been achieved at Claverham CC and which are increasingly a feature of other local schools. Consultation responses show that there is still some lack of confidence among staff, students and parents locally in existing provision, that some of the most able students are prepared to travel long distances to schools in Kent to access what is perceived as higher quality provision or better choices, and that the proposed Rother College could meet a longstanding demand in a way which respects the need to maintain viability and quality of other local provision.

14. It has also been argued that the Rother College would make a greater contribution to increasing participation if it were to focus more on Level 1 and 2 provision than on Level 3, and that any Level 1 and 2 programmes which are provided at the Rother College might be unattractive to students if the college has a predominantly academic environment. It will be important to ensure that opportunities for Level 1 and 2 courses are available at this college, and that the college leadership addresses the issue of how these programmes are made attractive to students. In further planning for the development of this college (and indeed of the overall college), it will be important to explore the opportunities there are for working in partnership with Plumpton College to develop programmes in land based studies. However, given the profile of achievement in this area, it is not realistic to plan for a predominantly Level 1 and 2 provision at the Rother College.

14. It is accepted that the Rother College does not provide a readily accessible option for students in the Rye area. Site searches have shown however that there is no realistic alternative site more centrally located in Rother District. Many Rye area students are travelling long distances to access post-16 learning, often without adequate public transport links. If the Rother College is to be located in Battle, the development of more readily accessible provision in Hastings, and improvements to transport links, become even more important in meeting the needs of students from this part of rural Rother. The development of local Level 1 programmes within the model proposed for the Hastings Sixth Form College is also important in addressing this issue.

15. Concern has been expressed about the location of the Rother College within Battle, because of the close association with Claverham and its distance from the station. Site sharing with Claverham does however provide the opportunity for some shared use of facilities, which might be difficult to replicate for a college of this size on a separate site. Further discussions with Rother DC have failed to identify a suitable alternative site in Battle. If the new college is to be developed on the Claverham site, consideration needs to be given to providing dedicated transport between the station and the college, so that the college becomes a more viable option for students from outside the immediate Battle area served by Claverham.

16. A strong concern has been expressed by Bexhill College and the Bexhill Partnership that the Rother College will reduce curriculum choice for all students in Rother, as it will reduce the range of options that can be made available at Bexhill College, whilst offering a smaller range of courses at the new Rother College than is currently available at Bexhill College. If the Rother College is successful, it is likely that there will be fewer Level 3 students at Bexhill College, and potentially some reduction in the number of A level options. However, from the reduced base of A level students the range of A level options should continue to be wide enough to meet the choices of most students other than those seeking highly specialised programmes such as the pre-Academy music programme which is currently only available in Lewes. At the same time, the capacity released at Bexhill College will provide the opportunity for more locally based vocational programmes, especially at Levels 1 and 2, giving the opportunity for an overall curriculum offer which more closely reflects the spread of need in the Bexhill area. Consultation responses suggest that this would be a welcome development, building on leading edge developments which are already in train through the Bexhill Partnership.

17. The small size of the Rother College means that it will inevitably need to work in particularly close partnership with Bexhill College and the local schools, in particular with Claverham. In detailed planning for the new college, it will be necessary to

explore how teachers may be shared across the various establishments, in a way which supports high standards and breadth of opportunity.

18. It is recommended that the Cabinet welcomes the inclusion of a Rother College within the final proposal from the Project Board. In doing so, the Cabinet is recommended to emphasise the following points:

- i. planning for the new college should include planning for Level 1 and 2 programmes, in particular through partnership with Bexhill College
- ii. in order to preserve opportunity and choice across the area, and in order to make the most efficient use of resources, there should be close collaboration with Bexhill College and local schools in planning for the Rother College
- iii. in order to improve accessibility, a transport service between Battle Station and the college should be provided, funded if necessary from the Corporation's wider resources

### Strategic leadership and governance

19. A variety of views has been expressed in the consultation exercise about the balance in the relationship between the overarching college corporation and management and the four colleges. Generally, it has been recognised that to 'add value' the overarching college must be more than a co-ordinator of provision and a referee of disputes between providers. It must have the capacity to offer strong – even 'coercive' – strategic leadership, to undertake holistic planning which reflects the wide social and economic needs of the area, and to exercise rigorous quality assurance. It will be a major player among the range of agencies working together for regeneration in Hastings and Rother. The challenge is to extend the boundaries of autonomy for the individual colleges as far as possible within this strategic framework.

20. The revised model proposed by the Project Board retains the strategic leadership, planning, funding and quality assurance role for the overarching corporation and leadership team. It recognises however, in its proposal for a Tertiary Board with strong school and college representation, that this leadership role must be grounded in the practical, day to day experience of the schools and colleges. The Tertiary Board will provide a crucial advisory function for the corporation. The college councils will provide vital local leadership and advice to the individual principals, and the opportunity to reflect particular focuses and concerns.

21. The revised model bears a strong resemblance to the model set out in the Federated Sixth Form paper. Both models allocate strategic responsibility to a single high level body, whilst providing local leadership opportunity through college councils. It will be important to ensure that the corporation and leadership team respect the boundaries of their responsibilities and do not become involved in micro-management of the individual colleges.

22. It is recommended that the Cabinet endorses the proposed strategic leadership and governance model for the new single college.

## **Part 2**

23. When the Cabinet last considered the Review at its meeting on 23 September 2003, it resolved that any future support to proposals for change would be dependent upon reassurances about

- how standards and participation would be raised
- funding from Government and National LSC
- accommodation between the Hastings 11 – 18 schools and the LSC/LEA on detailed arrangements – in effect, a development plan for the Hastings schools

In addition, the Cabinet asked for particular attention to be given in the next phase of development work to the implications for the Hastings schools of the proposals.

### Standards and participation

24. The debate about standards and participation during the consultation has not been as clear as it could have been. There have been numerous assertions that results in the school sixth forms and at Bexhill College are better than has been stated. However, any evidence that has been presented to the Review has not fundamentally challenged the review's broad conclusions about standards and participation. In relation to the sixth forms, the data that are available show that

- while A level results at Helenswood and William Parker improved between 2002 and 2003, in terms of average grades per entry they were very similar in 2003 to 2000 levels
- overall, results in the five school sixth forms have declined in each of the last four years at A level, by a total of half a grade per entry, compared with broadly no change over the same period in the national and East Sussex figures
- the value added analysis, based on national benchmarks, shows a significant decline over the last four years (from a positive position in 2000), overall and for each of the schools with the exception of Filsham Valley

The value added analysis shows improvement between 2002 and 2003 for Filsham Valley, Helenswood and William Parker, and it is to be hoped that this can be maintained in the 2004 results and beyond. The known trend must however be an important factor in considering whether the present arrangements are capable of securing significant and lasting improvements in standards.

25. The consultation document (p2) gives information about declining student numbers in the sixth forms in the period 2000 – 2002. When these figures are updated to include 2003/04, they show that total sixth form numbers were basically the same (increased by one) as for 2002/03, but had declined to 615 by January 2004. This overall figure includes increases in numbers at William Parker and Helenswood but further reductions in numbers at the other three Hastings schools, so that each of these schools had fewer than 100 sixth form students by January 2004. The Grove and Filsham Valley students are combined in 'SL6'. Some of the schools report positive feedback from students about intentions to stay on into the sixth form in 2004/05. However, there must be a concern about the capacity of the smaller sixth forms to offer wider choice and raise standards.

26. Raising standards is first and foremost a matter of high quality leadership and teaching. No absolute guarantee can be given that new arrangements will lead to raised standards of achievement and participation. How provision is organised can however provide a framework which is more or less conducive to success. Several factors are likely to contribute to raised standards under the proposed new arrangements:

- i. The Hastings Sixth Form College will provide the critical mass in terms of student numbers that will offer wider choice more closely matched to students' needs, sustain minority subjects and be attractive to high quality teachers
- ii. The proposed Rother College in Battle will build on the high standards already achieved at GCSE in the area
- iii. The wider curriculum that will be possible in Bexhill will provide a better match to the needs of local students, providing more students with opportunities in which they can succeed
- iv. Stronger information, advice and guidance for students will assist them in making better choices and increase their chances of success
- v. Removing barriers to collaboration will support the development of strong curriculum pathways between schools and colleges, to the benefit of all learners

These factors taken together suggest that there is a good prospect that the new arrangements will help to raise standards.

27. It is likely that new facilities and the impetus and excitement generated by leaders and staff creating new colleges will be attractive to students and that these factors may contribute to increased participation. There is some evidence for this (yet to be confirmed by actual take up in September) in the student interest for places at the new Bexhill College site and at Crossways Academy, a new sixth form college in Lewisham. These may however be short term effects, and would only be sustained by a quality offer for students.

28. One area of concern expressed by some people – especially students themselves – is the cost of transport to a college if there is no longer the opportunity to attend a school sixth form, to which many students currently would walk. Under current arrangements, students in the Hastings and Rother area can purchase weekly Freedom Tickets for £7. While this is a better concession than in other parts of the county, it is not guaranteed that it can continue, and even at this lower rate still may represent a significant disincentive for students on low incomes to continue in learning. However, the introduction in September 2004 of Education Maintenance Allowances for students on low incomes may help to address this issue. The implementation and impact of this scheme will be closely monitored in its first year by Sussex LSC.

### Funding

29. If the final proposal is to be implemented successfully, it will require transitional revenue funding for the new colleges and for those schools that are losing sixth forms, and capital funding for the new colleges and adaptations to schools. The revenue and capital costs relating to schools will largely fall to be met by the County Council.

30. Sussex LSC has recognised that transitional funding will need to be found to support for example the early appointment of senior staff for the overarching college and for new colleges within the model, and the participation of staff from schools and colleges from across the area in development work for the new college. One outcome of the successful Ofsted/ALI inspection report on 14-19 education and training in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove is the allocation of development funding to be used during the next academic year. Sussex LSC expects to be able to

meet the transitional costs for the new college from this funding and other resources available to it.

31. Sussex LSC has also recognised that the 11 – 18 schools will be faced with additional costs in the year (likely to be the school year 2007/08) when they still have Y13 but no Y12 students, if the guarantee to students that they may complete courses in the establishment in which they started them is to be fulfilled. The LSC will be prepared to negotiate with the schools an element of additional funding in relation to these costs.

32. Sussex LSC has been successful in securing in principle approval to a package of capital funding which will meet the estimated cost of developing the new colleges in Hastings and Battle (£53m). This package is made up of capital grant (£21.7m), contributions from the Hastings and Bexhill Task Force, capital receipts, and borrowing by the new college which has been allowed for in the financial modelling for the college carried out by KPMG. The Hastings Sixth Form College, provided it is formally part of the new college and funded through the college, will be eligible for capital support within this overall package.

33. The requirement for transitional funding for schools which would no longer have sixth forms falls into three main categories:

- i. funding premises which are no longer funded through the sixth form funding formula
- ii. managing the costs of contraction
- iii. early retirement and redundancy costs, and salary safeguarding

The costs of school staff participation in the development and planning of the new college will be met from LSC development funds as already mentioned.

34. The cost of including the floor area of the Hastings schools deemed to be funded at present by the LSC for the sixth form is £90 000. This would need to be met from the funding available for formula distribution to all schools, which should be augmented by this amount.

35. Estimating the costs of contraction is less straightforward. Appendix 3 shows a comparison between the estimated costs of maintaining the sixth forms at present, based on information provided by the schools this term, and the LSC funding for the sixth form which is part of their budget share. It can be seen that while there is a broadly neutral effect in Filsham Valley, The Grove and Hillcrest, for William Parker and Helenswood there is a difference of £197 000 and £179 000 respectively. This does not mean that there would be a similar ongoing additional funding requirement for the schools if they became 11 -16. Existing 11 -16 schools of a similar size are able to operate successfully under the current funding formula. Over the period leading up to full establishment of the new college (by September 2009), detailed planning will need to include a review of the schools' organisational structures and agreement with governing bodies about the level and timing of transitional support.

36. It is expected that there will be a wide range of opportunities to secure posts in the new arrangements, the majority of them ring-fenced to existing staff. The timescale for planning and implementing the new arrangements also allows time for consideration of how any staff at risk (where, for example, posts are duplicated) may be allocated different responsibilities at a similar level. Overall, the expectation is that there will be increased participation in learning. Taking all these factors together, and taking into account the experience of other reorganisations, it is

expected that the new arrangements could be introduced with very few early retirement or redundancy agreements being required. The costs of any redundancies would need to be met by the authority. As an illustration, the additional costs to the authority of the redundancy of a teacher with 30 years experience would be a redundancy payment of around £16 000 and around £5,000 on the lump sum payment and £2 800 ongoing pension enhancements.

37. Where a school undergoes a formal change of status such as from 11 - 18 to 11 – 16, teachers who are wholly or mainly engaged in responsibilities which relate to the school's former status are entitled to salary safeguarding in perpetuity. In practice, very few staff are affected by this provision – in the case of Tideway School, for example, it applied to only three teachers. The additional safeguarding cost relates only to the relevant responsibility allowances.

38. The additional costs to the authority of the items described in paragraphs 34 – 37 above would need to be met from the education budget.

39. The County Council will need to provide capital funding over time to support the development of the secondary schools in their new roles. The most pressing requirement is for the development of Helenswood Performing Arts College on a single site. The assessment of the headteacher and governors that the management and standards implications of operating as an 11 – 16 school on two sites so far apart would be unreasonable is accepted. A feasibility design study has been carried out by CRD Property to show how the additional accommodation required for KS4 on the Maplehurst site could be achieved. The net cost to the capital programme of this development is estimated to be around £4.5m, and it is recommended that should the proposals be implemented this project should be a high priority to be considered for inclusion in the capital programme starting in 2006-07.

40. Appendix 4 summarises the surplus capacity in each of the Hastings and Rye secondary schools which may arise from the loss of sixth forms. If the final proposal is approved, there will need to be detailed planning of how this accommodation can be developed to meet new needs (for example, in response to the Tomlinson Report, as a base for outreach provision from the colleges, as part of an extended school initiative or for wider community use) or removed. Hastings and Rother remains the County Council's highest priority for Phase 1 of the Building Schools for the Future programme, but there will be no notification from the DFES of when East Sussex may feature in the programme until the autumn. At this stage, therefore, the only commitment which can be given is to a phased programme of capital investment, to be developed in consultation with all the schools once a decision on the final proposal is known.

#### Development of the current 11 – 18 schools

41. This section of the report addresses the third part of the Cabinet's September 2003 resolution, and the particular points mentioned in section (3) of the resolution. Sufficient comment has already been made elsewhere in this report on some of the particular points in (3), namely on opportunities for staff in schools to work within any post-16 arrangement, the impact of any changes on schools budgets, and schools' participation in the governance arrangements for the proposed new college. More detailed comment is made below on the strategy for collaboration between schools and colleges, a development plan for the five Hastings schools and possible locations for a Hastings Sixth Form College.

### *Strategy for collaboration between schools and colleges*

42. The Federated Sixth Form proposal includes a strong commitment from the schools to the development of improved and high quality collaboration between schools and colleges, and the revised proposal seeks to incorporate some of the key elements of the Federated Sixth Form proposal. The revised proposal includes important provisions which will ensure that the schools' greatest concerns, about recruitment and retention of staff and opportunities for those students who may be least likely to continue in learning, can be accommodated in a way which retains the major benefits of the preferred option model i.e. wider curriculum choice for all students across Hastings and Rother, in 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities, and the removal of existing barriers to collaboration across the 14 – 19 curriculum.

43. Since the Cabinet meeting last September the joint East Sussex/Sussex LSC 14 – 19 Strategy has been adopted, and this provides a strong platform, recognised in the recent Ofsted/ALI Area Inspection report, for strengthening collaboration between schools and colleges and providing clear learning pathways for students. The Project Board's final proposal opens up exciting opportunities for high quality 14 -19 curriculum development in the Hastings and Rother area which will prove beneficial to learners and attractive to teachers. This will build upon the models of successful practice across East Sussex which have been praised in the area inspection report, and in which schools and colleges already participate – the main examples in Hastings and Rother being the Bexhill Partnership and the 14 – 19 Travel to Learn Area Group. The Project Board's final proposal, if adopted, will provide a strong incentive for schools and colleges to take greater responsibility for the strategic development of learning in their area, in partnership with the LEA and LSC.

44. Appendix 5 is a report prepared by the School Improvement Service which considers how the new arrangements would address current weaknesses in curriculum development and delivery, the opportunities for innovation and the support required to achieve these. The Hastings area in particular, through the Education Action Zone, Leadership Incentive Grant, the Greater Hollington Extended Schools Project and other initiatives already receives substantial additional support. The new post-16 arrangements, and the beneficial effect these can have on the 11 – 16 curriculum also, provide a framework within which this additional support can become perhaps more tightly focussed.

### *A development plan for five Hastings schools*

45. Appendix 4 indicates the existing capacity of the five Hastings schools and the current admission limits. It also includes a forecast of 11 – 16 student numbers in Hastings up to 2011/12 (NB the numbers for individual schools is indicative, based on recent trends in admissions). The forecast shows that the number of students will decline from 5080 in 2003/04 to 4615 in 2011/12. The total number of students in the 11+ cohort by 2011/12 is expected to be around 880, and may increase slightly in subsequent years to around 920.

46. As has previously been stated, the total number of students is sufficient to sustain five 11 – 16 schools of between 800 and 1000 students. While larger schools offer benefits of curriculum flexibility and may be able to offer greater opportunities for career progression, there are also arguments in favour of medium sized schools of this order, in terms of being able to offer a more supportive environment for students in which the more challenging aspects of student behaviour and disadvantage may be addressed. It can be argued that these benefits would be particularly relevant in the Hastings context.

47. A strategy to maintain the current five schools is however vulnerable while surplus capacity remains in the schools. It depends also upon the support of the schools for a plan to develop and rationalise their accommodation over time – in particular within the framework of Building Schools for the Future – so that the capacity more closely matches target numbers within the overall plan, which might for example include some schools with admission limits of 210 and others of 180.

48. An alternative strategy to reduce the number of schools to four would require increased 11 – 16 numbers of between 1000 and 1200 students at each school, with three of the schools at the upper end of this range. These three schools would have to have admission limits of at least 240. None of the schools currently has more than around 1100 11 – 16 students. The Hastings schools are expressing major concerns about challenging behaviour and the impact of this on standards. Against this background, it cannot be recommended that there should be a reduction in the number of schools which would require 11 – 16 numbers probably at all the remaining four schools to become larger.

49. While the post-16 arrangements are still undecided, and East Sussex's place within the Building Schools for the Future programme remains unknown, it has not been practical to take forward detailed discussion of the forward plan. The information provided in this report provides the parameters for the planning which will need to be undertaken once decisions are known, and a satisfactory basis for a presumption that this plan will include five secondary schools as now in Hastings.

#### *Location of the Hastings Sixth Form College*

50. The Cabinet requested further consideration of the location of the proposed Hastings Sixth Form College, and specifically whether a school site might be appropriate. Sussex LSC commissioned a detailed search of sites for the four elements of the preferred option from property consultants GVA Grimley. As part of this study, the consultants considered and visited each of the secondary school sites in Hastings. Their conclusion was that only the William Parker site offered the possibility of a suitable site for the college, and that even so the town centre sites were preferable to it.

51. The William Parker site was included as a possible location for the college in the public consultation document. There has been some support for it in responses from the public, which is probably related to the various concerns that have been expressed about the suitability of the town centre sites. However, responses from schools and colleges, including from William Parker itself, have not supported this location. The main reasons relate to accessibility and over-identification of the college with one school. In presenting the Federated Sixth Form proposal, the Hastings schools have stated that they would not wish to see the college located on a continuing school site.

52. The concerns that have been expressed about town centre sites have focussed on issues such as safety, accessibility, the large numbers of students, staff and other users, not only for the two colleges but also the University Centre and the proposed library, and parking. In considering the suitability of these aspects of the town centre sites, it is important to reflect on how the presence of high quality facilities and their users may transform the character of the town centre, building on changes which are already apparent as a result of recent investment.

53. The town centre sites, in particular the Havelock Road site proposed for the Hastings Sixth Form College, are constrained and will require high quality design solutions to offset their disadvantages. The predominantly vocational college proposed for the Station Plaza site will be housed in a seven storey building, sharing the separate Learning Resources Centre building with the other college and the University Centre. This shared use is an exciting dimension of the proposal, and staff and governors of HCAT are confident that the college will benefit from relocation to this site within the new arrangements. Construction and Engineering faculties will remain in Ore, following the move there made last September.

54. The benefits of the Havelock Road site for the Hastings Sixth form College element are that they provide a separate identity for the college which is nevertheless close to the public transport hubs and to the Learning Resource Centre and other facilities on the Plaza site. In the longer term, it will benefit from the more extensive development of the Havelock Road/Priory Street area proposed as Phase 2 of the Task Force town centre investment. A town centre location for the college is strongly favoured by Thomas Peacocke and Robertsbridge Community Colleges, as it is easily accessible by public transport.

55. The site is however restricted. Concept drawings show that the floor area required for the college facilities for up to 800 students can be accommodated in a three storey building on this site, which in itself could be attractive and fit for purpose. This would however leave a small area for outdoor recreation and landscaping, and little or no dedicated car parking. It also leaves no room for further expansion of the college at a later date, should this be needed, except as part of the Phase 2 development.

56. Discussion is continuing with senior Task Force staff and their architects about how this site can best be developed for the college. Further information will be available for the Cabinet meeting.

### **Summary of recommendations**

57. The Cabinet is recommended to advise the Council of Sussex LSC that it supports the revised proposal from the Project Board, subject to the following detailed comments:

- i. the Cabinet welcomes the ways in which the Project Board's revised proposal has incorporated key elements of the Federated Sixth Form paper , and recommends that the development of this element should have regard to the recommendations made in paragraph 11 (i) – (x)
- ii. the Cabinet welcomes the inclusion of a Rother College within the final proposal and recommends that the development of this element should have regard to the recommendations made in paragraph 18 (i) – (iii)
- iii. the Cabinet endorses the proposed strategic leadership and governance model for the new single college (paragraph 22)
- iv. should the proposals be implemented a project to relocate Helenswood on to a single site should be a high priority to be considered for inclusion in the County Council's capital programme starting in 2006-07