

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date: **29 June 2004**

Title of Report: **Review of Post-16 Education in Hastings and Rother**

By: **Director of Education and Libraries**

Purpose of Report: **To inform the Cabinet of the outcomes of consultation, to comment on a revised proposal from the Project Board and to make recommendations**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Cabinet is recommended to advise the Council of Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) that it supports the revised proposal from the Project Board, subject to the detailed recommendations summarised in paragraph 57 of the commentary (Appendix 1 to this report).

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The proposals for change, if approved, will require revenue and capital expenditure from the County Council to support transitional costs in schools and the adaptation and development of school buildings.

1.2 The revenue costs are identified in broad terms in paragraphs 34-37 of the commentary on the proposals which is attached as Appendix 1 of this report. They include:

- £90,000 to fund floor area no longer met through the sixth form funding formula (part year effect from 2007-08 and ongoing until adaptations of buildings can be completed)
- support for changes to staffing structures and other transitional costs: this will need to be agreed with the schools for a transitional period (minimum three years) beginning in 2007-08 taking into account the effects of losing sixth form funding from their overall budgets identified in paragraph 35 of the commentary and the agreed transition plans for each school
- the costs of any agreed early retirement and redundancy arrangements, and any salary safeguarding for staff whose additional responsibilities relate wholly or mainly to sixth forms: for the reasons stated in the report, it is not anticipated that significant numbers of staff will be at risk as a result of the proposals for change

These additional costs will need to be met from the Education and Libraries Department's budget from 2007-08 and subsequently.

1.3 The highest priority capital investment requirement for the County Council arising from the proposals for change is the need to develop Helenswood Performing Arts College as a single site school from September 2008. The net cost of this project is estimated to be £4.5m, commencing in the 2006-07 capital programme. This project will be submitted for consideration by the Capital and Property Strategy Group (CAPS) for inclusion in the four year capital programme commencing in 2005-06. Plans for the rationalisation, adaptation and development of other schools will be developed in further detail through discussion with the schools once a decision on the proposals has been made (by the Secretary of State) and will be submitted to CAPS, probably within the context of a Building Schools for the Future programme, in Autumn 2005.

1.4 The Hastings and Rye schools will need to develop transition plans, relating for example to curriculum development and staffing structures. This will be complementary to other development planning, such as that for changes to the 14 – 19 curriculum. The costs of support for the schools from the School Improvement Service and other officers in developing transition plans will be met from existing budgets, taking into account activities funded from other sources such as the Excellence Cluster. Sussex LSC will provide development funding to support all schools' participation in the detailed planning and development of the proposed new college, including release time for staff.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 Appendix 1 to this report provides a detailed commentary on the revised proposal from the Project Board for changes to post-16 education and training in Hastings and Rother. The Board's proposal is included in Appendix 2 of the report.

2.2 The revised proposal has been prepared following an extensive period of consultation which commenced on 27 February 2004 and ended on 28 May. There has been a high level of engagement by schools, colleges and local people, and views have been expressed sometimes intensely and forcefully, but also with considerable thought and commitment, about what is best for future generations of students. It is not surprising that there are conflicting views on such an important matter.

2.3 The future of post-16 education and training is part of a wider strategic consideration which embraces social and economic regeneration as well as educational issues which relate to the whole of secondary education in the area. These are set out in more detail in paragraph 3 of the commentary.

2.4 The key issues which have been identified in the consultation include the wish to preserve school sixth forms, the appropriateness and impact – in particular on Bexhill College - of the proposed Rother College in Battle, and the balance of responsibility between the college corporation and the four individual colleges. A broader developmental issue has been the need to take forward 14 – 19 curriculum development within a context of collaboration between schools and colleges. These issues are all reviewed in more detail in the commentary.

2.5 The Cabinet will need to take into account all these issues, and the breadth of response for and against the original proposal, in reaching its view on this vital strategic matter. However, the commentary focuses in particular on those issues of standards and participation, funding and development plans for the existing 11 – 18 schools which the Cabinet identified in September 2003.

2.6 The Cabinet must have particular regard to the strength of feeling that has been expressed in support of retaining school sixth forms. I recognise the very real concerns of parents, students and the schools about how the loss of sixth forms could have a harmful impact upon quality and standards in the 11 – 16 age range, particularly if this makes it more difficult to recruit and retain teachers. However, I am also concerned that a failure to take a strategic decision now could result in a diminution of choice and quality, not least because of the future impact of demographic change in Hastings.

2.7 For this reason, the schools' proposal for a Federated Sixth Form, operating as a separate entity on a single site and within the framework of a Tertiary Board, was welcome. The Project Board's revised proposal adopts many of the elements of the Federated Sixth Form proposal, and in recognition of that the Cabinet may wish to express a view about the possibility, raised in the Project Board's report, of naming the new Hastings Sixth Form College 'Hastings and Rye Federated Sixth Form College'. However, the Cabinet should be aware that the revised proposal does not include within it retention of 11-18 school status, which is a feature of the Hastings schools' model.

2.8 The Education and Libraries Scrutiny Committee has undertaken a study of the process of consultation for this review. Its report is included elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

3. Human Rights Act Implications

3.1 The governing bodies of Helenswood and William Parker Schools have previously taken legal advice on whether there are grounds for judicial review of any decisions arising from this Strategic Area Review, in particular in relation to the Human Rights Act. It is understood that this matter is not currently being pursued by either governing body, although no guarantee can be given that no challenge will be made. Any decision to seek a judicial review would be most likely made against Sussex LSC as the decision making body.

4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

4.1 The Cabinet is recommended to advise the Council of Sussex LSC that it supports the revised proposal from the Project Board, subject to the detailed recommendations summarised in paragraph 57 of

the commentary. The reason for this recommendation is that the Project Board's proposal offers the best prospect of securing strategic improvements in post-16 arrangements in the Hastings and Rother area which will improve opportunities for students and contribute to social and economic regeneration.

DENISE STOKOE

Director of Education and Libraries

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Local Members: Councillors Barnes, Birch, Bridger, Daniel, Dyason, Field, Gadd, Glazier,
Mrs Hopkinson, Jones, Kramer, Lock, Scott, Stevens, Thomas, Waite, Webb

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Post-16 education in Hastings and Rother – report to the Cabinet, 23 September 2003

Opportunity and Excellence for All – consultation document, Sussex LSC, February 2004

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