

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

7 November 2017

Subject: Post-16 Area Review of Education

Cabinet Member: Cllr Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

The government has recently carried out a review of further education provision in Wiltshire as part of a national post-16 area review process. Wiltshire College was the only provider in Wiltshire to be included in the 2016-17 Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire review. Findings were positive in that the College's curriculum delivers to the priority sectors identified by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) whilst maintaining provision in all areas where there is employment demand in the region and beyond, such as construction, health and tourism. The College is also making good progress towards becoming financially sustainable as a stand-alone institution.

Recommendations focus on collaboration between the LEP, local authority and colleges in particular around promotion of apprenticeships and addressing gaps in higher and degree level apprenticeships. These are welcome given the Council's new business plan focus on growing apprenticeships. The recommendation to develop an institute of technology for the area is actively being pursued by the LEP.

Proposals

For Cabinet to:

- (i) Note the contents of the report as they relate to Wiltshire.
- (ii) Endorse the report's recommendation to be part of a strategic planning group to monitor implementation of the review recommendations and drive the collaborative agenda relating to post-16 learning and skills.

Reason for Proposals

The post-16 area review report and recommendations were published in August 2017. Given that this is a national report in the public domain, it is important for Cabinet to be aware of the findings and recommendations regarding further education provision in Wiltshire.

Alistair Cunningham, Corporate Director

Wiltshire Council

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Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Cabinet of the findings and recommendations from the government review of local further education provision which was completed earlier in 2017.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. A key objective of the Council's new business plan is to grow the skills of the local workforce so that we attract and retain high value businesses in Wiltshire. A specific goal of the business plan is to provide 'more apprentices and improve access to further and higher education'. To do that we also recognise we need to have high quality schools, colleges and Higher Education provision. This health check of local further education provision is timely in light of our business plan objectives.

Background

3. In 2015, the government announced a rolling programme of around 40 local area reviews, to be completed by March 2017, covering all general further education (FE) and sixth-form colleges in England.
4. The reviews were designed to ensure that colleges are financially stable into the longer-term, that they are run efficiently, and are well-positioned to meet the present and future needs of individual students and the demands of employers.
5. Wiltshire was included in the Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire area review which assessed six colleges across the area. The four general FE colleges included in the review were Gloucestershire College, Swindon College, New College Swindon and Wiltshire College. Cirencester sixth form college and specialist land based Hartpury College were also included in the review.
6. Wiltshire College dominates provision in the county: it provided 42% of starts for apprenticeships, community learning and workplace learning in 2015/16. The next biggest provider in Wiltshire is the British Army with 18% of starts, with a mix of much smaller private, voluntary and public sector training providers making up the balance.

7. Wiltshire Council and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) were included on the area review steering group. At the start of the review, priorities for provision in the area were agreed as follows:
 - develop aspirations, improve attainment and progression, especially amongst vulnerable groups of learners, and develop employability.
 - develop the local workforce in line with labour market needs, taking advantage of the growing demand for higher levels skills across the review area.
 - grow apprenticeships and higher education provision.
8. The [final report](#) for the review was published in August 2017. The review identified employer and LEP priorities as these relate to further education and these are summarised on pages 9-11 of the report. The report also provides an overview of current further education provision (pages 14-19).
9. The local steering group was chaired by the Further Education Commissioner. The steering group met on four occasions between September 2016 and February 2017 and additional informal meetings also took place to consider and develop options in greater detail. Membership of the steering group comprised each college's chair of governors and principal, representatives from Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, Swindon and Wiltshire LEP, the Regional Schools Commissioner, and representatives from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and the Department for Education (DfE).
10. Part of the area review process involved a visit to each college by specialist further education and sixth-form college advisers who report to the respective commissioners. The advisers met with governors, senior managers and staff, and reviewed a wide range of documents and data relating to each college's current range and quality of provision, their track record in attracting students, and their overall financial health.

Main considerations for the Council

11. The report highlights a number of key issues relevant to Wiltshire. These are being addressed as summarised below:

	Key issue	How it is being addressed
a.	Improve attainment post-16 in local areas where attainment is below national benchmarks, including English and Maths, and amongst groups of learners for whom there is a performance gap.	Each school and academy will have an annual performance assessment based on the previous year's Key Stage 4 results. In addition, all local authority maintained schools and some academies will have at least one visit to provide verification and challenge where necessary. This will focus particularly on development activities and assess the impact of improvements on pupils including those that are vulnerable to underachievement. This in turn will support improved progression and participation post 16 and increase the proportion of vulnerable learners accessing appropriate provision.

	Key issue	How it is being addressed
b.	Develop opportunities for students with high needs to increase choice locally and offer employment based education.	Choices for high needs students have significantly improved recently, in terms of both number of providers and ease of access (as funding bands avoid the requirement to go through panel). The quality of all provision on offer is good or outstanding and includes employment based education such as apprenticeships, supported internships and work experience.
c.	A wider strategy is needed to improve outcomes and progression for high needs students across Swindon and Wiltshire.	The key strategy for Wiltshire is the Special Educational Needs improvement plan which includes post-16 provision. The council has recently implemented outcomes-based commissioning from providers and set up a new quality improvement group for post-16 provision. Meetings are held with Swindon Borough Council to discuss issues as they arise, and we are looking to develop joint working further.
d.	Support the provision of impartial and independent information, advice and guidance.	The Swindon and Wiltshire Enterprise Adviser Network, funded by the national Careers and Enterprise Company, supports the provision of impartial Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in Wiltshire schools and continues to grow year on year.
e.	Develop a strategic approach to the delivery of apprenticeships and increase supply throughout the Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire area, particularly higher level apprenticeships, contributing to the government's three million target.	The Swindon and Wiltshire LEP have developed an apprenticeship growth plan for the area which has recently been allocated funding. The Higher Futures programme has pledged to double the number of learners embarking on higher or degree apprenticeships between the 2015/16 and 2019/20 academic years.
f.	Grow employer links and develop the learning offer to meet current and future workforce requirements to achieve economic growth ambitions including in media, tourism, STEM subjects, higher level technical and professional skills, as well as in sectors where the workforce is expected to expand, such as health and social care.	The learning offer is being developed to meet employer needs by providers and also by programmes such as Higher Futures for higher level skills. There is currently a fully funded offer to employers for upskilling their staff to level 3 through the European Social Fund programme called Supporting Skills for the Workforce which has engaged 627 learners to date.
g.	Develop a broader higher education offer that encourages progress beyond level 3.	The LEP is currently developing a Higher Education Strategy for the area which will address the issue of progression in the areas of the county where this is currently low.
h.	Ensure the learning offer is accessible by students in the rural	This continues to be a challenge given the rural nature of the county.

	Key issue	How it is being addressed
	parts of the review area where public transport can be limited.	

Report recommendations

12. Specific recommendations agreed by the steering group at its meeting in February 2017 which are relevant to Wiltshire were as follows:

- (i) Wiltshire College to remain a stand-alone further education college. The report states that:
- *in terms of meeting current and future needs, the college's curriculum delivers to the priority sectors identified by the LEP (establishing a new civil engineering academy, for example) whilst maintaining provision in all areas where there is employment demand in the region and beyond, such as construction, health and tourism. Collaborative working discussions are taking place with Bath College and Swindon College on joint promotion and delivery of higher level apprenticeship provision. The college will continue to offer provision for high needs students and is developing its specialist support team.*
 - *with regard to financial sustainability, initial financial assessment demonstrates that, in achieving nearly all the financial benchmarks by 2017/18 and making good progress on the remaining operating surplus benchmark by 2019/20, the college is projecting to be sustainable as a stand-alone institution.*
 - *in respect of quality of provision, the college is rated as good by Ofsted. This demonstrated progress since the previous inspection, under the leadership of the new principal.*
 - *the college will continue to deliver its broad curriculum offer, including specialisms in engineering and land based programmes, which both reflect LEP and national priorities.*
- (ii) Collaboration between the LEPs, local authorities, Regional Schools Commissioner and the colleges. This will be led on behalf of the Council by the Employment and Skills service using existing resources. The report recommends:

A strategic planning group for Wiltshire and Swindon between the LEP, local authorities and colleges to monitor implementation of the review recommendations and to drive the collaborative agenda relating to post-16 learning and skills.

This will include (but is not limited to):

- *discussions to address gaps in particular sectors where higher and degree level apprenticeship are needed.*
- *joint promotion of apprenticeships to meet the needs of employers and the LEPs in the review area.*
- *apprenticeship delivery and end point assessment.*
- *promotion of adult loans.*

- *consideration of out of area travel flow issues.*
- *recruitment and staff sharing in hard to recruit areas.*
- *addressing science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) needs, potentially through development of an Institute of Technology.*
- *general further education colleges individually or collectively, where it is mutually beneficial, continuing to work together on benchmarking, sharing expertise and models of shared service or federation both within and across review areas.*

(iii) Institute of Technology

The strategic planning groups to review the potential for the development of a proposal for an Institute of Technology for their area aligned to the requirements of emerging national policy. This should meet local economic needs for higher technical Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths skills by strengthening and growing provision to fill gaps in the market. There is a need in the Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire review area, as prioritised by both LEPs, for increased specialisation in STEM related areas and a focus on the higher-level skills.

The Swindon and Wiltshire LEP is actively pursuing the opportunity to secure government funding for a new institute of technology in Swindon as a result of this recommendation.

- (iv) The review recommends a merger between Swindon College and New College Swindon which has not been accepted by the governing body of New College. This may be relevant for those Wiltshire residents who currently travel to Swindon for their education.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

13. This report will be considered by Children’s Select Committee at its meeting on 31 October 2017. Any comments from that meeting will be fed back to Cabinet.

Safeguarding Implications

14. None identified.

Public Health Implications

15. None identified.

Corporate Procurement Implications

16. There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

17. There are no direct equalities impacts for the council arising from this report. However, the review’s recommendation to develop a strategic approach to the delivery of apprenticeships and increase supply throughout the Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire area, particularly higher level apprenticeships, has the

ability to drive social mobility by enabling individuals who would not otherwise access higher education to gain higher level qualifications.

18. The review also identifies that the attainment gap needs to be addressed for key groups of learners and that opportunities and outcomes for high needs students need to be improved. These issues are currently being addressed as set out in paragraph 11 a-c.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

19. None identified.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

20. The areas of focus for the strategic planning group set out above in 12 (ii) may not be taken forward if the Council is unable to be an active partner in driving this agenda forward. This is a reputational risk for the Council. It is important for the Council to be proactive in resourcing this agenda given its prominence in the new business plan. The work is currently resourced within the Employment and Skills service. Given that this is a national review process, there is an expectation that the Council acknowledges and responds to the recommendations.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

21. No risks identified.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications for the Council. The work is currently resourced within the Employment and Skills service. The financial health check carried out as part of the area review concluded that our local further education college, Wiltshire College, is financially sustainable and therefore can continue to stand alone.

Legal Implications

23. No legal implications have been identified.

Options Considered

24. The review process considered whether every college was viable as a standalone institution, and where this was not the case, recommended merger with another college. In the case of Wiltshire College, the standalone option was the preferred one as it was assessed as being financially sustainable and it was noted that it already serves a large geographical area.

Conclusions

25. The post-16 area review process has provided an opportunity for government to assess further education provision across the country on an area by area basis. Wiltshire College was the only provider in Wiltshire to be included in the 2016-17 Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire review. Findings were positive in that

the College's curriculum delivers to the priority sectors identified by the LEP whilst maintaining provision in all areas where there is employment demand in the region and beyond, such as construction, health and tourism. The College is also making good progress towards becoming financially sustainable as a stand-alone institution and is now rated as 'good' by Ofsted. The Council, as a partner of the LEP, has recently supported the College to develop its offer further. Through the allocation of £20 million from the Local Growth Deal, provision at the college's Salisbury and Lackham campuses will be significantly improved.

26. Most of the key issues identified in the report are currently being addressed as set out in paragraph 11. However, access to provision from rural areas remains a wider strategic challenge.
27. Recommendations from the review focus on collaboration between the LEP, local authority and colleges in particular around promotion of apprenticeships and addressing gaps in higher and degree level apprenticeships. These are welcome given the Council's new business plan focus on growing apprenticeships and can be resourced through the Employment and Skills service. The recommendation to develop an institute of technology for the area is actively being pursued by the Swindon and Wiltshire LEP.
28. Progress against the recommendations will be tracked by the LEP's Skills and Talent sub group and Cabinet will be updated if there are any particular issues of note.

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7 September 2017

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

[Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire FE area review report](#) - available on gov.uk.

Appendices

None