

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

27 JANUARY 2011

16-19 Learning and Skills ~ Strategic Priorities for 2011-12 and update on the transfer of responsibility from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to the Local Authority

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents the draft Strategic Priorities Statement for Wiltshire 16-19 year olds in 2011-2012. It also provides an update of progress since the Local Authority (LA) took on the strategic responsibilities for education and training for 16-19 year olds from the Learning & Skills Council (LSC).

Background

2. In April 2010 the Local Authority took on a range of new statutory duties and responsibilities following the abolition of the LSC. These new statutory duties were set out in the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the ASCL Act). They include the duty on LAs to secure enough high quality suitable education and training to meet the reasonable needs of:
 - a. Persons in their area who are over compulsory school age but under 19, and
 - b. Persons in their area who are aged 19 or over but under 25 and subject to learning difficulty assessments.

Section 41 of the Act provides further detail of the duty which requires the Council to take account of quality, location and the time at which provision is made available. The Council is also required to act with a view to encouraging the diversity of provision and increasing the choice available to learners.

3. On the 19 July 2010 the Secretary of State for Education announced the need to simplify and streamline the processes and arrangements related to 16-19 funding and the commissioning processes. As a consequence key processes and responsibilities changed from those originally outlined, including:
 - a. The responsibility for the financial payments to General Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges and other training providers resting with the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) rather than the LA.

- b. The 2011/12 core allocation of funding for school sixth forms and colleges being based on the equivalent of 'lagged pupil numbers' rather than calculated on a projected number with in-year adjustment; and
 - c. Improved data and information flow from the Young People's Learning Agency to LAs so that they can maintain their strategic overview and fulfil their strategic commissioning and influencing roles, maintaining the strategic overview of provision and needs in their area.
4. On the 24 November 2010 the Education White Paper; The Importance of Teaching was published. In relation to the 16-19 phase it confirmed:
- a. all young people will be expected to remain in some form of education or training until they are 18. It is expected that the Raising of the Participation Age will come into full force by 2015;
 - b. the introduction of a single simple post 16 funding system for School Sixth Forms, Sixth Form and General Further Education Colleges. It is anticipated that the single funding system will end any disparity between different types of providers.
 - c. the introduction of the transition process to the new funding system would begin in 2011-2012 and complete by 2015.
 - d. there will be transitional protection for schools facing significant challenge as a result of the changes.
5. In addition to the changes outlined above it should be noted that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for post 16 learners will cease to exist from the end of the current academic year. An enhanced discretionary learner support fund will be developed for those learners who most need financial support; the details of this fund are not yet known. There is no further news at the time of preparing this paper on post 16 capital funding and on the review of vocational education led by Professor Alison Wolf. The review began in the Autumn 2010 and is due to initially report in Spring 2011. The purpose of the review is to consider how vocational education for 14-19 year-olds supports full participation and progression.

Main Considerations for the Council

6. The key document demonstrating the LA's strategic overview is the Statement of Priorities; the LA is required to develop and 'publish' it on an annual basis. The document structure is broadly prescribed requiring certain headings and information. Its purpose is to form the basis of planning and communication with the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and its successor organisation (Education Funding Agency), key stakeholders and providers 16-19 (14-19) and 16-25 for those with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.
7. The Wiltshire Strategic Priorities Statement was approved as a draft for circulation by the 13-19 Strategic Board in November 2010 and is annexed to this report. Annex 1 contains a summary of the priorities for 2011-2012 and Annex 2 the full draft statement containing all the background information.

Feedback and comments on the statement are currently being received from stakeholders and providers; it is intended that the final document is published in February 2011.

8. Four broad strategic priorities have been identified for 2011-2012;
 - a. **Increasing participation** of learners in education, training and employment (especially for LLDD)
 - b. Reducing economic disadvantage through **improving achievement and progression** opportunities for all learners
 - c. **Increasing the range of opportunities** available across a rural county in order to meet needs geographically and for identified groups
 - d. Improving the **quality of provision** and ensuring value for money in commissioned provision.

Annex 1 details specific areas of focus under each priority, especially the groups of learners or areas of focus. Once the priorities are confirmed more detailed targets, impact measures or outcomes will be finalised to accompany the priorities. **Annex 2** contains the detail behind the summary priorities and outlines both the current and planned actions which support the delivery of the outcomes.

9. Consultation regarding the priorities with providers (Schools, FE Colleges, Training Providers and Independent Specialist Providers) and the YPLA and other stakeholders is underway. Events and meetings are planned during January to support the development of the statement. As the LA receives further detail relating to both provider level and LA central funding for 2011-2012 specific funds (if available) can be allocated to activity and will enable the delivery against priorities. Select committee have already established groups focused on post 16 provision; they include those looking at provision in the Salisbury area and Special Education Needs (for those with Learning Difficulties & Disabilities). The outcomes and recommendations of these groups will contribute to the shaping of activity in 2011-2012 and beyond.
10. The LA in partnership with the YPLA is actively securing appropriate provision for those young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. Provision is in place for 2010-2011 and Connexions advisers are currently working with young people, parents and carers regarding the placements for 2011-2012. The budget relating to placements of young people in out-of-county Independent Specialist Providers (ISPs) remains with the YPLA. It is planned that this budget will transfer to the LA in the future; this is currently expected to happen for 2012. Officers are currently working with regional YPLA officers to not only ensure smooth transition, but also to reduce the risk of inheriting amongst the highest levels of out-of-county ISP placements in the South West.
11. The central funding provided through the special purposes grant to support the costs associated with the transferred staff and new duties is to be reduced.

Officers are currently working to manage the implications of the reduction in grant in line with the wider Council strategies to manage overall grant reduction.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

12. There is no further knowledge in relation to the environmental impact as a result of the transfer of responsibility from the LSC to the LA, especially in the proposals for governance, leadership and management. The Strategic Priorities Statement may lead to changes in the pattern of provision. If this is the case officers and providers will incorporate environment priorities into planning, in order to reduce the amount and distance of travel.

Risk Assessment

13. The Strategic Priorities Statement and its development will contribute to risk management processes, especially if changes or development is required to the current pattern of provision for 16-19 years. Changes in the pattern of funding to individual learners through the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) may lead to some young people who are not able to benefit from the new funds withdrawing from Education and Training provision, increasing the figure of those Not in Education and Training (NEET). Changes in the funding of School Sixth Forms as the development of the single funding formula emerges may lead to financial difficulty for individual providers. Transitional funding should ease this impact but full the implications of the change in funding formula is unlikely to be clear until March 2011 at the earliest.

Financial Implications

14. Reductions in grant allocations and funding through the Area Based Grant (ABG) are becoming clearer; reductions are likely to affect the capacity of the LA to deliver services as it has done in recent years. Changes to service delivery are planned and are taking place, this includes reduction in staff and changes to service delivery. As outlined previously the impact of the financial changes to EMA, provider funding and future capital are not fully known as we await detail of transitional and new learner support funding.

It has been confirmed that The Special Purpose Grant provided to fund the LSC staff who transferred will form part of the ABG will be subject to funding reductions and the financial rules for ABG. Reduction in the grant will be managed in line with the wider Council Strategies to manage overall grant reduction.

Legal Implications

15. Reference has regularly been made to the Council's legal team through the transfer process from the LSC and new policy and guidance emerges. To date no immediate issues have emerged.

Conclusion

16. The transfer process has been effectively managed to date with adjustment made to take account of the changing requirements. The Statement of Priorities is being shared and discussed with all providers and stakeholders and following feedback a final version will be published in February 2011; this will be renewed every year.

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

None