

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

27 September 2012

Report of the Further Education in the Salisbury Area Task Group:

Concerns raised by Sarum Academy regarding the Task Group's final report

Purpose

1. To report back to the Committee on the conclusions reached by of the Further Education in the Salisbury Area Task Group having considered the concerns raised by Sarum Academy regarding the Task Group's final report.

Background

2. On 26 July 2012, the Children's Select Committee received the response of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to the final report of the Further Education in the Salisbury Area Task Group. At this meeting, Ruth Johnson, Principal of Sarum Academy, raised a number of concerns regarding the Task Group's report, summarised as follows:
 - i. The school did not receive a hard copy of the report when it was first published and therefore did not have an opportunity to make representations to the Committee when it considered the report on 31 May. It was reported that copies of the report were also not received once this mistake had been identified and assurances had been given that copies would be provided.
 - ii. Concerns around the accuracy of the content of the report with regards to Sarum Academy.
3. A fuller description of the concerns raised can be found in the minutes of the Committee meeting of 26 July, which are included in this agenda pack. The concerns had also been raised in a letter sent by three of the school's four sponsors (Salisbury Diocese, Bath Spa University and Bryanston School) to Carolyn Godfrey, Corporate Director, on 21 June 2012 (letter attached at Appendix A). Mike Thompson, Chairman of the Task Group, replied to this letter on behalf of the Task Group on 11 July (letter attached at Appendix B).

4. Following the verbal representations made by Ruth Johnson at the Children's Select Committee, the Committee asked the Task Group to reconvene to consider the points raised and report back to the Committee at a later date. The Task Group met on 24 August and were joined by Ruth Johnson, Principal of Sarum Academy, who was invited to discuss her concerns with the Task Group. Members wish to express their gratitude to the Principal for giving her time to engaging in the overview and scrutiny process.

Summary of the Task Group's evidence gathering

5. During the evidence gathering that led up to its final report, the Task Group attended Sarum Academy on two occasions: 3 November and 10 November 2011. On the first occasion, the Task Group met with 14 pupils from Year 11 and discussed their perspectives on the post-16 education available in the Salisbury area and their plans for their own further education. The Task Group also met with the Principal, but this was cut short due to the Group's discussions with pupils having overrun. For this reason, the Task Group returned to the school on 10 November and had fuller discussions with the Principal about the school's sixth form provision.

Circulation of the Task Group's report

6. The letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy to Carolyn Godfrey raised concerns that the Task Group's final report had not been made available to the school when it was published on 18 May. As a consequence the school was not in a position to make representations to the Committee during its consideration of the report on 31 May. Following investigations, it was found that an administrative error led to the school being missed from the original circulation list. The Chairman of the Task Group apologised for this in his letter of reply and the Task Group wishes to reiterate that apology here. It is unacceptable that an organisation that engaged fully with the overview and scrutiny process and featured significantly in the resultant report did not receive a copy on publication.
7. At the Committee's meeting on 26 July, the Principal of Sarum Academy reported that she had still not received a hard copy of the report. Officers investigated this and found that arrangements had been made for a hard copy to be despatched. However, the Council does not keep detailed records of every postal despatch so this cannot be fully verified. An electronic copy was sent on 11 June of which there a record does exist.
8. At the Task Group meeting on 24 August, the Principal of Sarum Academy reported that she had still not received a hard copy of the report. Subsequent investigations showed that the four copies sent to the school by recorded

delivery on 31 July were signed for at the school on 1 August. This has been communicated to the school.

Concerns around the content of the report

Task Group recommendations

9. Excerpt from the letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy:

“We recognise that following limited discussion with the academy during the report’s research process, paragraphs 4.2.31 and 4.2.32 accurately reflect the challenges and the progress made by the academy. In contrast, however, we are concerned as sponsors by the manner in which these paragraphs are not adequately reflected in the subsequent recommendations. We call into question the objectivity of the process that has led to recommendations which omit Sarum’s role in post 16 education.”
10. During the Task Group meeting, the Principal of Sarum Academy added that the report identified a gap in provision that Sarum Academy had helped to fill by realigning its post-16 curriculum. As such the school was part of the solution. The lack of a recommendation mentioning Sarum Academy meant that readers of the report would be unaware of their post-16 offer and this was not supportive of the school’s provision. Omitting one school from the recommendations suggests a bias towards the others.
11. The Task Group concludes that its recommendations were designed solely to address those areas where, in the Task Group’s view, post-16 education in the Salisbury area needed development as set out in the objectives set by the Children’s Services Select Committee, namely to:
 - a. Identify the number of young people leaving the Salisbury area to access 16-19 education;
 - b. Identify why these young people choose to travel and the impact of doing so;
 - c. Investigate the young people’s perception of the 16-19 provision available to them;
 - d. Make recommendations, if a gap is identified, as to how this need might be met.

12. At the time of the review, Sarum Academy's post-16 curriculum was being redesigned and the school was awaiting the development of a new sixth form centre. Members concluded that the school was moving in the right direction and there was no need to recommend a change to its existing strategy. As is stated throughout the report, the Task Group were and are fully supportive of Sarum Academy's post-16 offer and commend the energy and effort being put in to developing it. However, the Task Group stand by its decision to make recommendations only where it felt action was required and to express its support for Sarum Academy within the body of the report.

Objectivity of the Task Group's process

13. The Task Group refutes the suggestion that the process followed during its review was not objective. The Group included two members from the north of the county to ensure a 'non-Salisbury' perspective and considered a very broad range of evidence in reaching its conclusions and recommendations, including:
- Meetings with students from Sarum Academy and, at a later meeting, with the Principal
 - Meetings with students, head teachers and principals, and governors of all five 11-16 secondary schools in the Salisbury area and Avon Valley College
 - Meetings with the principal and chair of the board of Wiltshire College, and with the principals of three Hampshire providers
 - School prospectuses, including the draft Sarum Academy Sixth Form Prospectus for September 2012
 - A parental questionnaire
 - Extensive data provided by Connexions and the Young Peoples Learning Agency
 - Vision Documents provided by the Laverstock Schools and Avon Valley College/Stonehenge School
 - Versions of the Expressions of Interest to establish sponsored academies through Salisbury High School (i.e. the successful Sarum Academy bid) and the Laverstock schools (i.e. the stalled "Laverstock Academy" proposal)
14. Thus, in relation to all the providers involved the report and recommendations were drawn from a number of sources and did not rely solely on individual meetings. In this respect, the Task Group does not consider that the report and recommendations lacked objectivity.

Post-16 curriculum

15. Excerpt from the letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy:

“The report states that **“Sarum Academy’s sixth form curriculum is designed to suit those with lower academic attainment who wish to focus on learning vocational and technical skills as well as pursuing academic studies”**. Whilst the academy has worked hard to extend and develop their vocational offer from September 2012 the curriculum continues to be a broad offer of L2 and L3 courses. When the study was carried out the academy offer was predominantly ‘A’ level provision.

“Section 4.2.15 states **“The Group concludes that at present there is no sixth form provision in central Salisbury meeting the needs of young people who wish to study primarily AS/A2 Levels rather than primarily Level 1 and 2 vocational courses offered by Sarum Academy’s sixth form centre”** Sarum Academy has always had and continues to have pupils studying primarily at this level. As a sponsor of Sarum Academy we find it unacceptable that Wiltshire Council has condoned and published this inaccurate statement, when they should be actively promoting the academy offer.”

16. When the Task Group met with the Principal of Sarum Academy in November 2011 it understood that the school’s post-16 provision would be moving away from being primarily A-level (Level 3) courses towards being primarily vocational Level 1/2 courses. The Task Group’s final report reflected this proposed shift. However, at its meeting on 24 August 2012, the Task Group learned that the school had retained a large number of its A-level courses and this and its vocational provision were therefore roughly equal. The Task Group therefore concludes that its final report describes a projected post-16 curriculum at the Academy that did not come to fruition. Based on Sarum Academy’s actual post-16 curriculum (which includes a broad mixture of A-levels and vocational courses) the Task Group concludes that Sarum Academy’s **can** meet the needs of some young people wishing to study primarily A-levels in the Salisbury area. However, the Task Group reiterates that as around 750 students – enough for more than two large sixth forms – leave the Salisbury area to study at post-16 in Hampshire every day, Sarum Academy’s proposed sixth form, even when fully developed and populated, will not meet this demand . A major gap will still exist.
17. The Task Group concludes that the sentence quoted in the report would more accurately read, “The Group concludes that at present there is, and will continue to be, a major gap in the sixth form provision in central Salisbury to meet the needs of young people who...”

- wish to study primarily AS/A2-Levels (Level 3);
- either wish or *need* to remain in school environment (as opposed to transitioning to Wiltshire College), because they require the greater level of guidance and pastoral care generally provided in school sixth forms; and
- do not have the very high GCSE grades required to enter the grammar schools' sixth form, or do not feel suited to that institution's academically fast paced environment.

Attracting post-16 learners from other cohorts

18. Excerpt from the letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy:

“At Sarum Academy the development of the sixth form provision is an acknowledgement of the need for additional post 16 places across the city. As such the curriculum is being designed to meet these local needs. The excerpt which states that **“it seems unlikely that this school will be successful in attracting significant numbers of 6th form students from outside of its Key Stage 4 cohort in the near future”** is not helpful in promoting this local provision and one would question on what premise this statement has been made. Since the study the academy has received a significant increase in sixth form applications for September 2012 both from Sarum Academy pupils and pupils from other schools.”
19. The Task Group notes that the sentence quoted above is actually an excerpt from the Laverstock Schools' Vision statement, which was quoted in italics within the Task Group's final report (paragraph 4.2.14). However, the report does go on to say that it “seems unlikely that Sarum Academy and [Wiltshire] College will be able to attract enough students to significantly reduce out-of-county migration in the near future.”
20. The letter from the three sponsors questions the premise on which this statement was made. The Task Group concludes that it was informed by members' meetings with around 70 pupils from all of the secondary schools it visited in the Salisbury area, which were undertaken as part of the Task Group's evidence gathering. None of the Key Stage 4 students interviewed from the other secondary schools visited expressed an intention to transfer to Sarum Academy, even when this option was raised by members of the Task Group. Of the fourteen Key Stage 4 students interviewed when the Task Group visited Sarum Academy, only three expressed an intention to stay on at the school for post-sixteen education and training. This was reinforced by the Connexions data demonstrating that no students had transferred from the

other Salisbury secondary schools to Sarum Academy in 2011, and that of 98 Key Stage 4 students at Sarum Academy only 35 were recorded as remaining there for post-16 education. The Task Group were reluctant to report this data in the first instance because it was aware and supportive of the strenuous efforts being made by Sarum Academy to overcome the situation.

21. The Task Group wish to point out that the report is also optimistic about the school's ability to tackle this issue, stating that, "the Group is hopeful that the refocusing of [Sarum Academy's] post-16 curriculum and the development of a new-build sixth form centre scheduled for completion in September 2013, will gradually change this situation". The Task Group wishes to congratulate the school on the significant increase in sixth form applications it has received for the 2012/13 academic year.

Reputational issues

22. Excerpt from the letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy:

"The report makes much of historic reputations and the Academy is deeply aware of the legacy it has from the predecessor school. It is regrettable that such references within the report talks of the historic reputation of Sarum Academy rather than that of the predecessor school, Salisbury High School, thus failing to make any distinction between the two institutions."

23. The Task Group acknowledges that within its final report the reputational issues faced by Sarum Academy are not in all cases explicitly linked to Salisbury High School. Nor does the report state that the two schools are separate legal entities. However, the Task Group reiterates that its interviews with Salisbury secondary school students showed that many of them did not distinguish between the Academy and the schools that came before it and therefore the former still carried some of the reputational legacy of the latter. The report recognises the energy being directed towards overcoming this and acknowledges that the students interviewed were influenced by the experiences of previous generations and that subsequent cohorts were more likely to develop a positive view of Sarum Academy, especially with the development of a new-build sixth form centre.

Key Stage 4 attainment

24. Excerpt from the letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy:

"Sarum Academy exists to be a properly comprehensive school, and yet the comment **"This curriculum is designed to suit the school's Key Stage 4 cohort,**

which has lower average attainment at GCSE.” implies otherwise and can only serve to continue to damage the reputation of this institution.”

25. Reading this sentence within the context of the full report highlights that a comparison was being made between Sarum Academy and the Salisbury grammar schools (see paragraphs 4.2.5 to 4.2.6 and also 4.2.14). However, the Task Group acknowledges that the sentence could have been worded better and does not convey the spirit of what was intended. It is recognised that Sarum Academy aims to be fully comprehensive and that its cohort includes pupils who show very high academic attainment. The sentence would more accurately read, “[Sarum Academy’s] curriculum is designed to suit the school’s Key Stage 4 cohort, which shows a broader range of attainment at GCSE than the cohorts of the Salisbury grammar schools.”

Supporting and promoting the school

26. The letter of 21 June sent by three sponsors of Sarum Academy expresses concern that, in publishing the Task Group’s report, the Council is not supporting, promoting or helping to develop Sarum Academy’s post-16 offer. The Task Group believes that its report is fully supportive of the Academy and recognises that the school has a key role in improving post-16 education in the Salisbury area. The report supports all of the post-16 developments reported by the school, including the repositioning of its curriculum and the development of a new sixth form facility. Where the report identifies challenges, such as the reputational legacy issues, it supports the approach being taken to overcome them and is optimistic for success.
27. The Task Group recognises that, as one of Sarum Academy’s four sponsors, Wiltshire Council has particular responsibilities in terms of helping to promote the school’s offer. However, the Task Group believes that overview and scrutiny has a duty to take an independent, evidence-based view of issues and to report its findings honestly to the Cabinet so that appropriate action can be taken. The Task Group’s final report represents the views of its members at the time of publication based on all of the evidenced considered during the review. It is important that the Council’s role as a sponsor of Sarum Academy is properly separated from the role of overview and scrutiny and, given this, some of the school’s concerns may be dealt with more appropriately by the Cabinet Member and officers.

Conclusions

28. Having considered the concerns raised by the Principal of Sarum Academy and three of the school's sponsors regarding the Task Group's final report, the Task Group concludes that:
1. No amendment is required to the recommendations that were included in the Task Group's final report, which were endorsed by the Committee on 31 May 2012.
 2. The process followed by the Task Group was thorough and objective and a broad evidence base was used to draw conclusions and make recommendations. The report represents a snapshot in time based on the evidence received over the course of the review. It should be read and absorbed as a whole rather than taking selected phrases out of context as doing so inevitably loses the spirit and intention of the text.
 3. The Task Group acknowledges that Sarum Academy's post-16 curriculum actually includes a broad mix of academic and vocational courses. However, the Task Group reiterates that as around 750 students – enough for more than two large sixth forms – leave the Salisbury area to study at post-16 in Hampshire every day, Sarum Academy's proposed sixth form will not meet this demand. Paragraph 4.2.15 of the report should therefore read, "The Group concludes that at present there is a major gap in the sixth form provision in central Salisbury [meeting] the needs of young people who wish to study primarily AS/A2 Levels".
 4. The comment in the final report that "[it] seems unlikely that Sarum Academy and [Wiltshire] College will be able to attract enough students to significantly reduce out-of-county migration in the near future" was based on the evidence received during review. However, the Task Group congratulates Sarum Academy on the significant increase in the number of sixth form applications it has received for the 2012/13 academic year.
 5. The final report reflects the reputational issues faced by Sarum Academy at the time of the Task Group's review, which were based on the evidence received.
 6. The sentence in paragraph 4.2.6 of the final report, "[Sarum Academy's post-16] curriculum is designed to suit the school's Key Stage 4 cohort, which has lower average attainment at GCSE", did not capture the Task Group's intentions and should read, "[Sarum Academy's post-16] curriculum is designed to suit the school's Key Stage 4 cohort, which shows a broader range of attainment at GCSE than the grammar schools."

7. The Task Group wish to reiterate its full support for Sarum Academy and welcomes the Principal's concluding comments at the meeting on August 24 recognising that there is a shortfall in provision for post-16 education and training in the Salisbury area and that Sarum Academy is committed to helping solve this problem.

Proposals

That the Committee:

1. **Notes the conclusions of the Further Education in the Salisbury Area Task Group and brings them to the attention of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.**
2. **Thanks Ruth Johnson, Principal of Sarum Academy, for attending the Task Group meeting on 24 August and for her engagement with the scrutiny process.**

Dr Mike Thompson – Chairman of the Further Education in the Salisbury Area Task Group

Report author: Henry Powell – Senior Scrutiny Officer

01225 718052 henry.powell@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices

- A. Letter sent by Salisbury Diocese, Bath Spa University and Bryanston School to Carolyn Godfrey, Corporate Director – 21 June
- B. Letter of reply sent by Mike Thompson, Task Group chairman – 11 July

Background documents

Final Report of the Further Education in the Salisbury Area Task Group – May 2012