

11 December 2013		ITEM: 15 01104257
Cabinet		
Education Commission		
Report of: Councillor John Kent, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Education		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non key	
Accountable Head of Service: Michael Peters, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		
Purpose of Report: The purpose of the report is to update members on the Thurrock Education Commission and to seek guidance on investment.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is to update Cabinet on the findings of the Thurrock Education Commission, to outline consultations that are taking place and to provide information on some of the key areas that will form part of a detailed action plan. Cabinet is asked to consider priorities for investment to raise standards of achievement and levels of aspiration for children and young people in Thurrock.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Support the recommendations of the Thurrock Education Commission.**
- 1.2 Comment on the initial actions following the Education Commission.**
- 1.3 Considers areas for potential investment to address issues arising from the Commission.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1** The Education Commission was asked to be bold and ambitious for Thurrock's future. The report recognises significant improvement in education and attainment over the last few years and a desire to push further and faster to make Thurrock a place where ambition and high achievement can flourish.

While recognising much that is good, the Commission found six issues which it believes are holding back faster progress.

- 2.2 The Commission made six core recommendations which were reported at the Children's Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 30 October. Implementation of the recommendations will involve the council, schools, academies and many partners. The report has been sent to head teachers, chairs of governors of academies, schools and the free school, colleges and other partners. They have all been asked to respond to the Commission's findings, indicating their priorities and actions that need to be taken. From these responses a detailed action plan will be developed. The Commission suggests the establishment of Thurrock Education Alliance, a partnership of schools, academies, other key players and the council to oversee and drive forward the recommendations. Cabinet is asked to agree this.
- 2.3 While the action plan is being developed, work has also been going on developing core actions recommended by the Commission and broad timescale for delivery are set out below.
- 2.4 **Recommendation 1: Build a compelling case for change and a powerful vision for education across the community in Thurrock that increases pride in what is being achieved and ambition for achieving even more (By March 2014).**

The Thurrock Community Strategy has been adopted by the council and many partners and highlights education as its top priority –“Create a great place for learning and opportunity” – and the council's ambition is to make every school “good” or “outstanding” in Ofsted terms as soon as possible. The strategy's vision and “aim” is: “Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish”, and “Our aim is to become a confident, well managed and influential council regarded by residents, peers and partners as ambitious for the people of Thurrock and totally focused on meeting their current and future aspirations”.

As part of this key actions would include:

- Encouraging the whole education community to support this community supported aim should also help create a borough-wide vision and ambition, lifting achievement and aspiration with specific achievement, performance improvement priorities, goals and ambitions.
- There should be a communication and engagement programme that includes every school, academy, free school, post 16 establishments, early years setting, FE/HE partner as well as every council department, cultural and employer partner and the voluntary/community sector. This programme should also engage parents and children, head teacher representatives trade unions, governors, key employers, sector specialists and members through newsletters, meetings, and briefings etc.
- Defining and refining the need for change, producing and advocating a compelling and achievable vision for the future of education in Thurrock.

2.5 Recommendation 2: Redefine the role of the local authority, agree with partners what change means in practice and make sure services are provided efficiently (March/April 2014).

It is important to note the local authority retains a number of statutory responsibilities. These include: the drive for high educational standards; ensuring that children's services are integrated across the council; working with head teachers, school governors, academy sponsors and principals to promote educational excellence for all children and young people; and taking rapid and decisive action in relation to poorly performing schools, including using their intervention powers with regard to maintained schools and considering alternative structural and operational solutions.

The Commission recommends a detailed discussion with schools about what they do themselves and how much they see the local authority doing. It suggests a small time-limited task group of senior management from the council, head teachers and governors is put together to establish clarity about the core functions of the authority.

It also recommends the council should produce an annual report on the quality of local education provision to be shared with schools, community, and sent to the Secretary of State so he receives early warnings of emerging issues in the academy trusts.

The key actions in relation to this recommendation include:

- Consideration of the above responsibilities with schools
- Drafting the annual report covering the academic year 2012/13
- Set out options for planning and commissioning places and provision post 16

These are being carried out.

2.6 Recommendation 3: Grow the role of schools themselves as the leaders in supporting other schools to improve (From March 2014).

The Commission recommends that, within three years, the council should phase out its provision of school improvement services and devolve them to a school led partnership, Thurrock Excellence Network. This is in line with best practice nationally. It is exceptional for a local authority the size of Thurrock to have four teaching schools and the Commission recommends this resource is built into the new school improvement framework and charged with improving performance and capacity across the borough, Thurrock Excellence Network should be established by March 2014.

As an immediate collaborative activity, the Commission recommends the local authority and schools devise a funded programme to address recognised areas for development in schools in Thurrock. This programme should also be up and running by March 2014.

2.7 Recommendation 4: Recruit and retain the best teachers and leaders by establishing greater pride in Thurrock (From February 2014 for September 2014).

Key actions already underway:

- Promoting Thurrock as an interesting and vibrant place in which to live and work.
- Greater use of Teach First trainees.
- Customised arts-based teacher-training programme based on the Teach First model.
- School Direct is used more extensively and strategically to create an offer and a clearing house is accessible to all schools in Thurrock.
- The Thurrock Excellence Network is asked, as a priority, to develop a coherent approach to talent management and succession planning.
- The expertise of the teaching schools should be of value and the network should look at the investment of some schools in teaching assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants as well as supporting the creation of a development path for them to become teachers.

Early feedback from schools indicates that this is one of the highest priorities

2.8 Recommendation 5: Use governors as key agents of support for improvement both within their own schools and across the school system in Thurrock (From March 2014).

The important role of school governors is highlighted in the report which makes a series of recommendations. In keeping with every other education service in Thurrock, a Thurrock Quality Standard should be produced and discussed in detail with partners.

2.9 Recommendation 6: Recognise and celebrate education and achievements in Thurrock (From January 2014).

The Commission suggest a number of activities. These include:

- Creating a website with teachers of good practice in and across schools in Thurrock;
- Using social media to celebrate key achievements;
- Publishing case studies of interesting initiatives and projects;
- Organising activities and competitions across schools for targeted groups of children and young people;
- Establishing a Thurrock 'alumni' club of adults who had attended Thurrock schools;
- Organising an annual awards ceremony to showcase Thurrock excellence.

Work on each of these is already well underway with our partners and details will be publicised soon after Christmas.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 Thurrock Council commissioned the independent review. The work was completed and reported in October 2013. Cabinet's options are to decide to adopt the recommendations in full or part or not at all. In adopting recommendations Cabinet will need to consider how it supports implementation and the role that Council plays in supporting achievement and aspiration of young people in the borough.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 The Education Commission was put in place to accelerate even further the pace of improvement in Thurrock's education system. The recommendations of the report should be implemented in order to achieve the step change that all involved in Thurrock's school system are working towards.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The Education Commission is with schools, academies, the free school, colleges and other partners for Consultation. Children's Overview and Scrutiny has initially considered the Commission report and have welcomed its publication and support the recommendations. Overview and Scrutiny wish to examine the action plans and their desired impact in greater detail.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 This report relates to the council priority to improve the education and skills of local people.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
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One million pounds was set aside for reserves over three years to support the work of the Education Commission. The report supports the council's review of school improvement finances over the coming three years.

Where funding has a cost implication, this will be met from either redirection of current resource, or specific targeting of current reserves retained for School Improvement.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
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The Authority has different duties in relation to its community maintained schools and those that have become academies, or are not maintained by it. Some overarching general duties on the Authority remain, such as the duty to ensure sufficient schools in the area (s14 Education Act 1996) and to promote high standards and the fulfilment of potential and fair access to educational opportunities for children of compulsory school age at school or otherwise or if under age at maintained schools).

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
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The report supports the greatest possible achievement of all groups in Thurrock and supports raising achievement for all as well as eliminating gaps in attainment between vulnerable groups and others.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

N/a.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Thurrock Education Commission Report
- Statutory Guidance of the role of Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children Services

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- None.

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