

2 July 2013		ITEM 5
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
REPORT ON THURROCK EDUCATION COMMISSION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY		
Report of: Vivien Cutler, Interim Strategic Lead, School Improvement, Learning and Skills		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Accountable Head of Service: as below		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: to update members on the work of the Commission and to describe its relationship to the emergent School Improvement Strategy		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the announcement by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) that Thurrock was placed in the bottom quintile of local authorities as a result of the proportion of its children being educated in primary schools judged to be 'good' or better by Ofsted, the Leader of the Council announced in February 2013 the intention to set up an Education Commission to identify existing good practice and ways to improve education in Thurrock still further. The proposal obtained cross-party support and was underpinned by a commitment of £1million over three years to fund any initiatives recommended. This report describes the Commission's work to date.

At the same time, officers have been developing and refining a new School Improvement Strategy, reflecting practice in the authority. This strategy will be informed both by extensive consultation and by the recommendations of the Commission that will be incorporated into the plan.

1. RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny note the work of the Education Commission to date and comment on the key planks of the draft School Improvement Strategy as set out in Appendix 1.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

Education Commission

- 2.1 The Commission is reviewing educational provision in Thurrock to see how progress and performance might be accelerated for children and young people. It has a particular focus on schools, looking in some detail at the current context, identifying both strengths and areas for development.
- 2.2 The Commission is being led by Christine Gilbert, an ex-headteacher, Director of Children's Services, local authority Chief Executive and, most appropriately, an ex-HMCI. She will be supported by Robert Hill and Becky King, two well-respected academics in the field of education in schools.
- 2.3 In order to launch the Commission, an Education Summit was held in March. This gave Christine Gilbert the opportunity to outline the remit and to set out the timetable for evidence gathering and reporting to the large group of members, senior officers, headteachers and governors that attended.
- 2.4 Evidence has been gathered by interrogating the Thurrock schools performance database; from school visits; from interviews with individuals representing the groups (as listed in 2.3) and from senior staff representing High House Production Park and at a further meeting with headteachers. In addition to the Overview and Scrutiny committee discussion, Christine Gilbert and Robert Hill will meet a focus group of parents to hear their views and there will be an open meeting with school governors on 16 July.
- 2.5 Stakeholder groups – headteachers, governors and parents/carers - have been invited to comment via a series of tailored questionnaires.
- 2.6 The Commission will present its initial findings and hypotheses to a group comprising the Leader, Shadow Portfolio Holder, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and senior officers on 9 July 2013. It is anticipated that a draft report will be available in September with the final version published by January 2014.

Thurrock School Improvement Strategy

- 2.7 Changes to the role of the local authority in school improvement have been enshrined in legislation since 2009 and further refined in subsequent Acts. The focus is now on system, also known as school-to-school, leadership, where schools and academies have the primary responsibility for supporting one another and disseminating good practice. The role of local authority officers now largely revolves around commissioning or brokering support for schools and intervening in maintained schools where there are concerns about standards and/or leadership and management.
- 2.8 Thurrock has demonstrated an innovative and responsible approach to improving the quality of its provision. It has encouraged a range of structural solutions including amalgamations, locally sponsored academy trusts, external sponsors and free schools. Further, it has supported the growth of teaching schools to ensure the supply of quality teachers and leaders into the borough.

2.9 Appendix 1 is an abridged draft of the emerging Strategy, providing a context and vision as well as key approaches to improving the quality of provision in the authority. The final document will have detailed sections on post-16 provision and more extensive reference to support services.

3. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS:

3.1 Issues and options will be highlighted when the respective reports are available for consultation.

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

4.1 As at 2.3 and 2.4, numerous groups and individuals have been consulted as part of the work of the Education Commission. Consultation on the draft School Improvement Strategy has already been initiated with headteachers.

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

5.1 This report is fully aligned to the council priority to improve the education and skills of local residents.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: Sean Clark
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Funding for the work of the Education Commission and the implementation of its recommendations, £1m total over 3 years, has been secured by members.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: Lucinda Bell
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There are no direct legal implications.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: Samson DeAlyn
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There are no direct diversity and equality implications at this stage. Both the Education Commission recommendations and the emergent School Improvement Strategy are designed to improve standards for all children and young people in Thurrock.

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

Not applicable

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The report sets out the mechanisms for driving up standards in Thurrock's schools. Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to contribute

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- None

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Draft School Improvement Strategy.

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