

30 October 2013		ITEM: 8
Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Findings of the Education Commission		
Report of: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Accountable Head of Service: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		
Purpose of Report: To set out the findings and recommendations of the Education Commission		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thurrock's Education Commission was established by Thurrock Council, with cross party support as an independent commission to take a longer term look at the future of education in the borough. The Commission was particularly tasked to consider how to accelerate even further educational attainment. The Commission recognised that significant improvement had been made in education in Thurrock in recent years.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Committee thanks Christine Gilbert and Robert Hill for the comprehensive report which will support future ambitions for children and young people in Thurrock.**
- 1.2 That the contents of the Education Commission are noted and that the report is distributed widely to interested parties including governing bodies for discussion.**

- 1.3 **That an update is considered at the next committee meeting in November.**
- 1.4 **That the recommendations of the report are considered and that they form the basis of an initial action plan which is brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 Improving the education and life chances of children and young people in Thurrock is the top priority for the Council. Education in Thurrock has made significant progress in recent years, but in order to achieve a real step change in aspiration and achievement a forensic analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the current was needed. With strong cross party agreement underpinning the work of the Commission, there was a significant opportunity to move into longer term planning and visioning.
- 2.2 An Education Commission was established in March 2013, led by Christine Gilbert, formerly Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Education, Children's Services and Skills at OFSTED. She was assisted by Robert Hill, a former senior government adviser on education and a visiting senior research fellow at Kings College London.
- 2.3 The Education Commission was launched at an education summit, *Ambitious for the Future*, in March 2013 at High House Production Park. Over the following months, evidence was collected from visits to around a third of schools in Thurrock, and interviews with individuals and groups of headteachers, teachers, governors, parents and carers, officers and councillors.
- 2.4 A desk top analysis of relevant data and statistics was also undertaken with information prepared by council officers and that published by the DfE.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 The Commission was tasked 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 further and faster progress. It is in the resolution of these that a step change in aspiration and achievement will be made possible.
- 3.2 Firstly, there is no overarching educational vision and strategy which is owned by all. With the major transformation going on in central and local government around the relationship between schools and the local authority there is a need to develop a vision and strategy which is owned by every part of the system. While it was recognised that there is great passion and drive for improvement in Thurrock, the Commission suggested that no current single strategy articulates this sufficiently for all.

- 3.3 Secondly, largely driven by history, the Commission suggested there is a lack of trust between the Council and headteachers, so that the relationship does not provide the strong platform that is essential for working together to improve schools. Some services are highly valued e.g. data and performance analysis and the newly formed governor services, while others need to develop trust over time, for example, pupil place planning. Creating ways to publicly celebrate the progress and achievement of Thurrock pupils is key.
- 3.4 Thirdly, the Commission suggested there are tensions between headteachers themselves which affect how schools work with and trust each other. The Commission suggested that in a relatively fragmented system with different types of school structures competition can be both positive and a challenge. The Commission suggests that a shared, borough wide vision with schools working in partnership towards this will effect change. The Commission found considerable interest and enthusiasm for working more collaboratively with the Council on this.
- 3.5 Fourthly, the Commission noted the significant improvement in Thurrock schools in recent years to which the Council had contributed and suggested that the school improvement model should now move to a more schools-led approach to school improvement. The current model draws on elements of this and this is in line with developments already planned and discussed with the Commission. Schools nationally are increasingly taking on the role of providing improvement to other schools and this is already evident in Thurrock. The Commission believes there is sufficient good practice in Thurrock schools to enable this to happen and this is supported by the Council. The role of governors is also cited as a crucial factor here.
- 3.6 Fifthly, the recruitment and retention of high quality teaching staff is crucial and the reports makes a number of recommendations to enhance the range of teacher recruitment and development opportunities to increase the supply of high quality staff for schools. This will also involve branding the place of Thurrock and marketing its many assets to attract high quality staff.
- 3.7 Lastly, the report suggests there is a need to lift aspiration across the community - children, young people and their families and in some cases, schools and teachers, to achieve more, progress further and make more of the increasing opportunities. The Commission recognises the huge increase in opportunities in Thurrock, from one of Europe's largest port and logistics developments to a whole range of arts, media and technology based activities which will enhance children's life chances.
- 3.8 The report makes a number of recommendation to achieve the step change articulated by senior leaders and schools in Thurrock:
 - 3.8.1 Build and communicate 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

- 3.8.2 Redefine the role of the local authority, agree with partners what change means in practice and make sure services are provided efficiently
- 3.8.3. Grow the role of schools themselves as the leaders in supporting other schools to improve
- 3.8.4. Recruit and retain the best teachers and leaders by establishing greater pride in Thurrock
- 3.8.5. Use governors as key agents of support and challenge for improvement both within their schools and across the system
- 3.8.6. Recognise and celebrate education in Thurrock

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1. The report covers a wide range of issues, strengths and challenges for the education system in Thurrock. It is important that there is an opportunity for all to engage with the Big Conversation over the coming months to agree a common and ambitious vision and strategy for making Thurrock an outstanding place for learning.

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

The report will be sent to all key stakeholders including schools, governors, councillors and other interested parties for a period of consultation and feedback until December 13th. This will help to inform a detailed action plan.

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

The report and its recommendations will play a significant role in ensuring that Thurrock becomes a great place for learning. It will significantly inform the current Children and Young People's Plan and shape a new Aspiration and Achievement Strategy which will inform future planning for young people in Thurrock.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by:
Telephone and email:

Kay Goodacre
01375 652466
kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk

One million pounds was set aside from 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.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Telephone and email: **07971316599**
Lucinda.bell@BDTLegal.org.uk

No decisions are required by this report. The Council has different duties in relation to its community maintained schools and those that have become academies, or are schools in different categories. Some overarching general duties 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 s13A Education Act 1996).

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01376 652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

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**

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1: Report of the Education Commission by Christine Gilbert and Robert Hill

Report Author Contact details:

Name: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services

Telephone: 01375 652208

E-mail: clittleton@thurrock.gov.uk