

Committee:	Cabinet
Date:	18 October 2005
By:	Director of Children's Services
Title:	Update on Review of Post-16 Provision in Hastings and Rother
Purpose:	To update the Cabinet on the progress of the review and to make arrangements for the County Council to respond to any revised Learning and Skills Council Sussex (LSC) proposals by 31 October 2005.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is recommended to agree to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services, following consultation with the Lead Member for Children's and Adults' Services, to agree a formal County Council response to any modified proposals for Post-16 Provision in Hastings and Rother submitted by the LSC to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by 31 October 2005

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. However any revised proposals put forward and accepted by the Secretary of State are likely to have resource implications in terms of implementation.

2. Supporting information

2.1 In the letter from the Minister of State for School Standards and 14 to 19 Learners dated 3 August 2005, the Minister indicated that, subject to all relevant planning permissions being granted and funding being made available, she was minded to approve a modified proposal for post-16 education and training in Hastings and Rother whereby:

- I. Bexhill College's corporation and the sixth forms at Helenswood School and William Parker Sports College will continue;
- II. the sixth forms at Thomas Peacocke Community College, Hillcrest School, The Grove, and Filsham Valley Schools will close; and
- III. Hastings College of Arts and Technology (HCAT) will relocate to the sites in the centre of town and accommodate pupils displaced by the sixth form closures.

2.2 The parameters of this modified proposal differed greatly from that submitted by the LSC in partnership with the County Council in February 2005. Most notably the Minister's letter indicated her desire to see Helenswood and William Parker continue as 11-18 schools while the other four schools in Hastings and Rye would be 11-16, rejected entirely the concept of the New Rother College at Battle, and rejected the concept of dissolving both HCAT and Bexhill College and creating a new College at Hastings under a single governance structure.

2.3 The LSC was originally given until 30 September 2005 to consult with statutory consultees and partners before deciding how to respond to the Minister's letter of 3 August 2005. That deadline has now been extended until 31 October 2005, but remains extremely challenging in terms of meaningful consultation.

2.4 The legal position remains that only the LSC may submit proposals to reorganise post-16 provision in the area to the Secretary of State and she may only accept or reject them. The Secretary of State has no powers to make proposals herself, although clearly the Minister's letter of 3 August 2005 gives a firm indication of the elements required within any proposal she is likely to accept.

2.5 The LSC can respond in one of four ways by the deadline of 21 October:

- I. it can decide that it does not wish to change its original proposal and resubmit it for further consideration by the Minister;
- II. it can submit a modified proposal;
- III. it can withdraw all proposals and leave provision unchanged;
- IV. it can accept the modifications to the proposal made by the Minister.

3. Activity Since 3 August 2005

3.1 The LSC and County Council had worked in close partnership on the proposals submitted to the Minister. Not surprisingly, therefore, both the County Council and the LSC found her letter of 3 August 2005 a profound disappointment.

3.2 Both the County Council and the LSC have concerns about the parameters proposed by the Minister, in particular in relation to:

- I. the educational viability of a much reduced New College in the centre of Hastings and Ore Valley;
- II. the financial viability of the College in terms of capital funding, and in ongoing revenue terms, especially as the College could bear significant borrowing repayments related to the project;
- III. securing local esteem and support;
- IV. whether it would produce the necessary improvement in standards; and
- V. the effect of a mix of 11-16 and 11-18 schools in Hastings and Rye and the possibility of a 'two tier' system of secondary schools emerging as a result.

3.3 Nevertheless, the LSC and the County Council remain committed to securing improvements in Hastings and Rother, and to the part that education and training can play in the regeneration initiative. The LSC is therefore resolved to investigate thoroughly the possibility of achieving new arrangements of the kind set out in the Minister's letter, and submitting a response by the deadline of 31 October 2005. It is engaging actively with stakeholders. The County Council in turn has been engaged in discussions with headteachers and governors in Hastings and Rother secondary schools and with the LSC and SEEDA. It has also sought clarification from the Minister and her officials about the evidential base for her letter of 3 August 2005 to gain a better understanding of her reasons for seeking a modification.

3.4 The LSC is working on two main strands at present:

- I. securing 'sign up', in particular from HCAT and the four schools which will no longer have sixth forms, but also from other partners, to a vision for the new college which will be based on excellence, meeting the skills needs of the future, and partnership working;
- II. technical work to review potential student numbers, the curriculum, space needs and how these can be met, capital funding requirements and ongoing financial viability.

3.5 Given our partnership working to date, the LSC has a strong desire to move forward with full support from the County Council. The LSC and the County Council would want any new proposal submitted at the end of October to enjoy broad support. In addition the LSC will work with DfES officials on the viability of any modified proposal in advance of submitting it to the Minister.

4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

4.1 The County Council, as a statutory consultee, must decide whether to offer its support to any revised proposal put forward by the LSC on 31 October 2005. Given the short timescales and intense activity involved in scoping, costing and seeking views of stakeholders on any such proposal, it is unlikely to emerge in any finalised form until the last week in October.

4.2 Any decision of whether to offer support will be based on a view of whether a modified proposal is likely to raise standards at 16+, meets 14-19 curriculum requirements, enjoys the support of schools and is affordable and achievable. Given the timescale, it will not be possible for that decision to be taken by a meeting of the Cabinet.

4.3 The Cabinet, therefore, is recommended to agree to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services, following consultation with the Lead Member for Children's and Adults' Services, to agree a formal County Council response to any modified proposals for Post-16 Provision in Hastings and Rother submitted by the LSC to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by 31 October 2005.

MATT DUNKLEY

Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: Councillors Barnes, Birch, Daniel, Dyason, Field, Forster, Gadd, Glazier, Gubby, Jones, Kramer, Lock, Maynard, Scott, Waite, Webb and Wilson

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Jacqui Smith, MP's letter of 3 August 2005

C18Oct2005UpdateonReviewofPost-16ProvisioninHastingsandRother.doc