

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN RUSHMOOR

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the background to activities the Council has undertaken, in relation to improving educational attainment in the Borough and to confirm the decision to make a one-off financial contribution towards the recruitment of an English teacher to work across Rushmoor Secondary schools.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Over the past few years, it has become evident that the GCSE results of children who live in Rushmoor and the GCSE results of Rushmoor secondary schools are not as high as Hampshire and England averages and, in some cases, are significantly worse.
- 2.2 The situation in the majority of schools worsened in 2013 when Rushmoor was the second lowest of the 326 local authority areas in England. As a result, Rushmoor Borough Council made improving educational attainment in the Borough a priority.
- 2.3 As a demonstration of its commitment and desire to help, the Council met with the four headteachers to ascertain what support was required and where we could help to reverse the trend. The two major issues identified as a barrier to improving educational attainment were the recruitment and retention of good teachers and a growing concern for mental health issues arising in pupils.
- 2.4 Following that meeting, the Council has worked hard to engage with all schools directly and has been working in partnership to address some of the challenges. Funding has been secured to employ a mental health professional to work one day a week in Fernhill and one day a week in Cove, to provide mental health support to pupils and training to teachers. The project, in partnership with CAMHS, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Supporting Families, is aimed at improving attainment and attendance levels.
- 2.5 The 2014/15 results show our overall position has further improved with Cove, in particular, making significant progress following changes to the leadership and management of the school.

- 2.6 A recent Ofsted report in November 2015 gave high praise and recognition to the interim executive Board at Cove for their role in securing the upward trajectory. Whilst the School still 'requires improvement', there is every confidence that it will continue to improve and be rated as 'good' in the near future.
- 2.7 Wavell School continues to deliver good results and remains just above the national average. Hampshire County Council is satisfied that they will continue to maintain their respected reputation.
- 2.8 In contrast, the situation for Fernhill and Connaught is vastly different. Both remain significantly below the national average and continue to be a cause for concern, despite strong leadership from the schools and progress and improvements in some subjects.
- 2.9 Results for Fernhill and Connaught remain disappointing, particularly in English. In 2015, only 29% of Connaught pupils and 40% of Fernhill pupils achieved 5 A*-C GCSE's including Maths and English, of which only 15% and 23% respectively achieved the English Baccalaureate. Both schools remain in need of English and Maths support in particular.
- 2.10 Furthermore, both schools suffer from a low cohort and have a demographic which is already below, or significantly below, the academic average on arrival. A low cohort has implications on the budget and hampers the ability to improve aspects of the school, including attracting high calibre teachers.
- 2.11 Recruitment of teachers remains a significant issue. This is a well-documented, national problem but one that is exacerbated in Rushmoor where schools are struggling to attract teachers. Reasons include competing against neighbouring authorities who offer London weighting and, in some cases, being prevented from employing NQT's because of the school's current Ofsted rating.
- 2.12 There is an extreme lack of English teachers, in particular, in the Borough. This situation is critical given that Fernhill alone need to recruit four English teachers in time to start in September 2016. In recognition of the recruitment problems, Hampshire County Council agreed to host a Teacher Recruitment Fair at the Princes Hall, Aldershot in January 2016.
- 2.13 The Council has been working with the Hampshire County Council to support and develop a more strategic, longer term response and there have been recent meetings with senior officers and Members to discuss the position of Connaught in particular. Poor reputation of our secondary schools is a serious issue for the Borough and our local economy, particularly in Aldershot where we need to attract new people into the town and the Wellesley development.

3.0 THE OPPORTUNITY - ENGLISH TEACHING RESOURCE

- 3.1 Peter Collins, head teacher at Fernhill School, recently interviewed two outstanding candidates to work as English teachers. The school would very much like to offer teaching positions to both candidates. However, the school's challenging financial position means that, from September 2016, it can only fund one teacher full time and one teacher for two days per week.
- 3.2 There is an opportunity for the Council to contribute towards the cost of the remaining three days and to secure the teacher's full time employment.

The total cost (with on costs) of employing the second teacher for the additional three days is £60,000. Hampshire County Council has been able to contribute £20,000. Hampshire County Council is well aware of the Council's commitment to raising educational attainment and has asked the Council to consider contributing £20,000 to help the school meet the temporary funding deficit. Fernhill School will pay the remaining £20,000 and, from 2017, will be in a position to fund the teachers independently.

- 3.3 It is proposed that the teacher will teach at Fernhill for two days per week and will use the remaining three days to support improved teaching and learning of English (coaching and modelling) in Fernhill and other Rushmoor secondary schools. The work will be prioritised according to each school's GCSE English outcome in 2016 along with the trend over the previous three years. This would form part of Hampshire County Council's overall strategy to raise standards and improve outcomes for young people in English across the secondary sector in Rushmoor.
- 3.4 Recognising the national teacher recruitment crisis and the severe shortage of English teachers at Fernhill in particular, this represents a unique opportunity to secure two quality teachers in our schools, improve the teaching standards and enhance the prospects of our young pupils.
- 3.5 By choosing to support the additional three days, the Council can be innovative and help provide a flexible resource to raise standards in English and make a practical contribution to raising educational attainment within the secondary sector in Rushmoor.

4.0 PROPOSAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council clearly has its own financial challenges. However, educational attainment has been identified as a priority by the Council. As schools are independent and funded directly from Central Government, we are able to make a grant to Fernhill School to fund this post directly. The Council also believes that there is the opportunity to seek contributions towards this grant from businesses and other organisations operating in the Borough who have previously expressed interest in supporting improvements in educational attainment.

- 4.2 In view of the need for Fernhill to confirm this post as soon as possible, the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Youth, has agreed that a grant of up to £20,000 be made to Fernhill School from September 2016. In the meantime, officers will seek contributions from other organisations to offset the cost to the Council.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 As the locally elected body, the Council has an obligation and desire to do the best it can for its residents and young people and the educational standards in some of Rushmoor's schools are considered to be unacceptable. The Council recognises that young people leaving school with no or very few qualifications have poorer life chances, may require more public support in the future and make a smaller contribution overall to the economy.
- 5.2 Improving education attainment is a Council corporate priority. This is a unique opportunity, for a relatively small amount of money, for the Council to be innovative and to demonstrate its leadership, its commitment to local schools and local children and to improving education in Rushmoor.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Cabinet are recommended to:
- (i) confirm and endorse the action taken by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Youth, to provide up to £20,000 to be paid as a one-off grant to Fernhill School towards recruiting the teacher; and
 - (ii) agree that officers should seek contributions from other organisations in the Borough to provide some financial contribution towards improving educational attainment.

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