

By: Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director for Education and Young People's Services

To: Scrutiny Committee – 9 November 2016

Subject: Select Committee on Grammar Schools and Social Mobility Action Plan and 3 Month Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: In accordance with the process for monitoring Select Committee recommendations, as set out in the Constitution (Appendix 4 Part 4 – 4.36), an action plan from the Cabinet Member/Corporate Director should be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration 3 months after the County Council has received the Select Committee's final report. This report sets out the actions plan and progress following County Council approval of the Select Committee Grammar Schools and Social Mobility recommendations.

Introduction

1.

- (a) The remit of the Select Committee (June 2016) was to identify what could be done to improve the representation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in grammar schools in Kent, so that they can benefit from a selective education if it is suitable for them.
- (b) In its findings the committee acknowledged the rapidly changing educational landscape which, with an increasing number of schools becoming academies, means that recommendations from this report cannot be imposed on schools.
- (c) The County Council is the Admissions Authority for only three of the Kent grammar schools. The others are all their own admission authority.
- (d) However, the committee believes that Kent County Council, primary, and grammar schools have a shared moral responsibility to ensure that the most academically able children from disadvantaged backgrounds access grammar schools in the same way other children do. The full report and recommendations were therefore presented and discussed at the Primary Heads Forum this month. Similar discussions will take place with the Kent Association of Headteachers executive group to promote the findings of the committee. In addition, all grammar schools will receive a pack of information, guidance and case studies of practice to support them in increasing the numbers of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who apply for and gain places at grammar schools.

Additional Considerations

1.

- (a) Members of the Select Committee are reminded that to deliver Recommendation 13 it is anticipated KCC will need to identify in excess of £500k to meet this discretionary requirement. It should be noted that no budget is currently identified and existing Home to School transport costs are already increasing at a significant pace driven primarily by the rising costs of fuel.
- (b) Scrutiny Committee Members are invited to consider the need to find ways to operate a new means tested system associated with the implementation of Recommendation 13. There is currently no established way to 'means test' families seeking this support and its implementation in advance of any nationally supported database could expose KCC to a significant risk of fraud. KCC currently does not have the means to police applications, or to detect and manage fraudulent activity which seeks to misrepresent income levels. The cost of establishing this resource will form part of the proposal that will be brought forward to Members at a later date.
- (c) The Scrutiny Committee is advised that the Government has identified working families who are 'just about managing' as a group it is keen to target with additional support. This same group would be regarded as those in a family income bracket of £16,190 to £21,000 which aligns with the ambition of the Select Committee to focus on supporting those in work but on a modest income. It is hoped that in order to provide support to this group the government will adapt the current means of identifying those families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals to also take account of those on incomes up to £21,000. This would help to remove the operational barrier and reduce the risk of fraud by allowing KCC to consult a nationally maintained data source in order to confirm eligibility. The role of education in supporting social mobility is a key component of the current DfE consultation 'Schools for Everyone'. If this theme is translated into national policy then it is reasonable to expect that mechanisms to identify the targeted group will support the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.

Recommendations

- 1. Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to acknowledge the completed actions and stated approach to delivering the Select Committee recommendations set out in Appendix 1.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Progress on Select Committee recommendations

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