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To: Scrutiny Committee – 29 November 2017

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

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out the actions plan and progress following County Council approval of the Select Committee Grammar Schools and Social Mobility recommendations and follows the three months update presented to this committee on 9 November 2016

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 was clear that in its view the 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.

Additional Considerations

1.
 - (a) As highlighted last year it should be noted 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 budgets are under pressure.
 - (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.
 - (c) The Scrutiny Committee is reminded that last year the Government 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 agenda for the Secretary of State for Education and the DfE. If this ambition to improve social mobility 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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