

AGENDA ITEM 9

REPORT TO: Halton Strategic Partnership Board
DATE: 15th March 2006
SUBJECT: Strategic Area Review (StAR)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Board Members on the latest situation concerning the LSC's Strategic Area Review.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Board Members agree that option 2 of the attached briefing is the way forward, and agree the consultation response (final version to be handed out).

3. BACKGROUND

The Learning and Skills Council Greater Merseyside (LSCGM) recently published the outcome of the Strategic Area Review (StAR) of 16-19 learning provision in Halton. The preferred outcome was to explore a College Merger with Collaboration (Option 2).

In order to proceed with this option, Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College, working in partnership, have developed a proposal detailing the rationale for amalgamation of both institutions. This was presented to LSCGM Council in January, who have given their consent for the two colleges to proceed to external consultation.

LSCGM are keen that views of individuals and organisations with an interest in post-16 education in Halton are taken into account and are encouraging partnership responses.

Whilst partners may wish to submit responses on behalf of their individual organisations, the Board may also like to submit a partnership response to this consultation. It is suggested that the Board would wish to support the proposed merger as step toward rationalising and better focusing provision, and providing a better range of opportunities more efficiently for our young people.

4. ISSUES

The main concern is that the deadline for consultation responses is 15th March 2006.

This report is being circulated electronically before the 15th to enable those partners who wish to comment to do so.

The consultation documents can be found at:

www.lsc.gov.uk/merseyside/corporate/South+Sefton+16-19+Competition.htm

The relevant documents can be then be found under Halton Documents.

5. CONCLUSIONS

If partners wish to contribute to a Halton Strategic Partnership response, it would be appreciated if partners would return the consultation response pro forma (attached) to lisa.driscoll@halton.gov.uk no later than Tuesday 7th March 2006.

ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

- 1) Briefing document for StAR (Annexe A)
- 2) Consultation response pro forma (Annexe B)

What is the Strategic Area Review?

The Learning and Skills Council has embarked upon a national review of 16+ provision known as Strategic Area Review (StAR). StAR is a fundamental examination of the learning provision needs of learners, communities and employers, both currently and in the future, and of the extent to which current provision meets these needs. StAR is a key process arising from the *Success for All* Strategy (<http://www.successforall.gov.uk/>).

StAR has four broad objectives to bring about change:

- To ensure that the pattern and mix of provision meets the current and future needs and priorities for all learners and communities;
- To create a better, more responsive infrastructure
- To achieve better choice for young people through improved 16-19 provision, whilst also strengthening the links between 14-19 providers; and
- To strengthen links with higher education providers

StAR covers all LSC funded provision across England, for learners at all levels over the age of 16. This includes provision delivered by providers such as school sixth forms, colleges, adult and community learning and voluntary sector provision and work-based learning including modern apprenticeships and other vocational routes

StAR in Halton

The Learning and Skills Council, locally as well as nationally has embarked upon a Strategic Area Review (StAR) for Halton which looks at all 16+ learning provision.

In Greater Merseyside the LSC has segmented StAR in line with their strategic objectives. Therefore, borough-specific reviews of 16-19 provision have been undertaken, together with a pan –Merseyside review of Adult Basic Skills, First Step and Leisure Learning; and a sub-regional review of Employer Engagement and Skills.

For the Halton 16-19 review, the LSC has analysed performance, participation and other data to identify the key issues that need to be addressed in Halton in relation to post-16 education and training. StAR will be a key component of the 14-19 strategy for Halton.

For the purposes of StAR, Runcorn and Widnes have been treated as two discreet communities and planning areas.

The StAR report highlights the following:

- Significantly more Runcorn residents leave the borough to access provision than Widnes residents;
- Although Halton has a good record of supporting Year 11 school leavers into post-16 education and training, with participation and retention higher than the national average, Runcorn figures are poor compared to Widnes figures, especially for those not in education, employment or training (NEET);
- Achievement at Key Stage 4 in Runcorn is below the borough average and at an institutional level varies from 15% to 47% A*-C grades. Whilst improvement in Widnes is improving year on year institutional performance in 2004 varied between 39% and 84% at A*-C;

- Over the past three years, performance at post-16 in Halton has been lower than the national average;
- A significant proportion of Year 7 students and post-16 learners travel outside the borough for provision, particularly in Runcorn;
- Halton imports around 400 pupils per year at ages 7-11, however over 1000 pupils are educated outside the borough;
- Evidence shows that over the past 3 years at FE level, twice the number of Runcorn residents travel outside the borough than Widnes residents.

Educational Structure in Halton

Area	11-16 Schools	11-18 Schools	FE Colleges	Sixth Form College
Widnes	Bankfield Fairfield Wade Deacon	St Peter and Paul Catholic	Halton College	Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form
Runcorn	Halton High The Heath The Grange	St Chad's Catholic		

There are a number of factors relating to demographic change, which will impact upon the type of structures needed to meet the needs of learners. By looking at the number of learners attending schools in Halton, it is possible to assess the impact of demographic changes upon the size of the future post-16 cohort.

The birth rate in Halton is declining, and this is already being seen in the falling numbers on roll in the district's primary schools. In January 2003 pupil numbers in Halton's Primary schools were over 1000 fewer than their net capacity. This will, naturally work its way through the system and affect pupil numbers in secondary education and FE,

The key policy driver underpinning any structural change at post-16 is the continuing development of the 14-19 agenda. Structures will need to be put in place to support the increasing vocationalisation of the 14-19 curriculum and ensure enough flexibility to deliver 14-19 reforms.

The LSC as a consequence has proposed three options for progressing the future of post-16 education in Halton. These options have been developed in consultation with the Area Wide Inspection Steering Group. All of the options will require a high level of collaboration, joint timetabling and travel planning between providers:

Option 1 : Structured Collaboration

This option would mean that post –16 provision would continue to be provided by current institutions, with collaboration in Widnes and Runcorn. Both Widnes and Runcorn would provide the full curriculum offer, with the 11-18 school, work based learning providers and the colleges working together.

Option 2: College Merger with Collaboration

This option would mean merging Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College. This would not mean a reduction in the number of sites, but would mean that they would fall under a single management structure to deliver a joint curriculum. The newly merged college would work in collaboration with school sixth forms in planning provision.

Option 3: One College in each planning area- Widnes and Runcorn- with Collaboration

This option would involve one provider pulling out of a site in Runcorn, and the other pulling out of a site in Widnes, resulting in one college operating in Widnes, and one in Runcorn, each providing a similar curriculum offer, in collaboration with school sixth forms.

The results of the consultation were published at the end of January 2006. The preferred option for Halton arising from the consultation is **Option 2: College Merger with Collaboration**. This option has also been endorsed by the Learning and Skills Council Greater Merseyside. Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College have developed an initial outline proposal and submitted this to LSCGM. This proposal provides the rationale for proposing the merger along with the potential benefits and implications of the merger and a statutory consultation is currently being undertaken. Naturally, when the final decision is made, the implementation will have major policy implications for the future direction of post-16 learning and skills provision in Halton.

More information about the Strategic Area Review Process can be found at:

<http://www.lscgm-star.info>

CONSULTATION RESPONSE PRO-FORMA

Responses are invited by 15 March 2006 to the consultation document on the proposed amalgamation of Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College.

Please provide your comments in the appropriate space below and append additional sheets as necessary. **Please indicate whether your comments are directed to the colleges involved, to the Learning and Skills Council or to both parties in order that the appropriate party may respond where necessary.** Please note, all responses will be considered both by the colleges and the Learning and Skills Council Greater Merseyside.

- Proposed amalgamation

- Proposed name of the college (see section C.5 for suggestions)

The above comments are directed to **(please tick one box only)**:

Colleges Learning and Skills Council Greater Merseyside Both

Name

Organisation (if applicable)

Address

Signature Date

Please return this pro-forma to: Paula Edwards, Senior Strategy Manager, Learning and Skills Council Greater Merseyside, Tithebarn House, Tithebarn Street, Liverpool, L2 2NZ by **15th March 2006**.