

Select Committee on Children's Services – 15 September 2008

Report of the Director of Children's Services

White Paper 'Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver'

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Select Committee about the proposals set out in the White Paper 'Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver' and the implications for the Council.

Background

2. In June 2007 the new Prime Minister made a written statement to the House of Commons in which he set out a number of changes to the machinery of government, notably the creation of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).
3. Alongside these changes the written statement announced that funding and the responsibility for commissioning for 16-18 education would transfer to local authorities from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The total revenue funding concerned amounts to £7 billion.
4. The White Paper 'Raising Expectations' sets out the government's intentions in more detail.
5. The proposals in the White Paper should be seen alongside the major changes in the secondary curriculum, including Diplomas and apprenticeships, the proposals in the Learning and Skills Bill to raise the minimum age at which young people may leave education, and the shift of responsibility for the provision of information, advice and guidance ('Connexions') to local authorities from April 2008.
6. The proposals in the White Paper will be set out in a Learning and Skills Bill during the autumn of 2008.

7. Together these changes are intended to raise standards of educational achievement and aspiration across the board.

'Raising Expectations'

8. The White Paper was sponsored by both DCSF and DIUS; this report focuses on the elements relating to education and training up to the age of 19, that is, of children as defined in the Children Act 2004.
9. The key proposal is to transfer funding for 16-18 education and training to local authorities. *"This gives local authorities clear responsibility for 14-19 provision, in line with their responsibility for commissioning children and young people's services, and enables them to take decisions locally about how services can best be delivered for young people."*
10. Colleges will remain independent corporations, as they have been since 1993. General further education colleges will be sponsored by DIUS, though their pre-19 provision will be commissioned by local authorities. Sixth form colleges and sixth forms in schools will have a closer relationship with local authorities. In each case, the local authority will not manage the provision but instead will commission it to meet the needs of the local populations and economy. Finally, work-based learning providers will remain entirely independent and will be commissioned to provide, for example, apprenticeships.
11. In the paragraph above, 'commissioning' should be read as including needs analysis and planning; contracting and procuring provision; and evaluating quality.
12. The sorts of decisions a local authority will make through the commissioning process might be:
 - the balance between subjects;
 - the balance between types of course and provision;
 - the balance between levels of provision; and
 - the location of provision.
13. When making commissioning decisions a local authority might take into account:

- student demand;
 - employer demand; and
 - quality of provision.
14. In order to carry out these functions, presently carried out by the LSC, resources (people) will be transferred from the LSC to local authorities.
 15. There will be a new national “*slimline*” agency, the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) to manage the whole process and to act as interface between DCSF and local authorities.
 16. There will also be a Skills Funding Agency reporting to DIUS for post-19 provision, within which there will be a National Apprenticeships Service which will be commissioned to provide apprenticeships to meet local demand.
 17. Since further education colleges typically serve areas greater than single local authorities, local authorities are being required to come together in ‘sub-regional groupings’ to commission further education colleges (but not sixth form colleges or sixth forms in schools). It seems likely that the four Black Country local authorities will form a single sub-regional grouping.
 18. While this brief summary sets out the key provisions, there are many details not described here and also many questions as yet unanswered; for example, provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, provision for offenders, decision-making about capital projects, and quality management and assurance.
 19. However it is clear that this is a major opportunity for local authorities to join-up 16-18 education and training with secondary provision, and at the same time to ensure that effective linkages are made with the economic development and regeneration agendas.
 20. There is no doubt that this presents a huge challenge; local authorities will have major new functions and duties, and will need to work with the existing LSC and colleges to secure a smooth changeover in August 2010. While this sounds some way off, the planning cycle for August 2010 starts in April 2009; so over the next six months or so there will need to be some extensive preparations.

21. Further reports will be made as the legislation progresses and more details emerge.

Finance

22. For Dudley, the funding transfer will approximate to £50m per year.

Law

23. The provisions will be set out in a Learning and Skills Bill during the autumn of 2008, which, subject to Parliament, will be fully enacted by August 2010.

Equality Impact

24. When it carries out the new functions, the Council will have duties to consider the impact on equalities, and also the views of young people.

Recommendation

25. It is recommended that the Select Committee considers and comments on the report.



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List of background papers

'Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver' (DSCF / DIUS 2008)