

Cllr Chris Whitehouse

Lead Member for Children's Services

Report to Full Council on 22nd February 2017

Having been appointed to my Executive position on Friday 20th January, I spent much of that day being briefed by the Director of Children's Services and other Hampshire officers on my statutory obligations and on the current situation in relation to school improvement and social services. I also met with the Island MP and colleagues to plan a major event to encourage former teachers to return to the profession.

I amended and approved papers to go to the Executive Committee on 9th February in relation to school admissions criteria and the Schools Funding Formula.

I attended the Children's Services Committee on 26th January, presenting, supported by Hampshire officers, a report on School Improvement and receiving an interesting presentation on child mental health services, which continue, in my view, to have waiting times that are far too long to access key support. The Committee challenged our NHS partners to improve several aspects of the service with Cllr Nicholson contributing some fascinating insights in how best this might be achieved. At the formal Committee session, and afterwards in its informal session, I set out my vision for the future of education on the Island, saying:

"I have a vision for the future of Island education and make the following for the new Administration:

"First, our partnership with Hampshire, appointed by a Conservative Schools Minister to take the lead on our education issues, will continue. It is delivering solid progress in the right direction, but things are far from good enough yet. We will be relentless in driving up standards so that all our children can achieve their full potential.

"Second, we will ensure that every school on the Island will be rated at least "good" by Ofsted, and at least 25% of them will be "outstanding". Our partners from Hampshire share this commitment.

"Third, we will consult widely and deeply with parents and teachers on a proposal to move from three terms to four. This would allow parents to access some holiday time out of peak season and also improve education outcomes as headteachers tell me that some students slip backwards educationally over the long summer break. But it will be a real consultation. If the overwhelming consensus is to make the move, we'll make it. If the consensus is for no change, then we'll leave things as they are. Other options for changing term dates will also be considered."

I also had a message for the teachers of the Island saying:

"Teaching is a noble and important vocation. Teachers are under-paid, over-worked, under-appreciated and under-valued. This situation should be addressed nationally, and I am happy to work with the professions to encourage government to do more in this area."

A new "Award for Excellence in Teaching" could also be on the way to recognise those individual Island teachers who make a real difference to the lives of their students. The proposal for such Awards met with enthusiastic support from councillors present, and I undertook to make it happen.

Major events to engage Island businesses in providing careers advice to students were also unveiled by Conservative Council Leader, Cllr Dave Stewart, who stressed the importance of working closely with Island employers to ensure that students are aware of the exciting opportunities for training, apprenticeships and careers that do already exist on the Island.

I obtained and read all the papers submitted to the Supreme Court in relation to the Jon Platt case relating to school attendance and was shocked that the previous portfolio holder had landed the Council with a potential £250,000+ liability should anything be said about the case that was not prior-approved by the Department for Education. What was truly shocking is that this was done apparently without formal approval of the Executive or Full Council despite the Constitution reflecting the stated policy of the previous Administration that significant delegated decisions by Executive Members should not be permitted.

I liaised with Pete Shaw, Executive Head of Medina College, Carisbrooke College and Island Innovation Sixth Form to congratulate him on the successful Ofsted visits to Medina and Carisbrooke Colleges. Delighted, also, to receive and study the Ofsted visit report in relation to St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School, Newport. I have also continued the dialogue with Teach First who are doing so much to support the Island improve educational outcomes in its schools.

I have been briefed on and studied papers relating to Serious Case Reviews.

Prepared with officers and submitted to Executive Committee papers with proposals on the School Funding Formula and school Admission Arrangements.

Had input into the Careers Event the Leader of the Council organised with island businesses.

Received, analysed and issued a statement on the good news that the Island is top in the South East for participation post 16.

Raised with officers concerns about the Statutory Guidance on the role and approach of the Lead Member for Children's Services.

Chris Whitehouse
20th February 2017