

Full Council – 15 March 2023

Written question from Mr B Hardy on behalf of the Youth Council to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

'How will the Council, in the next five years, ensure that young people who have been brought up in low income households are provided with opportunities to allow them an equal chance to forge a successful future? And how will young people be consulted in this?'

Thank you for your continued support.

Response

Thank you for your question. All young people have a right to high quality education and training that opens up pathways to forge successful futures. The pandemic has exacerbated the inequities and educational outcome gaps for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds nationally and locally and we are determined to close those gaps.

The Isle of Wight Council invest in the early years so that children get off to a good start. We have a good take up of early years education and children achieve well. Support is provided to early years settings through our inclusion and advisory services. In 2022, 99% of children aged 3 and 4 accessed early years provision on the Isle of Wight compared to 92% nationally.

Resources and training for schools to assist in tackling educational disadvantage have been produced and shared with/used with schools for some time; these have been refreshed by the school improvement team and are being rolled out once more, including through project work with schools. These are based upon the latest research undertaken through the Education Endowment Foundation.

The DfE provides additional funding to address the specific needs of children eligible for free school meals known as pupil premium. All schools are required to have a Pupil Premium Strategy which should be available on their website; the school improvement team is available to support the planning, implementation and evaluation of these strategies annually.

The school improvement team has produced a statement of intent known as the 'Twenty Strands' to improve outcomes for groups of children experiencing vulnerability. This has been compiled with the input of children and young people. Again, it is based upon the latest research of what works. We are encouraging schools and services to use that document to improve outcomes.

The Isle of Wight Council provides support to all young people to apply for and secure an appropriate place in post 16 education or training. In 2022-23 a guaranteed place was secured for 98.3% of all young people on the Island, the highest in the SE region and significantly above national average. Currently 96.2% are in education, employment, or training (Dec 2022), compared with 94.0% nationally. The Island offers a broad and comprehensive range of accessible post 16 academic, technical, and vocational options in school sixth forms, the Isle of Wight

College, and work-based training providers. Examples of support for those in vulnerable groups or facing financial hardship includes:

- The Council's careers and participation service, Island Futures, provides 1:1 Careers information, advice, and guidance to enable young people to transition successfully into post 16 pathways, prioritising those who are most vulnerable and who require additional support.
- Young people in low-income households are supported to access the 16-19 Bursary Fund, which is guaranteed for some. Every post 16 provider offers a discretionary bursary fund for those requiring financial support to allow them to stay and progress in education.
- The Uni Connect programme, in partnership with Southern Universities Network, ensures access to higher education is not limited by young people's background, location, or characteristics. It is supporting young people on the Island to make informed choices about their options into higher education and to minimise the barriers.
- Opportunities which focus on students from low-income backgrounds are actively highlighted to schools, for example Nuffield Research Placements which prioritise students from low-income backgrounds and those who are the first in their immediate family to attend university.
- Employability Hubs are being developed from 2023 which will provide new pathways for young people with SEND to access employment opportunities on the Island, working with employers to ensure equal access to jobs and careers.

The Holiday Activity and Food Programme has been developed and funded through the Department for Education. It has recognised that school holidays can be pressure points for some families, with children from low-income households being less likely to access organised out-of-school activities, more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health and more likely to experience social isolation.

The DfE has funded the Isle of Wight £432,000 to deliver the programme in 2023-24 and have confirmed funding through to March 2025.

The Isle of Wight Programme has ensured broad access to the scheme for eligible families through its network of 11 Providers based on the Island. In 2022-23 the programme reached over 1400 children, 37% of benefit-related FSM children compared to 26% nationally.

Feedback from children and parents directly to Providers informs their continual improvement. As a Programme, we recognize that the programme currently reflects a primary-age bias in attendance, reflecting the national figures. We have initiated a teen-voice project to ensure we can reflect the wants and needs of a secondary-age audience in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

With all of the above programmes we are very happy to engage with the Youth Council to ascertain where we can strengthen provision still further as it is vital that we engage proactively with young people to inform what we do.