



meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 6 April 2006

agenda item number

## REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND PROPERTY

### **Education portfolio**

#### **Response to DfES report on 'Improving the Student Finance Service'**

This report was received in early February and is a review of Higher Education Student Finance delivery in England.

The review makes a series of recommendations for changing the delivery of the service as part of a vision of a modern on-line service, bringing together applications for university and student finance. The covering letter makes it clear that ministers think there are strong arguments for centralising the delivery of application processing. This would mean removing this as a local authority function and would have significant implications for staff in Student Support. We feel a strong sense of disappointment that as a local authority we have enthusiastically engaged in pilot work to improve the national system whilst continuing to deliver a quality service to local users and are now faced with the strong possibility of losing this function. In Nottinghamshire we already provide a service that is characterised by consistency, quality, accountability and value for money. We challenge the premise that centralisation is more likely to achieve the required transformation in service delivery.

A strength in Nottinghamshire is our relationship with schools and colleges – 90% were visited in 2005 and presentations made on student finance. Furthermore we met all our Service Level Agreement targets with the DfES in 2005. In the absence of any evidence base for supporting the “centralised” options we question whether they can match the level of personal contact and face to face support that can be provided by a local authority. This is particularly relevant in areas of deprivation where there is no tradition of entering higher education and limited access to computers.

#### **Provision of Early Years Education Places at Gunthorpe CE Primary School**

Owing to the local early years provider having announced they would cease to operate during July 2005, the school approached the LA's Early Years team

with a view to providing this type of educational provision themselves. The school followed statutory procedures and having consulted with appropriate interested parties, subsequently published a statutory notice. The proposal was well received as the only other alternative early years provision was located outside of the village.

As this school is voluntary aided, the outcome of the proposal to lower the school's age range from 5-11 to 3-11 years fell to the Nottinghamshire School Organisation Committee to decide. The NSOC met on 17 January 2006 to consider and subsequently approve the governors' proposal to provide early years education with effect from 27 February 2006. This proposal will meet Government policy that early years education places are made available for all three and four year old children whose parents wish them to have one.

## **Early Years Conference**

I attended the eighth Early Years Conference, again very well organised by the Early Years Team. The guest speakers were Professor Al Ainsley – Green, Children's Commissioner for England and Jenny Moseley an early years educational professional. Both gave excellent presentations to probably our best attended conference yet. The exhibition and workshops were well received by delegates as was the work with children carried out by the staff of the County Council Play Service.

I am grateful to all the staff who made the day such a marvellous event for, children and young people, delegates and guests including senior officers of this Council, Paddy Tipping, MP and our partners in delivering high quality services to Children and Young People.

## **School Council Visits**

I have been delighted to take part in a number of School Council visits and thank those members who have also taken part in these events. Councillor Carroll assisted Croft, Hillocks and Leamington Primary Schools by using money from the Electoral Division Initiative to pay for a coach and the Bassetlaw County Councillors have set aside money to help schools from the north of the county visit County Hall. Portland and Valley Schools attended on 31 March.

## **Appointment of Director of Services for Children and Young People**

I will inform members orally of progress with this appointment. Interviews will have been held on 3 and 4 April.

## **Property portfolio**

### **Property issues**

I attended the ceremony to mark the opening of the River Maun Culvert Project at Meadow House, Mansfield. This is a successful partnership project

between the Environment Agency and Nottinghamshire County Council and an imaginative way to deal with 80 metres of collapsing river culvert. Opening up of the culvert has reduced risk of flooding to the local area and provided a greener landscape with an attractive area adjacent to Tichfield Park for local people and staff from nearby businesses to sit and walk beside the River Maun.

**COUNCILLOR MICHAEL STOREY**

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Property

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