

# Swindon Challenge

**Cabinet**

**Date: 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

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Author: Cabinet Member for Children's Services  
Head of Education  
Wards: All  
Locality Affected: All  
Parishes Affected: All

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## **1. Purpose and Reasons**

- 1.1 This report sets out a strategy to address and raise performance in primary, secondary schools and 16-19 education in Swindon through the introduction of "Swindon Challenge". This is a three-year programme to improve outcomes for young people and improve school performance.
- 1.2 The report is necessary to inform Members of the strategy and the actions taken so far to implement the programme.
- 1.3 The "Swindon Challenge" initiative links into one of the key priorities of the Council's vision for Swindon. Priority 2 is focused on education and includes a number of corporate performance measures including three related directly to secondary education or 16-19 provision, in particular to pledge 17: to improve educational attainment, in particular and ages 16-19 so we are above the English national average in five years.

## **2. Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Adopt the Strategy for School Improvement as outlined in the body of the report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Education in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to develop and implement the Swindon Challenge action plan.
- 2.3 Authorise the Head of Education in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to bring a further report to Cabinet as soon as practicable on how to make Swindon "A Learning Town".

## **3. Detail**

Background

- 3.1 Swindon has 11 secondary schools and one University Technical College (UTC) currently of which 6 are graded as good according to their latest inspection reports, 3 are rated as "requires improvement", three are rated as inadequate of which two are in special measures and one is in serious weaknesses. This

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equates to 50% of schools being judged as good or better against a national average of 74%. In terms of GCSE outcomes, 54% of pupils achieved 5A\*-C passes with English and mathematics against a national average of 57% in 2016. The gap of 3% to the national average has been persistent over a number of years (although the gap narrowed 1% in 2016) with concerns over the achievement of disadvantaged pupils particularly white disadvantaged boys and girls.

- 3.2 The proportion of young people moving on into higher education is also relatively low compared to the national average. Data shows that 33% of young people in Swindon move to higher education against a national average of 48%. Swindon has two FE colleges, one of which is graded outstanding and one graded good yet our relative position against other local authorities on a broad range of attainment indicators is at the lower end of the spectrum. Clearly, outcomes do vary from school to school and there are institutions that are being successful. However, the current data does show that there is a need for radical improvement in education outcomes at Key Stage 4 (14 to 16 year olds) and Key Stage 5 (16 to 18 year olds) in Swindon to realise individuals' potential and the SBC's vision.
- 3.3 Primary schools have been more successful in recent years with outcomes tending to be in line with the national average for most indicators. Currently, over 90% of primary schools are good or better and Swindon was ranked in 38<sup>th</sup> position (out of 152 local authorities) in the most recent HMCI (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector) annual report and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the South-West. In 2015/16 however, writing outcomes were very low in the new national assessment system introduced. Phonics outcomes for year one pupils were also relatively low. There is a recognition that there is work to do to improve in these areas.
- 3.4 There are 6 special schools in the Borough and of these, 5 are currently rated good or outstanding. One school is in special measures and this is our secondary SEMH (social, emotional and mental health) school which needs considerable improvement. Swindon also has an EOTAS (Education Otherwise than at School) provision which includes the Pupil Referral Unit and this is currently graded as good. Swindon's Tuition sits outside EOTAS but it is proposed to bring it back within this service.
- 3.5 In determining the Council's Vision (Council Minute 33, 2015/16 refers), Members acknowledged the need to work in partnership with schools and colleges to continue to raise education performance and attainment. Hence the Vision contained an explicit target in Pledge 17 about improved performance.
- 3.6 Members and Officers have actively sought out best practice from other local authorities in order to devise an approach. There has been senior political and administrative level cooperation with Poole Borough Council, a local authority whose positive response to a similar challenge has been highlighted by Ofsted.

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## A strategy for School Improvement

- 3.7 This report sets out clear aims and objectives and a strategy to improve primary and secondary school and 16-19 performance.
- 3.8 A Swindon Challenge Board has been established which held its first meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017. Its terms of reference, membership list and initial action plan are attached as appendices to this report. Its function is to lead improvement and challenge practice, bringing in a range of expertise and good practice to support education in Swindon. It will have an independent chair and consist of all relevant stakeholders including the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services along with the Shadow spokesperson for Children's Services. Headteacher associations will be represented as will the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office, the Teaching School and the local business community. Officer representation will include the Chief Executive, the DCS, and the Head of Education.
- 3.9 The aims of the Swindon Challenge are as follows:
- 3.9.1 To ensure that a common purpose of securing excellence and equity for all young people underpins all education provision in Swindon with an ambition to enhance the aspirations of children and families across the Borough
  - 3.9.2 To make a step change improvement in the educational outcomes for all young people aged 4-19.
  - 3.9.3 To ensure that disadvantaged pupils, Looked after Children and pupils with SEND receive high quality support, make at least good progress from their starting points and significantly narrow the gap with their peers.
- 3.10 The objectives of the Swindon Challenge are:
- 3.10.1 To underpin Swindon's educational vision by bringing leading educational research and practice into Swindon to shape and influence leadership and practice.
  - 3.10.2 To develop stronger partnership work both with national education influencers (including the DfE, Regional Schools Commissioner, National College for Teaching and Learning, leading educational researchers and practitioners and high performing local authorities at KS4 and KS5) to improve outcomes across all Swindon 11-19 providers.
  - 3.10.3 To ensure that every school in Swindon is judged good or better by 2020 including special schools.
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- 3.10.4 To ensure that outcomes at GCSE level and Post 16 indicators at least meet national averages against national benchmarks for all pupils including those with SEND.
  - 3.10.5 To increase the proportion of young people accessing Higher Education by 25% by 2020
  - 3.10.6 To ensure that phonics outcomes for Yr1 pupils are at the national average or above and that end of key stage 1 & 2 outcomes are at national averages or above.
  - 3.10.7 To ensure that strong and sustainable school leadership is in place and that school structures (Multi Academy Trusts, Federations) are in place by 2020 to ensure that Swindon has a self-improving education system.
  - 3.11 Key performance indicators staged over three years with a plan of action will be agreed within three months of the Swindon Challenge Board being established (by the end of June 2017). This will address school improvement across the town as well as specifically targeting key schools supporting them to improve by working with governors/directors and senior leaders. The Board will receive regular feedback. The Board will have a primary and a secondary sub group linked to the headteacher associations that will play an integral role in ensuring that appropriate actions are agreed and taken forward. This is essential to ensure schools are at the heart of decision making. The Teaching School will be represented on both boards and this should enable other funding that comes into the local authority to supplement, integrate and support programmes of school improvement.
  - 3.12 The Swindon Challenge Board will commission bespoke specific support working with the RSC, national partners and leading schools. This has already involved commissioning work for example with the following:
    - 3.12.1 The National Education Trust will be carrying out a review of each secondary school's work with disadvantaged and SEND pupils in the summer term (terms 5 & 6) with recommendations for practice improvement.
    - 3.12.2 All secondary schools have agreed to join PIXL, a national network of schools focusing on developing good practice.
    - 3.12.3 Individual work has been agreed to support individual schools including working with nationally known programmes to improve practice including Achievement for All (AFA), the Teacher Effectiveness Programme (TEEP) and the Improving/Outstanding Teacher Programmes.
    - 3.12.4 The Council has agreed to fund the Swindon Challenge programme for 3 years with a budget of £600,000 over that time (Council Minute 87,
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Peter Nathan, Direct Dial Telephone Number, 07467440955 or email: [pnathan@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:pnathan@swindon.gov.uk).

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2016/17 refers). This will pay for or contribute to the above and similar programmes. Reports on the use of these funds and its impact will be to the Challenge Board and also to Cabinet and relevant Scrutiny committees.

- 3.13 The Challenge Board will need to work closely with school governors and directors to ensure that they are fully involved in the direction of travel of the board. This is critical to ensure that sustainable improvements are in place and that a clear strategy for improving quality and standards is in place.
- 3.14 A key initiative in the plan for Swindon Challenge is to make Swindon “A Learning Town” with a campaign to highlight the importance of learning to all citizens across the town. This could involve the development of town wide education events such as “Swindon Reading Week”, “Swindon Science Week”, “Swindon History Week” and other such ideas. A “Swindon Challenge” action plan is to be developed and this would include:
- 3.14.1 **Leadership and management** – working with schools and governors to ensure that all schools have excellence in this area. Educational research for the past 40 years has emphasised the importance of strong leadership in achieving high outcomes. This could involve local leaders of education as well as National Leaders of Education (NLEs).
- 3.14.2 **Teaching and Learning** – ensuring that there is high quality teaching and learning in classrooms and beyond. This would involve supporting the recruitment of high quality NQTs and other teaching staff and leaders. It would also involve working closely with the Teaching School Alliance to ensure that there is high quality training in place to support teacher development and effectiveness. This would also involve peer-to-peer support between schools and within schools using outstanding practitioners to develop practice.
- 3.14.3 **Behaviour, Personal Development and Welfare** – ensuring that all schools have appropriate systems in place for effectively managing behaviour to reduce fixed term and permanent exclusions (as well as creating positive learning environments). Supporting schools to ensure that their schools are safe places to be and that young people are able to grow personally to become full and participating members of British society.
- 3.15 The action plan would have clear quantitative targets for improvement based on examination outcomes including progress measures, participation and engagement, destinations and also Ofsted inspection outcomes.

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## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 An alternative would be to develop a much larger scheme as took place with the City Challenge programme but it is recognised that current funding constraints would not allow this.

## 5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 Council has already approved a budget of £600k over the next 3 years to deliver the outcomes highlighted in this report (Council Minute 87 (Appendix 6 to the main report) 2016/17 refers).

### Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 There are no specific legal and human rights implications arising from this report. It is considered that the recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

### All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other implications arising from this report.

### Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA)

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed. No adverse impacts or other significant issues were found and that there would be a positive effect for students from disadvantaged groups. A copy of the DIA is available from the report author.

### Risk Management

- 5.5 None

## 6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## 7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

## 8. Appendices

- 8.1 Swindon Challenge Terms of Reference  
8.2 Swindon Challenge Initial Action Plan
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8.3 Swindon Challenge Membership List

**9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan**

9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for March 2017.