

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2003 AT 10.00 A.M.

Agenda Item No.

10

**PROPOSALS BY WEST HERTS COLLEGE TO DISCONTINUE CERTAIN PROVISION
ON THE COLLEGE'S DACORUM CAMPUS**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

Author: Mike Griffin and Marianne Stevenson

Tel: 01992 555927/555915

Executive Member: Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of the report

To provide the Committee with the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to provision at the Dacorum Campus of West Herts College. The College plans to begin implementation of the changes from September 2003.

2. Summary

2.1 The College plans, on a managed basis, to discontinue those adult leisure learning activities which do not explicitly and directly meet its strategic objectives. It plans to begin the process in September 2003, and to manage the withdrawal from these activities during 2003-2004. Unless managed carefully, these proposals create significant and immediate problems for the delivery of the County Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) Plan because identifying other providers, within the proposed timescale, in order to protect the needs of learners will be problematic.

2.2 In addition, full-time provision for 16-19 year olds will be transferred from the Dacorum Campus to Watford in September 2003. In the medium term, the reduction of provision on the Dacorum Campus could create significant difficulties for the delivery of the emerging 14-19 Strategy for schools and colleges. The DfES document "14-19 Opportunity and Excellence" sets out the vision for schools and colleges to work closely together to meet the needs of young people in this age range. It envisages that young people will learn in more than one place. Developing high quality, vocationally orientated provision over the next 2-3 years will be an important element of the delivery of a progressive 14-19 curriculum in the Dacorum area.

- 2.3 It is important that given the very tight timescales envisaged by the College, the LSC, the County Council and the College engage in careful discussions to plan provision and manage the proposed changes in order to ensure that the needs of learners in Dacorum are met.

3. Conclusion

The Committee is invited to set up a topic group to discuss the proposals in more detail and to invite representatives of West Herts College and the Learning and Skills Council to contribute to the discussion.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Authority subcontracts with the FE Colleges and the University, reimbursing them with the costs of fee concessions for those attending adult leisure learning. The total budget for 2002/03 for this element of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) is £152,202. The Authority is committed to ensuring that ACL is accessible to under represented groups and contributes to meeting basic skills targets, while maintaining the broad base of leisure learning opportunities for those who can afford to pay.
- 1.2 West Herts College, in the context of financial viability, has concluded that the college cannot afford to continue the delivery of aspects of its adult leisure learning programme or its full-time programme for 16-19 year olds on the Dacorum Campus.
- 1.3 The college has decided, after consideration of a number of scenarios, to refocus on the widening participation agenda through concentrating on adult first rung/basic skills provision. They wish to make the changes in time for the 2003/04 academic year. They envisage a phased withdrawal during 2003-2004 from a significant part of the recreational element of the College's ACL portfolio where such provision does not explicitly and directly meet the College's strategic objectives. They also plan to move all 16-19 full-time provision to Watford.

2. The timescale

- 2.1 In March 2003 the LEA was made aware of the College's intention to review provision on the Dacorum Campus in relation to adult leisure learning programmes. Precise details of which programmes would run and which would be discontinued were not available at this early stage of the College's planning.
- 2.2 On 4th April a letter was sent to the Principal advising that the Local Authority would wish to work closely with the College to ensure that the change process was carefully managed and communicated to reduce the degree of instability with the adult learning sector.
- 2.3 In May the local newspaper gave extensive coverage to the College's plans, which included the decision to move full-time provision for 16-19 year olds from the Dacorum Campus to Watford.
- 2.4 On 3rd June the College Principal shared two detailed briefing papers with the Director of CSF in which the College's strategy is set out in detail. These papers are available on request.
- 2.5 On 6th June the Community Development Manager for CSF met with the Principal of the college to discuss the proposals, and the implications for the Local Authority's ACL plan, in more detail.

3. Issues for the Local Authority

3.1 The College proposals, and in particular the timescale, present significant problems for the delivery of the Local Authority's ACL plan. Particular concerns are:

- the lack of time to identify new providers for the programmes which the College decides to discontinue;
- the difficulty in finding new locations for the delivery of adult learning at short notice;
- the difficulty of finding new tutors to replace those made redundant by the College; and
- the impact in the medium term on 14-19 collaborative provision.

4. Conclusion

4.1 These issues are of real significance for the Local Authority and it is proposed that the Committee should set up a Topic Group to investigate further. The Local LSC and representatives of West Herts College should be invited to contribute to the discussion.

4.2 The key issues for the Authority are that:

- any developments should be planned in such a way as to meet the needs of all learners in the local area; and
- the proposed developments support the delivery, over time, of a high quality 14-19 learning experience for young people in the area.

5. Rural Implications

5.1 It is important that the current provision in Berkhamsted and Tring for adult learners continues to be supported.