

Secondary School provision in Sittingbourne and Sheppey - the Administration view

I am grateful to Kent County Council for engaging with Swale Borough Councillors on this topic.

It is a topic that matters to Swale Borough Council:

- Because we are concerned about the difficulties that many of our residents increasingly face in accessing places of choice for their youngsters.
- But also, because Secondary Education plays a vital role in meeting our aspirations for our young people, for the local economy and for our community.

School places:

- There is a problem of shortfall in capacity. It is hoped that this can be met by the opening of the North West Sittingbourne School, but it is not clear to us when this will happen and in the meantime many families face stressful dilemmas each year.
- But the situation is further complicated due to the Academy on Sheppey never reaching its Pupil Admission numbers because so many young people on Sheppey migrate each day to the mainland. This has put severe pressure on places on the mainland, with many Sittingbourne youngsters being offered unwelcome places on Sheppey. It is the administration's view that this is not equitable, nor is it good for the sense of community on Sheppey for so many youngsters to want to go elsewhere for their important education.

Meeting young people's and local needs:

- School places are not the only issue.
- The long term low academic outcomes at the Academy on Sheppey are a matter of concern. It obviously motivates the daily migration to Sittingbourne, and it leaves many young people low on skills and aspirations. We would support any moves to widen the opportunities for young people by providing an option of two schools. However, the future provision of schools is very much in the hands of the Regional office for Academy schools. A two-school solution is supported by the constituency MP.

Vocational and Further Education:

- This, and previous, administrations want to see a Further Education college in Sittingbourne, which would complement the good work being done at Sheppey College and provide more skills needed by young people and by the local economy.

- But we cannot secure Government support and funding because numerically we cannot make a case based on demand. That is because so many youngsters stay in their Secondary Schools after the age of 16. They would plausibly not do so if there were a Further Education college.
- That being the dilemma, the administration at Swale supports any moves to establish more and better vocational education in the schools.
- In supporting the 2-school solution on Sheppey, we would also support one of the schools having a strong vocational bias and close links to the Sheppey College.
- We would support any plans for the new school in NW Sittingbourne to have a strong vocational bias with further education provision for the post 16 age group.

Cllr Roger Truelove
Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance