

**REPORT FROM: STRATEGIC DIRECTOR**

**TO: EXECUTIVE**

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## **THE PENDLE CHALLENGE**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide Members with an update on the Pendle Challenge and how, as a district council, we can support its development.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That Members' note the background of, and progress made, with the Pendle Challenge to date;
- (2) That Members' approve a financial contribution towards the Children's University model.

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) To raise awareness;
- (2) To carry out Pendle Council's community leadership role in supporting educational attainment and increasing aspirations for young people in Pendle.

## **ISSUE**

### **Background**

The idea to develop the Pendle Challenge arose initially from a group of Head teachers who recognised that GCSE results in Pendle have been low compared to other schools in Lancashire, and nationally.

Head teachers from all Pendle Secondary Schools, along with some Primary School Heads, met towards the end of last year to consider how attainment levels in Pendle could be improved.

Paul Dyson-Knight, Senior School Adviser for Secondary Schools, Lancashire County Council School Improvement Service, was invited to a meeting of Head teachers in December 2016. He provided some education statistics, as shown at Appendix 1. Notably, Pendle's attainment was the lowest out of the twelve Lancashire districts last year, and second from lowest (after Burnley) in the previous two years.

## **The National Picture**

Low educational attainment is not an exclusive issue for Pendle, or Lancashire. It is prevalent in the north of England, particularly in comparison with the south.

### ***Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy***

The Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy, published in November 2016, outlines the need for northern schools to 'catch up' to southern schools. The following is taken from the Executive summary:

1. The Northern Powerhouse initiative is designed to help rebalance the economy and establish the North as a centre of growth in the UK. For the purpose of this report, the 'North' covers the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humber regions.
2. A dynamic regional economy depends on an excellent education system. Currently, the standard of secondary schooling in the North of England fails to match this ambition. Secondary schools in the North are consistently outperformed by their counterparts in the South of England. The number of secondary schools judged to be good or outstanding in the South and East is 81%, compared with only 70% in the North<sup>3</sup>.
3. The outcomes for children from disadvantaged<sup>4</sup> backgrounds are also significant. DfE 2014-15 data shows that only 34% of disadvantaged students attending northern schools achieved 5+ A\*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared to a national disadvantaged average of 37% and 48% in London<sup>5</sup>.
4. This underperformance has implications for the life chances of young people, including further study and careers.

### ***Growing up North***

The children's commissioner Anne Longfield is leading this project to better understand why children do better in some parts of the country. Over this year, she will be joined by a panel of politicians, academics, sports, charities and cultural leaders for the *growing up north* project, which will gather data on children in the region to examine factors that influence their progression.

She will look at the issues facing the north in the context of ongoing regeneration of the region, including the government's northern powerhouse strategy.

The *growing up north* project will bring together data on pupil outcomes in order to "increase understanding" of regional differences, and Longfield hopes by the end of the year to be able to identify "where children are excelling and where they are being left behind".

## **The Pendle Challenge**

Head teachers representing Early Years, Primary and Secondary Schools, met to discuss how to tackle the attainment issue and how to involve other educators and wider partners.

The idea of the Pendle Challenge was based on that of the London Challenge, a project which began in 2003 to improve the performance of London schools (find out more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/11/london-challenge-turned-poor-schools-around>)

A launch event took place in February 2017 at the ACE Centre, to involve education settings across the spectrum and other partner agencies to identify the key issues for Pendle in tackling attainment. About 80 people attended, along with keynote speakers.

Since then, the Pendle Challenge Steering Group has met to consider its priorities, based on the outcomes of the discussions at the event.

Four key projects have now been identified, that will be running in the autumn this year:

- 1) The Pendle Reading Challenge – led by the Colne Cluster (Rebecca Howlett at Park High has taken responsibility for this)
- 2) A project on oracy, speech language and communication – led by the Nelson and Brierfield Cluster
- 3) A scheme for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and Recently Qualified Teachers (RQTs) in conjunction with Liverpool Hope University – currently lead by Dr Paul Parkin at Park
- 4) Family Learning Partnerships – Led by Lancashire Adult Learning (NCC)

An initial meeting for the Reading project took place on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July and for the Family Learning Partnership on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June).

A strategy document has been developed (see Appendix 2), with some key overarching areas of focus and a range of potential activities underneath this. These key areas of focus have directed the projects that have been chosen, i.e. reading, parental engagement and developing staff.

Perhaps the most pleasing aspect of the Pendle Challenge so far is the effect it has had in encouraging educationalists in Pendle to talk with each other. There is now a vibrant cluster meeting in Nelson and Brierfield and there are plans for a West Craven cluster in future. The Challenge has also brought in interest from wider partners such as Burnley Football in the Community, Curious Minds and In-Situ, with discussions ongoing about how they can link in with Pendle schools to support the Challenge.

Pendle Council has so far supported the Pendle Challenge through the Steering Group, launch event, and in bringing some structure to the project.

The key areas in which Pendle Council can support the priorities are as follows:

### ***A common approach to engaging parents in learning at all stages***

Following an unsuccessful bid from the Burnley and Pendle Children's Partnership Board to the Big Lottery Reaching Communities fund, to support 'school readiness' and the transition to primary school, it is anticipated that the Pendle Challenge could take forward some of this work. This would be a Pendle-specific project, emulating the project delivered by St.Philip's Primary School in Nelson two years ago which engaged parents and children alike, prior to them starting in Reception year.

### ***A collective approach to raising student aspirations***

Pendle Council is already delivering the 'Business Class Hub' project, working with Business in the Community, to support students to be 'work ready' on leaving secondary school. The pilot project is currently working with two Pendle secondary schools: West Craven and Marsden Heights. It is in the second year of a three pilot, funded by Pendle Council. It is envisaged that the work will continue beyond this period, and that other schools will see the benefits of participating in this project in future. This project sits underneath the Enterprise Adviser Network, which has a high

level business member linked to each school and an action plan. The Business Class Hub project is one of these actions.

### **Children's University**

The Children's University has been established nationally, and its approach seeks to support both of the above priorities. The following is taken from *Children's University: Our Case for Support* (November 2016):

We know that children who thrive in school and in later life develop their confidence, aspirations and love of learning from the skills, characteristics and passions they develop in and beyond the classroom. Not every child has the luxury of accessing these opportunities. Sadly, children that miss out on these vital developmental experiences fall behind in the classroom, lack confidence in their learning and are far less likely to succeed in later life.

Children's University's innovative Passport to Learning encourages children from the age of 5 to try new learning experiences in and outside of school; at after school clubs, at home, in the local library, museum or further afield. Culminating in an inspirational graduation ceremony, this adventure introduces children to the joy of learning, a sense of wonder in the world around them and develops their confidence and aspirations for the brightest futures.

Evidence overwhelmingly shows that children thrive in a learning environment if they are able to extend their learning outside of the classroom. Researchers have found that extra-curricular activities taking place in school can significantly increase a pupil's positive identification with school, build self-confidence and resilience. They also found that extra-curricular sports can boost a competitive spirit and the desire to succeed, and other out of school activities can provide additional opportunities for academic learning, with direct benefits for attainment outcomes.

Conversely, the research shows that children that do not have access to these opportunities fall behind, lack self-confidence, and fail to develop career aspirations. They do not reach their full potential and they are significantly less likely to attend University or access a skilled career. Often children from disadvantaged backgrounds are those most affected by this lack of access. The resulting attainment gap is so significant that 25% of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds achieve below expected attainment levels, compared to just 3% of children from affluent backgrounds, so that by Key Stage 2 they are on average one whole level below other children, with only a minority catching up by the time they leave school.

There are 90 local Children's Universities around the UK, with 1,000 participating schools and reaching over 100,000 children. One priority of the Children's University is to reach children from local authority areas with above the national average gap in Higher Education participation between those receiving free school meals and other children. It is recognised that this is where The Children's University can make the greatest difference.

Some primary schools in Pendle already participate in Children's University, such as Walverden Primary School. Given the evidenced benefits to children when schools join the Children's University, particularly in more deprived areas, it seems advantageous to encourage more schools in Pendle to participate. However, given shrinking resources and competing priorities, cost can be a barrier for schools to join. The cost for each school to participate is proportionate to the number of pupils in the school.

For every one of our thirty-seven primary schools to participate, this would amount to £75,600 in total over a three year period. If Pendle Council was to offer 25% of the costs, this would reduce the fees paid by schools to £56,700, with a £18,900 contribution from Pendle Council. This could be taken from the £36,000 funds remaining from the former Pendle Children's Trust. Appendix 3 illustrates this in more detail. However, it is not anticipated that all schools will take this up, so if only half of them choose to, this would require £9,450 from Pendle Council over three years.

The Executive is asked to agree the funding contribution of 25% to those schools who wish to participate, and to encourage more schools to do so. This is recognising the clear impact that Children's University has on raising aspirations, and at the same time, the role of Pendle Council as a community leader with a vested interest in working in partnership to improve the experiences and outcomes of our young people. This would be taken forward as part of the Pendle Challenge.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Policy:**

The Pendle Challenge and its related projects support the work of the Lancashire Children's Trust and Burnley and Pendle Children's Partnership Board, particularly around raising attainment and aspirations of young people in Pendle.

### **Financial:**

Other than officer time in supporting the work of the Pendle Challenge, a financial implication is the potential to contribute 25% of the Children's University fees to schools.

### **Legal:**

There are no direct legal implications.

### **Risk Management:**

Should the Pendle Challenge and its related projects not be supported, there is a risk that attainment in Pendle will continue to be lower than the Lancashire and national average and that, as a key player in Pendle, we will fail our young people.

### **Health and Safety:**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

### **Sustainability:**

The work of the Pendle Challenge is to enable schools and wider partners to work collaboratively to establish sustained changes over time that will improve attainment and raise aspirations of our young people in the long term.

### **Community Safety:**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

### **Equality and Diversity:**

The work of the Pendle Challenge is to benefit all young people in Pendle, whilst recognising that poorer attainment and lower aspiration can be linked to more deprived areas.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Performance information

Appendix 2 – Pendle Challenge Vision and action plan

Appendix 3 – Children's University costs

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-36081560>