

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [Standards Not Tiers](#)

**To:** [Pugh, David](#)

**Cc:** [Steve Beynon](#) ; [members@iow.gov.uk](mailto:members@iow.gov.uk)

**Sent:** Monday, March 03, 2008 8:37 PM

**Subject:** Re: Surplus Places - Important message from the DCSF

David Pugh  
Leader, Isle of Wight Council  
County Hall  
Newport  
Isle of Wight

3rd March 2008

Dear David

What makes you think that you will fail to have your Primary Strategy for Change approved? Could it be the failure to deal with surplus places in accordance with DCSF guidelines also issued in December 2007, which directly supports your own officer's recommendations on tackling surplus places issued in July 2006?

I have just had a long telephone conversation with Peter Connell, the programme manager of the PCP. He explained in considerable detail that the Strategy for Primary Capital Funding is a process designed to gain commitment from the Local Authority to a number of issues including the management of surplus places. It does not impose on any Authority an inflexible set of rules. He was very, very clear. PCP funding is not dependant on, nor does it force local authorities to reduce surplus places to less than 10% overall and no more than 25% in any one school verbatim. It all depends on the specific circumstances of the local Authority in question.

He confirmed to me that it is indeed a fact, that failure to meet the 10% and 25% (LA average & individual school) surplus places targets will not mean that the £8.3m PCP will be denied to us.

The 10% and 25% targets are guidelines that are influenced by other factors that are also outlined in DCSF guidance. These factors include taking account of the mix of rural and urban centres of population in the local authority. Mr Connell directed me to the Value for Money Agreement, also issued in December 2007 and intended to be a bed fellow of the PCP guidance. It states:

*"We recognise that all authorities will need to maintain a reasonable level of surplus to accommodate year to year fluctuations in pupil population, and to support choice and diversity. In addition, there is a presumption against closing rural schools because of their importance to rural communities. However, there are many local authorities with excessive levels of surplus places in urban schools where there is no prospect that the places will be needed for the foreseeable future: this represents a poor use of resources." (p14)*

Please do not assume that because I have not copied the contents of the entire Value for Money Agreement that I am simply quoting out of context.

David, you have made it abundantly clear that you believe that unless the Local Authority physically makes the reduction to 10% and 25% now, the £8.3m PCP funding will be lost, whereas both Peter Connell (programme manager of the PCP) and Josephine Bell of the School Organisation Unit are telling you that this is categorically not the case. You should admitt that you are wrong and do the honest thing and resign.

Mr Connell also told me that PCP is designed to build schools and not to provide the grounds close them.

Now I am sorry that you find our views tiresome but let us be very clear about this. It is a fact that the Local Authority failed in July 2006 to properly implement its own Strategy for Reducing Surplus Places. As I recall, the two people responsible for this, Tony Flower and Andy Seaward both left the authority that year and the programme floundered. Mobile class rooms that could be removed are left on site and some pre-schools that could be moved into primary schools remain in the grounds. This lack of action to address the problem is simply compounded by your insistence on artificially inflating the surplus place data. It beggars believe that you actually think that doing this, is in anyway justifiable. I put this point to Peter Connell. He was surprised. In fact he mentioned that he had understood that the 30% figure had come about because the local media had mistakenly added the primary and the secondary figures together rather than averaging them. I wonder where he got that from?

As you know only too well, the DCSF calculate surplus places based on capacity against rolls not admissions and yet you insist on using the admissions data and then publically blame governors for the result, because you say that this gives a better view of the future. That is not a view shared by demographers who say that we are currently at the bottom of the demographic curve and that from now on, rolls will begin to recover. Even if they stayed flat which they will not, the use of admissions data in this way is misleading. It is particularly unpleasant, as this is what you are basing the decision to close schools on.

The DCSF are themselves more than clear about the matter. You must commit to a strategy for reducing surplus places and that is something that you should have been doing since the launch of the PCP in March 2006. A point the Local Authority recognised in July of the same year but failed to fully implement. Instead you have decided to do the opposite and resort to a schools closure programme, or have you changed your mind on that as well?

Mr Connell was at pains to point out that an important factor in determining PCP applications is the performance of the primary schools in question. On the Isle of Wight we have no failing primary schools and that will be an important and positive factor that will help to mitigate any negative aspects of the surplus place situation, assuming, that is, that you actually commit to doing something a little more imaginative than simply closing small rural primary schools.

David, stop playing these silly games. This is not an election of the Executive of Conservative Future. This is the future of not only this generation of children, but many generations to come. I for one am very tired of your constant misuse of the DCSF guidelines and the data, to make a false case for reorganisation; so much so that I am tempted to quote Jeremy Paxman.

Yours sincerely

Chris Welsford  
Chairman - Standards-Not-Tiers  
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This email is intended for wider distribution. Please forward and make public.

----- Original Message -----

From: Pugh, David

To: Standards Not Tiers

Cc: All Members

Sent: Monday, March 03, 2008 1:27 PM

Subject: RE: Surplus Places - Important message from the DCSF

Dear Chris

I believe that it is also important not to quote selectively from DCSF officials, particularly as you have received other statements from them which expand in more detail on the funding allocations.

On 5th February you published a press release which included a statement from a "senior civil servant", which said:

"As previously indicated PCP funding is new money and - subject to approval of the primary strategy for change - will deliver £8.3 of investment over the CSR period to support the authority in implementing a strategic approach to delivering 21st century primary schools."

Furthermore, the Schools Capital Allocation document from the DCSF (attached) states that "PCP allocations are indicative until the LA's primary strategy for change has been agreed with the Department".

As you will see, this £8.3m is part of the £36.1m allocated for the Isle of Wight, so our failure to have a "primary strategy for change" approved / agreed will result in us not receiving this £8.3m.

I then refer you to the Primary Strategy for Change document, published on 6th December 2007, which states that "strategies that fail to commit to addressing surplus capacity at local authority or individual school level will not be approved". They go on to make clear that they would expect to see decisive plans for early action to ensure that no school has more than 25% surplus places, and more importantly that the number of surplus places across the local authority area is reduced to less than 10%.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/resourcesfinanceandbuilding/News/PCP/>

Therefore the release of £8.3m is dependent on us submitting a "decisive plan for early action" to reduce overall surplus places across the Isle of Wight to less than 10%. We have received no advice or guidance to suggest that this has changed at all.

Therefore Mrs Bell is correct in saying that we do not need to "reduce the level of surplus places to 10% or below in order to secure £7 million in funding" - it is £8.3m which has been allocated to the Isle of Wight, which is dependent on the agreement of a primary strategy for change.

The £7m figure relates to the reduction in our general capital funding for school buildings over the next financial year, which is demonstrated by the attached chart, which shows that the following grants, which have been in place for the past two years, have been discontinued: Secondary Modernisation; Primary Modernisation; New Pupil Places.

This money has been reallocated to new funding streams, such as the Primary Capital Programme - hence why the amount of allocated funding has fallen only from £37.4m to £36.1m. The difference this time is that we need to meet defined criteria to secure £8.3m of it.

I'm happy to be challenged on various points of fact, but this constant line from Standards-not-Tiers that we are misleading the public is becoming rather tiresome, and does your cause - or the current debate - no good.

It is perhaps more concerning that you urged us last week to join you in "congratulating our high schools on their excellent results", just because they happen not to have less than 30% of their pupils achieving 5 A\* to C grades at GCSE (including English and Maths). Bearing in mind the national average is 46.7%, it seems rather perverse to describe as "excellent" that none of our five high schools fall below 30%. Aspirational? I think not!

Regards

David

From: Standards Not Tiers [mailto:everychildmatters@btconnect.com]  
Sent: 03 March 2008 06:44  
To: All Members  
Subject: Fw: Surplus Places - Important message from the DCSF

Dear Councillor

You may be interested to read the following statement from J Bell (Mrs) of the School Organisation Unit, DCSF, sent 29th February in reply to a request for information on the surplus place situation:

"You mention in your email, the LA having to reduce the level of surplus places to 10% or below in order to secure £7 million in funding. This is incorrect. The Department has not said that LAs must reduce surplus to 10% or less, and we have not made it a condition for securing capital funding. Overall capital funding for the Isle of Wight for the 3 year period 2005-2008 was 37.4 million, and the overall funding for 2008-11 is 36.1 million. The reduction is largely accounted for by a projected reduction in basic need funding. Basic need funding is intended to support local authorities in meeting their statutory obligations to deliver new places in areas of population growth and is allocated by means of a formula driven by LA forecasts of population growth. On the plus side, the new primary capital programme will deliver £8.3 million of new investment over the CSR (Comprehensive Spending Review) period to support the authority in implementing a strategic approach to delivering 21st century primary schools. This will lead to over half of all schools on the island benefiting by 2022-23."

This statement and the similar statement made by Peter Connell manager of the DCSF PCP project, directly contradict statements made by both the leader of the Council David Pugh and Alan Wells, which suggest quite the opposite.

The truth is important.

Yours faithfully

Chris Welsford  
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