

Standards-Not-Tiers
Press Release
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Isle of Wight Council Ignored
It's Own Advice on Surplus Places

Pressure group Standards-Not-Tiers have been provided with a DCSF (Department of Children, Schools & Families) statement that shows that the Isle of Council's claim that they are facing a £7m budget shortfall this year is not correct.

The statement, made by a senior civil servant at the DCSF, which has been published on the group's website www.yourschoolneedsyou.com states:

"There has been no reduction in primary capital grant – but there has been a change in emphasis from formula funding for school modernisation to strategic investment supported by PCP. The picture will differ between authorities but I can assure you that IOW has been treated equitably. Overall capital funding for IOW for the 3 year period 2005-2008 was 37.4 million. Overall funding for 2008-11 is 36.1 million. This reduction is largely accounted for by a 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. As such it is allocated by means of a formula driven by LA forecasts of population growth. 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 – with over half of all schools benefiting by 2022-23"

A spokesperson for Standards-Not-Tiers said: "At the moment the only thing to be cut is the funding for new places and that amounts to just £450k per annum. The council claim that they have already had their budget cut from £10m to £3m. This is a distortion of the facts.

"Next year they will get three million for primary maintenance and the money for rebuilding and refurbishing will come in the year after. They got £10m last year. The way they are portraying it is that we "only" have three million. We understand that they had just over 5 million for the whole primary and secondary sector in 1998!

"To say that to get the £7m back we have to make radical school closures or the government won't give it back to us is farcical - they won't "get the £7m back" and £3m for maintenance of primary schools in the relatively short term (i.e. until the PCP funding kicks in) and is hardly peanuts in a year when they won't be undertaking major projects anyway as they will begin a year later.

"If they fail to get the £36 million, it will be entirely the fault of the Isle of Wight Council for ignoring new Government guidelines first presented back in March 2006.

"Nonetheless it is not too late. Surplus places can be reduced by doing what the guidance suggests and closing schools on this scale is not necessary. Government guidelines state that to qualify for PCP grants, local authorities must put in place a plan to manage their surplus places. Unfortunately the Isle of Wight Council decided to ignore most of the guidance and opt for closures only in their response. The Council's Eduwight website presents a completely misleading view of Government guidance on the matter.

It states that the DCSF are telling them:

Local authority members and officials working with schools and other partners have a duty to obtain value for money through:

- *Removing surplus school places through reorganisation: this involves amalgamating and/or closing some schools in order to release resources for distribution to the schools that remain. It requires commitment from the highest level within the local authority and strong political leadership to take the necessary decisions and see them through.*
- *Making better use of capital and revenue finance: this involves looking at the formula for distribution of resources to schools.*
- *Encouraging schools to work more closely together: this is likely to involve schools joining up to share resources through a range of options from amalgamation, federation or collaboration through to other less formal kinds of cooperation.*

And this what the DCSF actually say in their December 2007 guidance about tackling surplus places (look at the emboldened strategies against the three that the IWC say they are being told to implement):

*Local authorities **can** and do deal with surplus places by:*

1. ***Closing or amalgamating unpopular or under-subscribed schools,***
2. ***Decommissioning/selling parts of school buildings to reduce the physical size of the school, or***
3. ***Using parts of the building for alternative uses such as children's centres, community facilities, etc.***

The spokesperson went on to say: "The DCSF are clear in their advice. That advice has not changed despite the protestations of Mr Beynon. Action should have been taken over the last 3 years and it was not. There is considerable evidence of neglect over the management of surplus school places on the Isle of Wight, with recommendations from a key strategy document being largely unimplemented by officers. The document dated July 2006, clearly written in response to the Government prospectus for the new PCP, outlines many ways in which surplus places could have been reduced including the removal of mobile classrooms and the re-designation of unused classrooms for other purposes. It beggars belief that by January 2007, overall capacity had actually been increased by 61 places across the Island, despite the growing need for completely the opposite outcome. Building projects at schools like Arreton Primary that now face closure have actually contributed to an increase in capacity. Not only will this prove to be a complete waste of taxpayers money but it also makes the surplus places situation worse".

Summary

- Over the next three years there has been no cut to the capital grant as claimed by the council
- PCP and BSF grants are not dependent on capacity but on surplus places
- The councils own mismanagement of surplus places has contributed to the current situation.
- Small schools are not outlawed by the DCSF
- What the IWC tell us is simply not confirmed by the evidence

For further information editors should visit: www.yourschoolneedsyou.com
and contact:

Chris Welsford, Chairman - Standards-Not-Tiers
07854 744 062 or 01983 853 600