



## PRESS RELEASE

Isle of Wight Constituency Labour Party

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ISLAND NEEDS 'TASK FORCE' TO TACKLE EDUCATION

The Island's Labour Party has called on the Isle of Wight Council to set up a special task force to tackle the issue of the Island's failing education system.

The party's parliamentary candidate Stewart Blackmore has urged the local authority to focus on education instead of creating a transport task force as suggested by Conservative minister John Hayes and Conservative MP Andrew Turner following a Commons debate last week.

Mr Blackmore said the ferry taskforce was unnecessary as a special council task and finish group, led by Labour councillor Geoff Lumley, had already conducted a comprehensive review of ferry services. Just as important to the Island, Mr Blackmore said, was its education system which remained out of the hands of the Island community with key decisions being taken off Island by Hampshire County Council.

His call was supported by shadow education secretary Tristram Hunt who discussed the issue with Mr Blackmore during a visit to the Island last week.

Mr Hunt said: "Better schools cannot be imposed on the Island by Government nor from Hampshire County Council which now runs the Island's education from across the water.

"It is perverse that at a time when the Westminster talk is of giving more local power to local communities, on the Island the responsibility for crucial local decisions is going in the opposite direction – to Hampshire and to Whitehall."

Mr Blackmore added: "The improvement we desperately need requires two fundamental things. Firstly to invest in teachers to ensure those educating our children do so with excellence and enthusiasm. This means both attracting the best teachers and supporting existing staff to ensure they have the skills and drive to make classrooms inspirational.

"Government talk of sacking underperforming teachers will not solve the Island's problem of struggling to attract staff. Yes we need our teachers to be the best but this will be achieved by

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supporting them, not haranguing them. Labour believes all teachers must be qualified but that assistance should be given to help teachers get the required qualifications

“The second step change is to reconnect many parents with the education system. Education begins at home so we need to restore civic pride by raising the standard of living, sense of community and to create a sense of aspiration.

“Parents should be ensuring their children are ready and keen to learn - it is then the job of teachers to take that readiness and enthusiasm and to instil within our schoolchildren the skills that will serve them well throughout their adult life, both in the workplace and in society.”

Mr Blackmore said too many parents had themselves been failed by the local education system creating a cycle of indifference and pessimism which bred the lack of aspiration which was at the route of the current unacceptable standards

“We need to reconnect parents with the system that is educating their children,” Mr Blackmore said.

“Rather than embark on yet another discussion on cross-Solent travel, the council should undertake an urgent, fundamental review of why our children are being failed. Important as regular and affordable cross-Solent travel is, my view is that, given the current government has made it clear it has no intention of seriously intervening in this issue, the best way of securing improvements is to talk directly to the operators.

“I will be meeting Wightlink shortly and will be discussing with them that a Labour Government is committed to regulating ferry services to the Island. This action, and not more words, is what we need.

“It is a waste of the council’s scant resources to establish a taskforce on a subject over which it has little influence and even less control. Instead it should concentrate on its statutory duty – giving our young people quality education.

“An education taskforce would investigate the issues holding our pupils back and then identify steps to unite the Island in driving up standards. This has so far proved to be beyond our politicians alone. Now we need a new approach and an education task force would be the ignition key for that. I would be pleased to get views from parents and teachers as to what a taskforce should look at.”

ENDS