

Motion to North Norfolk District Council (Word count 493)

Sheringham Sixth Form Provision and Post-16 Educational Inequality

Proposed by: Cllr Liz Withington

In a rural and coastal community such as Sheringham, access to post-16 education is not a peripheral issue — it is Fundamental.

It shapes aspiration, life chances, workforce sustainability, the economy and whether geography limits opportunity. The proposed loss of A-Level provision is therefore far more than an internal trust decision; it is a matter of public consequence. On behalf of the young people of North Norfolk, we ask Council to consider the following recommendations.

Council Notes:

1. That Synergy Multi-Academy Trust has announced the cessation of A-Level provision and the effective closure of Sheringham Sixth Form.
2. That Sheringham and the wider North Norfolk district are rural and coastal communities experiencing structural inequality, including coastal deprivation, lower average wages, seasonal employment patterns, transport limitations and above-average 16–17 NEET rates at county level.
3. That the removal of local sixth-form provision is likely to increase travel times and costs for young people, reduce participation in post-16 education, increase NEET risk, diminish aspiration and adversely impact local workforce development and the economy.
4. That the Government's Education Bill currently before Parliament proposes strengthened accountability for Multi-Academy Trusts and greater alignment with local authority oversight.

Council Believes:

- That access to post-16 education constitutes essential infrastructure in rural and coastal communities.
- That educational opportunity should not be constrained by geography.

- That decisions of this scale must be subject to full equality, rural access and economic impact assessment.
- That the strategic planning of 16+ provision in North Norfolk must reflect long-term community need.

Council Resolves:

1. To write to the DfE Regional Director for the East of England requesting:

- Intervention and review of the decision to cease A-Level provision in Sheringham.
- A pause in implementation pending completion of:
 - A full Equality Impact Assessment under the Public Sector Equality Duty;
 - A rural and coastal access impact review;
 - An assessment of implications for participation, NEET levels and inequality.
- Clarification as to how the decision aligns with forthcoming legislative reforms to MAT accountability.

2. To write to Norfolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Education seeking:

- An explanation of how this decision aligns with Norfolk's strategic vision for 16+ education in North Norfolk.
- Assessment of the projected impact on participation, progression and NEET levels.
- Details of alternative delivery models explored with Synergy MAT.
- Assurance that a coherent 16+ sufficiency plan remains in place for Sheringham and surrounding communities.

3. To write to Synergy Multi-Academy Trust requesting:

- Publication of the Trust's impact assessment, including projected effects on participation, travel burdens, NEET levels and Free School Meal pupils over five years.

- A detailed explanation of the financial rationale for closure, including comparative data with other rural Norfolk sixth form, trends in numbers on roll since 2018, strategies undertaken to increase recruitment, and the evidence base supporting the proposed vocational curriculum as viable and sustainable.