

Report to: Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Date: 27th August, 2009

Report of: NEET Scrutiny Panel

Report No:

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Report Title: **Young People Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEET)**

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Non Confidential:**
(delete as approp)

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(Non-Confidential) This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

Purpose:

To present the finding of the NEET Scrutiny Panel

Recommendations:

To approve the recommendations of the Panel

Background Doc(s):

Summary:

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

At the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on

It was decided to establish a Scrutiny Panel to examine the number of young people in Bolton currently not in education, employment or training and the level and range of services offered in Bolton to meet their needs. The review was undertaken to identify whether there was more the the Council could do to support young people in this situation in the Borough.

The Panel was subsequently appointed, being politically balanced and comprised:

1. Councillor Ashcroft
2. Councillor Darvesh
3. Councillor Mrs. Fairclough (later replaced by Councillor Mrs. D. Brierley)
4. Councillor Mrs. B. Ronson
5. Councillor R. Silvester (Chair)
6. Councillor White (later replaced by Councillor Williamson)

The Panel was supported through its investigations by the following officers

Julie Thompson	-	Assistant Director (Positive Contributions)
Denise Luczka	-	Head of Connexions
John Addison	-	Scrutiny Support Manager

1.2 Terms of Reference

The Panel agreed the following terms of reference:

- To review current national and Bolton Council policy and guidance regarding NEET young people and how this related in practice to young people in Bolton;
- To review the demographic profile of NEET young people in Bolton;
- To review any findings of the Joint Area Review (JAR) in relation to NEET young people focusing on areas of concern and building on work already done;
- To review the current level and range of services offered to NEET young people in Bolton ;
- To consider the reasons why young people fell into the NEET category and to investigate preventative measures to reduce the incidence of this; and
- To investigate potential funding streams for reducing the number of NEET young people currently in Bolton.

1.3 Process and Evidence

The Panel met on 6 occasions and undertook a visit to Blackburn Community College in order to understand its integrated approach to student learning.

During the course of its deliberations the Panel, in addition to oral evidence from officers, also considered reports and undertook consultation/research as follows:

- The NEET Reduction Strategy for Bolton 2009/10;
- Breakdown of the year 11 "Not Settled" figure, together with information about whether there was an alternative curriculum for male students;
- Breakdown of target area data by post code,

- Overlay data by population and deprivation and health indices; and
- Transport provision for NEET group.

The Panel also looked at how the LSC NEET Hotspot monies and ESF Co-financing bids have supported the NEET reduction for the last 2 years, and explored the possibility of accessing opportunities through ABG and Working Neighbourhood Fund.

2.0 The Current Situation

The foreword to the Council's 2009/10 NEET Reduction Strategy re-emphasised the position that at the time of the Council's 14-19 Progress Check in November, 2006, Bolton had a high level of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). It was also recognised that at that time, the current strategies and policies had not resulted in a significant reduction in the number of NEETs.

The 14-19 Strategic Partnership recognised that reducing the number of young people categorised as NEET in Bolton could only be achieved by co-ordinating and refocusing the priorities and actions of key partners. To this end the Partnership commissioned Connexions Bolton, Bolton Council's Education Improvement 11-19 and the Learning and Skills Council, Greater Manchester to develop a NEETS Strategy for Bolton.

The Strategy was refreshed in January 2009, to reflect changing priorities and to incorporate the four key themes outlined by the 2007 DCSF NEET Strategy of:

- Careful tracking;
- Personalised guidance and support;
- A flexible mix of learning provision; and
- Re-engagement.

A copy of the Council's NEET Reduction Strategy is appended to this report. **(John are you doing this?)**

Key Aims:

Management and Leadership

- To provide effective management leadership in order to construct a visible way for all stakeholders to work together, taking full ownership of the NEET Reduction Strategy on behalf of Bolton, and to manage the Strategy against the Progress Check; "by having an effective 14-19 partnership with productive collaborative arrangements in place".

Data Sharing

- To create a data-sharing culture amongst stakeholders, ensuring accurate information is available to all.

Barriers, prevention, intervention and sustainability

- For stakeholders to work collaboratively in order to break down barriers that prevent young people from accessing further learning, training and/or employment.
- To facilitate all agencies to work together, in order to prioritise the identification and offer of universal support to young people who are at risk of becoming NEET at the end of compulsory education.
- To create a seamless process whereby agencies work together to enhance pathways for young people to enter or re-enter employment, education or training.

- To take action to prevent young people from becoming NEET following post 16 transition or returning to NEET following a period in EET.

3.0 National Context

The latest national target for NEET was measured in November 2008 and current performance showed a decrease in the number of young people who went into the NEET category.

There are two measures that are indicative for progress:

- Activity Survey – November 2008 Year 11 leavers
- 16-18 NEET – Average taken over a 3 month period, November, December and January

See Appendix 1 for November 2008 figure sent to DCSF.

Challenges facing Bolton

- Maintaining the downward trend in the present economic downturn
- Appropriate opportunities to meet the individual learners needs when analysis of the NEET group shows that a high percentage of young people in this category are at academic Level 1 or entry level
- Continued flexible approaches for those young people in vulnerable groups
- To deliver Impartial Information, Advice and guidance
- Embed the NEET agenda firmly onto the agenda of all key partners and in particular with the schools

4.0 Investigations and Recommendations

Following its investigations, the Panel focussed in on five key areas. Each area is considered below together with the resulting recommendations.

4.1 Involvement of Elected Members

The Panel, as part of its evidence gathering process, received detailed information of the location of NEETs (available and not available) to the job market in relation to postcode districts, neighbourhood renewal target areas and IMD. The evidence pointed to a number of significant factors:

- Ethnicity was not a major factor;
- NEETs were distributed throughout Bolton with the highest percentages being in areas of deprivation
- However, there were growing clusters of NEETs outside areas of multiple deprivation and that anecdotal evidence showed that this might be linked to the increase in international new arrivals and private tenancy arrangements.

Members of the Panel concluded that there was a significant need to provide members with intelligence in relation to the NEET agenda, particularly within their ward. To support this detailed ward information, the Panel was of the opinion that members should receive a more general grounding on the NEET agenda both in the national and local context to aid their understanding of ward issues

The Panel also discussed the reporting mechanisms in relation to NI 117. This is an annual indicator with the position being reported in November of each year, although the actual numbers of NEET young people can fluctuate throughout the year. Also, in vulnerable groups, where the numbers are small, percentage changes can be misleading.

With these considerations in mind, the Panel makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Elected Member for Children's Services to receive a quarterly report outlining performance against NI 117 16-18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment.**
- 2. Elected members should enter into a dialogue with area Locality Leads in Positive Contribution on NEETS via the Area Forum Member Only Meetings to familiarise themselves with the local position. Members agreed that it would be useful to have reports including actual figures alongside percentages in order to influence decision and planning at a local level and contribute to overall NEET Reduction.**
- 3. As part of the Elected Member Development Programme all members of the Council should have access to training and development in relation to the NEET Reduction Strategy.**

4.2 Mobility Factors

Transport was an issue for all young people but was a particular issue for those on low or no income (i.e. the NEET group).

No specific consultation had been done with the NEET group. However, as transport was a key issue within the UK Youth Parliament, the Council hosted a transport consultation event in October, 2008, which was attended by a large proportion of the bus companies within Greater Manchester and the North West. Many of the North West MYPs also attended. Various issues were discussed including the possibility of having a North West concession card for buses, trains and trams making it easier for young people to travel to access training or employment opportunities. It would appear that since this event, any further discussions have not resulted in a positive outcome on the proposal.

A piece of research entitled "Travel to Learn Patterns for Every School" was commissioned. Individual schools had acted on the information but to date there had been no formal feedback. The introduction of Diploma lines was promoting collaborative learning across the clusters which considered transport as a key barrier to progression.

The NEET Strategy had a specified objective to Action Plan around transport for 2009 onwards. All Personal Development Opportunities that were commissioned now included a per day transport allowance as feedback from Personal Advisors had consistently reported that the cost of transport was prohibitive to young people attending unwaged opportunities.

Locally, with the NEET Group, figures from the Activity Agreement supported the claim that transport was a major issue, with approximately 20% of the overall budget of £37,500 being spent on transport.

With this in mind, the Panel makes the following recommendation:

Ascertain via Council representative on GMITA whether there are any policies/practices available to assist young people who fell into the NEET grouping with improved/free transport arrangements to enable them to access training or employment opportunities.

4.3 Arrangements with Other Council Departments/Outside Agencies

The Panel was advised that although informal arrangements were in place with Children's Services and Business Bolton to share job vacancy opportunities, this proved not to be consistent or timely enough to have an impact on young people available to the job market. It was felt that the arrangement could be improved by formalising the existing arrangements.

The Panel also acknowledged that during the course of its investigations, the national economic situation had continued to decline. This, inevitably, would impact on the NEET group with an increasing number of redundant adults with experience, skills and knowledge being available for

work. The Panel also recognised that many of the NEET group had little or no formal work experience on which to prepare a CV and that the current economic climate would only exacerbate this situation. The Panel concluded that efforts should be made to emphasise to the NEET group the importance of voluntary work as a means of building work experience or creating a CV.

The Panel recognised that the economic downturn was a cyclical event and that ultimately the economy would recover. This could result in the more entrepreneurial members of the NEET group having the opportunity to engage in business development through social enterprise. The NEET Strategy should recognise this opportunity and relationships developed with appropriate organisations to support young people in the NEET cohort.

With this in mind, the Panel makes the following recommendations:

1. A Memorandum of Understanding should be developed with Business Bolton (The Workshop) to ensure protocols were in place to share vacancies, develop a consistent message with local businesses and provide a clear understanding of the roles played by the Children's Services and Development and Regeneration Directorates to ensure a more detailed understanding of the local labour market.

2. Efforts should be made to engage organisations such as Young Enterprise as a business partners to support young people in the NEET cohort.

4.4 Relationships with Schools

The Panel was presented with information regarding the successful impact that had been achieved with the LPSA schools. A crucial factor was the engagement with Connexions and a Senior Manager within the School at joint identification, assessment, planning and review of those young people at risk of becoming NEET.

With this in mind the Panel makes the following recommendations:

1. The Panel would wish to see a continuing dialogue through the School Improvement Structure with secondary schools and would welcome secondary schools strengthening their commitment to the NEET reduction strategy via the appointment of a NEET champion within the senior management with responsibility for NEET progression.

2. The current approach adopted with LPSA schools should be extended to all secondary schools.

3. The role of impartial Information, Advice and Guidance in schools should be strengthened to ensure that the aspirations of young people were met, this would build on the implementation of the IAG Standards; embed IAG into the SIP process and link to the Careers, Education and Guidance curriculum.

4.5 Relationship with Other Agencies

The Panel undertook a visit to Blackburn Community College in May, 2009, and was accompanied by Carol Bannerman, Principal and Chief Executive of Bolton Community College.

The Panel received a presentation from the Vice Principal of Blackburn College on its approach to all student learning. Blackburn advised that early in the 1980s, it had departed from segregated provision for students in favour of an integrated approach by which all students were in possession of an individual personalised learning plan. Students with disabilities were not segregated into discrete provision but accommodated in classes with the necessary support.

Blackburn College also emphasised the importance of supported employment opportunities for NEET students either via the local authority, the supported employment agency or the third sector.

Blackburn also stressed that it had a sometimes difficult relationship with secondary schools in communicating what was available via the College as opposed to students remaining within 6th form provision.

Blackburn also noted the time it had taken for them to be in the position they were in, in terms of their integrated approach for all learners and offered to support Bolton College in a role of 'critical friend' to support them to improve their delivery of flexible personalised learning opportunities.

With this in mind the Panel makes the following recommendations

1. The Panel welcomed the commitment of the Principal of Bolton College to work together with the Council and partners to develop appropriate transition pathways to learning with additional emphasis towards vulnerable groups.

2. The Panel recognised that the 14 – 19 Strategic Partnership already had in place structures that can support the recommendations put forward by the Panel in relation to multi agency working.

3. The Council and other partners work together to maximise the opportunities presented by the opening of the new campus to move towards a full inclusion model of learning provision to allow all learners and especially vulnerable groups to access learning which meets their needs.

5.0 Conclusion

The Panel are aware that some of their recommendations will necessitate careful consideration. They therefore, request that the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services present their responses to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting in November, 2009.

In discovering the background to this highly complex area, the Panel quickly began to realise that this was an area in which Bolton was performing well.

The scrutiny function in Bolton performs the role of a critical friend and as such makes recommendations where it believes improvements could be made. Therefore, the Panel sees the small number of recommendations in this report as testimony to the approach taken by Bolton in this area.



CONNEXIONS BOLTON
2008 ACTIVITY SURVEY REPORT (REVISED 7/1/09)

ACTIVITY	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	07 – 08 %DIFF
F.T. Education	67.7% (2,755)	70.3% (2,850)	71.5% (2,913)	74.0% (3,103)	79.4% (3,206)	+ 5.4%
FT Employment	15.6% (637)	12.8% (520)	12.2% (497)	11.8% (494)	7.5% (302)	- 4.3 %
FT Training (non employed)	3.3% (133)	3.4% (136)	3.0% (122)	3.1% (132)	4.3% (175)	+ 1.2%
% NEET	8.3% (339)	9.0% (363)	8.9% (363)	8.4% (351)	5.5% (221)	- 2.9%
Moved out of Contact/No response/Refused to participate	3.5% (143)	3.0% (122)	2.4% (99)	1.7% (71)	2.1% (85)	+ 0.4%
%PARTICIPATING IN “LEARNING”	82.3% (3,349)	82.4% (3,341)	83.4% (3,395)	85.4% (3,585)	88.8% (3,588)	+ 3.4%
% “NOT SETTLED”	9.9% (403)	10.5% (425)	10.9% (442)	9.4% (396)	6.7% (272)	- 2.7%
SURVEY TOTAL	4,071	4,053	4,073	4,196	4,040	- 156

KEY OF TERMS

- **“Learning”** = FT Education, Training/Employment funded through Gov. Supported Training, Employment with Training to NVQ 2 or above, Employment with “Locally Recognised Good Quality Training” (LRGQT)*.

* LRGQT is counted as “Learning” only as part of the Activity Survey. All other Participation in Learning (PIL) indicators (e.g. for 16-18 yp) exclude it and include only training that is NVQ or equivalent.

- **NEET** = Not in Education, Employment or Training – Comprises those who are available to take up training/employment opportunities and those not available due to illness, carers, pregnancy etc
- **“Not Settled”** = Not Settled in a full time activity. A category unique to the annual Activity Survey and comprises those in NEET plus those in the following activities; Part Time Education, Part Time Employment, Part Time Voluntary work and all PDOs.

Connexions Bolton 7/1/09
V1.2



CONNEXIONS BOLTON
16-18 NEET THREE MONTH AVERAGE
(NOV, DEC, JAN)

16 - 18 NEET 3 Month Average

