

# NEET Reduction and Prevention Strategy 2017 -2021

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## Introduction

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are at risk of not achieving their potential, economically or socially. Engagement in learning and educational attainment is critical if young people are to make a success of their lives.

In 2013, The Government introduced under the Raising the Age of Participation Policy, new guidance issued under the Education and Skills Act 2008 that requires all young people to continue in education until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In practice this tends to be the end of the academic year in which they turn 18. Most young people already continue in education or training after they finish year 11, because it gives them the best chance to get the skills and qualifications that employers and higher education look for. However, the smaller group of young people not participating includes some of the most vulnerable. Worcestershire County Council is committed to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to develop the skills they need for adult life and to achieve their full potential.

Participating in education or training for longer means young people are more likely to attain higher levels of qualifications and have increased earnings over their lifetime, better health and improved social skills. This in turn contributes to a more highly skilled, and productive workforce for the county.

The cost of being NEET between the ages of 16 to 18 is estimated to be around £56,000 in public finance costs and £104,000 in resource costs (lost labour market potential), over the working lifetime of each person who has been NEET at this age. This equates to circa £12 billion for all young people who are NEET, with the total associated loss to the economy, individuals and their families judged to be circa £22 billion. In Worcestershire within the current cohort of 16-18 year olds in July 2017 this equates to £22.5 Million lifetime cost to public finances.

Evidence suggests there are a number of wider benefits to learning, which include:

- Physical and mental health: those educated to level 2 or below are 75% more likely to be smoking at age 30 compared to a similar individual educated to degree level or higher. Increasing the qualification level of women without qualifications to level 2 could reduce their risk of depression at age 42 by 15%.
- Teenage motherhood: 47% of young women who did not obtain any GCSEs in year 11 had a child by 19, compared to 3% of those achieving 5 or more GCSEs A\* to C.

This strategy and the associated action plans provide focus and direction to the various and cross cutting workstreams that already exist in County Council directorates and services and in stakeholder organisations and institutions.

Worcestershire County Council's commitment to reduce the number of young people that are NEET and improving the outcomes for Worcestershire's Young people forms a key objective of both the *Open for Business* agenda and the Children and Young Peoples Plan priorities. Whilst ensuring that the local authority meets its statutory obligations to :

- Ensure all young people remain in education until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or up to age 25 for those young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA).
- Make available support for all young people until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or up to age 25 for those young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Learning

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Difficulty Assessment (LDA) that will encourage, enable of assist them to participate in Education and training.

- Promote participation in education and training of young people in Worcestershire, particularly to those young people identified as not participating.

This strategy seeks to be aspirational yet practical in challenging the Council to continuously improve performance in identifying, engaging and effectively supporting those that are NEET, or at risk of becoming so to achieve their full potential, especially those who are most vulnerable and those for whom the Council has a corporate parenting responsibility.

## Vision

Worcestershire is ambitious for all children and young people and has set out a challenging agenda through its Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2017-2021: Putting children at the heart of everything we do. Taking the lead from the CYPP, the vision is for

### **Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up.**

We believe it is important that all children and young people:-

- Are safe from harm
- Reach their full potential
- Make a positive contribution in their communities
- Live healthy, happy and fun filled lives

Worcestershire County Council recognises that Worcestershire's young people have the potential to make a great contribution to the economic development of the county in the future. The Council is committed to supporting them to reach their full potential and wherever possible, to remain in the county to make their individual and collective contributions to the prosperity and quality of life of their families and communities.

Prevention of NEET remains the strategic ambition whilst focusing on resolving those young peoples situations within the current year 12 and 13 cohort. Whilst prevention of NEET supports Worcestershire's young people to reach their full potential, the Council recognises the positive impact on communities and health that employment and educational achievement delivers.

Worcestershire County Council aims to reduce its NEET cohort to zero, this will be achieved this through delivery of effective programmes and challenging the education system to develop an inclusive education offer , ensuring the county provides the right education to support its young people. The strategy also recognises that a number of young people will have challenges such as health, that mean they are unable to enter the education system at this time but WCC will work towards ensuring those young people recognise a pathway and a plan back into education, employment and training.

**Worcestershire County Council wishes to ensuring that no young person is outside of education, whilst committing to working with the Counties young people and recognising those within vulnerable groups who are at greater risk of becoming NEET and ensuring that they have the same opportunity as their peers and that all our children thrive in Worcestershire.**

# National and Local Policy Framework and Context

## Statutory guidance and legislation – our obligations

### **Education and Skills Act 2008** (sections 10, 12 and 68)

The DfE provides the framework to increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people NEET, but the responsibility and accountability lies with local authorities.

Local Authorities have existing duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. These duties are to:

- *Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people who are over compulsory school age but under 19 and for those up to age 25 with a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in their area. To fulfil this, local authorities must have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.*
- *Make available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those up to age 25 with an LDA or EHCP, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.*
- *Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of young people aged 16,17 years old in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place.*
- *Local authorities must make arrangements to identify those aged 16 , 17 years old up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday who are not participating in education or training.*

Local authorities also have a duty to provide strategic leadership in their areas to support participation in education, training and employment - working with and influencing partners by:

- *Ensuring a focus on participation is embedded and communicated throughout the authority's services for children and young people;*
- *Ensuring the services for young people in the local area come together to meet the needs of young people – including funding for education and training places and re-engagement provision;*
- *Agreeing ways of working with other partners such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Jobcentre Plus, employers, voluntary and community sector organisations, health services, police, and probation services; and*
- *Working with neighbouring authorities, especially where young people routinely travel out of the area to access education and training, for work or other services.*

## The September Guarantee

The DfE also publishes information regarding the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who were made an offer of suitable provision in education or training by the end of September in each year. This is known as the September Guarantee.

The September Guarantee forms the start point for tracking and identification of NEETs in Worcestershire, this data is used to verify the status of a young person in the county and commence an offer of support to those young people who find themselves outside of Education, Employment and Training.

This is used as an indicator by the DfE of the County's NEET figures and the DfE expect this to sit at over 90% before challenge will be made. Worcestershire has faced challenges with this. In 2013 this figure was just above 62%. However performance has been greatly improved since 2015, currently the combined offer sits at 92.5%.

	2015	2016	Unknowns
<b>Yrs 11 &amp; 12 % Combined Offer Made Worcestershire</b>	92.9%	92.5%	6.4%
<b>Yrs 11 &amp; 12 % Combined Offer Made West Midlands</b>	94.6%	93.1%	5.4%
<b>Yrs 11 &amp; 12 % Combined Offer Made England</b>	94.1%	94.5%	3.5%

September Guarantee figures as submitted to DfE

This figure has decreased primarily due to the establishment of more effective and positive working relationships with schools and colleges alongside improving processes and the work of the County Council's NEET prevention team with those young people most in need of support to identify and secure positive destinations.

## Worcestershire County Council's data collection

To enable Worcestershire County Council to be able to identify young people who are not participating, and assess their needs. WCC maintains a database – known as CCIS (Client Caseload Information System) on which to record young people's current activity. To do this the data team draws heavily on the following sources of data, through building/rebuilding relationships with key individuals, and often more than one piece of information is required to identify/confirm those who are NEET:

- Education and Training providers
- Personal contact eg Phone, Text, Email, Social Media
- ESFA
- DFE
- Other LAs
- Youth services
- Jobcentre Plus/DWP
- Other WCC teams eg Social Care, SEN
- Commissioned services eg Babcock Prime, Connecting Families/Early

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These organisations send the county council data on destinations and enrolments of our counties young people , following analysis of this information, then informs the data on all the young people in the county whose destinations are unknown. The County Council then through existing contact methods and social media will track those missing young people and once identified as NEET, this is then passed to the Post 16 team at WCC's education delivery partner, Babcock Prime to commence the process of contact with the young people and resolution.



## Local Context - the local picture

### NEETs & Unknowns

The DfE publishes data submitted by local authorities through the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS). CCIS contains data on a variety of linked identifiers used by the DfE for comparison including Participation, September Guarantee, Intended Destinations, Special Educational Needs, Vulnerable Groups and Youth Contract with a particular focus on NEETs and those whose status with regard to their participation in education, employment and training is "Unknown".

Local authorities with high rates of NEETs and Unknowns are subject to increased scrutiny and pressure from central government to show improvement.

Following significant work between 2013–2016, the proportion of identified "true" NEETs in Worcestershire has remained low, down to 3.4% in July 2017 with an Unknown figure of 0.9%, resulting in a combined unknown NEET figure of 4.3%.

This figure compared to a NEET combined NEET unknown figure of 6.3% across England and 6.9% in the West Midlands shows the investment made by Worcestershire County Council since March 2014 has supported improving outcomes for young people.

However whilst these figures suggest low numbers of young people in the county finding themselves NEET, Worcestershire County Council recognises that those people currently in this group are amongst the county's most vulnerable often involving care leavers, young people with SEN needs or those with mental health problems which can have long term economic consequences on our public services and our economy.

### Staff investment in the NEET Agenda for Worcestershire

In March 2014 Worcestershire County Council invested in staffing to track and identify the NEET cohort. This accurate tracking and identification has supported the improvement in our NEET figures alongside improved choice in education for NEET young people and prevention programmes.

Alongside this in October 2015, Worcestershire County Council contracted a variety of schools services to Babcock Prime, our education delivery partner which included the Post 16 team whose role it is to work with and support our young people aged 16-18 who find themselves NEET, back into Employment, Education and Training.

Since November 2016, WCC has also invested in a strategic lead to look at the work completed around NEETs and bring together partners and teams to complete the local authority's statutory duty and focus on solutions for those most vulnerable.

### Funding

Whilst Worcestershire County Council has funded staff and resource towards this agenda, funding activity and programmes have relied on external investment and bidding activity.

Worcestershire County Council's NEET prevention team has an Education and Skills Funding Agency contract to deliver Traineeships and Study programmes to young people

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who have Level 1 educational needs within the cohort, this programme recruits around 160 young people a year to its vocational programmes. The challenge for this funding being that the better the Council is at preventing NEET and supporting and challenging external education provision, the more complex the needs of those in the NEET cohort are and therefore the harder to engage in any type of classroom based activity. This results in lower numbers into the WCC provision which then makes it more challenging for Worcestershire County Council to provide the variety of provision needed.

The Council also has a number of European Social Fund programmes aimed at this cohort. "Springboard" is aimed at engaging those young people not ready for a study programme in a short term programme. This programme engages them in learning and then transitions them into an appropriate programme. "Seek and Reach" offers a youth work/mentor approach to a young person and supports them to overcome their barriers, seeking to help them push through and engage back into learning or employment. This funding is short term as with all European funding but through the UK's intention to exit Europe, may not exist moving forward.

Prevention activity for vulnerable groups including those young people deemed to be at risk of being NEET has been funded through short term projects from sources such as the Careers and Enterprise Company, as well as through financial commitment to the programme from schools, who are seeking to improve their intended destination measures for Ofsted.

Whilst the Council recognises that short term funding is not necessarily a bad thing, it does challenge the successes that can be offered through more flexible and different approaches and fitting into the funding agenda.

WCC are committed to continuing to seek funding and resources for the prevention and cure of NEET across County and as such will continue to apply for bids as it can find.

## **Governance**

### **NEET Strategy Group**

Worcestershire County Council intend that this strategy will underpin the maintenance and further development of mutually beneficial working relationships with schools, colleges, other providers of education and training and our partner organisations such as DWP, health etc. This will result in shared ownership of these priorities and that responsibility for NEET prevention and reduction does not become too narrowly focused on particular services, agencies or individuals.

There is already a strong focus on improving partnership working across Worcestershire County Council and its directorates, for this reason a NEET Strategy Working Group has been formed which involves representatives from Social Care, Special Educational Needs, Looked After Children Team including the Virtual Head, Early Help, Health and Education. This team will lead on the delivery plan formed through this strategy. This group will then look to have a phased approach to include outside agencies over the length of this plan, looking to embrace further health, involve FE colleges, school consortia, DWP, Babcock and Youth Offending Service etc.

Alongside this group, The Worcestershire Training Provider Association will lead a NEET provider forum to share and encourage best practice and joint working.

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It will be through these working together that the greatest impact in reducing NEETs and Unknowns will be made.

The NEET Strategy Group has informed the development of this strategy and associated plans and will act as a steering group and in a monitoring role. This strategy and plans are dynamic working documents and additional actions will be added as required in order to support NEET prevention and reduction going forward.

This group will report to the relevant strategic groups (e.g. Children, Families and Communities Performance Board, Open for Business Board, WLEP Employment and Skills Board, Corporate Parenting Board, etc.).

## Right Provision in the right place at the right time – developing an inclusive education system.

Worcestershire is committed to help all young people ‘achieve whatever they are capable of achieving, irrespective of socio-economic background, gender, race or levels of ability and disability’. In defining ‘achievement’ to encompass a wide range of talents and abilities, in targeting resources towards particular groups of learners, and in constantly improving the Education offer in the county.

The NEET strategy reflects the need for an inclusive education system and support in identifying gaps within the county for our most vulnerable young people, this includes where appropriate identifying solutions that support the break down of young peoples barriers to entering education in the first place such as physical health, mental health, family circumstances, rural locations and behavioural challenges.

This also includes the need for preventative measures to ensure young people do not become NEET through improved support in schools both in careers advice and guidance and employer experiences but also in the challenge of decisions made in educational establishments that can affect a young persons education pathways.

## Strategic Priorities

This Strategy is owned by Worcestershire County Council and focuses on continuously improving performance in identifying, engaging and effectively supporting those that are NEET or at risk of becoming so that all young people can reach their full potential. There will be a particular focus on more vulnerable groups. The strategy aims to :-

- Develop and maintain a corporate focus, sense of ownership and accountability for achieving ambitions for the NEET group.
- Further develop multi-partner ownership of the achievement of key aims of this strategy and contribution to the achievement of key objectives of both *Open for Business* and the Children and Young Peoples plan.
- Understand the NEET cohort better, through effective data gathering and performance monitoring to support achievement of key aims.
- Continue to develop and maintain robust and joined up identification and tracking arrangements to support improved performance.
- Ensure right provision is available at the right time to meet the needs of NEET young people.
- Influence the development and commissioning of provision for NEET groups.
- Work with partners to unblock the barriers young people have to Education and Employment.
- Reduce the inequality between vulnerable groups and their peers.

## Priority 1 : Focus on the most vulnerable

- Develop a good understanding of the most vulnerable young people and facilitate the development of pathways that ensure that those most in need of targeted interventions are identified and supported in the most appropriate, timely and effective way.
- Ensure that all our Looked after children and Care leavers receive individually tailored, on going support, information and guidance.
- Understand the needs of our SEN young people in the future to facilitate appropriate provision locally.

Young people who, due to a variety of reasons and circumstances are most vulnerable are also most likely to become NEET.

Worcestershire County Council are continuously increasing our understanding of the cohort of most vulnerable young people and facilitating the development of operational pathways that ensure that those most in need of targeted interventions are identified and supported in the most appropriate and effective way. Due to the success of more creative and targeted approaches to identification and tracking, the number of young people requiring such intervention and support is now more accurately known. However there is still work to be done in improving the way our teams work with that support and how we interact with the education providers to improve the experiences of our young people.

Many, but not all of these risk indicators are included in the components of the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) tool already in use and inform targeting of work by the Babcock Post 16 team, NEET Prevention teams and local Parenting and Family support service providers.

However, there are multiple factors and characteristics that need to be recognised in order to ensure that the right support is made available to those who need it most and to improve outcomes.

Vulnerable groups include those who are:

- Looked After , leaving Care or on the edge of Care
- With Special Educational Needs / Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
- Being excluded or at risk of exclusion from school
- Attending a school that is in an "Inadequate" category of concern
- From a minority ethnic background, including those from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community
- Arriving in the UK and having English as a second language
- Missing education
- Being Electively Home Educated
- In ill health, including hospitalisation affecting school attendance
- Already NEET
- Involved in or affected by Drug or alcohol abuse
- Teenage Parents

[Document details/information]

- Offenders or at risk of offending
- Young Carers
- Affected by their own or their parents/carers mental health issues
- Living in inappropriate or inadequate accommodation
- Refugees

Worcestershire has a corporate parenting responsibility for many children and young people and it is very important that they are prioritised for preventative support as a vulnerable group. From the current population of the county's care leavers over 42% become NEET, therefore as part of the governance and reporting structure supporting this strategy, progress against priorities will be a regular item on the agenda of Corporate Parenting Board meetings.

This work will be taken forward through the county working to build an inclusive education offer, recognising that every young person has the opportunity to thrive in our county.

## Priority 2 : Linking with Business and the Economy

- Continue to strengthen links and identify interdependencies with the *Open for Business* agenda and the *Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)* and ensure that strategic and operational fit is achieved and duplication or competition avoided.
- Deliver the Connecting School and Business programme in co operation with the LEP and its Employment and Skills Agenda
- Ensure that synergies are achieved and duplication or competition avoided in developing new initiatives and making external funding bids.
- Widening the awareness of social value and its role for vulnerable groups, expanding the reach and appeal of such opportunities and encouraging employers and stakeholders to "go the extra mile".

The business community and related stakeholders have a key role to play in providing opportunities for work placements, traineeships, apprenticeships and long term employment for young people. Worcestershire County Council are working to strengthen these links through our procurement and contracting ,it is therefore important that the interdependencies between the County Council's *Future Fit* and *Open for Business* agendas, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), District Councils and other local partnerships are identified, and collaborative working enhanced further.

Worcestershire County Council through its' partnership with the LEP on the Connecting Schools and Business programme is also seeking to identify the employment needs of the labour market in Worcestershire. This will support young people and their parents in planning their future careers planning and ensuring that the needs are met of our employers in county.

This strategy and its associated action plans and governance arrangements has the potential to establish and maintain an overview of the priorities and current or potential contributions of the wide range of stakeholders that can make a difference to the opportunities available to Worcestershire's young people and the counties economy.



## Priority 3 : Right service provision

- Continued emphasis on September Guarantee and the tracking and identification of all young people aged 16-18 in Worcestershire.
- Understand the NEET cohort better, through effective data gathering and performance monitoring to support achievement of key aims.
- Mapping of all educational services available to young people in Worcestershire for 16- 24 year olds.
- Support Educational establishments to provision plan and support future cohorts through building effective working relationships with post 16 providers with particular emphasis around vulnerable groups.
- Continue to develop the Counties NEET Solutions Panels, work towards one in every district offering a young person centered approach that identifies positive solutions and moves young people forward.
- Work with Health and the Community Trusts to support the delivery of a range of programmes and ensure that these services are visible and available to our NEET young people.

In addition, focussed activity by local service delivery partners is being increased. Multi-partner task groups known as "NEET Solutions Panels" are in place across the County including a focused quarterly panel to look at the county's looked after children. Based on a model that has already been successfully operating at a county level, these are bringing together key stakeholders such as schools, colleges, Early Help providers, local social housing providers, district councils, health, Babcock Prime team and voluntary sector organisations to prioritise interventions with specific individuals and groups of young people – converting data into names and enabling appropriate support to be planned and actioned with regard to which agencies are best placed to achieve positive outcomes.

### Management of service risks

Some key aspects of the current arrangements for data gathering and analysis, identification and tracking remain too dependent a few on individuals with specific expert knowledge or sole responsibility for crucial functions and short term budgetary commitment. These potential "single points of failure" will be addressed in particular service areas in order to avoid disruption of the positive progress being made and ensure that the related statutory reporting obligations are met.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The delivery plan for this strategy will be wholly owned by Worcestershire County Council's NEET strategy group and has informed the development of this strategy and associated plans. The group will act as a steering group and in a monitoring role. This strategy and plans are dynamic working documents and additional actions will be added as required in order to support NEET prevention and reduction going forward.

The strategic objectives and priorities will be delivered through a series of activities which will form part of the detailed delivery plan which will be developed after the approval/adoption of the Strategy by the Governing body. Many of the envisaged actions are already taking place contained within the existing or developing programmes / initiatives. The NEET strategy delivery plan will form an umbrella for the current and new activities to be integrated within it. Monitoring and evaluation will be on the basis of identified measures, enabling the impact of the overall strategy to be assessed by the NEET Strategy group.

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