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To:	Education Committee – 21 st November 2012
Subject	Decision Number - 12/01897 - Draft 14-24 Learning, Employment & Skills Strategy
Classification:	Unrestricted

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Summary:	This report informs the Education Cabinet Committee about the progress of the current stakeholder consultation upon the draft 14-24 Learning, Employment & Skills Strategy, which intended for final approval by Cabinet in December.
Recommendations:	To note the contents of the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Following the previous Education Cabinet Committee meeting on the 12th September, the Committee's comments have been incorporated into an revised draft of the 14-24 Learning, Employment & Skills Strategy which was launched for consultation with key stakeholders on the 11th October. The purpose of this report is to provide interim findings from responses received so far through the consultation and to outline current activity that is taking place to support the Strategy's implementation.

2 Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

2.1 The proposed decision to approve the Strategy links with the Council's Medium Term Plan (Bold Steps for Kent), as it directly serves the Plan's commitment in Priority 4 to work with all providers to "deliver a 14-24 strategy that equips young people with the academic, vocational and life skills required to succeed in the 21st century economy."

2.2 The proposed decision does not relate to a plan or strategy set out in the Council's Policy Framework.

3. Consultation Responses

3.1 The consultation launch event was held on the 11th October at Oakwood House. 107 people attended from a range of organisations including schools, academies, FE colleges, work based learning providers, Connexions Kent and employers. Initial views from the table discussions and plenary sessions included:

- The proposed priorities are the right ones, but there should be fewer targets, and they should be shared targets.
- The need to raise aspirations was highlighted, and the role that families play in this.

- The need for providers to facilitate travel arrangements was a recurring issue, with the need to consider offering provision where transport is difficult. The rural issue of accessibility was also raised.
- Employability skills were discussed, including the need to define what exactly we mean by this, the need for pre-apprenticeship/Young Apprenticeship style programmes and inclusion of work experience, especially due to the changes in requirements for work related learning.
- Collaboration and partnership: this was a main theme for the table discussions, including
 - Using collaboration to address the need to offer English and Maths post-16.
 - The need to revitalise the local 14-19 Planning Forums.
 - Use existing arrangements rather than create new structures, e.g. existing head teacher meetings; “join rather than form”.
 - Smaller partnerships e.g. two or three schools have proved more successful in some areas than broader groups.
 - There is a role for non-provider organisations to provide a brokering role in facilitating partnership working.
- **Risks and barriers to successful collaboration** were also considered, and included:
 - Conflicts of interest and tension, e.g. declining rolls, league tables, the selective system
 - Financial pressure, e.g. regarding post-16 funding
 - Logistical problem of moving pupils or resources around an area to the provision
 - A risk that organisational silos evolve into district silos.

3.2 Responses via the Strategy’s online consultation website have highlighted the following points so far:

- Respondents support the strategy’s ambition and priorities, and feel that the four key areas are the right ones to focus on.
- Other areas of focus should include improving outcomes for Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (STEM) subjects, a focus on job progression, sustained support for vulnerable young people into post-16 provision and ongoing support for young people and employers for transition beyond the apprenticeship.
- Potential tensions between the proposals and respondents’ future plans included workforce planning, the potential for 14 and 15 year olds studying full time at college and the impact of Free Schools, University Technology Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools.
- Potential barriers to organisations helping to deliver the targets included the lack of independent Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) in schools.
- Respondents felt that KCC has made its role clear through the strategy, and suggested support from the LA in the following areas:
 - Strategic mapping of the learning offer to employment need
 - Liaise more with Kent’s work based learning (WBL) providers
 - Set up an apprenticeship matching service for Kent’s employers, learners and WBL providers
 - Actively encourage apprenticeships across all of KCC’s directorates

3.3 Summary of Consultation Responses from Key Partners:

- **Connexions Kent (CXK), Kent Association of FE Colleges (KAFEC) and Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO):**

Have collectively commented that there are too many targets and question how achievable they are during the life of the strategy.

- **Connexions** also highlighted the need for young people's and parents' perspective, and recommended producing a user friendly version of the strategy that clearly explains what's in it for them.
- **iKent Strategic Forum for 14-19 Education & Training:** the partnership discussed the strategy at their meeting on the 5th November, and will provide a formal response to the consultation, including their views on the formation of a County Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership Board.
- **Families & Social Care:** feedback has been received that underlines the need for greater emphasis in the strategy on addressing the needs of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities. This includes access to more work experience opportunities, assistance in preparing for the world of work, how we should support those young people with a disability who cannot access mainstream education provision and how we can offer suitable provision within Kent to reduce the need to place young adults in independent colleges out of county.
- **Kent Enterprise Education Partnership:** The partners have requested that there be a focus on developing young people's attitudes in the strategy, enabling them to manage their own career paths. They felt there should be targets regarding destination measures and self-employment and that the enterprise sector should be represented on the proposed Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership Board. They also envisaged a brokering role for KCC between schools and businesses to manage the cultural differences and move away from ad hoc reactive relationships. There is also a need for better apprenticeships IAG to improve retention and better sharing of local market information to prevent businesses from having to 'import' skilled labour from outside of the county.
- **Skills Funding Agency:** The central government funding agencies have yet to respond, apart from the SFA who have declined to comment on the draft strategy as they feel it is not their role to take a view on local plans, which should be driven by learners, employers and stakeholders.

3.3 Learner Feedback

Support they would like to receive:

- **Participate in taster weeks** to properly experience subjects of interest for post-19 learning, so they can get a feel for whether it is the course for them, as sometimes open days are not enough. This would help prevent students from dropping out.
- **Job search advice:** Receive comprehensive advice on how to search and apply for jobs in their chosen subject fields, in order to prepare them for

successfully moving into employment once they have achieved their qualifications.

- **Employability skills** such as time management needs to be taught, which would help them to prepare not just for employment but for post-16 learning too.
- **Proper advice about careers and earning potential:** This would help persuade those young people who want to leave and start earning money as quickly as possible that if they stay in education they will gain qualifications that will help them to earn money than if they left school.
- **Relatable advice:** Would like younger adults to come and speak to them about career and learning options relevant to their interests, as they would relate to them more easily.
- **More information and support for parents** would be welcome. KCC, schools and colleges should do more to encourage parents to take more interest in their children's education and understand the courses they are studying.

Barriers to learning:

- **Transport issues:** There were strong feelings about transport causing problems for accessing school or college; there needs to be more buses available in rural areas for those students that can not rely on transport by their parents.
- **Lack of feedback from teachers:** They would like personal and regular one to one feedback, so they know how they are performing and have an opportunity to improve.
- **More support for vulnerable pupils:** Specifically for those who may struggle due to problems at home, for example, a pupil having to drop out and earn money to help support their single parent.
- **Insufficient work experience:** Current work experience placements of one or two weeks during Year 10 do not give pupils a real idea of employment options. They would like more regular work experience opportunities that directly relate to their career interests. This is particularly important for young people studying academic subjects, who tend to be put into more generic placements than their counterparts on vocational courses.

4. Further Consultation Activity

4.1 The consultation closes on the 16th November, at which point all comments and feedback will be considered in producing the final version of the Strategy for Cabinet's approval on the 3rd December. By the end of the consultation, a number of focus groups for young people from Thanet, Ashford, Swale, Maidstone and Deal/Sandwich will have been held. The Kent Youth County Council will have given their views at their full council meeting on the 18th November – this will be fed into the responses. The Strategy will have also been discussed at the next meeting of the Business Advisory Board on the 14th November, to gain the views of employers. Individual meetings will also have taken place with a number of stakeholders including Kent Association of Training Organisations and KCC's Community Learning & Skills.

5. Current Activity Supporting the 14-24 Learning, Employment & Skills Strategy.

5.1 There are already a number of programmes and initiatives underway that are supporting the ambitions of the draft strategy:

- **KCC Skills & Employability Service:** The team has now filled its remaining vacancies and is at full strength and a strong position to support implementation of the strategy. In addition to activity listed below, the S&E Service has area-based teams that will be able to drive implementation at a district level, including officers with a specific focus on employer engagement and employability, to make the vital links between employers and the 14-19 learning offer and progression.
- **Apprenticeships:** Despite the current economic challenges, Kent's success in increasing the number of apprenticeships appears to be bucking the trend. The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has reported that Kent is outperforming the Southeast for the number of people starting apprenticeships, particularly for 16-18 year olds. Official figures providing the details will be released by NAS in January. This is a considerable achievement for Kent, which highlights the commitment and effort made by KCC, education and training providers and other partners such as NAS in driving forward apprenticeships to help provide positive outcomes for young people whilst meeting the needs of local employers.
- **Support for vulnerable learners:** The S&E Service is targeting support for specific vulnerable groups in collaboration with other KCC departments and partners. For example, work is being undertaken to devise a programme to support Kent's teenage parents, as currently 79% of this group of vulnerable learners are Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET), and therefore education and training prospects are bleak without intervention. Colleagues in the S&E Service and Families & Social Care Commissioning are taking proposals for addressing the needs of teenage parents to senior management for approval.
- **Preparation for Raising the Participation Age (RPA):** The S&E Service has been working hard to prepare for the RPA requirements, which will see current Year 11s staying in education or training from September 2013 until their 17th birthday, and current Year 10s participating until age 18. The Service has launched an RPA awareness week from 5th to 9th November, to coincide with this year's launch of Kentchoices4u, the website that provides young people with information for making post-16 choices about education or training. During the RPA week, schools are encouraged to talk to their pupils about the changes and what it means for them. To support this, the S&E Service has written to Headteachers and school staff providing guidance and suggestions for awareness-raising activity in their schools, and provided briefing sessions which staff from almost all schools have attended. Pupils and parents have also been written to, informing them about the changes and how to access Kentchoices4u.
- **Kent Employment Programme:** The Kent Employment Programme has been set up as a flexible grant fund to encourage local businesses to take on young unemployed people as apprentices allowing employers to meet their skills needs. Kent County Council will offer grants of £2000 to businesses who take on a young person 18-24 who has been claiming out of work benefits. These grants are specific to the Kent Employment Programme and in some cases will compliment other national and regional grants already in place. The team have established strong partnerships with Job Centres and Work Programme providers across Kent, as well as various training providers and colleges. In all cases staff have been briefed at these organisations as to how the programme works and how to refer businesses and candidates to the programme team. The team has

engaged with over 300 businesses throughout Kent and have placed over 100 young people into apprenticeship positions.

- **Planned re-launch of vocational centres:** The S&E Service are in the process of re-shaping the programmes currently offered by vocational centres, to broaden their scope so that provision better meets the needs of the local economy.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The responses and feedback received through the consultation so far have proved encouraging. They support the strategy's ambitions and priorities, whilst offering insight and suggestions as to how the strategy's remit can address specific key matters in delivering 14-24 education and training. Stakeholders' views also demonstrate the need to get the delivery framework right, in particular how the remit for the proposed Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership Board will be defined, how it will link into local delivery partnerships, and what form these local partnerships should take.

8. Recommendations

Members are requested to note the interim responses to the consultation, prior to Cabinet considering the final version of the 14-24 Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy in early December.

9. Background Documents

- Draft 14-24 Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy
- Bold Steps For Kent
- Skills & Employability Annual Plan
- 14-24 Learning, Employment & Skills Strategy Baseline Information for Key Performance Indicators

10. Contact details

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