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To: CFE: Learning & Development Policy Overview and Scrutiny
 Committee - 5 November 2009

Subject: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)
 in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an update on the number of young people who are NEET in Kent, and details of strategies in place to address the issues for this cohort of young people.

1. Introduction

(1) Reducing the number of 16 to 18 year old young people who are NEET within Kent has been a high priority for a number of years, first encapsulated in Kent Agreement 1 and now one of the 35 targets within Kent's second Local Area Agreement. The Government places high priority upon tackling NEET issues, and published a national strategy in Autumn 2008 as part of the wider 14-19 reform that highlighted three key strands of Provision, Tracking and Support (Appendix A).

2. Current NEETs Results

(1) The table below illustrates the current numbers of NEET young people for September 2009 compared to the same time last year:

Area	September 2008		September 2009	
	Number	%	Number	%
Ashford	144	4.95	115	3.73
Canterbury	193	4.14	224	4.42**
Dartford	194	5.94	225	5.97**
Dover	117	5.33	107	3.92*
Folkestone	191	7.30	137	5.33*
Gravesend	170	5.89	183	5.24
Maidstone	383	6.85	304	5.00*
Swale	264	7.72	276	6.63
Thanet	248	6.71	262	6.37
Tonbridge	243	4.33	272	4.19
KENT	2147	5.71	2105	5.02

* The largest reduction in NEET % compared to last year for September

** The largest (and only) increase in NEET % compared to last year for September

(2) This indicates that in spite of the challenging economic climate, Kent is still making good progress in reducing the number of NEETs at a highly vulnerable time when young people are making a transition from compulsory education to post-16 activity, with particularly strong performance from Dover, Folkestone and Maidstone.

3. The Strategic and Local Approach to Addressing NEETs Issues

(1) County Level:

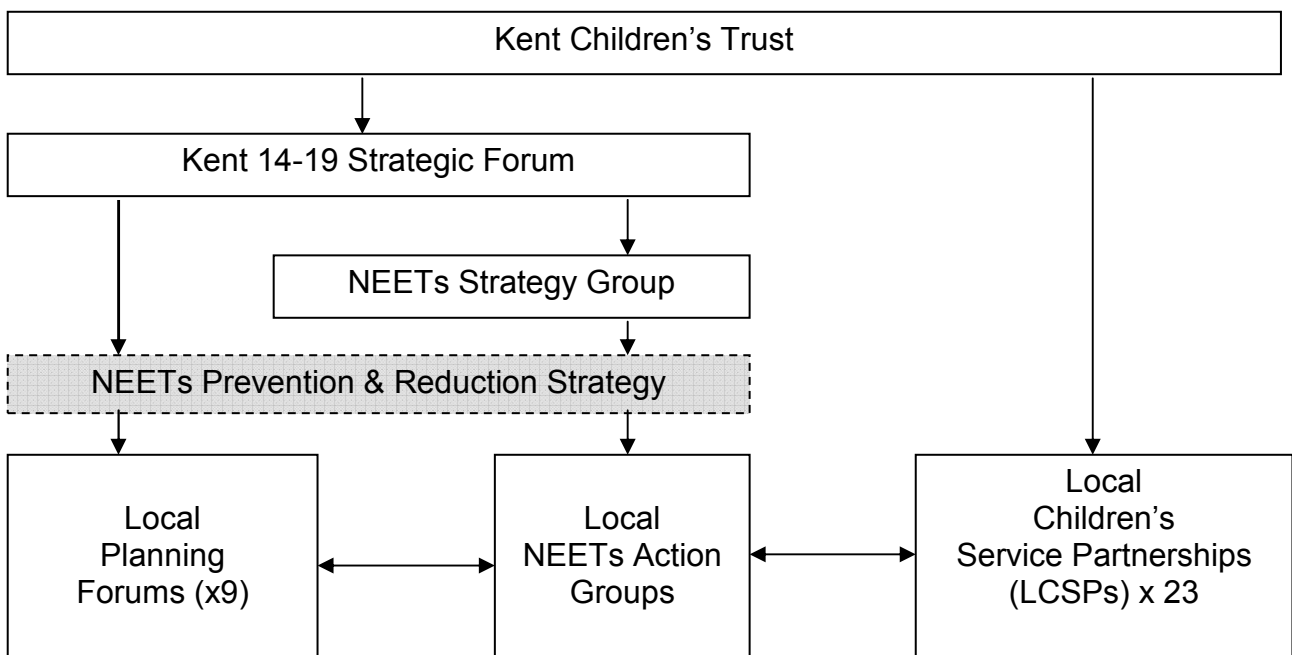
- (i) In line with the DCSF's national NEETs strategy, Kent has produced its own Prevention and Reduction Strategy that aims to address key issues through the three strands of Provision, Tracking and Support. This strategy is owned by Kent's county NEETs Strategy Group, which is led by CFE and has a broad representation of membership across CFE, Communities, Connexions and partner organisations and is a sub-group of the Kent 14-19 Strategic Forum. The strategy, group membership, terms of reference and previous meeting papers can be found on the NEETs Strategy Group's webpage (Appendix B).
- (ii) The NEETs Strategy Group was formed in June 2008 and meets bi-monthly to cover specific issues regarding NEETs. The group has a particular focus on the needs and challenges for vulnerable groups of young people, and devotes a substantial item to a particular group at each meeting. Examples of this include learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD), unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and looked after children (LAC).
- (iii) In April 2008, responsibility for the Connexions service was transferred to the Local Authority. Kent County Council has decided to maintain the service as an outsourced contract, but can now manage the performance of the provider more rigorously and ensure resources are targeted at need. A new Connexions contract was won by the current provider through a competitive process, as required by KCC. This new contract commences in April 2010 and has a rigorous outcomes-based specification. In addition, KCC is currently commissioning an external evaluation on the impact of Connexions on improving outcomes, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups such as young people with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities.

(2) Local Level:

- (i) In addition to the strategy group, localised networks are also being established to address the reduction of NEET young people within Kent's 14-19 Local Planning Forum (LPF) areas. The county's LPFs have all set up local NEETs Action Groups as sub-groups of the Forums. This is a recent development that is highlighting increasing collaboration between Kent's education and training providers in partnership with KCC, the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions, and in many cases these groups are forming direct links with the Local Children's Service Partnerships (LCSPs). The key

contacts for each of these local action groups can be found in Appendix C.

The diagram below illustrates the county and local strategic structure:



4. Current Activity

(1) **September Guarantee:** This is the entitlement to an offer of a place in post-16 education or training by the end of September to 16 and 17 year olds completing compulsory education, and it is a key driver in preventing young people from becoming NEET. Connexions Kent is currently working hard to track and support young people to ensure they receive an offer of learning. The final figures will be submitted to the DCSF by 28th October 2009, but interim results indicate that out of the total 16 year old cohort of 17,081 in Kent, 824 young people (4.6%) are currently without an offer of education or training, which puts Kent below the DCSF's maximum threshold of 5%. There are currently 1411 17 year olds (7.6%) without an offer out of a cohort of 18,702. These numbers will reduce further as Connexions continues to provide ongoing support for these young people to secure a suitable opportunity within education or training. Furthermore, for those young people who are going into employment without training (124 16 year olds at 1% and 767 17 year olds at 4%), Connexions will be approaching their employers to see if they will offer apprenticeships or accredited training for those young people.

(2) In addition to the September Guarantee, there is a great deal of activity taking place across the county to re-engage those young people who do become NEET, which includes the following:

- **Entry to Employment (E2E):** E2E engages young people who need additional support in learning and equips them for further learning, employment or both. E2E programmes are roll-on/roll-off, therefore recruitment and progression takes place throughout the year. 2009/10 will be the last year the E2E programme will operate as a discrete programme and will be absorbed into the Foundation Learning stream of the 14-19 curriculum. Learner numbers on E2E were 2285 in 2008/09, costing £5 million, which has risen to 2559 in 2009/10 at a cost of £5.4 million. The largest provider of

E2E provision is currently the Communities Directorate's Key Training, offering 705 places and 30% of total provision. The positive progression rate for young people from the programme is 50% which is slightly lower than previous years.

- Connexions Kent delivers a number of programmes for 16 to 18 year olds designed to engage hardest to reach NEET young people. These include:
 - **Activity Agreement:** this 20 week programme provides activities that develop personal and employability skills and the option of gaining qualifications, with 43% of young people participating since April 2009 progressing into EET and 63% have progressed since the programme's launch in April 2006.
 - **Back on Track:** this is a three-week activity course available to any NEET 16 to 18 year old to provide skills such as CV writing and first aid. This programme has achieved 66% progression rate for participants moving into EET with 98% attendance. An additional version, **Return of Back on Track** provides a concentrated focus on job-seeking skills and activities.
- **Kent Community Programme:** run by KCC's Supporting Independence Programme, this initiative engages hardest to reach NEET young people in activities that provide them with new skills and raises self-esteem whilst benefiting the local community. 26 young people have been referred onto the programme so far in 2009 with 17 completing the course and making positive progression into EET destinations, providing a 65% success rate. A further 88 young people are projected to participate in 11 projects across the county, including Canterbury, Maidstone and Ashford.
- **Flexible Starts:** Kent's seven FE Colleges are all offering 'flexible starts' for a number of their post-16 courses. The majority of these include courses that start in January, which is a crucial time when young people are most likely to drop out of post-16 education or training. A number of colleges have also started to offer October starts, providing more flexible options for young people who have been unsure of which path to take.
- **Kent NEETs Conference:** Kent recently held a multi-agency NEETs conference on the 12th October aimed at practitioners in education and training settings. This was jointly organised between KCC, the LSC, the Kent Association of FE Corporations (KAFEC), the Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO) and Connexions and was attended by over 100 professionals. The conference gave attendees very practical insights into what works around curriculum development so that they could take ideas back to their locality, and was an excellent opportunity to share good practice and promote partnership between schools, colleges and training providers.
- **Early Identification:** KCC is also currently undertaking work with key partners including schools and colleges to make better use of data to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent young people from becoming NEET.

5. Upcoming Activity

(1) In addition to the activity described above, there are a number of new initiatives and projects that are about to take place:

- **LSC Practical Learning and Collaboration Fund:** This £178,000 pot (formerly known as the NEETs Fighting Fund) is funding nine projects between August 2009 and March

2010 across areas such as Maidstone, Thanet and Shepway to specifically engage and address NEETs issues. The projects were selected by a panel consisting of LSC, KCC and Connexions representatives and evaluations of their outcomes will be presented to the NEETs Strategy Group and relevant Local NEETs Action Groups after the projects have been completed. A summary of the projects can be found in Appendix D.

- **Back on Track for LLDDs:** Connexions will deliver a number of BoT programmes specifically for LLDDs within Maidstone and Thanet between September and December 2009, in partnership with Mid Kent College and Thanet College.
- **Thanet Works:** A number of preventative and engagement projects will be implemented through the Neighbourhood Working Fund initiative to reduce the number of NEET young people in Thanet involving sport, vocational training and creative activities and will target vulnerable groups such as minority groups and refugees.
- **New Skills, New Lives:** A project designed to engage young offenders in EET upon leaving custody.
- **FE/WBL engagement project:** KAFEC and KATO have received funding to deliver short courses for 16-19 year olds to address their skills gaps and enable progression into EET.
- **Foundation Learning pilot:** This is part of the reforms to the 14-19 curriculum and is designed to provide learning pathways for learners at Level 1 or below, to help keep them engaged and improve their transition into post-16 EET activity.
- **Kent Success social enterprise pilot:** KATO and KCC have won a bid to develop an Apprenticeships Training Association (ATA) which is designed to ease the process of setting up apprenticeships for employers and improve supply to current demand.

6. Future Challenges and Priorities for Kent

(1) There are a number of challenges and priorities that KCC and its partners will need to focus on to ensure we are continuing to prevent and reduce the number of young people who become NEET:

- Raising the Participation Age to 17 from 2013 and 18 from 2015.
- Transfer of commissioning and funding responsibilities for 16-19 education and training to Local Authorities from April 2010.
- Focus on preventative services and early identification.
- Breaking the unemployment and NEETs cycles in areas of deprivation.
- Focusing specifically on 17 year olds who become NEET.
- Extending the focus to young people remaining NEET beyond 18.
- Connecting with Primary Schools for earlier intervention regarding literacy and numeracy.

Recommendations

Members of the CFE Learning & Development Policy Overview Committee are asked to:

- Note the progress made in reducing the number of Kent's young people who are NEET.

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Background Documents:

Appendix A: DCSF NEETs Strategy weblink
http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/neet_strategy_0803.pdf

Appendix B : Kent Strategy Group weblink
http://www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/Children/kct_subgroups_neets_strategy.cfm

Appendix C: Contact List for Local NEETs Action Groups

Appendix D: Summary of 2009/10 Projects funded by the LSC 'Practical Learning and Collaboration Fund'

Other Useful Information: None