



# Review exploring the barriers facing 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and how these can be overcome

April 2010

# REVIEW EXPLORING THE BARRIERS FACING 16-18 YEAR OLDS WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) AND HOW THESE CAN BE OVERCOME

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# REVIEW EXPLORING THE BARRIERS FACING 16 -18 YEAR OLDS WHO ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) AND HOW THESE CAN BE OVERCOME

## Introduction by the Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group



On behalf of the task and finish group, I am very pleased to present the findings and recommendations of this review. The review aimed to explore the barriers facing young people aged 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This was in order to understand how these young people came to be in this category, to recognise the challenges they face and to establish ways of overcoming these barriers.

Readers of this report will quickly identify the strong links to the wider issue of educational underachievement. The detail of this report identifies the impact on individuals, the wider community and the local economy in both human and financial cost terms. It is essential that we do not underestimate why this is such an important issue which must be addressed by a collective of local Partners and agencies as soon as practical.

Members were aware that poor educational achievement was likely to be a factor in young people becoming NEET and this was confirmed during the review. However, the review opened our eyes to how crucial the attainment of Level 2 qualifications (i.e GCSEs) is for young people and the direct impact this has on the ability of businesses to source employees. Furthermore, lack of relevant qualifications was a significant factor in why young people remain NEET. With no GCSE re-sit provision within the District the opportunity for young people to address this was a further barrier.

As the review progressed, it became more apparent that young people who had not achieved GCSE Maths and English had very limited choices in terms of accessing further education, employment or training. By speaking with experts in the field the group established a good understanding of the support provided to young people, which primarily focused on improving their skills base so that they were in a position to access the range of opportunities that are available in the district. The group were able to conclude that young people in the district have a wide range of training opportunities on their door step but are having difficulties accessing them due to poor qualifications.

In the course of the review the group considered a range of detailed information regarding NEETs. This allowed Members to identify other factors that are contributing to the likelihood of some young people becoming NEET and barriers that are preventing some young people from accessing education, employment or training.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their contributions to this review, the many partners that contributed their views, the officers that assisted the group and the young people who gave their time to provide feedback on our findings and recommendations.

I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to this review and hope our recommendations will play a part in ensuring all young people within the district reach their full potential.



Councillor S Buckley  
Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group



# 1. SUMMARY OF REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Review Recommendations

- 1.1 The task and finish group's conclusions and recommendations, including supporting evidence, are set out in the report. However, for ease of reference the recommendations and a brief summary of the review undertaken are set out below.
- 1.2 In addition to the recommendations below, the task and finish group would like the relevant Scrutiny Committee to review progress on the implementation of the below recommendations, approximately 6 months after there has been agreement on whether they are to be adopted. This will ensure progress is being made on them being delivered and they can be reviewed as necessary thereafter to ensure they are having the desired outcomes.
- 1.3 The recommendations below have been grouped according to the organisation the group feel is best placed for delivery.

### **Recommendations Arising from the Review Exploring the Barriers Facing 16-18 year olds who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and How These Can be Overcome**

#### **Essex County Council**

1. That Basildon Council be provided the opportunity to input into the Commissioning Strategy for the area to help shape the education and training provision in the district.
2. That efforts be made to create greater alignment between Further Education (FE), training and the jobs available in the district so that our young people have the necessary skills to access the local job market.
3. Provision for young people to re-sit their GCSE's in Maths and English be made available as a matter of urgency within the district and this provision be innovative reflecting the fact that young people who have struggled in a conventional education environment are unlikely to prosper if met with the same environment.
4. That GCSE re-sit provision be linked to a particular career to demonstrate how GCSEs relate to the practicalities of the working environment, encouraging greater commitment to the courses and ultimately completion.
5. That every effort be made to identify a means of overcoming the barrier created by data protection legislation and to work with other Partners and agencies to establish appropriate data sharing protocols, which will help reduce the number of NEET young people in the district.

6. That the County Council explore with schools ways of preparing young people for their future (post 16), with particular focus on those young people that are showing signs that an academic route is unlikely to be their chosen route. This may include providing certain courses over longer periods of time or offering pre-apprenticeship schemes at a younger age.
7. That a more coherent and employment-focused vocational route be developed as a matter of urgency to provide young people with a credible alternative to an academic route.

### **Connexions**

8. That a careers advice service that is accessible to all young people in the school environment be provided, in particular when selecting their GCSE options.
9. That additional Learning Mentors be provided in schools that have a high number of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) or where data indicates the school is a high producer of young people who go on to become NEET.
10. Connexions develop a way of working and communicating with the parents of NEET young people to encourage greater re-engagement.

### **Basildon Action on Learning (BAL)**

11. That a Trade Union representative be appointed to the Basildon Action on Learning Group to attend meetings of the group and to help identify opportunities to support businesses through the provision of workforce training.
12. That BAL explore ways of establishing practical links between businesses and schools.
13. That BAL act as the facilitator between the Council and local businesses to further promote the opportunities of the apprenticeship scheme.

### **Basildon Council**

14. That an on going media campaign be undertaken to promote apprenticeship schemes available in the District, which may include articles in the District Diary and other media.
15. That Council networks be used as a means to encourage local employers to take part in apprenticeship schemes.
16. That a Benefits Assessor be made available to hold drop-in sessions at Connexions on a monthly basis, or more regularly if necessary, to provide advice and guidance on benefits and how they are affected should a young person wish to take up further education, training or employment.

17. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meet with representatives of Job Centre Plus to discuss the difficulties being experienced by young people using the service and ways these issues can be addressed, specifically including the issue of stating minimum qualification requirements for all jobs at the earliest stage.

**External Agencies**

18. That National Express East Anglia consider introducing a free ticket scheme for young people attending interviews and subsequently their first month of employment at Wickford and Billericay rail stations, similar to the scheme operated by C2C at Basildon rail station.

**Summary of Review**

- 1.4 The number of young people not in education, employment or training is a growing problem with far reaching implications for society and the productivity of the country. The responsibility for youth services lies with Essex County Council. However, as a district council Basildon is keen to contribute to this important agenda recognising that ways of resolving the problem require a joint approach.
- 1.5 The Council's Strategic Improvement Plan 2010 – 2013 is committed to this area of work. Within the Regeneration objective of the plan is a commitment to support and grow the local economy. The objective is to develop with partners the education and skills opportunities within the District. In particular, engagement of hard to reach groups such as young people not in education, employment and training, economically inactive and low skilled employees in skills, training and education.
- 1.6 It was also identified in the Essex Strategy Review (Basildon Local Strategic Partnership) that there is a gap in understanding the root causes behind poor educational attainment in the District. One aspect of which is the growing number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Being NEET between the ages of 16-18 is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, teenage motherhood, depression and poor physical health. It is also linked to low levels of attainment.
- 1.7 At an Overview and Scrutiny Training Session held in July 2009 this issue was raised as a potential area for further investigation. It was anticipated that by exploring the efforts being made to address the number of individuals categorised as NEET the review could contribute to further building an understanding of the reasons why young people become NEET and do not go into education, employment or training, so that identified barriers could be overcome. A Task and Finish Group was subsequently established to undertake a review of the barriers facing young people aged 16 -18 years old who are not in education, employment or training and how these barriers could be overcome.

1.8 Essex County Council has the lead responsibility for reducing the proportion of young people classified as NEET in the county. As such, reducing the number of young people that fall within the NEET category is identified as Priority 1 in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) for the area. This reflects the commitment that local authorities within the LAA have placed on addressing this issue.

***“Having large numbers of young people who are NEET does not just have a negative impact on families, local communities and the individuals themselves. It makes optimum economic productivity and social inclusion more difficult to achieve. Qualifications and skills are more important than ever if young people are going to compete in the employment market.”<sup>1</sup>***

1.9 Underpinning the LAA commitment are a number of areas of work and performance measures that seek to achieve this outcome. These national performance indicators, known as NIs are:

- NI 79 - % Achievement of a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19. We want young people to succeed in learning and training
- NI 87 – Secondary school persistent absence rate
- NI 87a – Primary school persistent absence rate
- NI 117 – 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training

1.10 The Task and Finish Group agreed at the outset of the review that this piece of work would contribute in part to developing an understanding of poor educational achievement and how this links to the future outcomes achieved by young people. The review did not seek to address the whole issue of poor educational achievement, which would require a significantly larger review.

1.11 The Group held a number of witness sessions with key agencies and partners to understand the approach being adopted in the district to reduce the number of NEET young people. Through these witness sessions Members were able to identify gaps in provision and barriers preventing young people from accessing further education, employment or training.

1.12 Due to the nature of the review, the Group were able to learn a great deal about the support services provided to young people and how other factors outside the scope of this review can contribute to some young people not reaching their full potential. The Group were mindful not to make generalisations, but have identified in this report ‘other factors’ that were raised, but not explored as part of this review.

1.13 The review confirmed that poor educational achievement, specifically concerning the attainment of GCSEs in Math and English at grades A – C, was a significant barrier for young people wishing to go into further education, training or employment. The review also identified some other factors that contribute to some young people not achieving the necessary grades in the first instance whilst at school.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Area Agreement 2008-11

- 1.14 By receiving evidence from various organisations the group were able to build up a picture of the services and initiatives in place to encourage young people to go into further education, employment or training and the weaknesses that exist in this approach. The group were able to conclude that much of the support provided to young people aims to improve their skills base and make up for the deficiencies in their education. However, even with additional support through courses such as the E2E programme, many young people with poor qualifications are still having difficulties accessing the majority of the training and employment opportunities available in the district.
- 1.15 The Group were pleased to learn that young people in the district have a range of training opportunities available to them, but were disappointed that many young people are not in the position to capitalise on this provision when leaving school. A number of the recommendations to Essex County Council seek to ensure that young people have clear academic and vocational pathways when they reach school leaving age. Ensuring the education and training provision in the district is reflective of the jobs available is another area that requires further development.
- 1.16 The Group have also explored ways of creating more integrated working amongst those organisations involved in the NEET agenda. The Group are keen that the barrier caused by the inability to legally share data amongst key organisations involved in reducing the number of NEET young people be addressed. The Group have also recommended ways that Basildon Council can assist in the work being undertaken to reduce the number of NEET young people and have suggested greater involvement in the forthcoming work to be undertaken by Essex County Council regarding the commissioning of education and training provision in the area.
- 1.17 The Task and Finish Group believe that the findings of this review will contribute to a greater understanding of the reasons for young people not being in education, employment or training. Much work is underway to reduce the number of NEET young people in the district and it should be recognised that the recommendations of the Group seek to build on and complement this work.

## **2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE REVIEW**

- 2.1 The review recommendations are wide ranging. The Task and Finish Group have allocated the recommendations according to the organisation the Group feel are best placed for delivery. Where responsibility for the implementation of a recommendation rests solely with another organisation it will be for them to assess for themselves the costs of that recommendation and the feasibility of its delivery. Partner organisations will be asked to provide feedback to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission whether they accept the recommendation(s) and if not the reasons why they are unable to do so.

### **3. MEMBERS OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP AND THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 The Task and Finish Group comprised:**

Councillor S Buckley (Lead Member)  
Councillor A Blake  
Councillor Jackman  
Councillor P W Rackley  
Councillor G Williams

#### **3.2 The Task and Finish Group wishes to thank the following external representatives and Council officers who assisted them in the review:**

Clare Kershaw – 14-19 Strategy Manager, Essex County Council  
Jackie Menday – Senior Personal Advisor, Connexions  
Jo Hammond – Integrated Services Manager, Connexions  
Mark Hughes – Area Manager for Integrated Youth Services, Essex County Council  
Noel Kellaway – Chairman of Basildon Action on Learning  
Peter Bates – Chief Executive, Prospects College  
Peter Cook – Assist. Director for Skills and International Trade, Essex County Council

Gunilla Edwards – Economic Regeneration Officer, Basildon District Council  
Hannah Morton – Graduate Management Trainee, Basildon District Council  
Michael Broderick – Economic Regeneration Co-Ordinator, Basildon District Council  
Pippa Brent-Isherwood – Manager of Community Services, Basildon District Council  
Samantha Nicholson – Senior Committee Manager (Overview and Scrutiny) Basildon District Council

The Group would also like to thank the young people who attended a session at Connexions and provided feedback on the findings and recommendations of the review.

### **4. METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW**

4.1 To ensure that the desired aims of the review were met in a co-ordinated and timely manner the Group agreed a methodology setting out the aims of each meeting based on the agreed project plan.

4.2 The desired objectives/outcomes of the review were agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission as follows:

- Assess the current approach within the district to reducing the number of individuals between the ages of 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training.

- Lead to a clear understanding of the mechanisms in place to support young people to re-engage in education, employment and training.
- An assessment of best practice preventative measures and support mechanisms used by other local authorities and whether opportunities exist to introduce such measures/mechanisms in the district.
- Identification of further ways in which the Council and other organisations can assist in the reduction of the number of young people finding themselves NEET.
- Understanding the impact that the current economic climate has had on the expectations and opportunities available to 16-18 year olds and what specific actions are being taken in the district to address any negative implications.

#### 4.3 As part of the review the task and finish group undertook the following:

- Held a witness session with the Chairman of Basildon Action on Learning and relevant officers to gain a broader understanding of the aims and achievements of the group, to understand the group's plans for reducing the number of young people who are classified as NEET, the impact of the economic climate and the role of the business sector.
- Held a witness session with the Manager of Community Services to discuss Basildon Council's Community Action Schemes targeted to help and support young people.
- Received a presentation from Connexions which covered:
  - How Connexions engage with young people at risk of becoming NEET or who are already defined as NEET
  - The use of the Client Caseload Information System
  - How Connexions works with other organisations to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET
  - The methods used by Connexions to help prevent young people from becoming NEET
  - Reasons for young people becoming NEET, the barriers they encounter and how these can be overcome
  - Any weaknesses in support to NEETs that is causing a barrier to young people who wish to get into education, employment and training
- Held a witness session with the Chief Executive from Prospects College
- The Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group undertook a site visit of Prospects college to see first-hand the types of facilities on offer to young people forging a career through the various apprenticeship schemes on offer in the district.
- Held a witness session with representatives from Essex County Council in order to gain an overview of the County Council's approach to reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), with particular focus on how this is being addressed in the district.
- Undertook a sample survey at the 'Your Future' event held in September 2009 to gain an insight into the reasons attendees were attending the

event and the barriers they had experienced whilst seeking access to further education, employment or training.

- Wrote to all Head Teachers within the district seeking their views on the matter under consideration.
- Met with young people defined as NEET to gain their views on the findings of the review.

4.4 Throughout the review the Group requested supplementary information to build their understanding of the key issues associated with reducing the level of NEETs.

## **5. WHO TO CONTACT REGARDING THE REVIEW**

5.1 Enquiries regarding this review should be directed to:

Samantha Nicholson  
Senior Committee Manager (Overview and Scrutiny)  
Democratic Services  
Basildon Council  
St Martin's Square,  
Basildon, Essex SS14 1DL

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## **REVIEW FINDINGS**

## 6. **Setting the Scene**

- 6.1 This section provides a summary of information that Members used to forge their understanding of the significance of having 16-18 years olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) within the district, the barriers these young people encounter and the implications for their future.

### **The Basildon Context**

- 6.2 The broad definition of NEETs is young people not engaged in education, employment or training of any type. However, different age brackets and different data sources are used to collect a range of information on NEETs depending on who, where and when the statistics are reported.
- 6.3 At the outset of the review in 2009, 606 young people aged 16-18 were defined as NEET in Basildon<sup>2</sup>. This equated to 12.2% of all young people in the district. This figure reflected a noticeable increase from July 2008 when 9.8% of the youth population fell within this category. Historically, the level of NEETs in the district had been 6% of the youth population, however this figure had doubled during the recession.
- 6.4 The NEET issue is not a district issue. In Essex, 2779 young people are defined as NEET<sup>3</sup>. There are marked variations across the districts with Basildon having the highest volume of young people who are NEET and Tendring having the highest percentage. Both Braintree and Colchester also have large concentrations of young people defined as NEET.
- 6.5 The financial implications of having significant numbers of NEET young people within a community are a compelling reason to address the issue. In 1999, it was estimated each young person who was NEET would accrue additional costs to the system of £97,000 over a lifetime. This included estimates of the costs of educational underachievement, unemployment, inactivity, crime and health in both the short, medium and long term. Based on this estimate alone, the existing cohort of NEETs in Basildon would cost local public sector partners approximately £49 million over their lifetime.

### **Defining NEETs**

- 6.6 The NEET category is not a homogenous group, with the reasons for each young person being in this category varying significantly. The Group learnt that young people defined as NEET can be broadly defined as falling into one of three categories:
- Core – Have personal barriers and negative educational experiences such as truancy and bullying; have below Level 1 qualifications; feel they have little information and choices and are most at risk of becoming long term NEET.

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<sup>2</sup> November 2009, data provided by Connexions

<sup>3</sup> Data provided by Essex Council, January 2010

- Transitional – Have taken time out before taking up further education; are undecided on what route to take; face little or no personal barriers and are NEET for 3 – 6 months.
  - Floating – Lack direction and have spells of unemployment between jobs and education, but are open to learning and have above Level 2 qualifications.
- 6.7 Meeting young people at the ‘Your Future 09’ event organised by Basildon Council also confirmed that there are many reasons for a young person becoming NEET and not all NEET young people have little or no qualifications. For this reason, tackling the issue requires a range of approaches and initiatives to keep young people engaged.
- 6.8 Through the evidence sessions held with Connexions and Essex County Council the Group developed a good understanding of the complex make-up of the NEET cohort. In January 2010 the cohort included:
- 70 teenage parents
  - 34 young offenders
  - 24 in care/care leavers
  - 8 young carers
  - 47 young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- 6.9 The group were advised of specific initiatives that were in place to support these vulnerable groups. These included:
- The Cradle Project aimed at engaging teenage parents.
  - A case review of all Basildon young offenders who are NEET, scheduled in March 2010, to identify the specific reasons for each individual being NEET.
  - Use of Youth Rehabilitation Orders linked to education and training to encourage engagement.
  - Integrated Youth Service courses on employability, anger management and motivation.
- 6.10 During an evidence gathering session with Essex County Council in February 2010 it was reported that across Essex 6.8% of the 16-18 year old cohort was NEET compared to the national figure of 6.4%<sup>4</sup>. However, in Basildon 12.8% of the 16-18 year cohort were NEET, which equated to 550 young people. Of this, 5.8% of the cohort were ‘unknown’ to the Integrated Youth Service (121 young people) compared to 3.7% across Essex.
- 6.11 It should be recognised that the NEET cohort for the area is constantly changing as new young people fall into the category and others move onto to further education, employment or training. For this reason, the numbers of NEET young people reported to the group at various stages of the review differed.

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<sup>4</sup> January 2010

- 6.12 Having established an understanding of the problem and contributory factors, the Task and Finish Group were keen to meet with the various organisations involved in reducing the number of NEET young people in the district.
- 6.13 Although the review focused on young people aged 16 -18 years old it was recognised that there were a range of factors that could influence the likelihood of a young person finding themselves NEET. These factors usually began to take affect long before the young person reached 16 years old. In addition, there were also a number of institutional and personal barriers and economic factors that also impacted on a young person's life chances. For this reason, the task and finish group sought to gain a thorough understanding of the approach adopted within the district to tackle this problem. It was anticipated that through an assessment of the approach adopted by the various agencies involved it would be possible to identify both potential barriers and ways in which the Council, partners and other organisations could assist in the reduction of young people finding themselves NEET.
7. ***Assessment of the current approach within the District to reducing the number of individuals between the ages of 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training***
- 7.1 As referenced earlier in this report, the NEET problem is far reaching and this is reflected in national policy. The Backing Young Britain initiative is aimed at raising young people's aspirations and providing opportunities for young people to acquire the necessary skills and qualifications needed for success in life and work.
- 7.2 Consideration of the efforts underway at a national level to tackle the matter provided a useful backdrop to the review and merited consideration in order to understand the relevance of these policies and how they were applied locally.
- 7.3 A summary of the national initiatives underway to tackle the NEET issue is provided below. This is followed by an in-depth synopsis of the work and efforts of the various organisations involved at a local level in addressing the issue.

#### National Perspective

##### **Backing Young Britain**

- 7.3 The Group considered the 'Investing in Potential – Our Strategy to increase the proportion of 16 – 24 year olds in education, employment or training' which had been produced jointly by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills.
- 7.4 This policy document outlines the government's approach to addressing and reducing the number of young people who are NEET. The Group were made aware of key national initiatives and funding aimed at reducing the number of young people who are NEET. In later evidence sessions, the Group gained a

greater understanding of how these schemes were being implemented locally and how successful they were proving to be at tackling the NEET issue.

- 7.5 **Young Person's Guarantee** – The September Guarantee is an offer, by the end of September, of a suitable place in learning to young people completing compulsory education. The guarantee was implemented nationally in 2007 and extended to anyone 25 and under in 2009 to give those who had enrolled on one-year or short courses, or who had left the activity they chose when leaving school, a further opportunity to engage in learning.<sup>5</sup> Building on the September Guarantee, the January Guarantee ensures the offer of a place on an Entry to Employment programme (E2E) to all 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in January 2010<sup>6</sup>.
- 7.6 **Entry to Employment (E2E) scheme** – This scheme is aimed at 16-18 year olds who are not participating in any post-16 learning. It aims to equip young people with the necessary skills to progress to an apprenticeship, further learning or a job.
- 7.7 **Futures Job Fund** – This is a challenge fund run by the Department for Work and Pensions. It forms part of the Young Persons Guarantee Scheme and aims to create 170,000 additional jobs. Organisations can submit bids to secure funding for schemes they wish to implement in their area.

#### Local Perspective

- 7.8 A number of organisations are involved in different aspects of the lives of the districts young people. The Group received evidence from a number of these organisations to understand the different approaches being adopted locally to tackle the NEET issue.
- 7.9 To demonstrate how the Group's thinking evolved during the course of the review each witness session is listed in this document in the order in which the Group received evidence. The Group undertook thorough discussions with the witnesses that attended each session and gained an understanding of the factors that directly and indirectly impact on the NEET issue. This report details the key findings and areas of interest that the Group felt were most relevant in understanding the barriers facing young people aged 16 -18 years old and how these can be overcome in the future.

#### Basildon Council

##### **Basildon Action on Learning (BAL)**

- 7.10 The Task and Finish Group held their first witness session with Noel Kelleway, Chairman of BAL, Mike Broderick, Economic Regeneration Co-ordinator and Gunilla Edwards, Economic Regeneration Officer. This was a productive session as it familiarised the group with the activities of BAL. The Group considered the Basildon Action on Learning Action Plan 2009-2011, which detailed a range of objectives that BAL was aiming to achieve. These included :

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<sup>5</sup> DSCF – 14-19 Reform

<sup>6</sup> DSCF – 14-19 Reform

- More work with schools locally to stimulate entrepreneurship, enterprise and create vocational training and employment
- Increase the number of local people getting into local jobs
- Raise local skills levels generally by enabling access to training and ensuring appropriate provision
- Seeking to raise the aspirations amongst young people
- Engage the economically inactive
- Ensure provision is steered by what the local economy needs; and
- Help parents to engage thereby increasing their capacity to support their child's learning.

7.11 The three main initiatives used to achieve these objectives were:

- Trade School – Construction and Engineering
- 'Your Future' event
- Skills Fest

7.12 BAL is made up of a number of training providers, colleges and work-based learning providers (i.e. apprenticeship providers). The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of BAL are both from the private sector. The Group were made aware of local business workforce needs and how a decline in suitably trained young people impacts on a business. This implied that the NEETs issue had a direct knock on effect for business productivity, as suitably skilled young people could not be sourced by employers to enter into their respective businesses.

7.13 Whilst discussing the trade school initiative Members were made aware of how local businesses had contributed materials and labour to the trade school helping young people to try construction taster sessions from those in the business. Since 2005, 154 young people had passed through the trade school with 97% still in employment, education or training.

7.14 Local businesses play a valuable role in providing opportunities to local young people. However, it must be recognised that the primary aim of the private sector is to make money and, therefore, it would be unreasonable to place the solution of the NEETs problem solely on this sector.

7.15 During this session the role of trade unions in training their workforces was discussed. It was felt that there was merit in having a trade union representative involved in the work of BAL to identify opportunities to support businesses through the provision of workforce training. For this reason, the group recommended that a trade union representative be appointed to BAL to attend meetings of the group and to help identify opportunities to support businesses through the provision of workforce training.

7.16 It was apparent during this session that stemming the flow of young people leaving school with little or no qualifications was paramount. This was also echoed throughout other witness sessions, which reflected the far reaching implications that poor educational attainment had on young people and society as a whole.

## **Skills Fest and Your Future 09 Events**

- 7.17 BAL has been involved in organising events held with a number of organisations involved in reducing the number of NEET young people to facilitate a joint approach to the issue. A Skills Fest was held at the Bas Fest, which was visited by approximately 3000 residents. It provided the opportunity for young people and adults to receive advice, guidance and training taster sessions.
- 7.18 The Your Future event held in September 2009 was an event targeted specifically at NEET young people and was held at the Towngate Theatre. The event was attended by approximately 200 young people who were able to access advice and guidance on careers from the many organisations that attended.
- 7.19 The Task and Finish Group prepared a questionnaire to be circulated at the 'Your Future' event to gain the views of attendees. This was completed by 20 young people who attended the event. Although the sample is too small to make any robust conclusions, it does give a flavour of the varying reasons why young people find themselves not in education, employment or training. Comments provided included:

*"I stopped attending school at 15 so I missed the last year and had no careers advice"*

*"I didn't do as well as I hoped in my GCSE's and so couldn't take up my college place"*

*"In between school and college I had a period when I was not at all motivated"*

*"I had to find a college course as there are no jobs"*

*"I attended college but I'm not sure what to do now"*

*"I have returned to the area from University, I studied Interior Design and there are no jobs available in that sector"*

A full summary of the questionnaire responses is detailed at **Appendix A**.

## **Sustainable Community Services**

- 7.20 The Group held a witness session with Basildon Council's Manager of Community Services to find out how this service was supporting young people and working to reduce the personal barriers that often lead to a young person becoming disengaged.

## **Support provided by Community Development and Health Outreach Teams**

- 7.21 Community Services provide indirect support to young people, in part to deter them from becoming NEET. Health Outreach Officers provide support to young people looking to access education, employment or training by helping them define their aspirations, identifying appropriate opportunities and providing

support when applying for them. They also help young people with practical advice on preparation for interviews and ensuring they are suitably dressed to attend an interview. Unfortunately, this level of support is not always on offer to these young people from within their own families.

- 7.22 The Community Development and Health Outreach Teams also engage in general aspiration raising and mentoring with young people, particularly where it is evident that this is not available within their own home.

### **Initiatives to Help Young People Gain Relevant Skills**

- 7.23 The Youth Council provides an opportunity for young people to participate in volunteering opportunities and to get involved in organising key events such as the Youth Conference. The young people that take part in this initiative are often already engaged and therefore this improves their ability to move forward in to further education, employment or training.

### **Children Centres**

- 7.24 Basildon Council is the lead body for 2 Children's Centres (Northlands Park Children's Centre and Start Bright Children's Centre, based in Pitsea Library). The centres provide support to young people, in particular to those who have had children and who are returning to education, employment or training.
- 7.25 Through early intervention the Council can start to tackle a range of issues. A number of programmes are in place to support both parents and their children such as positive parenting courses, speech courses for children and courses to prepare parents and children when starting school. The group was advised that early evidence indicated that these programmes had been successful in improving outcomes for children when they enter the formal education system.

### **Tackling Teenage Pregnancy**

- 7.26 The Change or Choice Project is a multi-agency project combining prevention and education aimed at young people to demonstrate the realities of teenage parenting. Participants are referred from the Essex Youth Service, Connexions and Social Services as well as from within the education system where they have been identified as being at high risk of becoming a teenage parent.
- 7.27 The course runs for 10 weeks and concludes with a visit to a mother and baby hostel. Evaluation of the course indicates that there is a sustained improvement in the school attendance of those who participate in this course. Improving school attendance is also directly linked to improved educational attainment.
- 7.28 This project, along with other work led by the Council's Health Outreach Workers as part of the County wide Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has contributed to Basildon achieving the second fastest rate of decline in teenage conceptions across the county since 2000.

## **Children in Need and Child Safeguarding**

- 7.29 Basildon Council is not a social care authority as this responsibility lies with Essex County Council. However, it does have a duty to co-operate with the County Council on matters such as child protection. When a young person has a number of other issues impacting on their lives they are less likely to concentrate on their education. If the Council has a concern regarding a child or their family there are mechanisms in place for the relevant body to be made aware. A multi agency approach is adopted in Basildon ensuring the right level of assistance and support is provided to the child. This support could mean the child is educated out of mainstream school or provided a place at the local Trade School.

## **Family Intervention Project**

- 7.30 The Group was made aware of a bid submitted to the Housing Challenge Fund for a Family Intervention Project within Fryerns and Craylands. The bid had been developed jointly by Basildon Council Housing Team, St. Georges Community Housing (the Council's arms length management organisation) and Family Mosaic Housing Association, with support from the Children's Trust, health partners, police and probation service. Based on a holistic 'whole family' approach the project aimed to focus on families where anti-social behaviour and other 'risky behaviours' are evident. Families referred to the project may include those in which a family member is serving a prison sentence or where there is drug and alcohol misuse.
- 7.31 The issues highlighted during the discussion with the Manager of Community Services indicated that where risky behaviours were apparent in the young person or their family their chances of becoming NEET were more likely. Similarly, the efforts of the service to deter young people from becoming teenage parents and to support young parents and their children so that they can participate in the education system reflects the link between educational attendance, attainment and achieving successful outcomes.

## **Prospects College**

- 7.32 Prospects College is a provider of vocational training in South Essex. The Prospects Learning Foundation operates a number of skills centres including centres in Basildon where it provides training for the engineering, construction, aviation and marine industries. The college caters for a range of people including young people still at school, school leavers, young people who are employed and older workers. Courses provided at the college include E2E Programmes and industry specific courses and apprenticeships.
- 7.33 The Group received a presentation from the Chief Executive of Prospects College in January 2010 covering the following issues:
- Overview of the college and the courses it provides.
  - Methods used by the college to support young people.
  - How the college links with other agencies to identify and support young people most at risk of becoming NEET.

- Reasons for young people becoming NEET, the barriers they encounter and how these can be overcome.
- Any weaknesses in support that is causing a barrier to young people who wish to get into education, employment and training.

7.34 The need for young people to be suitably qualified to compete in the working world was drawn out in this session and echoed the key messages from the session held with BAL. Improving the skills of our young people will positively impact on the economic productivity of the country. It was also drawn to the Group's attention that there were disparities in the level of qualifications attained by young people. It was suggested that many young people either have a degree or equivalent qualification or no qualifications at all. This was leaving a skills shortage at levels 1 and 2 (equivalent of GCSEs) which in turn was affecting the business sector who recruit and train from this level.

7.35 Members were provided a thorough overview of the apprenticeship schemes available to young people. It was apparent from these discussions that certain apprenticeships, such as Engineering, formed part of a clear vocational pathway for some young people. The requirement to have level 2 qualifications (GCSEs) was essential and such students were supported by an employer from day one. This differed to the apprenticeships offered in Construction whereby the qualification level of participants was lower and the course was suitable for young people with lower levels of academic ability and there were more difficulties in securing an employer.

7.36 Technical certificates provide an opportunity to raise the education standards of students in areas such as Maths and English whilst also allowing the student to complete a practical assessment. Pre-apprenticeship courses are also in place to help young people reach the necessary qualification level to be able to access and complete a level 2 apprenticeship.

“Opportunities for continuing education and training are often designed to make up for deficiencies in initial education...data suggests that participation among individuals with strong initial qualifications is significantly higher than among the least qualified, such that these opportunities often do not reach those who need them most”<sup>7</sup>

7.37 Linking the national curriculum to outcomes other than further education appears to be an area that requires further development. In particular, the national curriculum and apprenticeship schemes appear to be disjointed. Young people wanting to take up an apprenticeship are not meeting the minimum requirements of attaining GCSE Maths and English. The message that qualifications are needed needs to be further promoted through schools and careers advice services so that young people who want a career in a specific trade or industry are fully aware of the qualification requirements needed to access apprenticeship schemes. Later in the review, the task and finish group held a session with NEET young people at Connexions. The young people at this session confirmed that the importance of GCSEs and how they affect your ability to access training and jobs in later life was not getting through at school.

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<sup>7</sup> OECD – Education at a Glance, 2009

- 7.38 It needs to be recognised that some young people, regardless of the support they receive, will not achieve the necessary academic requirements. The educational offer available to young people needs to reflect this so that these young people remain engaged and can undertake training to gain skills to enhance their future prospects. This may mean providing certain courses over a longer period of time or offering pre-apprenticeship schemes at a younger age.
- 7.39 It was acknowledged that achieving a good pass rate was a pressure on colleges. Colleges are measured on how many young people start and complete their course. The Group were informed that Prospects College operated a 6 week trial whereby those students who were not up to the required level could change to a level 1 course to build up the necessary skills to undertake a level 2 course. Each student was required to pass all sections of their course which included a work based assessment in key skills such as numeracy. It was brought to Members attention that should the College success rate drop below 50% it would compromise the contract the College had as a provider and for this reason it was necessary to assess the ability of each young person to complete their chosen course or apprenticeship.
- 7.40 The need to maintain a good success rate to some degree explained the lack of GCSE re-sit provision within the district and the reluctance of providers to take on young people who were not suitably qualified for the courses.
- 7.41 The importance of shaping the educational offer in the district became more apparent as the review progressed. Ensuring young people of all ability have a suitable pathway, be that further education, training or employment, would help young people remain engaged. This issue was further explored later in the review when the task and finish group met with Essex County Council.
- 7.42 The Lead Member of the Task and Finish Group visited Prospects College in February 2010 to experience first hand the type of training environment that was available in the district. The visit was worthwhile and provided a real insight into the range of trades covered by the apprenticeship programme offered at the college.

### **Connexions**

- 7.43 Every month approximately 900 people use the One Stop Shop service offered by Connexions. During the evidence gathering session held with the Integrated Services Manager and Senior Personal Advisor from Connexions the Group learnt about the range of services offered by the centre, how these link with the work of other organisations and how Connexions was working to reduce the number of NEET young people in the district.
- 7.44 Connexions provide a range of services to support young people. This includes the provision of Universal Personal Advisors (historically known as Careers Advisors), Targeted Personal Advisors who help young people overcome barriers to learning and School Mentors who work with schools to work with young people most at risk of becoming NEET.

- 7.45 The Group were interested in the role of Universal Personal Advisors who are based in all Basildon schools. In the past, their role had been that of a careers advisor, but this had changed with the introduction of a more holistic approach to information, advice and guidance by Connexions. Historically, each pupil would have been seen by the Universal PA as part of the careers advice service. However, it was now the school who identified which students it felt would benefit from a visit to the Universal PA. Under legislation, young people with a Statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) must be seen by the Universal PA. In schools with a larger SEN cohort this meant there was little time available to other pupils including those most at risk of becoming NEET. It was clarified that in Year 11 contact is made with all pupils, however this was not necessarily direct contact and could be via a questionnaire.
- 7.46 The group felt that the interaction between pupils and Connexions in the school environment could be improved. It was acknowledged that schools producing high levels of NEET young people already receive additional support through the provision of Learning Mentors and schools with a high cohort of SEN young people are allocated additional Personal Advisor time. However, the group are concerned that less time is available for other young people in these schools to access the Universal Personal Advisors to get the necessary advice and guidance that is crucial during this time.
- 7.47 Ensuring young people have direct access to the advice and guidance provided by a Universal Personal Advisor, particularly during the selection of GCSE courses, would ensure that all young people receive the necessary level of support to help them make decisions that will ultimately affect their future.
- 7.48 Connexions use a Client Caseload Information system called Profile 2000, which registers the details of every pupil leaving school. The system records information relating to 13,932 young people (January 2010) in Basildon, Billericay and Wickford and is the only source of information used by Connexions to track and make contact with school leavers. The system also allows analysis of trends to be undertaken so that resources can be targeted. It can also split information into categories such as NEET young people, year groups, support levels and individual circumstances.
- 7.49 At the time young people leave school a number of young people become 'unknown' to Connexions until their new destination (i.e. further education or employment) has been confirmed. A percentage of the unknowns total in the district is added to the NEET figure for the area. This is based on an assumption of how many of the young people identified as 'unknown' are likely to not be in education, employment or training. A young person can not be removed as an unknown from the Connexions database until contact has been made.
- 7.50 In January 2010, Basildon had 550 known NEETs and 121 young people between 16 -18 years old who were unknown. The 'unknown' element of the NEETs category can be misleading as in some cases the young person may have a job but may ignore the efforts of Connexions to make contact.

- 7.51 Data sharing makes resolving the 'unknown' element more difficult and resource intensive as it can potential mask the true number of NEET young people in the district and makes it more difficult for the relevant agencies to take informed action. The inability of the various agencies, such as schools, FE providers, Connexions and Job Centre Plus, to be able to share information relating to individuals means tracking each young person who has disengaged from the system becomes even more difficult. As the review progressed it became evident that the inability to be able to share data, such as new contact details for individuals or to confirm that a young person has signed on for Jobseeker's Allowance, was a primary barrier to reducing the number of NEET young people in the district.
- 7.52 Connexions are undertaking a great deal of work to both engage with young people at risk of becoming NEET and to work with young people who are already in this category. The group heard that Connexions was supporting young people defined as NEET in the following ways:
- One Stop Shop service.
  - Text Tool – Text messaging regarding local opportunities.
  - Mail shots of opportunities.
  - Short Courses (Go Girls/Go Boys/GOALS/OCN employability course/Anger management course).
  - Occupation code matching.
  - Submissions to vacancies and training opportunities.
  - Bi-weekly follow up calls to all NEET young people.
  - Voucher incentives for those young people unknown to Connexions to get in contact.
  - Analysis of local provision to identify any gaps in provision.
  - Purchase of additional short courses with Local Area Agreement funding such as Fork lift Truck Licensing course.
  - Job Coach.
  - Employer Liaison Team.
- 7.53 There are a number of initiatives and schemes in place to encourage young people to continue with education, training or to go into employment. However, it must be recognised that many of the initiatives and schemes are in response to the problem of poor educational achievement and do not necessarily tackle the root causes behind this.
- 7.54 The group was made aware of the pressures young people experience from their families to bring home a wage, particularly those from low income families. Meeting the costs to attend interviews was an issue as was acquiring the necessary funds for the first month of travel to work. Members learnt that Connexions was participating in a scheme operated by C2C railway at Basildon rail station whereby the railway company provides a free travel voucher to a young person (via Connexions) to attend an interview. Once they have secured the job, the rail company allow them to travel to their new job for free for the first month.

- 7.55 The Group felt this was a commendable initiative implemented by the station to support young people in the district. It was brought to the group's attention that this arrangement was not in place at Billericay or Wickford rail stations operated by National Express (East Anglia). The Group wrote to National Express (East Anglia) to enquire whether a similar arrangement could be introduced in Billericay and Wickford. At the time this report was compiled a letter had been received from National Express East Anglia, which advised the company was reviewing the proposal put forward by the Task and Finish Group.
- 7.56 Connexions appear to play a crucial role in enticing young people who have disengaged and do not appear to have a clear pathway to re-engage in the system. It also identifies suitable training to help young people gain the necessary skills, particularly for those young people with no qualifications. Much emphasis is placed on the young person. The group felt it beneficial for Connexions to develop an approach that includes parents as it was evident in the session that some parents were the driving force behind a number of young people re-accessing the service.

### **Essex County Council**

#### **Integrated Youth Services**

- 7.57 Having met with a number of organisations prior to this session, Members were able to have an in-depth discussion with representatives from Integrated Youth Services about the County Council's approach to reducing NEET young people in the district.
- 7.58 During the evidence gathering session held with the Head of 14–19 Improvement it was advised that the County Council was focusing on the following areas:
- Increasing the number of young people (particularly 16-18 year olds) with a minimum of level 2 qualifications.
  - Reducing the increasing and concerning number of NEET young people.
  - Targeting co-ordinated packages of support on the County's most disadvantaged groups of young people (e.g. care leavers, young carers and young offenders).
  - Developing a more coherent and employment focused vocational route (e.g. diplomas, vocational centres, work experience, careers advice, apprenticeships).
- 7.59 The Group learnt of imminent changes to the responsibilities of the County Council with regards to education and training provision. From April 2010, under the 14-19 reforms, responsibility for securing sufficient education and training provision for all young people, including those aged 16-19 and 19-25 year olds with learning difficulties/disabilities, as well as juveniles in custody, will pass from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to local authorities. In the case of Basildon, these responsibilities would pass to Essex County Council.
- 7.60 The Group received further information on the merger of South East Essex College, Thurrock College and Basildon to form the new South Essex College.

The purpose was to create a more coherent education and training provision across Southend, Basildon and Thurrock with a campus in each locality. In the past, the LSC had provided funding to education providers who had then chosen the provision of education and training for an area. With local authorities now being held accountable via a number of performance indicators this arrangement was likely to change. Essex County Council would be developing a commissioning strategy to address inequalities in provision and would be a driving force in commissioning the provision for the area.

- 7.61 The Group felt that the impending changes provided an opportunity to develop provision to provide a more coherent and employment focused vocational route within the district that would appeal to young people not wishing to pursue an academic route. It would also ensure that provision was made within the district for those young people who needed to re-sit their GCSE's. Taking account of the fact that young people who had struggled in a conventional education environment were unlikely to prosper if met with the same environment, the Group are keen for an innovative approach to be developed in the district.
- 7.62 Having received an account from Connexions of how the inability to share data impacted on their work, the Task and Finish Group queried how this could be tackled. The Group was advised that the Total Place initiative being undertaken in Tendring was exploring ways of breaking down such barriers to ensure a more holistic approach to the issue. The Group were keen that should practical ways of removing this barrier be identified then this should be rolled out promptly to help other areas facing the same problems.

### **Essex County Council Apprenticeship Programme**

- 7.63 The Group met with the Assistant Director for Skills and Economic Development (Essex County Council) and was informed of the apprenticeship programme that was underway. The County Council had started the apprenticeship scheme in September 2009 and had made a commitment to sponsor 1000 placements. In total, 1750 apprenticeship placements had been secured across the County in both public and private sector organisations. Of these, 390 were in Basildon.
- 7.64 The group were provided an overview of the types of apprenticeships secured, which included:
- 120 in Engineering and Manufacturing
  - 300 in further key economic sectors including creative industries, environmental technologies, construction, marine, aviation, ports and Logistics
  - 400 placements with Essex County Council
  - 80 in other public sector bodies including District and Unitary Authorities, Fire Service, Police Service and Higher Education
  - 120 in Construction, targeted at NEET young people principally in South Essex
  - 100 of any business occupation ring-fenced for vulnerable groups including care leavers and young offenders

- 650 placements in 2010 allocated to the 4 districts worst affected by large concentrations of NEET young people (175 in Basildon, 175 Colchester, 150 in Braintree and 150 in Tendring)

- 7.65 It was confirmed that many of these apprenticeships were already underway with the remainder due to be rolled out over the next 12-18 months.
- 7.66 It was brought to Members' attention that the public sector was falling short in terms of the number apprenticeships it was offering. This was an area that the Group felt could be addressed by better ownership amongst public sector organisations of the apprenticeship scheme and what it has to offer to an organisation.
- 7.67 Although apprenticeship starts were down by 11% in 2009<sup>8</sup> it was evident that apprenticeship schemes provide benefits for both young people in terms of training and for the employer who can target specific areas of their business and effectively 'grow their own' employees.
- 7.68 Members were concerned to hear that a recent apprenticeship scheme, aimed at NEET young people, had only attracted 12 young people to attend a sign up session for the course. Of these young people, only 4 had suitable entry level qualifications to take up a place on the course.
- 7.69 Evidence considered by the group suggested the district does have many opportunities available to its young people, particular in the form of apprenticeships. The challenge appears be equipping young people with the necessary qualifications to be able to access these opportunities.

### **Local Headteacher Consultation**

- 7.70 The task and finish group wrote to all Headteachers in the district to gain their views on the matter under consideration. Of the 65 schools contacted, only one Headteacher provided a response to the group.
- 7.71 The task and finish group would like to express their disappointment that local headteachers did not take the opportunity to put forward their views on this important issue. Members are concerned that the low response rate may reflect an unwillingness amongst schools to take responsibility for the future destinations of young people leaving their schools.
8. **Meeting with NEET Young People to discuss Findings and Recommendations of the Review**
- 8.1 The group felt it beneficial to meet with young people currently in the NEET category to discuss the findings and recommendations of the review. A pizza lunch was held at Connexions in March 2010 that was attended by Councillors S. Buckley, A. Blake and 5 NEET young people.

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<sup>8</sup> Essex County Council witness session

- 8.2 The meeting provided an opportunity to have an open and informal discussion about the reasons why attendees had become NEET and the problems they were now experiencing trying to access education, employment or training.
- 8.3 Members were pleased that the findings of the session mirrored those identified by the group. The session also raised other issues that supported the recommendations of the review.
- 8.4 A summary of the key findings of the session and how they link to the findings and recommendations of the task and finish group are detailed below:

### **GCSE attainment**

The session confirmed that not achieving GCSE Maths and English was a significant barrier preventing young people from moving forward. There was strong support from the young people that attended the session that GCSE re-sit provision should be provided in the District, particularly in a non school environment and that this provision should cater for young people aged 16 -19 years old. It was highlighted to the task and finish group members that if you fail your GCSE's its very difficult to find another way of reaching the required level for Maths and English. It was also raised that GCSE's are the measure of success but do not necessarily reflect the true ability of a person. In particular, some people struggle with the exam element of the assessment and this can mean they do not get recognised for their true abilities.

### **Job Centre Plus**

A number of issues were raised by the young people regarding their experiences at Job Centre Plus, which on the whole had been negative. The young people expressed concern that the jobs they were being offered did not match their qualifications meaning they were not suitably qualified to apply for the position. This was frustrating and often de-motivating. It was suggested that it would be more productive if they were only offered jobs that matched their qualifications. Issues concerning waiting times and poor communication when visiting the centre were also raised with some young people having to wait for significant periods of time to see an officer.

Councillors S. Buckley and A. Blake were interested to learn about the difficulties being experienced. As the Task and Finish Group did not meet with Job Centre Plus it was thought beneficial for the issue to be explored in further detail. For this reason, the Task and Finish Group have recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meet with Job Centre Plus to discuss the difficulties being experienced by young people using the service and ways these issues can be addressed.

### **Travel**

Travel was a major concern for the young people that attended the session. All had walked to the centre in order to take part in the session and this was their usual mode of transport. Some of the young people had experienced difficulties

when offered jobs that were too far to walk to or difficult to access by public transport. The cost of public transport was also an issue. Members felt this supported their recommendation to National Express East Anglia to introduce a free ticket scheme for young people using the train to attend interviews and subsequently their first month of employment.

### **Careers Advice and Support at School**

Attendees at the session welcomed the recommendation to have greater advice provided at school on how GCSE attainment affects your training and career options. In particular, advice on which GCSEs and associated grades you need for particular jobs was needed. It was felt efforts should be made to ensure all pupils were made fully aware of the importance of GCSEs and how they affect your future.

It was also highlighted to Councillors S. Buckley and A. Blake that better support mechanisms were needed in schools so that when a pupil starts to struggle with a subject they receive additional support rather than changing classes to a lower teaching set. Young people at the session explained that they had found the lower teaching sets were more disruptive making it more difficult to learn.

### **Benefits**

There was a strong desire from the young people at the session to get back into education, training or employment. A further barrier was identified in this session that had not come through in the previous evidence gathering sessions. Members were made aware of how uncertainties regarding benefits, in particular housing benefits, was deterring some young people from going back into education or applying for training such as an apprenticeships.

From the session it was clear that young people who live on their own or who receive benefits need clear and consistent advice on how taking up a training placement or course will affect their benefits.

The Task and Finish Group feel the Council can assist in reducing these anxieties by providing the necessary advice and guidance in an environment familiar to young people. Therefore, the Group suggest a benefits assessor be made available at Connexions at least monthly to hold a drop in session with young people who need advice and guidance on their benefits.

9. **Identification of barriers facing 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training and Conclusions**
- 9.1 Early intervention is crucial in tackling the issues that prevent young people from reaching their full potential. The range of issues facing young people is immense and therefore the problem requires a multi-faceted approach. The Group feel that the impending changes to the responsibilities of the County Council with regards to education and training provides an ideal opportunity to address some of the

barriers to learning that contribute to the NEET issue evident in the district and this is reflected in the groups recommendations.

- 9.2 Due to the recession, poor educational achievement is only one factor in why a young person may become NEET, but it would appear to be the most significant. It was evident during course of the review that educational attainment has a significant impact on opportunities available to a young person at 16 years old. It was reassuring to see that attainment in Basildon has grown steadily since 2002 with 62.7% of 15 year olds achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C<sup>9</sup>. However, further improvements are needed.
- 9.3 For this reason, a number of the task and finish group's recommendations focus on addressing weaknesses in the education and training provision in the district. It was apparent during the course of the review that there are many training courses available to young people post-16 but the number of young people leaving school with insufficient qualifications to access these courses appears to be a major barrier. Similarly, these young people also struggle to access the job market. The employment rate of those with level 2 qualifications is over 50% higher than those without qualifications.<sup>10</sup>
- 9.4 It was apparent from the witnesses sessions held by the Group that the transition from secondary education was a crucial point when the path chosen by a young person could vary quite significantly. It was also a challenging time for the agencies involved in tracking each young person, particular for Connexions who need to ensure each young person has a destination or remains in contact with Connexions whilst they decide whether to go into further education, employment or training. Ensuring a more co-ordinated transition for young people from formal education into further education, training or employment is required to prevent young people from becoming disengaged. Early identification of those young people most at risk of becoming NEET is essential and this needs to happen long before they reach school leaving age.
- 9.5 During each witness session held by the Group the inability to data share was raised as a barrier to reaching NEET young people. This prevented these young people from being made aware of the opportunities available to them. There is no doubt in the group's mind that greater ability to data share would contribute to a reduction in the number of young people 'unknown' to Connexions. It would also allow greater communication with the cohort of the opportunities available to them thereby increasing the chances of a young person re-engaging.
- 9.6 The inability to data share also makes resolving the 'unknown' element more difficult and resource intensive. The inability of the various agencies, such as schools, FE providers, Connexions and Job Centre Plus, to be able to share information means tracking each young person who has disengaged from the system becomes even more difficult. As recommended by the Group, overcoming the data sharing barrier will make it easier to track the progress of each young person, to provide support if they disengage and to be able to

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<sup>9</sup> Source: Thames Gateway Knowledge Platform

<sup>10</sup> Source: DCSF - Investing in Potential Strategy, December 2009

remove them from the list of NEET young people should their circumstances change.

- 9.7 Academic achievement appears to be the measure of success. All young people must attain at least level 2 qualifications in Maths and English to be able to successfully proceed on to further education or training. The current education system does not appear to cater for those individuals that will not make the grade or will need longer to achieve the necessary qualifications. This needs to be addressed to ensure all young people have options available to them for their future.
- 9.8 Although long term NEETs are characterised by a lack of Level 2 qualifications, it became evident in the review that young people with qualifications were also finding themselves in the NEET category. This was largely due to the impact of the current economic recession and its effect on the job market. Statistics indicated that 70,000 graduates from 2008 had yet to secure full time work and these would be joined by a further 30,000 from the class of 2009.
- 9.9 The Group received evidence as part of the review that indicated more competition over low skilled jobs was also impacting on the availability of jobs for unqualified young people. With reduced recruitment amongst many employers and increased competition for low skilled jobs it was recognised by the Group that the recession has made it more challenging to reduce the level of NEETs in the district.
- 9.10 The Group believe the recommendations of this review will contribute to a reduction in the number of young people becoming NEET and will alleviate some of the barriers facing 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training.
- 9.11 For ease of reference, a summary of the group's recommendations are detailed below:

**Recommendations arising from the review exploring the barriers facing 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and how these can be overcome**

**Essex County Council**

1. That Basildon Council be provided the opportunity to input into the Commissioning Strategy for the area to help shape the education and training provision in the district
2. That efforts be made to create greater alignment between Further Education (FE), training and the jobs available in the district so that our young people have the necessary skills to access the local job market
3. Provision for young people to re-sit their GCSE's in Maths and English be made available as a matter of urgency within the district and this

provision be innovative reflecting the fact that young people who have struggled in a conventional education environment are unlikely to prosper if met with the same environment

4. That GCSE re-sit provision be linked to a particular career to demonstrate how GCSEs relate to the practicalities of the working environment, encouraging greater commitment to the courses and ultimately completion.
5. That every effort be made to identify a means of overcoming the barrier created by data protection legislation and to work with other Partners and agencies to establish appropriate data sharing protocols, which will help reduce the number of NEET young people in the district.
6. That the County Council explore with schools ways of preparing young people for their future (post 16), with particular focus on those young people that are showing signs that an academic route is unlikely to be their chosen route. This may include providing certain courses over longer periods of time or offering pre-apprenticeship schemes at a younger age.
7. That a more coherent and employment-focused vocational route be developed as a matter of urgency to provide young people with a credible alternative to an academic route.

#### **Connexions**

8. That a careers advice service that is accessible to all young people in the school environment be provided, in particular when selecting their GCSE options.
9. That additional Learning Mentors be provided in schools that have a high number of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) or where data indicates the school is a high producer of young people who go on to become NEET
10. Connexions develop a way of working and communicating with the parents of NEET young people to encourage greater re-engagement

#### **Basildon Action on Learning (BAL)**

11. That a Trade Union representative be appointed to the Basildon Action on Learning Group to attend meetings of the group and to help identify opportunities to support businesses through the provision of workforce training
12. That BAL explore ways of establishing practical links between businesses and schools
13. That BAL act as the facilitator between the Council and local businesses to further promote the opportunities of the apprenticeship scheme

### **Basildon Council**

14. That an on going media campaign be undertaken to promote apprenticeship schemes available in the District, which may include articles in the District Diary and other media.
15. That Council networks be used as a means to encourage local employers to take part in apprenticeship schemes.
16. That a Benefits Assessor be made available to hold drop-in sessions at Connexions on a monthly basis, or more regularly if necessary, to provide advice and guidance on benefits and how they are affected should a young person wish to take up further education, training or employment.
17. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meet with representatives of Job Centre Plus to discuss the difficulties being experienced by young people using the service and ways these issues can be addressed, specifically including the issue of stating minimum qualification requirements for all jobs at the earliest stage.

### **External Agencies**

18. That National Express East Anglia consider introducing a free ticket scheme for young people attending interviews and subsequently their first month of employment at Wickford and Billericay rail stations, similar to the scheme operated by C2C at Basildon rail station.

### *Your Future Event – Summary of Questionnaire Findings*

#### Age

15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1	4	6	5	2	1	1

#### Gender

Male	Female
7	13

#### Are you in education, employment or training?

Yes	No
12	8

#### What do you feel have been the main reasons for you finding yourself not in education, employment or training?

- 6 x not answered.
- 16 yrs – Female – I stopped attending school at 15 so I missed the last year and had no careers advice.
- 17 yrs – Male – I didn't do as well as I hoped in my GCSE's and so couldn't take up my college place.
- 17 yrs – Male – In between school & college had a period when I was not at all motivated – laziness really.
- 17 yrs – Female – I had to find a college course, as there were no jobs.
- 17 yrs – Female – College course – but I want to get a job now.
- 17 yrs – Female – Education – sorting out options.
- 18 yrs – Female – Couldn't decide what to do, have had some part time jobs.
- 18 yrs – Female – I had to leave college because I failed my online test (beautician).
- 18 yrs – Female – Attended college but not sure what to do now.
- 18 yrs – Male – Want to get into a trade now, really want to do plumbing. Went to work straight from school, back to college to do bricklaying.
- 19 yrs – Female – Know what would like to do but finding it hard to get into a college, want to do a child care course.
- 19 yrs – Female – Done education, been in employment, made redundant, now looking for a job.
- 20 yrs – Female - Done college, now want a job.
- 21 yrs – Female – I have returned to the area from University, I studied Interior Design and there are no jobs available in that sector.

Have you decided that you want to get back into education or want to get employed or trained?

Yes	No	Sorting options
17	0	3
<u>Comments:</u> - I need to pay back my student debt. - Want to get on a bricklaying course - 3 people studying 'public services' want to get into the fire service - Want employment - Job placement/training as mechanic - Further education - Studying engineering - Want training to learn a trade - Want to get on course for child care - Looking again after last employment		

If yes, what has helped you to make this decision?

- Prospect College – Trade school, really helped, attending this course now, as I know what I want to do.
- Always want to go into the Fire Service; now attending a 10 month course – 1 day month – course has been really good.
- Pressure from parents.
- Not too sure, told to stay in education because of current economic climate.
- Mum.
- I want to earn some money.
- School and Connections.
- I am worried that if I go back into education I may waste more time and it may not lead to a job.
- I want to give it a go, but not sure whether to go into education, employment or training.
- Decided needed a trade, want to do plumbing but doing bricklaying.
- Wanted to get back into education/employment or training for 2 years, but had no job at time of leaving college.
- I was made redundant from last job so want to find another.
- Need to have training on updates for CVs etc.
- I feel I wasted 3 years of my life and feel that my University course raised my expectations; I was shocked how hard it is to find a job.

Which people, groups or organisations have you found most helpful when trying to access education, employment or training and why?

- Trade School.
- Parents/Family.
- Tutors.
- Friends.
- Connections.
- Basildon & Thurrock College.
- A work placement at Sellex in Basildon gave me the drive to go back to studying.
- Southend College.
- At the event today to find some contacts/guidance to become a policeman.

Who has not been so helpful and why?

- School – completely unhelpful.
- Jobcentre.
- I was distracted by friends who had no direction themselves and were negative about my plans.
- Careers advice at school didn't really help or motivate me.
- Gangs/other kids.
- Basildon College
- Temporary employment agencies.

Other comments

- I feel I am just wasting time at college and want to get on with my life.



## *Barriers*

### **Other Factors**

The Group became aware of a number of 'other factors' which contribute to the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET. The group learnt about these underlying factors in the context of how they impact on a young person's ability to engage in education. A more detailed piece of work would be necessary to establish firm links and to draw specific conclusions with regards to how these factors affect a young person's outcome.

### **Low income families and Poverty**

In the UK, 12 million people live below the poverty line with only 15% of children from deprived background going onto Higher Education. This contrasts with other families where 79% are likely to go into Higher Education.

The role of the family in motivating and supporting young people is crucial in a child's development. It should not be taken for granted that the family will be in the position to offer the necessary level of support. Raising the aspirations of young people requires a holistic approach to the family as a whole rather than focusing on the young person in isolation.

Young people whose parents are in 'routine' occupations are more than four times as likely to be NEET than young people whose parents are in the 'higher professional' category<sup>11</sup>

Likewise the family can provide the necessary support to counteract some of the factors that increase a young person's chance of becoming NEET.

### **Crime**

Young people who are NEET are more likely to have a criminal record than those who are not NEET.

### **Jobs without training**

"Young people in the NEET group not only do not gain skills but also are at risk of social exclusion. Essex has an estimated 5,400 16 and 17 year olds in jobs without training; many of these do not have a Level 2 qualification."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Source: DCSF – Investing in Potential Strategy, December 2009

<sup>12</sup> Local Area Agreement 2008-2011