

**Not in Employment Education or Training  
Scrutiny Select Committee**

**6 pm, 27 January 2010**

**Present at the meeting:**

Councillor Ms P L Holland (Chairman)	Councillor E Russon
Councillor S Dawber	Councillor Mrs M J Whiteside
Councillor B J Fagan	Councillor W J Wilkes
Councillor W Rotherham	

**Officers in attendance**

Gary Finch – Principal Officer – Overview and Scrutiny

Janet Lumley – Administrative Assistant Democratic Services

**.1 Apologies for absence:** Councillors Mrs A Turnock, W Wilkes and R Winkworth.

**.2 Minutes of the Last Meeting:** The minutes of the meeting of 12 January 2010 were approved as a correct record.

**.3 Whipping Declarations:** Government guidance expected Members of the Select Committee not to act in accordance with party whipping and that, if they did, they were to declare it.

There were no declarations made.

**.4 Follow up from last meeting:** Officers from Connexions presented a number of reports which gave feedback to the questions asked at previous meetings. Apologies were given for the fact that answers had not been provided earlier but this had been due to a misunderstanding of the timescales involved.

It was pointed out that since the last report was given to the Committee the number of youngsters NEET in the borough had reduced significantly from 976 to 745. From these 119 were not available for placement for various reasons including some who were teenage parents and did not want to work and those who were unfit for work at the present time.

It was explained that Connexions tracked all young people to confirm their current situation and offer help and support where needed. Through the tracking mechanisms in place and using the government agreed formula, only 3.53% of the 16-18 cohort is 'not known' to Connexions. Contact is first made when the young person is in Year 9 at secondary school and then follows them to the age of 18 when they transfer to other providers. Youngsters were allocated a Personal Adviser to work with them to help place them in employment or training. These advisers could pass on skills ranging from how to fill out application forms and interview techniques, to advice on suitable college courses or other training provision and could even help with drug, alcohol and benefit problems.

Often the young person had lost confidence and motivation and needed encouragement and support. Systems in place were very successful and often led to a favourable outcome. Assistance offered was dependant on the individual needs of the NEET youngster, some could be guided back into training or employment after one meeting whereas for others it was more of an ongoing process.

Members enquired as to whether Connexions had any input into the Wigan Skills Shop and were informed that they had a daily presence there although the majority of its clients were in the 18 plus age group.

It was felt that most youngsters given the right guidance would want to be in employment or training and it was partly due to the fact that industry was in such decline and so few apprenticeships or training places were available that prevented this from happening. Once their enthusiasm was dented and no employment or training was found for them they could drift into lethargy, drinking, drugs etc., and then be lost to the system. On the contrary if youngsters were able to be given a chance it could set them on a path to a worthwhile career.

A number of casework studies had been provided as requested and it was suggested that Members read these at their leisure and contact the Connexions staff should they have any follow up questions.

In addition to written documents there were also a number of graphs providing details of both EET (in employment and training) and NEET youngsters throughout the whole of the Greater Manchester area and in statistically neighbouring authorities. From these graphs it could be seen that even though Wigan had a very large cohort of youngsters its number of NEET youngsters remained very low and that Wigan was second best in the area. In statistically similar areas Dudley and Nottingham performed better than Wigan and the Service Manager, Connexions, undertook to contact officers there to share ideas. Questions were raised as to whether the good practice that was in place with 16 to 18 year olds could be applied in any way to help those in the 18 to 24 age group. It was important to realise that youngsters matured at different times and that one solution would not fit all the problems.

Questions were raised as to what could be done to help vulnerable youngsters, such as young carers and those in local authority care, to support them back into EET. Approaches had been made for money to be allocated from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund but as yet nothing had been finalised.

Members identified a number of possible recommendations for the final report;

- that staff of Job Centre Plus and Connexions share information as a matter of course to enable even better tracking of youngsters;
- that external funding for a project which was run by Economic Regeneration and which enabled carers to interact more be re-introduced; and
- that as a council, Wigan reward and recognise those firms who work together with partners in this area to provide training opportunities for young people.

Resolved:

- (1) Officers be thanked for their detailed and informative report.
- (2) Members be requested to contact the Principal Officer – Scrutiny with suggestions as to the format they would wish the Leigh stakeholder meeting to take.
- (3) Connexions officers be requested to provide figures on the use of the Skills shop by their client base and the outcomes relative to those individuals.

**.5 Purpose of next meeting:** Resolved: The Select Committee will visit the Connexions office in Standishgate, Wigan, on 10 February 2010 at 4pm, to meet with officers and clients to further enhance their understanding of the problems involved. Following this the next meeting will take place on 24 February 2010 at 6pm at the Connexions office in Leigh where Members will have the opportunity to meet and talk with stakeholders. Suggested stakeholders to be invited were Education Business Partnership, Job Centre Plus, Economic Regeneration and the Chamber of Commerce.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 7:30 p.m.