Option 2: How well is the Council playing its part in reducing the numbers of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training and what more might it do?

Overview

The Education and Skills Act, sections 10, 12 and 68 (2008), set out statutory duties on local authorities in relation to the participation of young people in education or training, otherwise known as Raising the Participation Age (RPA). Young people have, since 2015, been required to participate in education, employment or training until the academic year in which they turn 18. Statutory guidance issued in 2014 (Participation of young people in education, employment or training) provides detail of what is considered statutory under different circumstances.

Policy and legislative issues

The principal statutory duties are:

- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of 16 and 17 year olds in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place;
- Local authorities must make arrangements – i.e. maintain a tracking system - to identify 16 and 17 year olds who are not participating in education or training;
- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16 to 18 and for those up to age 25 with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in their area;
- Make available to all young people aged 13-18 and to those up to age 25 with an EHC plan, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.

Data and Performance

Barking and Dagenham’s performance in reducing the numbers of young people aged 16-18 who are NEET or Unknown has improved substantially over the past 4 years as demonstrated by the key national measure of the November – January average figure (see figure 1). The national November – January average figure for 2016 is yet to be published, but the provisional figure is available. It demonstrates that Barking and Dagenham has improved its performance to better than national average. The provisional London average figure is 6.7%.
The majority of the progress made has been in the reduction of Unknowns, with NEETs appearing to be stubbornly high (see figure 2). The reduction in Unknowns has been largely achieved through better coordination of council and partner resources. For example, having access to the council’s Revs and Bens database to ensure contact details are up to date to enable more accurate tracking. Better and more accurate data sharing between services has also reduced levels of dependency on more costly tracking interventions, such as door knocking.

It is important to note that approximately one third of Unknowns are usually found to be NEET through the tracking process. Therefore, whilst it appears that NEETs have not shifted, NEETs may have reduced in real terms by up to 50% between 2013 and 2016. Nevertheless, the Local Authority has had a consistently high cohort of around
200 NEET young people to support back into education, employment and training over this period, which is too high and amongst the highest in London.

NEET and Unknown performance is particularly challenging in key target groups, such as teen parents, those with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities and care leavers. As a corporate parent, Local Authorities have a duty to provide services to all care leavers until the age of 21 (or 25 if in further education), including supporting those that are Not in Education, Employment or Training in EET.

The ongoing annual work of the local authority in raising levels of participation at post-16 and driving down NEETs is guided by the borough’s 14-19 Participation Plan, which sets out core annual activities against four overarching themes:

- An effective programme of pre-NEET prevention work, including a focus on preventing drop-outs;
- Improved outreach and marketing of existing services;
- Effective data sharing and partnerships;
- Improved support for vulnerable groups.

A workshop involving key Cabinet Members with a portfolio interest in NEETs and Local Authority leads was held in January 2017 to discuss strategies to further reduce our levels of NEETs, both generally and within priority groups. A series of core proposals and actions were then identified and developed into an action plan which was further discussed and finalised at a further workshop held in March. A number of core, longer term projects were signed off by the Workforce Board in April 2017 as part of the action plan and are currently being taken forward.

These are:
- expanding the council’s work experience offer;
- developing a partnership pledge for Small to Medium-Sized Enterprises;
- introducing a care leaver support grant to encourage take up or apprenticeships;
- introducing a corporate target or ringfence around the take up of apprenticeships from Care Leavers and other vulnerable groups;
- develop an internship offer for care leavers leaving university.

Areas of potential enquiry

Areas of potential enquiry for the committee could be to:

- hear the views of pupils, parents and Headteachers around the Council’s current work experience and work-related learning offer and how this might be improved;
- hear the views of businesses around what the Council might do to enable them to provide more support around developing work-place skills in our young people;
- hear the views of Care Leavers to better understand their support needs around moving into the world of work, whether they are NEET or in higher education;
- hear the views of pupils, parents and teachers around the public perceptions of apprenticeships and what the Council might do to further improve the image and take up of apprenticeships locally;
- scrutinise the level of support being provided by Officers in reducing NEETs, particularly with regard to care leavers.

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