



Committee Report

PURPOSE: Final Decision Report

Key or non-key decision: Key decision over £500k

COMMITTEE: Children and Young People Committee

DATE: 06 March 2025

TITLE: Youth Engagement and Post 16 Education, Training and Employment

Ward(s) All

Officer presenting the report: Jane Taylor

Job title: Head of Service (Employment, Skills and Lifelong Learning)

Committee Chair: Councillor Christine Townsend

Executive Director lead: Hannah Woodhouse: Executive Director for Childrens and Education

Proposal origin: BCC Staff

Purpose of Report:

1. To provide up to date information about young people aged 14-21 in Bristol, including those who are at risk or have disengaged from education, employment and training.
2. To provide an overview of local authority youth focused statutory duties, strategies, plans, services, resources, and systems
3. To consider the results of a collaborative analysis of current youth focused services, together with some identified areas to improve our approach and outcomes.
4. To seek approval to hold detailed bid negotiations to secure grant funding from the West of England Combined Authority for 14-21 services to plug gaps and secure improved outcomes.

Evidence Base

1. The most recent demographic data shows that Bristol has a young and diverse population with approximately 145,000 young people under 25 (ONS 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimates). Bristol has 41 Lower Super Output Areas that fall in the 10% most deprived in England (Deprivation in Bristol 2019) and it is estimated that 22% of young people under the age of 16 living in relative low-income families. 28% of young people in Bristol are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background (Bristol Family Hubs and Start for Life: Summary of Needs 2023). Data regarding young people Yr 10 and Yr 11 at Risk of NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training), young people post 16 who are NEET or destination unknown, and those aged 18-24 who are unemployed is included in Appendix A Information Pack.

2. In common with other cities there are indicators relating to attendance and engagement of young people in Bristol which cause concern. Over 15,000 children in Bristol are persistently absent (26.1% in Bristol cf 20.7% nationally) equivalent to missing at least 1 day per fortnight of school whilst 3.2% children in Bristol experience severe absence (missing 50% or more of school). In early February, Bristol had 1951 young people in Yr10/11 who were persistently absent (with attendance below 90%) and 310 who were severely absent (attendance below 50%) - significantly higher than other core cities. Out of this cohort, 427 had Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and 16 were Children in Care. We also had 85 young people in year 10/11 who were classified as Children Missing Education (CME). These children will either have not yet been offered a place in a school or have been removed from the roll of a school and are awaiting a new place through our Fair Access Protocol.
3. We want young people to be in school not only to achieve skills and educational outcomes but also to keep them safe. We know that post pandemic engagement with education, anxiety, mental health and behaviour have been adversely affected. We have heard through the CYP committee before that whilst permanent exclusions spiked in Bristol in 22/23, they have reduced since the new process for off site direction has been revised, however latest data showed 24 young people permanently excluded in the autumn term 2024. We have also seen a recent uptick in fixed term suspensions across secondary schools in the city. It was clear from the rapid review into the serious youth violence events early in 2024 that a number of both victims and perpetrators had moved between schools or were out of school or excluded.
4. There is evidence that where young people do not attend and achieve in secondary school they are less likely to move onto a positive destination post 16. In January 2025, whilst the number of young people aged 16/17 living in Bristol without a known destination had reduced to 0.49, there were 600 young people not in education, training and employment (NEET) wanting to find opportunities. This includes young people facing complex challenges, including children engaged with the youth justice service, children in care and those with SEND and SEN support.
5. In addition, there are a high number of young people who are coming through the education system who are at risk of becoming NEET. Out of 8,696 Year 10 & 11 pupils aged 14 to 16 (including those with a Bristol postcode and schools that share attendance data) include several groups at risk of losing learning, particularly those with SEN support needs (2017) and those below 70% attendance averaged over 3 consecutive school years (582).

Statutory Guidance, Strategies and Plans

6. Both previous governments set out clearly their focus on attendance and published a suite of expectations on local authorities, schools and parents. In addition the new OfSTED report card will focus more broadly on attainment but also the progress of school in supporting broader inclusion for all young people in education. There are two key statutory guidance documents that outline the local authority duties relating to young people's engagement and support into post 16 education, employment and training, including:
 - i) 'The Participation of Young People in Education, Employment and Training' (Department for Education, April 2024) and;
 - ii) 'Services and Activities to Improve Young People's Wellbeing' (Department for Culture,

Media and Sport, Sept 2023).

7. There are also other statutory documents that include duties relating to teenagers and young people, covering themes such as careers guidance; children and family support; SEND; youth housing; youth transport; youth justice; youth health; schools and trusts. A summary of these duties is included in Appendix A.
8. In November 2024, government announced a new National Youth Strategy, co-produced by young people to improve opportunities and support service. It is intended that young people will be involved in decision making through engagements and a national conversation called 'Today's Youth, Tomorrow's Nation'.
9. The Bristol Children and Education Plan 2025-30 includes a commitment to universal youth services and targeted employment, skills and lifelong learning, delivered through hyper-local and community-based support, to reduce the risk of those disengaged from education, and providing early help and support to families and young people before their issues escalate.
10. To achieve these duties and ambitions, there is scope for a more strategic, integrated approach to engaging and supporting teenagers and young people with an emphasis on collaboration, coordination, accountability and youth leadership.

Resources and Services for Young People

11. Bristol City Council is spending approximately £1.762m per year on youth and post 16 participation services. These functions are currently managed across two divisions within the Children and Education Directorate. There is also significant Council spend on a wide range of other local authority services for young people – including school funding, Education Welfare; Special Education Needs; Children in Care; Youth Justice; and Youth Housing services.
12. National government provides core funding for a range of post 16 education, skills and employment services through centrally managed services (e.g. DWP Youth Hubs and National Careers Service) and to individual post 16 providers.
13. Grant funding for youth services is also provided through national youth agencies in the community and voluntary sector, for example through the Youth Endowment Fund, the Prince's Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, Sport England, Youth Futures Foundation.
14. The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) have increased powers and funding for young careers, NEET reduction, young employment and skills support:
 - In 2024/25, Bristol City Council has secured £244K grants for experience of work and careers development activities for young people pre-16, delivered through the Bristol WORKS team.
 - £2.5m has also been allocated from the Mayoral Skills Priority Fund for services for young people 2025-27, including the West of England Careers Hub (£1m) and £1.5m for local authority NEET Reduction activities. Bristol ESL and Post 16 managers are currently working on a business case for £858K for activities to re-engage young people aged 15 to 19 so they can access EET.

15. The National Youth Strategy includes an initial £185m nationally for new initiatives to improve youth outcomes:
- a) A Local Youth Transformation pilot: including tools, guidance, and funding to rebuild local youth services
 - b) Creative Careers Programme, expanding opportunities in the arts
 - c) Youth Guarantee, ensuring every 18–21-year-old in England is earning or learning through employment, apprenticeships or training.

By building on our infrastructure, Bristol City Council is well placed to benefit from this new investment.

A System Overview and Opportunities

16. The current system of youth engagement and EET support is delivered across a wide range of different local organisations, including the local authority, local schools and trusts, criminal justice service, health services and a range of youth and community organisations. There are also national and regional bodies with youth focused functions, including the Department of Work and Pensions and the West of England Combined Authority (WECA). Engagement and support for young people aged 13-21 (and up to 25 where young people have an EHCP) is a cross-cutting theme that forms part of core local authority work streams:

- a) **Better Educational Outcomes.** The local authority (LA) is working intensively with school leaders to ensure that young people are well supported to achieve education success and progression. Data shows that some of our most vulnerable young people are impacted by poor attendance and low attainment, particularly those young people on Free School Meals and those experiencing multiple deprivation, Children in Care and Care Leavers, young people with SEND and some Black and Minority Ethnic communities. To break the link between deprivation and attainment, the LA is working with school and trust leaders to lead and develop a wider education vision for the city which focused on breaking the link between poor educational outcomes and poverty. This will include working with the DfE, trusts and through our own SI framework to support and challenge schools in need of support. In addition, the LA are focusing on young people at risk including facilitating a range of collaborative work programmes so that schools are places of belonging, learning and progression for young people. This includes sector led work on an attendance strategy with a clear expectation and support for young people who are persistently absent, and joint work with the Alternative Provision Team to prevent exclusion and to provide alternative learning for young people at risk.
- b) **Employment and Skills Support.** The Council has transformed the way that post 16 statutory duties are managed, bringing commissioned functions back in house and creating a strong internal Post 16 Team which has resulted in significant improvements moving Bristol from the bottom 5th to the 2nd national quintile. The Council's Employment, Skills and Lifelong Learning service is a significant provider of young careers and experience of work, youth engagement, apprenticeships, employment support and community learning. There is work underway so young people and their parents and carers have greater access to these and other services as part of a hyper-local family hub offer. There is also a great opportunity to improve joint systems, accountability, data and support for older young people aged 18-21 through the new Youth Guarantee programme.

- c) **Transformation of Children and Family Services.** The delivery of quality children’s social care services in Bristol enables our most vulnerable young people to thrive in safety and stability. With multiple pressures on families, there have been increasing levels of young people coming into contact with the service. To meet this challenge, service transformations are underway, including the introduction of a centralised Adolescent Team that will be leading on our work with children at risk of harm outside the home, and a centralised Edge of Care Team. The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership and Safer Options Team are leading Bristol’s response to serious youth violence. A Bristol Youth Hub is being established to reduce youth homelessness. Families in Focus and Area Teams are also coming together to form neighbourhood teams, including the introduction of family help key workers. The main opportunity is ensuring that young people supported by specialist services can access the total youth and post 16 offer.
- d) **Bristol Youth Service.** Youth work in Bristol is mostly delivered by the Voluntary, Community and Enterprise sector partners which are supported by the Bristol Play and Youth Alliance. In 2024 a National Youth Agency (NYA) Peer Review highlighted the effective collaboration and trust that has been achieved through a strong commissioning process and the creation of area partnerships that plan and deliver youth work activity together, well supported by youth work practitioners. There is also a new South Bristol Youth Zone centre scheduled to open in 2025 bringing great opportunities for young people. To achieve service improvements, the NYA made several recommendations, including: the creation of a senior level champion for youth services; a greater emphasis on activities for 14–18-year-olds; improved engagement with the wider school community and the strengthening of impact measurement. Overall, there is a great opportunity to strengthen and share a strong vision for youth services, including professional youth work, to secure sustainable and impactful provision for young people.
- e) **Bristol Youth Voice and Participation.** Bristol has a highly regarded Youth Council which is supplemented and enriched by three area Youth Forums which are well supported by skilled youth professionals. In addition, there is a myriad of excellent youth voice activity taking place across city council teams and external organisations. For example, there is an active Listening Partnership which is empowering young people with SEND to shape local services; there is also a Children in Care Council who meet to discuss the issues that affect them. The Post 16 Team are working with the Robins Foundation on a Peer Research programme to hear the voices of those disengaging early from education. The NYA reported that the young people they spoke to felt positively engaged through these youth voice processes. They also identified a need for greater co-ordination and measurement of youth participation.
17. Whilst recognising the many strengths and improvement work underway, children and education managers and stakeholders agree there is scope to improve our strategic co-ordination of services for teenagers and young people. Unlike the Council’s age-based focus on early years, the approach to young people is currently organised through a service specific lens (e.g. commissioning; post 16; Children in Care; SEND; Youth Justice services).
18. To address the current challenges, some initial areas of focus that could strengthen our youth offer are:
- a. Review how local youth engagement and post 16 support is provided in Bristol – developing a clear joined up offer that is shaped by young people, and well communicated and easy to access by young

people, their parents and carers, key staff and partners.

- b. Ensure that a youth and post 16 strand is a central part of the locality early help and prevention model and as part of new family hub and 'team around the school' locality teams and partnerships that can develop targeted/specialist provision to meet local needs.
- c. Work with WECA & our Economic Development Team to establish more systematic and sustainable employer engagement so that young people get better access to inclusive experience of work, work placements, supported internships, inclusive recruitment processes and sustainable entry level jobs with in-work support for progression.
- d. Work with WECA and neighbouring authorities on a youth strategy and funded programmes, including a NEET Reduction business case and the new youth guarantee trailblazer initiative, including a potential youth employment pilot in South Bristol.

Officer Recommendations: -

That the Committee for Children & Young People:

1. Notes the content of this report and information pack, including the identified areas to improve services for support for vulnerable young people so Bristol teenagers and young people can thrive.
2. Authorise the Director of Education, Inclusion and Skills (working with the Head of Service Employment, Skills and Lifelong Learning) in consultation with the Chair of the Children and Young People's Committee to take all steps required to negotiate with WECA and to accept and spend employment support grant funding of up to £1,923,032K to deliver Risk of NEET, NEET Reduction and Youth Guarantee programmes as outlined in this report.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

The proposed recommendations make a significant contribution to the Council's vision for a Child Friendly City "where every child belongs and gets the best start in life, regardless of their circumstances". The actions outlined will support young people "by providing opportunities for growth and development, ensuring they have access to quality education and services". In line with the Children and Education Plan, young people with a higher risk of being NEET will 'gain consistent access to high quality employment, skills and learning'. Improving career outcomes, providing inclusive opportunities and supporting young people in their transition from education to employment are key priorities in the Employment, Skills and Lifelong Learning Plan and aligned with various One City and Council policies: Corporate Parenting Strategy; SEND Strategy; Prevention Youth Violence; Family Hubs and Early Intervention; Inclusive Growth.

City Benefits:

The recommendations outlined will benefit the city through the development of a more co-ordinated youth strategy with improved co-ordination across youth engagement, post 16 and wraparound services. The City

Council will be better prepared to benefit from new funding opportunities for youth focused services. Through this activity, young people will benefit from improved confidence, skills, knowledge and opportunities to progress into sustainable careers as part of stronger neighbourhood and city networks. We anticipate that many of our young beneficiaries will be from equalities communities and groups facing the greatest challenges and risks. By addressing poverty this work programme will also have a positive impact on tackling education, housing and health inequalities.

Consultation Details:

This proposal has been widely discussed with Bristol City Council Children and Education managers, with One City Children and Young People Board members, WECA and neighbouring authority skills teams.

Background Documents:

[DfE Statutory Guidance – Participation of Young People: education, employment and training](#)
[DfE Statutory Guidance for local authorities on services to improve young people’s well being](#)

Revenue Cost	£1,923,032K	Source of Revenue Funding	WECA/CEC
Capital Cost	N/A	Source of Capital Funding	N/A
One off cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving <input type="checkbox"/>	Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Income generation proposal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1. Finance Advice: The NEET Reduction programme as proposed is to be fully funded from external grant funding so would present little risk to the General Fund or other ring-fenced grants within BCC. This is an established work area, however the project does need to carry ring-fenced redundancy contingency due to the potential for employees accruing sufficient service for employment protections.

Finance Business Partner: Travis Young - Finance Business Partner, Children & Education, 14 January 2025

2. Legal Advice: “There are no specific legal implications arising from applying for the grant funding. Where relevant, any procurement process must be conducted in line with the 2015 Procurement Regulations/Procurement Act 2023 and the Councils own procurement rules. Legal services will advise and assist officers with regard to the conduct of the procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements”.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones - Team Manager/Solicitor, Wednesday 8 January 2025

3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT in regard to this activity.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson - Lead Enterprise Architect, 9 January 2025

4. HR Advice: “Where funding is of limited duration and there is a requirement to employ project workers, it may be appropriate to use fixed term contracts. In law, employees who have been continuously employed for four years or more on a series of successive fixed-term contracts are automatically deemed to be permanent employees, unless the continued use of a fixed-term contract can be objectively justified. The Council’s Managing Change Policy will apply in relation to changes or reductions in the need for project workers. Employees on fixed term contracts where the reason for the expiry of the contract would be

redundancy would be treated equally to colleagues on permanent contracts.”

HR Partner: James Brereton – Head of Human Resources, 14 January 2025

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	YES
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	YES
Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment	YES
Appendix D – Risk assessment	YES
Appendix E – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix Choose an item.	NO
Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis Choose an item.	NO