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**REPORT ON THE CONNEXIONS SERVICE IN DARLINGTON**

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**SUMMARY REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee of the structure, operation and performance of the Connexions Service within Darlington.

**Summary**

2. The Connexions Service was established in 2000, through the Learning and Skills Act, as a result of a series of governmental policy papers (most notably 'Bridging the Gap') to provide more holistic information, advice and guidance to young people aged 13-19 (or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities).
3. Initially it was delivered through 47 Connexions Partnerships – and to 2007 young people in Darlington received access and support via Connexions Tees Valley.
4. In April 2008, as part of wider reforms articulated through Youth Matters and Youth Matters: Next Steps, funding for Connexions passed from Partnerships to Local Authorities and the Education and Skills Act (2008) places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to provide Connexions support services to young people. Across the Tees Valley disaggregation from the sub-regional Partnership to the respective 5 Local Authorities took place one year ahead of schedule in April 2007.
5. The Education and Skills Act (2008) confirmed the pre-existing duties on Local Authorities, most notably: to ensure access, for young people, to Personal Advisors who can provide information, advice, guidance, advocacy and brokerage services; to present services through the Connexions brand; to provide particular support for particular target groups of young people (specifically those not in education, employment or training or 'NEET'); to maintain an effective working relationship with Connexions Direct; to have in place and maintain a robust client management system and client tracking arrangements; to conduct, or arrange to be conducted, assessments relating to learning difficulties and disabilities in accordance with section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000); and to provide careers services to young people in the Connexions client group including assistance in finding employment.
6. In March 2008, Secretary of State Ed Balls wrote to all Local Authorities emphasising the importance of effective impartial information, advice and guidance for all young people – 'it is essential for our shared ambitions that young people should participate in education and training and achieve the best possible qualifications that will provide them with a foundation for further learning and employment, and it underpins our requirement for services which build their resilience in an increasingly complex environment'.

**Recommendation(s)**

7. It is recommended that:-

(a) The members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

**Murray Rose**  
**Director of Children's Services**

**Background Papers**

Mervyn Bell : Extension 227

S17 Crime and Disorder	Work of the Connexions service will have an impact on Crime and Disorder as it aims to give advice and information on suitable education, employment or training opportunities for all young people and therefore reduce the number of young people who have nothing to do and may participate in antisocial or criminal activities.
Health and Well Being	Being in employment, education or training should have a positive effect on emotional health and well being
Sustainability	There are no direct implications arising from this report
Diversity	The work of the connexions service covers all young people aged 13 -19 and those up to 24 for with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All young people aged 13 -19 (or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities).
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no budget implications arising from this report
Efficiency	There are no efficiency implications arising from this report
Key Decision	This report is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This report does not require an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The work of the Connexions service will support elements of both the Aspiring and Prosperous themes

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. In Darlington, the Connexions Service sits within the Partnerships Team in Children's Services reporting to Gill Walker, Assistant Director. It comprises 23.6 FTE staff. Since February 2008, it has been managed by the Youth Support Partnership Manager (who also has lead responsibility for the Youth Service) as part of a wider integrated youth support service.
9. The work of the Connexions Service is complex and difficult to capture (in detail) in a brief report. As noted above, it has a core role and function to provide impartial information, advice and guidance to support choices and progression planning, to raise aspirations and achievement and to support personalised learning. As such Personal Advisors work closely with a wide range of agencies and bodies, notably schools, colleges, employers, work-based learning providers, Third Sector agencies and numerous Council teams and departments. Despite having core responsibility for the NEET figure (NI 117) the Service is also expected to contribute to a range of cross-cutting government targets including attainment levels (at 16 and 19), attendance levels, levels of participation in education and training and levels of apprenticeships. The Service leads on the delivery of the 'September Guarantee' – the provision of an offer of learning to all young people leaving Year 11, or aged 17 who are NEET and EET. The Service is also expected to provide support and guidance to a wide range of vulnerable and marginalised groups including teenage parents, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young people in care/care leavers, young carers, young people with special educational needs, young people with substance misuse problems, and young people who have offended.
10. Locally, staff resource is configured across three teams: an education team (focusing on schools, colleges and alternative education); a targeted team (focussing on post 16 and vulnerable groups); and a Borough wide support team (the One Stop Shop team and the KIT/admin team – who have a core function of maintaining the CCIS database).
11. Headline detail on the roles and core functions of each team is provided in Appendix 1 and staff have articulated this into a Connexions Core Offer (Appendix 2) which can be shared with young people, parents and partners. Whilst this is a common core offer to all, Personal Advisors and support staff have the ability and autonomy to respond appropriately to the needs of each individual young person and customise interventions and support accordingly.
12. Formal working relationships with respective partners, particularly schools, colleges and work based learning providers, are confirmed through Partnership Agreements – bespoke agreements with institutions and providers, negotiated on an annual basis and reviewed regularly throughout an academic year and in consultation with young people.
13. There are a raft of policy and guidance papers which aid delivery of the service to the prerequisite standard – particularly quality standards on information, advice and guidance (with an IAG strategy to be announced by government in the autumn), and national NEET toolkit. Additionally the Connexions Service must be mindful of and responsive to the wider 14-19 reforms – the raising of the participation age, development of alternative qualification routes (diplomas, apprenticeships, foundation learning tier), and development of Area Prospectuses and Common Application Process. All of these require Personal Advisors and Team Leaders to keep up to date and fully informed.

14. Appendix 3 details current activity in two key areas - response to and engagement with young offenders; and response to and engagement with young people not in education, employment or training. Both are offered to give an insight into some of the detailed work which occurs at an individual and organisational level

## **Performance**

15. As noted, the Connexions Service contributes to performance across a number of indicators and performance measures, but has specific lead responsibility in a number of key areas: National Indicator 117, September Guarantee, intended destinations and destinations survey. The Service also maintains the Connexions Client Information System (CCIS) – a database logging the status of (and interventions with) all young people aged 13-19 (or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities).
16. NI 117 captures the percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Data is collected monthly, however, this indicator and NEET targets use an annual result which is based on three one month snapshots at the end of November, December and January each year. The determination of the NEET figure can be a complex calculation taking account of: clear definitions of what does and does not constitute NEET or EET status; if a young person's situation is not known; and if the 'currency' of an individual's record has expired. A mathematical equation is utilised by DCSF to confirm the final annual NEET figure (and separate equations are employed to calculate each months 'adjusted' NEET and EET figures).
17. The NEET performance target for Darlington is 5.7% by 2010/11. Current performance is 6.9% (2008/09) and the target for this year (2009/10) is 6.3%. After 2010/11 it is anticipated that the Government will revise the national (and local) NEET targets.
18. In terms of performance in 2008, regionally only 1 local authority has a better NEET figure and no authority can surpass our Unknown figure (2.9% for 2008). Nationally, the NEET figure now puts Darlington 80<sup>th</sup> out of 150 LAs – and for rate of improvement 30<sup>th</sup> out of 150. The figure for improvement of Unknowns places Darlington 29<sup>th</sup> out of 150.
19. The September Guarantee is the guarantee of an offer of learning, post-16, for every young person leaving year 11 (and for 17 year olds on a one course of study or in employment or training). The purpose of the Guarantee is to ensure that all young people will remain in and benefit from education or training up to the age of 18. The Guarantee is not an isolated exercise. It is part of a wider process that includes making sure that all young people have 'intended destinations' and confirming through the annual activity survey that offers have been taken up, to ensure all young people have the opportunity to participate and achieve post-16.
20. Performance for 2008 was 99.7% and the Service is currently engaged in activity to comply with the Guarantee for 2009. As such performance for 2009 is not available at this time.
21. The Connexions Service, through interventions with young people and maintenance of the CCIS database also record and report on intended destinations (of young people about to leave school in Year 11) by March of each year and subsequently on actual destinations by November of each year.
22. All indicators and measures rely on the CCIS database being maintained with accurate and up to date data (a crucial role for all Personal Advisors) and for all records to be checked regularly to ensure that 'currency expired' records are kept to a minimum. The Darlington

CCIS database is recognised as being one of the most robust in the north-east region).

### **Conclusion**

23. The Connexions Service, and all team members, are wholly committed to the provision of impartial and timely information, advice and guidance to all young people aged 13-19/24, and to enable all young people to make informed choices and be in a positive destination after leaving school.
24. In collaboration with a wide range of partners, the Service contributes to provision of more integrated support to young people and to more targeted support for those more vulnerable young people who require additional assistance and intervention. It is anticipated that this integrated and targeted support will be further enhanced through departmental changes to provide integrated services across the whole 0-19 age range.
25. The performance of the Service, against key national indicators, is encouraging particularly when set against all other regional Local Authorities and given the current economic climate.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

26. No consultation took place.