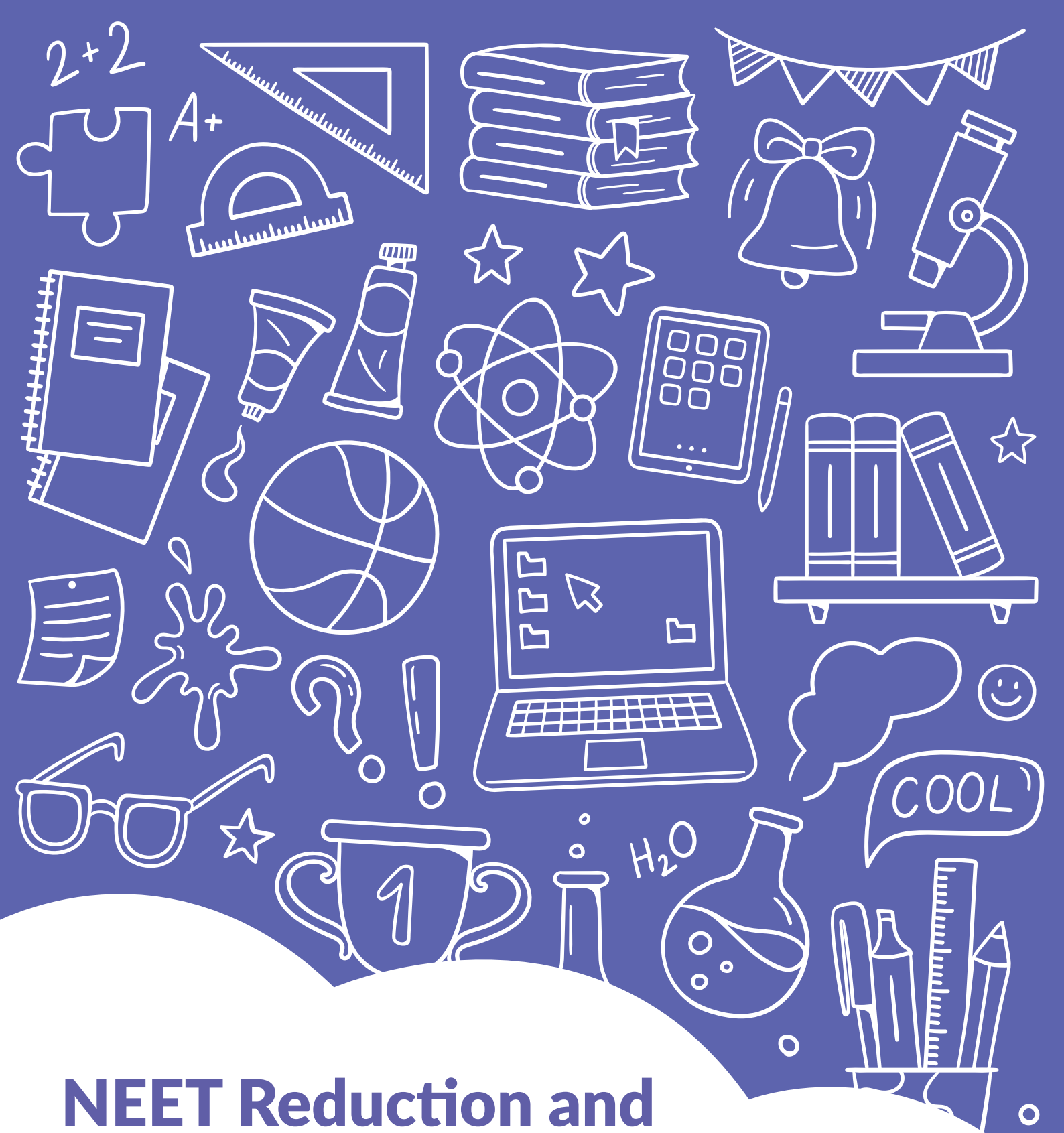




NEET Reduction and Prevention Strategy

2025 - 2030

Contents

Foreword from Adam Johnston	3
Introduction	5
Long term Impact – The Wider concerns	7
Worcestershire: the picture	9
Employment and Unemployment	9
Economic Inactivity	10
Apprenticeships	11
NEETs	12
Social Care including Care leavers	12
Young People with Education, Health Care Plans (EHCP) Aged 16 to 24	13
Young People with Education, Health Care Plans (EHCP) Aged 16 to 18 who are NEET.	14
Vision	15
National and Local Policy Framework and Context	16
Statutory guidance and legislation – our obligations	16
The September Guarantee.	17
What is the process of data collection and identification within Worcestershire County Council?	17
Local Context – NEET Prevention and NEET support - the local picture	19
Investment in the NEET Agenda for Worcestershire	19
Governance	21
Right Provision in the right place at the right time – developing an inclusive education system accessible to all.	23
Strategic Priorities	24
Priority 1 : Focus on the most vulnerable.	25
Priority 2: Looking forward - Linking with Business and the Economy.	27
Priority 3: Right service provision	28

Foreword from Adam Johnston

The journey of every young person in Worcestershire is a story of potential, hope, and the promise of a bright future. Our NEET Reduction and Prevention Strategy for 2024-2030 is a testament to our unwavering commitment to ensuring that no young person is left behind, and that every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

At the heart of our strategy is a vision that aligns with Worcestershire's Children and Young People's Plan: to make Worcestershire a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up. We believe in providing the best start in life, access to the right education, and the support needed for emotional health and wellbeing. Our goal is for every young person to reach their potential, live healthy, happy lives, and be safe from harm.



We recognise that young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) face significant challenges. Being NEET can have long-term impacts on an individual's economic and social outcomes, often referred to as "scarring." It's not just about the immediate lack of engagement; it's about the future opportunities that are diminished as a result. This strategy is designed to address these challenges head-on, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

This strategy is not just a document; it's a call to action for all stakeholders in Worcestershire. It's about working together—across council services, with schools, colleges, employers, and the voluntary sector—to create a network of support for our young people. It's about recognising the role that each of us plays in shaping the future of our community.

We are particularly mindful of the most vulnerable young people in our county. Those with special educational needs, care leavers, and those facing health challenges are at a higher risk of becoming NEET. Our strategy places a strong emphasis on identifying and supporting these individuals, ensuring they have access to tailored interventions that meet their unique needs.

Worcestershire's business community is a vital partner in this endeavour. By strengthening links with employers, we aim to create more opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships, and long-term employment. It's about building an inclusive economy where every young person has the chance to contribute and succeed.

An inclusive education system that is accessible to all is central to our approach. We are committed to developing provision that meets the needs of our young people, particularly those who are vulnerable. This includes working with education providers to ensure that the right support is in place at the right time.

As we move forward with this strategy, I want to express my personal commitment to this cause. Every young person in Worcestershire deserves the chance to build a bright future, and it is our collective responsibility to make that happen. This strategy is a reflection of our dedication to creating a county where all young people can flourish.

The NEET Reduction and Prevention Strategy for 2024-2030 is more than a plan; it's a promise to our young people. A promise that we will stand by them, support them, and provide the opportunities they need to succeed. Together, we can make a difference and ensure that Worcestershire is a place where every young person can achieve their potential.

Adam Johnston
Strategic Director for Childrens Services



Introduction

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are at risk of not achieving their potential, economically or socially. Engagement in learning and educational attainment is critical if young people are to make a success of their lives.

In 2013, The Government introduced under the Raising the Age of Participation Policy, new guidance issued under the Education and Skills Act 2008 that requires all young people to continue in education until their 18th birthday. In practice this tends to be the end of the academic year in which they turn 18. Most young people already continue in education or training after they finish year 11, because it gives them the best chance to get the skills and qualifications that employers and higher education look for. However, the smaller group of young people not participating includes some of the most vulnerable within the county.

Participating in education or training for longer means young people are more likely to attain higher levels of qualifications and have increased earnings over their lifetime, better health and improved social skills. This in turn contributes to a more highly skilled, and productive workforce for the county meeting the objectives of the County council's corporate plan.

Worcestershire County Council is committed to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to develop the skills they need for adult life and to achieve their full potential within their working lives.

From 2013 to 2019, following the RPA legislation and restructuring of the service and focus, there was a drop in the proportion of 16 and 18-year-olds classified as NEET. The figures show that at the end of 2013 the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds (yr 12-13) who were NEET was 3.8%, this fell to 2.4% in 2019, the lowest figure since 2000.

However, the immediate reduction in the percentage of NEET young people has not persisted, with fluctuations occurring due to changes in the job market, systemic issues in education, and the recent Covid-19 pandemic.



Worcestershire County Council's commitment to reduce the number of young people that are NEET and improving the outcomes for Worcestershire's Young people forms a key objective of both the Open for Business agenda, the Worcestershire Education and Skills strategy, the SEND Strategy and Social Care, Virtual School and Care leavers priorities. Whilst ensuring that the local authority meets its statutory obligations to:

- Ensure all young people remain in education until their 18th birthday or up to age 25 for those young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA).
- Make available support for all young people until their 18th birthday or up to age 25 for those young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) that will encourage, enable of assist them to participate in Education and training.
- Promote participation in education and training of young people in Worcestershire, particularly to those young people identified as not participating.

This strategy seeks to be aspirational yet practical in challenging the Council to continuously improve performance in identifying, engaging and effectively supporting those that are NEET, or at risk of becoming so to achieve their full potential, especially those who are most vulnerable and those for whom the Council has a corporate parenting responsibility.



Long term Impact – The Wider concerns

Young people being NEET has extensive impacts for individuals, communities and the economy and these effects have been described as “scarring”.

Being NEET even for a short amount time, can impact on a young persons projected future earnings. The cost of being NEET between the ages of 16 to 18 was estimated in 2010 to be around £56,000 in public finance costs and £104,000 in resource costs (lost labour market potential) over the working lifetime of each person who has been NEET at this age. In 2024 terms according to the Bank of England's inflation calculations, this equates roughly to £84000 and £156000 respectively, this in UK terms equates in turn to circa £12 billion for all young people who are NEET, with the total associated loss to the economy, individuals and their families judged to be circa £32.5 billion. In Worcestershire within the current cohort of 16–18-year-olds in 2024 this equates to £81 Million lifetime cost to public finances.

Alongside the financial cost, there are particular risks associated with being unemployed at a young age. Long-term unemployment at a young age has a direct effect on health and also makes the chances of being employed in a good career later on in life significantly less likely. For this reason, those who are NEET for longer than six months should be of particular concern. By the age of 21, people in this group are more likely to be unemployed, low paid, have no training, a criminal record, and suffer from poor health and depression. One study found that young men who were NEET were three times more likely to suffer from depression than their peers. Bell and Blanchflower in 2010 found that spending time unemployed under the age of 23 lowers life satisfaction, health status, job satisfaction and wages more than twenty years later – the effect known as ‘scarring’¹.

Being NEET can also influence unhealthy behaviours. For example:-

There is an association between youth unemployment and increased alcohol consumption: evidence suggests that reducing the number of those who are NEET would reduce harm from alcohol. In one survey, 11% of 16-25-year-olds who had been unemployed said that they had “turned to drugs or alcohol” because of their unemployment².

There have been documented links between youth unemployment and civil unrest, and crime. Young men who are NEET are five times more likely to have a criminal record than their peers. Although causality in this area is hard to establish, it is likely that at least for some young people, a lack of employment or education increases their chances of committing crimes, partly for instrumental reasons – as a necessity.

Whereas being in education tends to be particularly protective of health. Four more years of schooling (in total, up to age 25) on average relates to a 16% reduction in mortality rates and reduces risk of heart disease and diabetes. There is a clear gradient: those who have lower levels of education or fewer qualifications tend to have lower life expectancy and worse health outcomes than those who are more qualified or stayed in education longer.

1 Young People and the Great Recession – David NF Bell and David G Blanchflower, 2011, <https://docs.iza.org/dp5674.pdf>

2 Local Action on health inequalities: Reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) Public Health England [Review3_NEETs_health_inequalities.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444444/Review3_NEETs_health_inequalities.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

In the current financial environment public services are within in 2024, it is imperative that all residents are supported to prevent the escalation of risk to both public finances, residents' health and wellbeing and that all young people are encouraged to fulfil their working potential and boost the economic prosperity in Worcestershire.

NEET Programmes in the county are both delivered internally by Worcestershire County Council and externally, these programmes must support that intent to ensure that residents are supported to be active in education and employment where appropriate.

This strategy and the associated action plans provide focus and direction to the various and cross cutting workstreams that already exist in County Council directorates and services and in stakeholder organisations and institutions.



Worcestershire: the picture

Employment and Unemployment

In Worcestershire, the current employment rate is 81% (April 2023 – March 2024). The employment rate has fluctuated over recent years, dropping in 2021/22 to 76%, but has been positively increasing steadily since then. Table 1 shows the employment rate for different groups.

Employment Demographics	Employment Rate
Male	83.7%
Female	78.4%
Aged 16-19	42.0%
Aged 20 – 24	81.1%

Table 1 – Local Authority Employment Rate Data – April 2023 – March 2024.

As the employment rate has risen following the pandemic, unemployment has dropped. As of August 2024, claimant count at all ages was at 12'305 (which can be seen in table 2) or 3.4% representing a material increase on the previous month. However, increases at this time are being driven broadly by changes in the administrative earnings threshold which is clouding comparisons but using comparisons such as West Midlands running at 5.8% and England at 4.4% Worcestershire is performing well overall.

Area	Claimant Count 16-64	Rate
Bromsgrove	1,635	2.8%
Malvern Hills	1,270	2.8%
Redditch	2,240	4.2%
Worcester	2,815	4.2%
Wychavon	2,280	2.9%
Wyre Forest	2,055	3.5%
Worcestershire	12,305	3.4%
West Midlands	213,625	5.8%
England	1,565,940	4.4%

Table 2 – Local Authority Claimant Level Data – August 2024

This performance however whilst repeated in our claimant rates of young people, with currently 2040 residents claiming, representing 4.9% against rates of 7.4% in the West Midlands and 5.4% in England is of real concern particularly with a district council regions such as Redditch reaching higher levels such as 6.4% and Worcester and Wychavon reporting levels up to 45% higher than a similar picture in March 2020.

Area	Claimant Count 18-24	Rate
Bromsgrove	270	4.4%
Malvern Hills	220	4.5%
Redditch	385	6.4%
Worcester	465	4.6%
Wychavon	365	4.5%
Wyre Forest	340	5.2%
Worcestershire	2,040	4.9%
West Midlands	37,285	7.4%
England	252,380	5.4%

Table 3 – Local Authority Youth Claimant Level Data – August 2024

Economic Inactivity

The economic inactivity rate in Worcestershire for the period of April 2023 to March 2024 is estimated to be 17.4% below the West Midlands rate (21.9%) and England rate (21.2%). In 2022, the percentage of workless households (defined as households where no one aged 16 years or over is in employment) in the region was 11.1%, this has decreased in recent years and although slightly higher than in 2021, is at its lowest rates in the last ten years suggesting positive results in the county. Economic Activity as a measure around young people should always be used cautiously as whilst the number is high it also records all students in education.

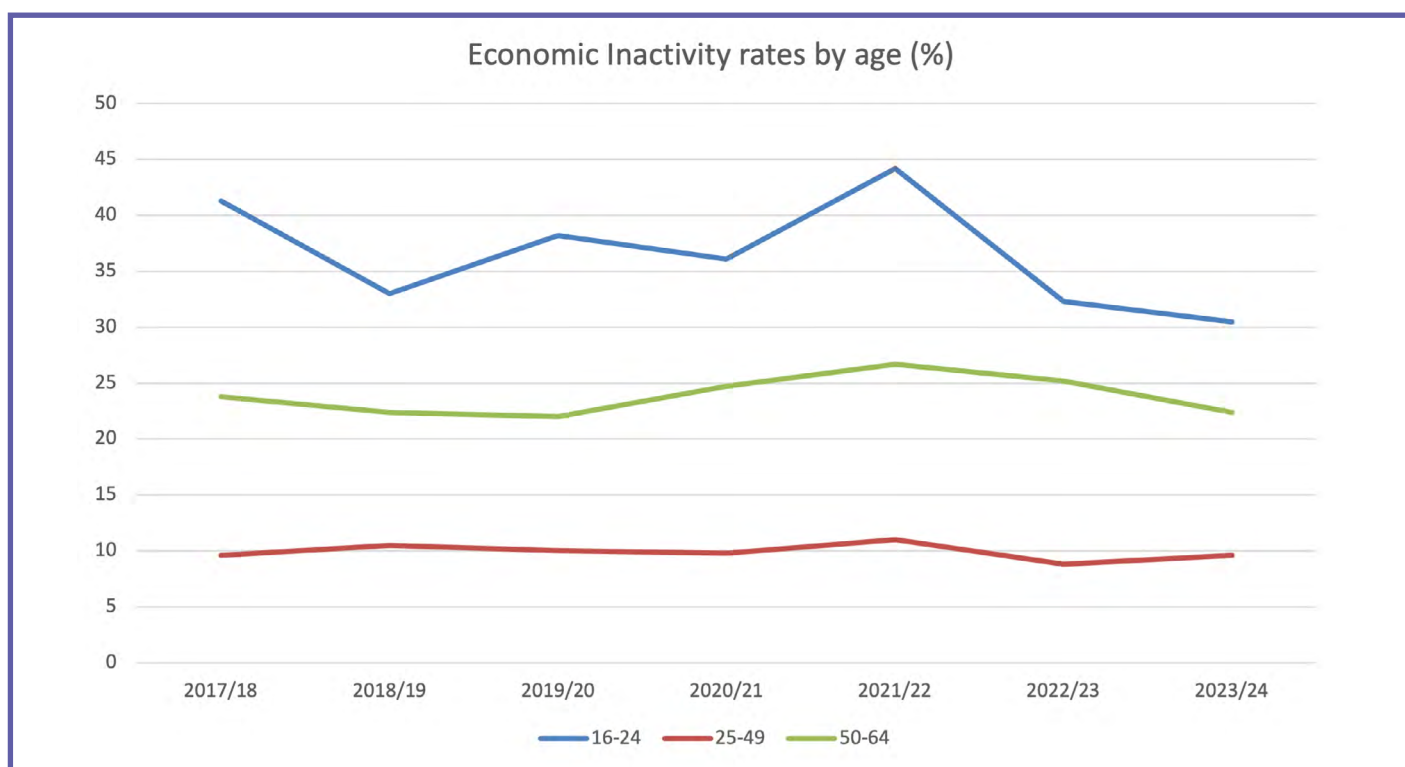


Table 4 – Economic Inactivity Rates by age

Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics (nomisweb.co.uk)

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a passion in Worcestershire and considerable work has been done to drive the agenda, albeit national policy changes have challenged the agenda over time. The picture is strong with 2023 seeing 18000 young people have talks delivered around Apprenticeships in school settings. Annually around 3500 apprenticeships take place in Worcestershire with over 2000 of those being to young people aged 16-24. In Worcestershire around 5% of school leavers move into Apprenticeship at age 16 or 18 transition points.



Table 5 – Apprenticeship Start Data, DfE – August 2024

All Apprenticeships have reduced in Worcestershire since 2018 for a number of reasons including the impact of the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, the Covid pandemic and the move to apprenticeship standards from frameworks but recovery is strong in early 2023/24 and the picture is positive into the new academic year of 2024/25.

NEETs

Local authority data shows the proportion of those aged 16-17 not in education, employment or training or whose activity is unknown. Table 6 shows the NEET rates in Worcestershire as of June 2024 across the districts. At this time overall NEETs sat at 548 with 148 Unknown, 4.1% and 1.1% respectively. The Office for National Statistics reports this as nationally at a rate of 4% for a similar time period.

DISTRICT	NEET	NEET %
Bromsgrove	64	2.9
Malvern Hills	58	3.9
Redditch	96	4.5
Worcester City	131	5.8
Wychavon	85	3.4

Table 6 – Local Authority NEET Data – June 2024

Worcester City and Redditch have the highest NEET rates at 5.8% and 4.5% respectively. NEET rates over the last twelve months have grown which could be attributed to a lack of careers advice and support during the Covid Pandemic alongside a rising challenge in young people’s mental health.

Social Care including Care leavers

Local Authority data shows that as of August 2024, within the current NEET cohort of young people aged 16 – 18 Worcestershire County Council has 50 young people whom it is responsible for across England that are either looked after or Care leavers who are NEET. In Worcestershire young people in care currently equate for 13 of those overall young people, whilst a small number however this equates to 14.8% of the cohort in comparison to 4.24% of young people overall. Alongside this Worcestershire also houses a small number of young people who are under the care of other Local authorities within England.

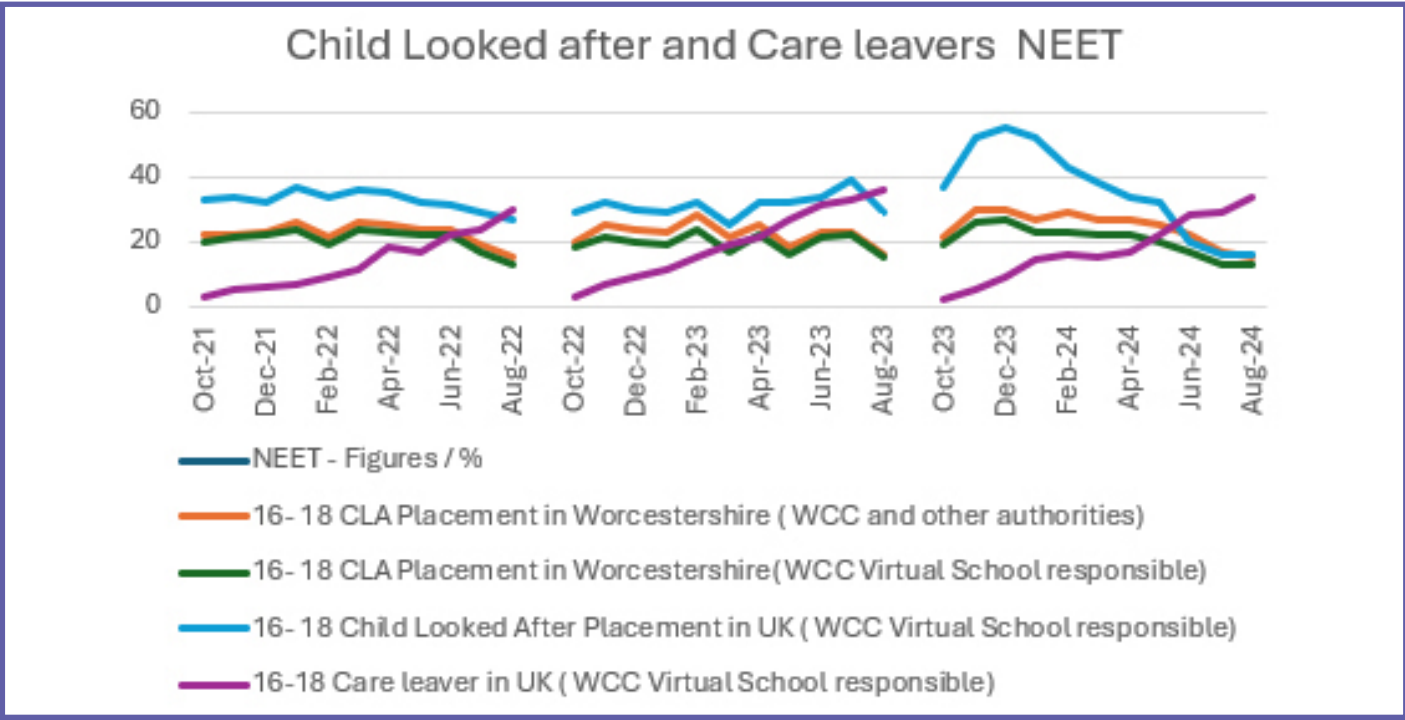


Table 7 – Local Authority NEET Data – August 2024 - It should also be noted that Children who are looked after will drop out of the CLA figures and appear only in Care Leaver figures as they reach their 18th Birthday.

Worcestershire County Council also focuses its NEET activity on the cohort of Care leavers aged 18-20 and 21-25 and their destinations. Currently in Worcestershire as of June 2024, 143 young people aged 18-20 and 104 young people aged 19-25 are classed as NEET, representing 41 and 59 % of the cohort respectively.

Young People with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) Aged 16 to 24

Worcestershire in August 2024, has around 105 young people aged 19-24 with EHCPs who are NEET and 200 young people whose destinations are unknown, representing a total of 13.4% of the cohort who are NEET. This number has been relatively stable within the county over the last few years, efforts have been focused on reducing the number of unknowns in this cohort and supporting to reengage young people.

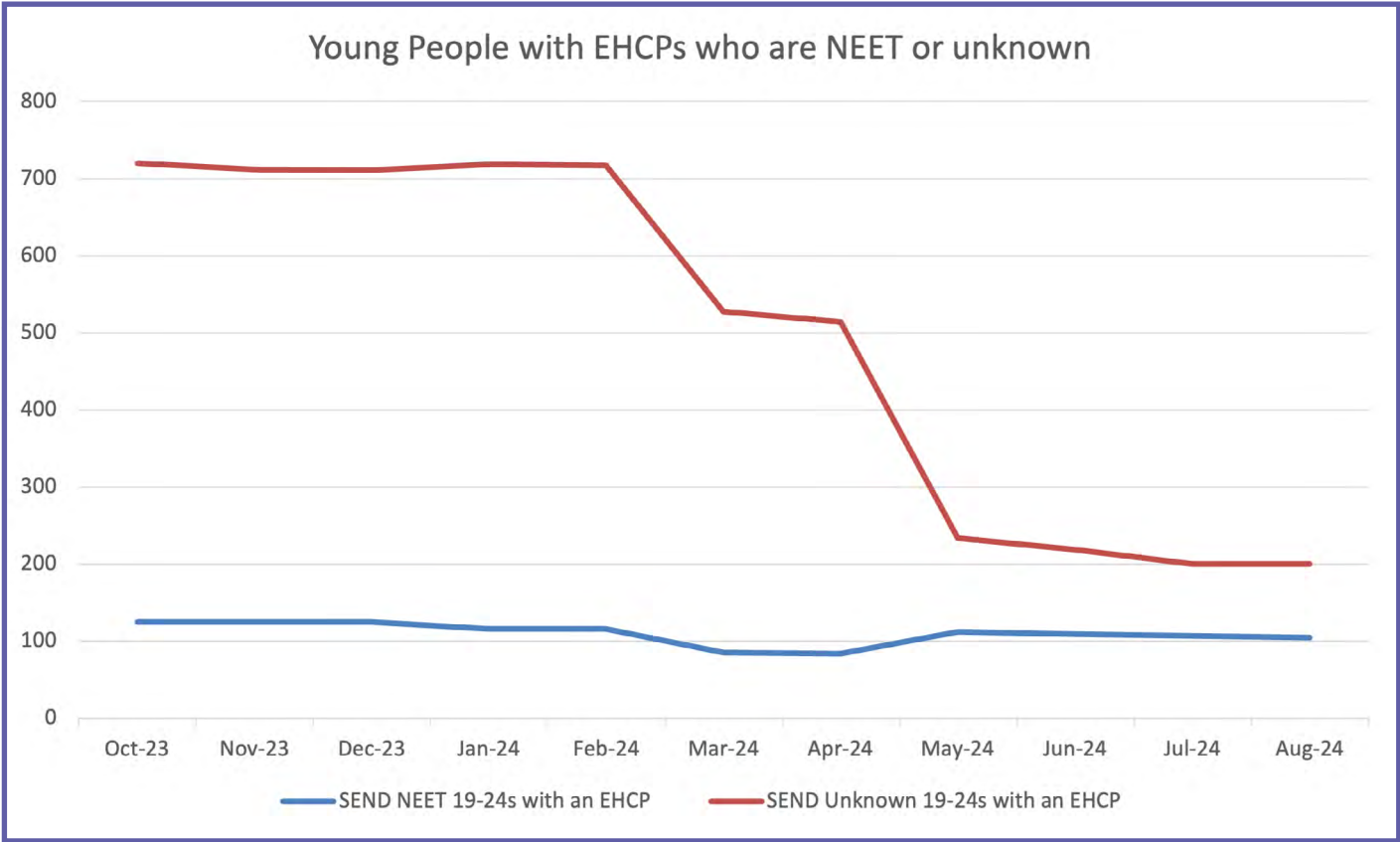
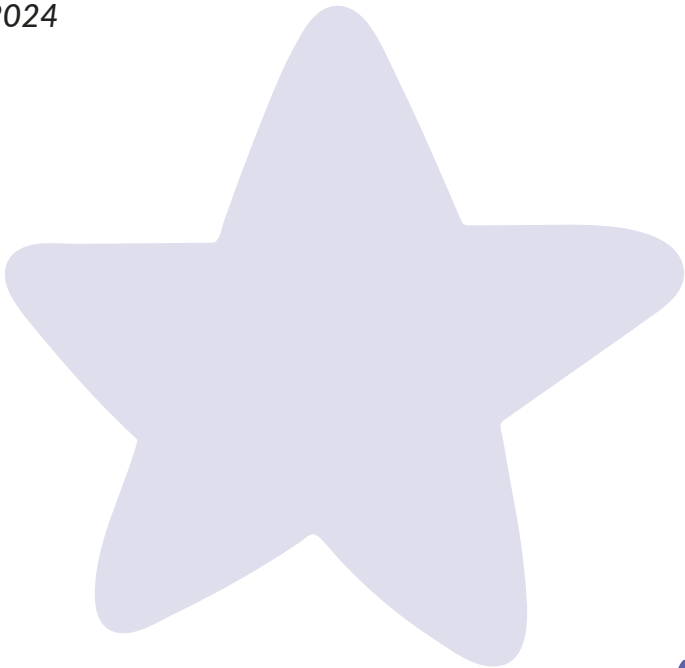


Table 8 – Local Authority SEND NEET Data – August 2024



Young People with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) Aged 16 to 18 who are NEET.

Worcestershire in July 2024 has around 50 young people aged 16-18 with EHCPs Worcester in August 2024, has around 105 young people aged 19-24 with EHCPs who are NEET and 200 young people whose destinations are unknown, representing a total of 13.4% of the cohort who are NEET. This is an area of focus for Worcester as we move forward both within the Education teams and across wider Employability programmes.

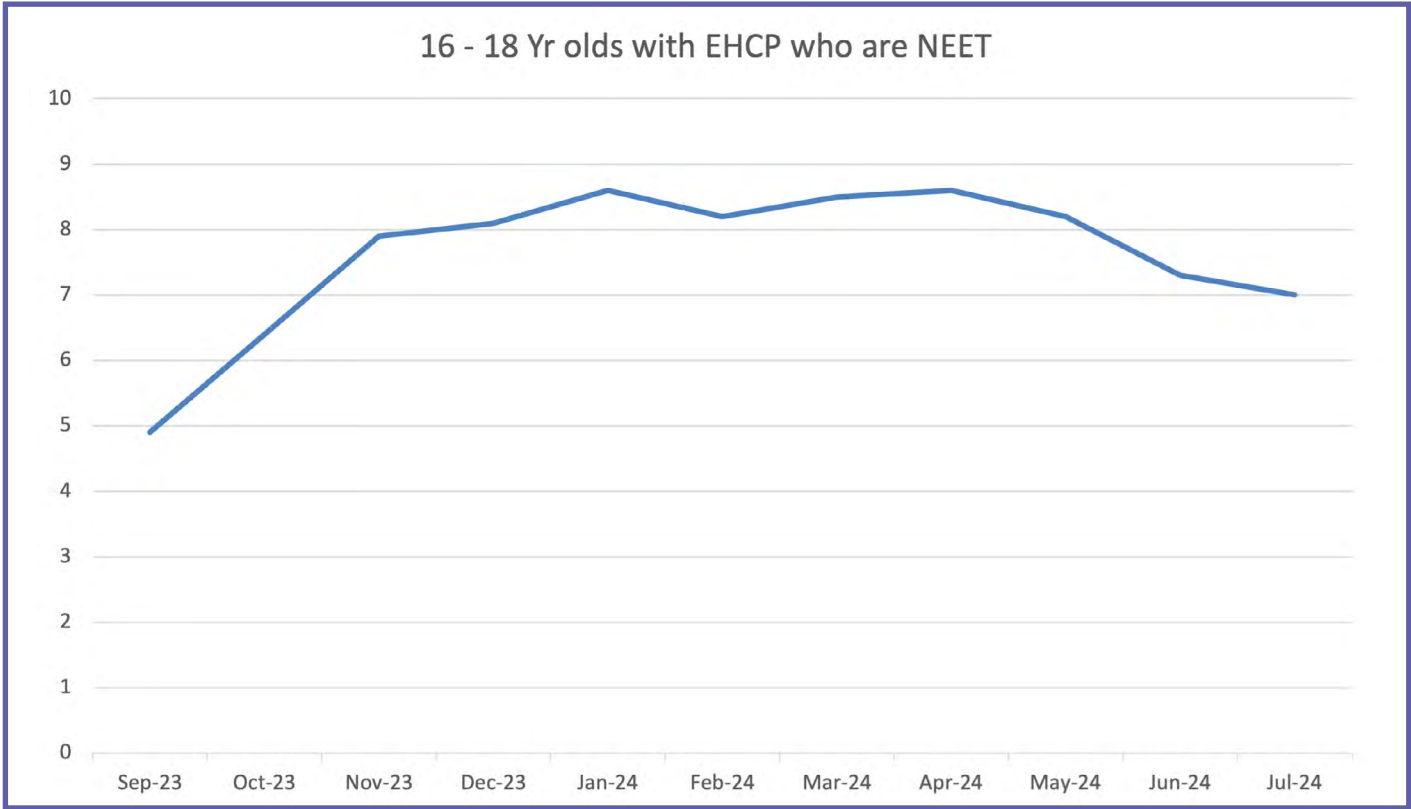


Table 9 – Local Authority SEND NEET Data – August 2024



Vision

Worcestershire is ambitious for all children and young people and has set out a challenging agenda through its Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2022-2024: Putting children at the heart of everything we do. Taking the lead from the CYPP, the vision is for

Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up.

We believe it is important that all children and young people:-

- Get the best start to life
- Have access to the right education
- Have access to emotional health and wellbeing and mental health support interventions
- Reach their potential
- Safe from harm
- Live healthy, happy and fun filled lives

Worcestershire County Council recognises that Worcestershire's young people have the potential to make a great contribution to the economic development of the county in the future. The Council is committed to supporting them to reach their full potential and wherever possible, to remain in the county to make their individual and collective contributions to the prosperity and quality of life of their families and communities.

Prevention of NEET remains the strategic ambition of the council whilst focusing on resolving those young people's situations within the current year 12 and 13 cohort.

Whilst prevention of NEET supports Worcestershire's young people to reach their full potential, the Council recognises the positive impact on communities and health that employment and educational achievement delivers.

Worcestershire County Council aims to reduce its NEET cohort to below national averages where possible, this will be achieved through delivery of effective programmes and through challenging the stakeholders of Worcestershire. From ensuring the education system develops a wholly inclusive education offer which provides varied and appropriate education options to support its young people and that Worcestershire's employers have inclusive practices in place to recruit those young people at the right time.

The strategy also recognises that a number of young people will have challenges such as health, that mean they are unable to enter the education system or employment at this time, but WCC will work towards ensuring those young people recognise a pathway and that pathways are created through funding activities to create them a plan back into education, employment and training.

Worcestershire County Council wishes to ensure that no young person is outside of education, employment or training. We are committed to working with the counties young people and recognising those with disadvantage who are at greater risk of becoming NEET and ensuring that they have the same opportunity as their peers and that all our children thrive in Worcestershire.

National and Local Policy Framework and Context

Statutory guidance and legislation – our obligations

Education and Skills Act 2008 (sections 10, 12 and 68)

The DfE provides the framework to increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people NEET, but the responsibility and accountability lies with local authorities.

Local Authorities have existing duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. These duties are to:

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people who are over compulsory school age but under 19 and for those up to age 25 with a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in their area. To fulfil this, local authorities must have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.
- Make available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those up to age 25 with an LDA or EHCP, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.
- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of young people aged 16,17 years old 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 to identify those aged 16, 17 years old up to their 18th birthday who are not participating in education or training.

Local authorities also have a duty to provide strategic leadership in their areas to support participation in education, training and employment - working with and influencing partners by:

- Ensuring a focus on participation is embedded and communicated throughout the authority's services for children and young people.
- Ensuring the services for young people in the local area come together to meet the needs of young people – including funding for education and training places and re-engagement provision.
- Agreeing ways of working with other partners such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Jobcentre Plus, employers, voluntary and community sector organisations, health services, police, and probation services.
- Working with neighbouring authorities, especially where young people routinely travel out of the area to access education and training, for work or other services.

The September Guarantee

The DfE publishes information regarding the proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds who were made an offer of suitable provision in education or training by the end of September in each year. This is known as the September Guarantee.

The September Guarantee forms the start point for tracking and identification of NEETs in Worcestershire, this data is used to verify the status of a young person in the county and commence an offer of support to those young people who find themselves outside of Education, Employment and Training.

This is used as an indicator by the DfE of the County's NEET figures and the DfE expect this to sit at over 90% before challenge will be made. Worcestershire has faced challenges with this. In 2013 this figure was just above 62% and over 10 years work has been done to affect change in this area and report positive destination figures.

September Guarantee figures as submitted to DfE

September Guarantee (offers of Learning made)	2020	2021	2022	2023
Yrs 11 & 12 % Combined Offer Made Worcestershire	90.4	93.3	90.9	89.7
Yrs 11 & 12 % Combined Offer Made West Midlands	94.9	96.3	96.1	92.6
Yrs 11 & 12 % Combined Offer Made England	94.3	95.5	94.6	94.6

Table 9 – Local Authority September Guarantee Data submitted to DfE – Annual March Submissions

This figure has increased primarily due to the establishment of more effective and positive working relationships with schools and colleges alongside improving processes. Alongside this, the implementation of the Careers and Enterprise Company programme in Worcestershire, supporting education settings with careers strategy has also improved the overall conversation and ensured young people are focuses on destinations.

What is the process of data collection and identification within Worcestershire County Council?

To enable Worcestershire County Council to be able to identify young people who are not participating, and assess their needs, Worcestershire County Council maintains a database – known as CCIS (Client Caseload Information System) on which to record young people's current activity. To do this the data team draws heavily on the following sources of data, through building/rebuilding relationships with key individuals, and often more than one piece of information is required to identify/confirm those who are NEET:

- Education and Training providers including Schools and Further Education colleges
- Personal contact e.g. Phone, Text, Email, social media
- DfE
- Other LAs
- Youth services
- Jobcentre Plus/DWP
- Other WCC teams e.g. Social Care, SEN, Skills

These organisations send the County Council data on destinations and enrolments of our county's young people. Following analysis of this information it then informs the data on all the young people in the county whose destinations are unknown. The County Council then through existing contact methods and social media will track those missing young people and once identified as NEET, this is then passed to the NEET advisers to commence the process of contact with the young people and resolution.

Worcestershire County Council also works with the Careers and Enterprise Company Programme in the County to have a focused conversation in September each year with all School settings Careers leaders around those young people at risk and their actions to prevent. This conversation supports the identification of those at risk of being NEET and then considers what prevention solutions and support there is that they can access and where appropriate the council works with the school to implement support.

In 2022, Worcestershire County Council completed the redevelopment of the county's Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) Tool, this tool had been developed a decade before and the data the tool was using to assess risk was considered outdated. This refresh in 2022, supported to bring a single view of a child together that would use data sets from various sources across the local authority from school attendance, social care, SEND, education outcomes to date, family circumstances, ethnicity and demographics as well as others such as local school-based information to produce a risk of NEET Likelihood level. This analysis allows resources to be more effectively challenged towards those young people most in need and has dramatically improved identification within the county.



Local Context – NEET Prevention and NEET support - the local picture

Following significant work over the last few years to understand the challenges and the picture within Worcestershire, the proportion of identified “true” NEETs in Worcestershire has grown but from the impact of really understanding the NEET picture and from the impact that the county faces from both the Covid Pandemic impacting on attendance and health but also the challenges in availability of provision that cause endless challenges between February and August every year. The figures currently at 4.1% whilst low overall, in comparison to other neighbouring authorities is still higher than pre pandemic where regularly the county saw levels of 2 – 2.5%.

A significant improvement over recent years has been tracking young people up to 25 years old with an EHCP. Until recently, this cohort had not been tracked effectively or consistently and so unknown figures were very high - reaching 90% for the over 20's in June 2018. By the end of August 2024, this figure of unknowns had reached 25.5% a significant improvement on previous, this however has not impacted the NEET cohort where numbers have remained relatively stable as we have begun to understand the cohort and as these individuals are identified they can now be supported or have their needs re-assessed.

Overall, these figures suggest low numbers of young people in the county finding themselves NEET, but Worcestershire County Council recognises that the data hides some concerning trends in the county's most vulnerable often involving care leavers, young people with SEN needs or those with mental health problems which can have long term economic consequences on our public services and our economy.

Investment in the NEET Agenda for Worcestershire

Staffing

Worcestershire County Council continues to invest in staffing to strategically lead the work completed around NEETs, to track and identify the NEET cohort and in staff whose role is it to work with and support our young people aged 16-18 who find themselves NEET, back into Employment, Education and Training, within this team are two dedicated Careers Post 16 advisors whose role it is to proactively contact those young people who find themselves NEET and to support them to reengage.

The Council also invests through its teams in specialist support such as that of the Virtual School, Social Care and SEND teams. The Virtual School houses two Post 16 Learning Advocates, part of whose role is to support those who are out of Education and within the Care system to support them back into education, the SEND team continues to prioritise tracking and support through its case workers and Social Care, Care Leavers Managers lead the agenda within their function.

Over the last two years, the Virtual School has brought forward several workstreams around prevention and intervention and focused activity around supporting young people to be in Employment, Education and Training. This approach will support to ensure that less young people in the care of Worcestershire County Council become NEET and that current NEET rates of care leavers reduce. These workstreams have been as follows:

- Improved awareness of the Careers Education offers available to schools through Careers Explainer for all staff within the education setting.
- Careers conversations improved through the Personal Education Plan to ensure that all young people in care are being offered the correct support in school.
- Improved cross working between local authority teams to ensure that young people are transitioned between support and no young person is lost.
- Ensured that young people of statutory school age under care of local authority received effective and appropriate CEIAG in line with Gatsby Benchmarks.
- Improved targeting to ensure that young people who are looked after facing additional barriers such as EHCPs are prioritised.
- Introduction of the Fresh Start in Education programme to engage young people where other solutions have been exhausted and intervention is needed to secure their engagement.
- Improved systems tracking and monitoring Post 18 destinations with Social Care teams.
- Introduction of enhanced local offer for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children including faster access to education, tuition, resource packs, a Summer Scheme and bespoke educational provision.

Programmes

Over recent years support to young people who find themselves NEET has grown, through a mix of funding streams and internal investment in programmes.

Worcestershire County Council continues to utilise its internal capacity to invest alongside Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership in the prevention agenda, investing in Careers planning support for Schools through the Careers and Enterprise Company Programme and initiatives that support Apprenticeships and Careers advice for 16–24-year-olds. The partnership ensured that all educational establishments in the county with year 7 students and above were involved. Specific focus has been made to include our Special Educational Need and Alternative Provision Free Schools to ensure the in balance of our most vulnerable is addressed. The resulting efforts ensuring that education establishments in Worcestershire have one of the highest results in the country and that over the last ten years around 100'000 school aged young people have been advised around apprenticeships and 50'000 young people have commenced programmes.

Funds have also been brought forward through sources such as DWP and UK Shared Prosperity Funds to focus on Youth unemployment and those young people aged 16-24 who need advice and support on next steps. Careers Worcestershire, through its dynamic careers hubs, serves as a vital support system for young people aged 16-24 across Worcestershire, providing individualised careers advice and guidance. Our transformative impact has influenced national policy, leading to the requirement that all new DWP hubs offer health and wellbeing support alongside the traditional careers and employment offer. This change is driven by the success of Worcestershire's approach, where the provision of personalised one-to-one support has significantly benefitted young people,

allowing them to manage wellbeing and break down barriers to work. Over the past two years, we have engaged with over 600 young people, with more than 250 successfully securing employment and directly transforming their futures. As part of this workstream specific focus has been on care leavers from the local authority and offering personalised support to those young people working closely with colleagues in social care including running a pilot programme for Apprenticeships for care leavers. This approach will continue to be built on in future funding years.

Specific focus has also been made on those most vulnerable and Worcestershire over the last two years has focused on doubling the number of supported internships it has in county, reaching 70 in its intake for 2024, meaning that more young people with EHCPs are given employer encounters whilst in education and move into employment destinations. This focus has also been part of our internal Learning Services team for Young Adult Learning reforming the service it offers to focus on young people with social, emotional mental health needs for its study programmes and creating a cohort of supported interns within the local NHS Worcester Acute Hospital.

To support this drive the focus on prevention for young people with Education, Health Care plans has been enhanced, alongside the activities that continue in our SEND and mainstream schools, students are now invited annually to a Life Beyond School event and a library of resources is now available to highlight the opportunities available to these students.

These investments alongside the continuous review of programmes and projects designed specifically to support young people at risk and those who are NEET shows the commitment of Worcestershire County Council to the agenda.

The Council recognises that short term funding is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does challenge the successes that can be offered through more flexible and different approaches to fitting into the funding agenda and constantly evaluates its position, resourcing and programmes in this area of work.

WCC are committed to continuing to seek funding and resources for the prevention and cure of NEET across County and as such will continue to apply for bids as it can find.

Governance

NEET Strategy Group

Worcestershire County Council intend that this strategy will underpin the maintenance and further development of mutually beneficial working relationships with schools, colleges, other providers of education and training and our partner organisations such as DWP, health etc. This will result in shared ownership of these priorities and that responsibility for NEET prevention and reduction does not become too narrowly focused on particular services, agencies or individuals.

There is already a strong focus on improving partnership working across Worcestershire County Council and its directorates, for this reason a NEET Strategy Group which involves representatives from Social Care, SEND, the Education Engagement service, the Virtual School Headteacher, tracking teams, Health and Education has been set up to lead on this agenda. This team identified priority leads within the directorates of the council to facilitate NEET delivery plans specific to their area of work formed through this strategy and the priorities identified. This group of priority leads will then meet as a delivery group, seeking efficiencies and potential cross working to improve the outcomes of the overall approach. This approach to delivery will then look to embrace outside agencies over the length of the plans, looking to embrace further health, involve FE colleges, school personnel, the community and voluntary sector, DWP and Youth Offending Service etc.

Delivery Plans will be implemented across the following areas: -

- Education – Virtual School
- Social Care - Care Leavers
- NEET Prevention – Careers Education in Schools
- NEET Support – Education Engagement – Tracking, Data and Engagement
- NEET Support - Education and Careers Programmes
- Education - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Procurement – identifying Social Value opportunities

Alongside this group, several working groups will be held to case work specific cases through our Missing Mondays and Social Work case conferences, these will focus on solutions. It will be through these working and the focus on every young person that the greatest impact in reducing NEETs and Unknowns will be made.

The NEET Strategy Group has informed the development of this strategy and associated delivery plans and will act as a steering group and in a monitoring role. This strategy and plans are dynamic working documents and additional actions will be added as required in order to support NEET prevention and reduction going forward.

This group will report to the relevant strategic groups (e.g. Worcestershire County Council Scrutiny, Children and Young People Plan Strategic Board, Open for Business Board, WLEP Employment and Skills Board, Corporate Parenting Board, etc.)



Right Provision in the right place at the right time – developing an inclusive education system accessible to all.

Worcestershire is committed to help all young people 'achieve whatever they are capable of achieving, irrespective of socio-economic background, gender, race or levels of ability and disability'. In defining 'achievement' to encompass a wide range of talents and abilities, in targeting resources towards certain groups of learners, and in constantly improving the Education offer in the county.

The NEET strategy reflects the need for an inclusive education system and support in identifying gaps within the county for our most vulnerable young people, this includes where appropriate identifying solutions and proactively seeking new solutions that support the breakdown of young people's barriers to entering education in the first place such as physical health, mental health, family circumstances, rural locations and behavioural challenges.

This also includes the need for preventative measures to ensure young people do not become NEET through improved support in schools both in careers advice and guidance and employer experiences but also in the challenge of decisions made in educational establishments that can affect a young person's education pathways.



Strategic Priorities

This Strategy is owned by Worcestershire County Council and focuses on continuously improving performance in identifying, engaging and effectively supporting those that are NEET or at risk of becoming so that all young people can reach their full potential. There will be a particular focus on more vulnerable groups. The strategy aims to: -

- Develop and maintain a corporate focus, sense of ownership and accountability for achieving ambitions for the NEET group.
- Further develop multi-partner ownership of the achievement of key aims of this strategy and contribution to the achievement of key objectives of both Open for Business and the Children and Young Peoples plan.
- Continue to understand the NEET cohort better, through effective data gathering and performance monitoring to support achievement of key aims. Utilise case studies and deep dives to understand the data detail.
- Continue to develop and maintain robust and joined up identification and tracking arrangements to support improved performance.
- Ensure the right provision is available at the right time to meet the needs of NEET young people.
- Influence the development and commissioning of provision for NEET groups.
- Work with partners to unblock the barriers young people have to Education and Employment.
- Focus on those young people most at risk of becoming NEET to reduce inequality between vulnerable groups and their peers.



Priority 1 : Focus on the most vulnerable

- Develop a good understanding of the most vulnerable young people and facilitate the development of pathways that ensure that those most in need of targeted interventions are identified and supported in the most appropriate, timely and effective way.
- Ensure that all our Looked after children and Care leavers receive individually tailored, ongoing support, information and guidance.
- Understand the needs of our SEND young people in the future to facilitate appropriate provision locally.
- Establish new pathways for young people with SEND to move into employment such as supported internships and apprenticeships for all.
- Ensure that all young people at risk are given quality careers support in their education settings to identify early concerns.

Young people who, due to a variety of reasons and circumstances are most vulnerable are also most likely to become NEET.

Worcestershire County Council are continuously increasing our understanding of the cohort of most vulnerable young people and facilitating the development of operational pathways that ensure that those most in need of targeted interventions are identified and supported in the most appropriate and effective way. Due to the continued success of more creative and targeted approaches to identification and tracking, the number of young people requiring such intervention and support is accurately known. However, there is still work to be done in improving the way our teams work with that support and how we interact with the education providers to improve the experiences of our young people.

Many, but not all of these risk indicators are included in the components of the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) tool refreshed in 2022 and inform targeting of work by the education establishments to ensure focus is given to our most vulnerable.

However, there are multiple factors and characteristics that need to be recognised in order to ensure that the right support is made available to those who need it most and to improve outcomes.

Vulnerable groups include those who are:

- Looked After , leaving Care or on the edge of Care
- With Special Educational Needs / Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
- Being excluded or at risk of exclusion from school
- Attending a school that is in an “Inadequate” category of concern
- From a minority ethnic background, including those from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community
- Arriving in the UK and having English as a second language
- Missing education

- Being Electively Home Educated
- In ill health, including hospitalisation affecting school attendance
- Already NEET
- Involved in or affected by Drug or alcohol abuse
- Teenage Parents
- Offenders or at risk of offending
- Young Carers
- Affected by their own or their parents/carers mental health issues
- Living in inappropriate or inadequate accommodation
- Refugees

Worcestershire has a corporate parenting responsibility for many children and young people, and it is very important that they are prioritised for preventative support as a vulnerable group. This starts with the annual school's conversation around their RONIs and identifying appropriate support interventions for them from within the educational establishments and through partners in wider Worcestershire organisations.

From the current population of the county's care leavers 47% are NEET [June 2024], therefore as part of the governance and reporting structure supporting this strategy, progress against priorities will be a regular item on the agenda of Corporate Parenting Board meetings.

This work will be taken forward through the county working to build an inclusive education offer, recognising that every young person has the opportunity to thrive in our county.



Priority 2: Looking forward - Linking with Business and the Economy

- Continue to strengthen links and identify interdependencies between the agenda and the stakeholders working with employers and ensure that strategic and operational fit is achieved, strengthened and duplication or competition avoided.
- Deliver the Careers and Enterprise company programme in Worcestershire cooperation the wider Employment and Skills Agenda
- Deliver the Inclusive Worcestershire agenda to increase inclusive employment opportunities for residents
- Build the strength of employers in Worcestershire to support the NEET agenda and recruit young people
- Ensure that synergies are achieved, and duplication or competition avoided in developing new initiatives and making external funding bids.
- Widening the awareness of social value and its role for vulnerable groups, expanding the reach and appeal of such opportunities and encouraging employers and stakeholders to “go the extra mile”.

The business community and related stakeholders have a key role to play in providing opportunities for work experience placements, education programme work placements, supported internships, apprenticeships and long-term employment for young people. Worcestershire County Council are working to strengthen these links through our procurement and contracting, it is therefore important that the interdependencies between the County Council’s agenda, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, District Councils and other local partnerships are identified, and collaborative working enhanced further.

Worcestershire County Council through its’ partnership with the LEP on the Inspiring Worcestershire programme seeks to identify the employment needs of the labour market and the expectations of employers around skills levels and behaviours in Worcestershire communicating these needs to its young residents. This supports young people and their parents in planning their future careers planning and ensuring that the needs are met of our employers in county.

This strategy and its associated action plans and governance arrangements has the potential to establish and maintain an overview of the priorities and current or potential contributions of the wide range of stakeholders that can make a difference to the opportunities available to Worcestershire’s young people and the county’s economy.

Priority 3: Right service provision

- Continued emphasis on September Guarantee and the tracking and identification of all young people aged 16-18 in Worcestershire.
- Continue to understand the NEET cohort better, through effective data gathering and performance monitoring to support achievement of key aims.
- Mapping of all educational services available to young people in Worcestershire for 16-24-year-olds.
- Support Educational establishments to provision plan and support future cohorts through building effective working relationships with post 16 providers with particular emphasis around vulnerable groups.
- Continued focus on the work of Young Adult Learning within Worcestershire County Council and development of the offer to fill gaps in provision outside of mainstream for 16-18 or up to 25 with Special Educational Needs to offer employability training using Study Programmes and Supported Internships in residents' communities.
- Support the delivery of services to enable young people aged 16-24 to have access to careers support and advice within the county.
- Develop the Local offer within the county to signpost more young people with SEND to understand Post 16 and Post 18 options
- Work with Public Health, Health and the Community Trusts to support the delivery of a range of programmes and address any health-related barriers that prevent young people moving forward when NEET.
- Engage Education stakeholders in the County to develop more innovative and cost-effective provision to support drive towards employment for young people with SEND.

In addition, focussed action to engage local service delivery partners is being increased. Regular meetings will take place with key stakeholders such as the Further Education College, Education settings such as Schools and Alternative Provisions, DWP, local social housing providers, district councils, health and voluntary sector to ensure that solutions and support is aligned in the county.

Worcestershire County Council has commenced a NEET delivery forum for active employment, health and training providers in this space, looking to break down barriers and address challenges seen in the marketplace to compliment activity and seek solutions.

Worcestershire County Council will also continue to develop the Inclusive Worcestershire agenda to ensure that more opportunities are available in areas such as supported internships both internally from the councils Learning Services and external providers.



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