

CONNEXIONS INTENSIVE SERVICE REVIEW

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio	Education and Children's Services
Officer Contact	Tom Murphy, Education and Children's Services
Papers with report	Appendix one: Connexions Intensive Service model options Appendix two: Revised resource deployment proposals

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To report the outcomes of a review of the Connexions Intensive Service
Contribution to our plans and strategies	The provision of Connexions services contributes to priorities and outcomes as detailed in: The Council Plan; The Sustainable Communities Strategy 208 – 2018; and The Children and Families Trust Plan.
Financial Cost	There are no additional costs associated with implementing the outcomes of this review other than those being met through the existing budget for this service area. If enacted the review will generate an efficiency saving of £101,000 in accordance with MTFF savings requirements placed upon the Connexions Service.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Education and Children's Service Policy Overview Committee
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Note the outcomes of the review and the associated conclusions contained within the main body of the report; and
2. Agree the proposal to re-organise the existing service and create a new service delivery model described as options two in appendix one. The associated resource deployment proposals are presented in appendix two; and
3. Agree to further consideration of the Connexions Intensive Service as part of a wider review of services for young people within the Business Improvement Delivery (BID) Project.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The recommendations have been arrived at following a detailed review of the Connexions Intensive Service. They are offered in order to address the findings of the review and secure improved service effectiveness and efficiency. The options have been considered within the context of the Business Improvement Development (BID) project although the review was initiated and completed prior to BID. The changes proposed sit within the integrated service delivery model of the Youth and Connexions Service. This model can be seen on page two of appendix one. The review of the Connexions Intensive Service is part of an ongoing youth service transformation process, which has seen significant development and service improvement over the past five years.

Alternative options considered / risk management

Three service re-configuration options were considered during the review process. Options one and three were viewed as the least favourable by the Connexions (IAG) Steering Group and the Integrated Youth Support Service Steering Group, the two primary bodies overseeing the work of Connexions in Hillingdon, as they were felt to present the highest level of risk and least amount of business benefits of the three given the context in which the service is being developed. Option three, re-specifying and tendering for the service externally, is an option that may be considered as part of the process of re-tendering for the main Universal Connexions Service contract which is due to expire on 31st March 2011.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

None at this stage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Service Background

The Connexions Service: Its Purpose and History

1. The Connexions Service was established in 2001 in response to the vision set out in the Social Exclusion Unit's report *Bridging the Gap* and the White Paper *Learning to Succeed*. These documents proposed the creation of a more co-ordinated youth support service to address problems and issues faced by young people, and in particular those not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming so.
2. Reducing the proportion of 16-18 year olds NEET is therefore, the primary focus for the Service. This has been addressed in the main by the impartial information, advice, guidance, support, brokerage and advocacy role of the personal adviser (PA) as a single point of contact for the individual young person. The service brief is to provide support to all young people encompassing the careers advice and guidance function, whilst also providing more intensive and targeted support to those most at risk of disaffection and thereby becoming NEET.

3. Arrangements for the operational delivery of Connexions services have historically been facilitated through regional partnerships. National policy has not been prescriptive in terms of the exact nature of partnership arrangements, with a variety of models developed and applied. Hillingdon's Connexions Service has been coordinated through a partnership of six West London boroughs with the sub-regional accountability for the securing of Connexions services resting with Connexions London West (CXLW), a Company Limited by Guarantee. CXLW discharged this responsibility through a contract delivery model, commissioning a range of providers including local authority services to offer the service.

4. Responsibility for the securing of Connexions services was transferred to Hillingdon Council following a review of partnership arrangements initiated as a consequence of major budgetary pressures, which could be offset through transfer of responsibility to local authorities. Cabinet approved this transfer in October 2004. National policy has followed the course of direction taken in West London, and as a consequence the responsibility for securing Connexions services is now a statutory requirement placed upon all local authorities. The full terms of reference for the securing of Connexions services by local authorities are set out in 'The Specification for services', available as '*Background Document One*' to this report..

5. The then Youth and Community Service took direct responsibility for the delivery of Connexions services on behalf of the Council. A minor level of organisation change was initiated with the Youth and Community Service to accommodate the change in accountabilities.

6. Revised arrangements have enabled services to be maintained between 2004 and 2008 with the Service largely remaining the same as under previous management arrangements described below.

6.1 The Hillingdon Connexions service is delivered through a range of contracts and Service Level Agreements, primarily:

- 6.1.1 A core contract with a specialist guidance company to deliver more universally available services to young people, with a significant focus on information, advice and guidance;
- 6.1.2 Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with other Council departments and functions to provide more intensive support to specialised groups such as young offenders, looked after young people and those with behaviour/attendance issues at school; and
- 6.1.3 Contracts with community and voluntary groups to provide more intensive support to specialised groups such as refugees and asylum seekers and teenage mothers.

7. The majority of these contracts and Service Level Agreements have been in place since the start of Connexions in 2002. In general terms the overall performance of the service has been good. The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) has been significantly reduced and a valued level of support has been provided to young people in Hillingdon.

8. Although the Service has been effectively maintained it has been clear for some time that current arrangements for the management and delivery of services would benefit from review. Change in national policy as articulated in a range of documents including the amended Education and Skills Act 2006, Youth Matters, Youth Matters: Next Steps, 14 – 19 policy reform and the more recent Aiming High for Young People Strategy added further impetus to the need to assess arrangements for the provision of Connexions services within the context of a national drive to strengthen the integration of support services for young people. Local developments including the creation of the Education and Children's Directorate and a Children and Families Trust provided the local context for review and reform. The current economic climate and the associated impact on employment opportunities for young people is another contextual issue informing the review and its outcomes.

9. This report is concerned with the outcomes of a review of the Connexions Service in Hillingdon. The review comprised two component parts, a review of the Universal Service, providing the majority of Connexions services primarily through schools and a review of the Intensive Service, providing support for young people with significant and multiple barriers to progression. The review of the Universal Service was completed in September 2008. The overall process should be seen within the context of a move to more closely align services to discreet levels of needs. Further details on the segmentation of services in response to need is available as '*Background Document Two*'. This report centres on the outcomes of the review of the Intensive Service.

10. The Intensive Service Review was initiated in 2007. A great deal of work was undertaken during the initial stages however changes in personnel and resultant loss in capacity hindered its completion. This deficiency was addressed and the review has now been completed. The recommendations offered have been informed by the consolidated outcomes of current and previous work undertaken over the past 2 years.

Review Purpose

11. To assess the effectiveness of current arrangements for the provision of Intensive Connexions Support Services and enable service improvement.

Aims

12. To review existing arrangements for the provision of Intensive Connexions services;
13. To assess the relative merits and constraints of current arrangements; and
14. To offer options and recommendations for the improvement of services offered.

Review Methodology

The review process has included:

15. Desktop analysis of national research and interrogation of performance data;
16. A detailed and independently evaluated assessment of contract performance and resource deployment;
17. Analysis of organisational management arrangements and systems;

18. An assessment of stakeholder views through a series of structured workshops and meetings with key local partners including current contractors and practitioners, young people, schools and representatives of local young people services and interest groups; and

19. Analysis of national research concerned with the provision of effective intensive support services.

Review Stages

20. The review was undertaken using the following staged process:

20.1 Stage one: Consideration of national research and best practice;

20.2 Stage two: Consideration of local research and data analysis relating to the Intensive Service client group and their outcomes;

20.3 Stage three: An assessment of the current Intensive Service configuration and deployment, and an evaluation of its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the target client group; and

20.4 Stage four: An assessment of existing organisational management arrangements and systems and their effectiveness in enabling and ensuring effective service delivery.

Conclusions

21. Stage One: Consideration of National Research and Best Practice. High performance in the following theme areas are recognised as the key characteristics of an effective Intensive Connexions Service:

21.1 Comprehensive data mapping and needs assessment;

21.2 Early intervention and preventative action;

21.3 Effective targeting of resources;

21.4 Good practice in the role and deployment of the personal adviser for the provision of advocacy, brokerage and information, advice and guidance;

21.5 Robust and effective referral and data sharing among partners; and

21.6 Building capacity of Personal Advisors to provide quality data.

22. Summary findings arising from stage one of the review:

22.1 Client need is identified and understood in general terms although the quality and analysis of local data is not sufficiently strong to enable consistently effective forensic use;

22.2 The majority of existing Intensive Service contractors appear, and perceive themselves as providers of 'preventative services' although the nature and quality is more anecdotal than evidence based;

22.3 Resources are loosely targeted in response to a perceived need although the apportionment appears to be primarily historically based;

22.4 PA practise and deployment is inconsistent and variable; and

- 23.5 Referral, tracking, information sharing and data inputting is inconsistent.
- 24.6 In many instances the Intensive Service is providing valued support to young people with a variety of needs, in a range of appropriate settings. The Service is not however providing a consistent service to the intended client group in a manner that leads to clear and evidenced outcomes. The above listed areas for development require focused attention in order strengthen the Service's capacity to improve outcomes for the young people it seeks to serve.

23. Stage Two: Consideration of local research and data analysis. This stage of the process was concerned with understanding the local service context in relation to 'the NEET position' in Hillingdon. Supporting data for this stage of the process can be found in '*Background Document Three*' to this report..

24. Summary findings arising from stage two of the review:

- 24.1 A significant level of NEET reduction has been achieved over the past three years although this has reached a plateau;
- 24.2 There is little evidence to suggest the current Intensive Service has made a significant contribution to this reduction other than an anecdotal impact on NEET levels through preventative work;
- 24.3 A disproportionate amount of NEET to EET success has been achieved by the Universal Service as opposed to the Intensive Service;
- 24.4 There is a clear correlation between poor attainment and NEET risk;
- 24.5 There is a clear correlation between sustained EET and employment without training;
- 24.6 NEET 'churn rate' is relatively high;
- 24.7 There is a clear correlation between given localities, certain schools and NEET 'hot-spots';
- 24.8 There is evidence to suggest that young people with learning, difficulties and disabilities amongst other vulnerable groups and white young people would benefit from more effective support to enable their progression as they feature disproportionately in the NEET group;
- 24.9 There is evidence to suggest that the outcomes for some client groups are being positively impacted upon through PA interventions secured through current arrangements.

25. Analysis of findings relating to this stage of the process suggests that:

- 25.1 Greater focus on NEET to EET outcomes is required in order to achieve a further and sustained impact in NEET reduction;
- 25.2 A more detailed understanding of NEET patterns, trends and underlying causes should be developed to inform future deployment of resources;

- 25.3 In some instances deployment of PA resource through internal and external partner agencies has had evidenced impact on NEET reduction. Successful practice should be built upon and replicated; and
- 25.4 An appropriate balance needs to be achieved between resources deployed to meet the needs of a specific target group and more generic preventative services.

26. Stage Three: An assessment of the current Intensive Service and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the target client group. This aspect of the process relates to a detailed analysis of contract monitoring activity the outline of which can be found in '*Background Document Four*' to this report.

27. Summary findings arising from stage three of the review:

- 27.1 There appears to be 'added value' in external contractual arrangements although this is not consistently translating to evidenced outcomes in most cases;
- 27.2 Contractor performance is good in places although in general it is inconsistent and does not coherently and cohesively deliver against the core Connexions Service performance target of reducing the number of young people NEET;
- 27.3 Contractor focus on core Connexions business is deficient;
- 27.4 Contractor NEET to EET performance, a part from a few notable exceptions, is deficient and represents questionable value for money;
- 27.5 Resource deployment against need appears imbalanced; and
- 27.6 Data inputting by contractors is inconsistent and results in associated weaknesses in forensic analysis of management information.

28. Analysis of findings relating to this stage of the process suggests that:

- 28.1 A 'mixed economy' of service providers can add value to the service if the 'host' service is effectively managed and the personal adviser resource remains focused on Connexions core business;
- 28.2 The contracting process requires strengthening including the specification of services required together with clear determination of outcomes the contractual arrangement seeks to secure;
- 28.3 The Service needs to consider how best to deploy its resource to maximise on the potential added value secured through external contracts whilst minimising the risk of dilution of focus on Connexions core business;
- 28.4 The Service needs to strengthen its enabling and ensuring function in order to achieve the required level of NEET to EET outcomes; and
- 28.5 The Service needs to redress the apparent imbalance in resource deployment and focus on commonly agreed priority areas of need.

29. Stage four: An assessment of existing organisational management arrangements and their effectiveness in delivering the best possible service. This stage of the process considered the efficacy of management arrangements for the strategic leadership and organisational management of the Intensive Service.

30. Summary findings arising from stage four of the review:

- 30.1 The Connexions Service was successfully transferred to Hillingdon Council in 2004. Despite the swiftness of change and limited opportunity to plan for the transfer, the service has largely been well maintained with performance improving post transition.
- 30.2 Limited managerial capacity post transition has impacted on service development 2005 – 2008;
- 30.3 Insufficient capacity has been afforded to the contract management and quality assurance function of the service whole;
- 30.4 Although contractual arrangements have been strengthened, contract compliance has been inconsistently achieved and ensured;
- 30.5 Contractual arrangements are not sufficiently focused on:
 - Preventative work pre-16 which will clearly demonstrates a reduction in potential NEETs post-16;
 - Moving young people from NEET to EET; and
 - Ensuring young people who are EET and who are at significant risk of becoming NEET are supported to remain in EET.
- 30.6 Operational leadership and co-ordination of the Intensive Service requires development;
- 30.7 Management information systems have been strengthened although processes are not consistently applied; and
- 30.8 Specification of intensive service requires strengthening including enhancing the focus on NEET to EET outcomes and differentiating between pre-16 preventative and post 16 targeted work.

31. Analysis of findings arising from this stage of the process suggests that:

- 31.1 Connexions Service management capacity and function has largely remained unaltered since the Service became the responsibility of the Local Authority. The increase in responsibility has not been matched with sufficient managerial capacity to develop the Service in order to sustain recent success in NEET reduction. This situation has been compounded by periodic gaps in managerial capacity over the past three years;
- 31.2 The capacity to initiate change at a managerial level has been limited. This has resulted in historic and in part ineffective arrangements for service delivery remaining in place. As a consequence the Service has largely been maintained as opposed to developed;

- 31.3 Recent added capacity has led to the strengthening of the Service both in terms of leadership and organisational management. A full service review, improved contracts, a strengthening of data collection and analysis and enhancement of contract monitoring has led to service improvement. This direction of travel needs to be maintained through further improvement in managerial capacity coupled with a needs led process of service specification and resource deployment;
- 31.4 The disparate nature of contractual arrangements has not engendered a 'team approach' to the existing 'virtual' Intensive Service Team. This has to some degree compromised its performance. The absence of capacity to provide strong operational leadership of the Service has also contributed to areas of underachievement highlighted in this report. The uncertainty of annual contracting arrangements has also influenced the difficulties experienced within the Intensive Service;
- 31.5 The location of the Intensive Service within the Youth and Connexions Service and the wider family of integrated youth support service providers has supported the securing of good outcomes. This should be built upon by fostering a collegiate Intensive Service approach shaped by a common team purpose as part of developing integrated youth support service arrangements; and
- 31.6 Referral and tracking systems are in place for the universal service but are not consistently applied across the Intensive Service. This situation needs to be rectified in order to ensure young people are receiving swift and effective support.

32. The findings and associated summary analysis as detailed have informed the recommendations offered in this report. It should be noted that many of the areas for development discussed related to wider strategic activity in relation to NEET reduction that are currently being progressed by the 14 – 19 Strategy Group and the Connexions (IAG) Steering Group through the development of a NEET Reduction Strategy. The provision of effective Intensive Connexions services is an integral component of a collaborative, multi-agency approach to NEET reduction. This report advocates that the recommendations presented are acted upon in order to maintain the momentum of recently achieved service improvement.

Financial Implications

33. The proposed organisational changes are needed to generate an efficiency saving of £101,000 in accordance with MTFF savings requirements within the Connexions Service.

34. The proposal is to achieve the saving in intensive service costs by transferring the function and absorbing the cost of personal adviser support to young people with learning difficulties and disabilities within the universal service and guidance company contract and by re-organising the support currently provided to young people under existing arrangements.

35. There are no additional costs associated with implementing the outcomes of this review other than those being met through the existing budget for this service area.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

36. Acting upon the recommendations proposed will lead to an improvement in services provided to young people who require additional support to secure the best possible outcomes. The actions proposed will lead to increased value for money by ensuring that resources deployed generate specific and clearly defined outcomes and address service priorities. The review has shown that the Council is not securing value for money under current arrangements with the investment being made through many partners not translating into satisfactory performance outcomes.

37. The recommendations propose the reduction or withdrawal of resources from some voluntary groups. Approval of the recommendations offered in this report will lead to significant changes to the current delivery model. These include the re-deployment of some resources currently located in voluntary services and partner agencies and the transfer of staff to direct Council management through the Youth and Connexions Service. All relevant groups have been engaged in order to determine the potential impact of implementing the recommendations arising from the review. Consultation is also taking place between Council Officers to determine the impact that withdrawal of support may have on organisations who are dependant on a range of support from different Council departments. An impact assessment and risk analysis has been carried out and is detailed in appendix three. An Equalities Impact Assessment has also been carried out and is attached as '*Background Document Five*' to this report..

38. Local business will also benefit from the strengthening of the Connexions Intensive Service. Revised arrangements will ensure that young people are effectively supported to access local employment and training and receive the level of support they need to sustain their engagement.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

39. The contents of this report, and the recommendations made, have been informed by a wide-ranging consultation exercise. The process has obtained the views of young people, contractors, partners and other stakeholders. A secondary process of consultation has also been undertaken to assess the impact of implementing the proposals arising from the review. Details are attached as '*Background Document Six*' to this report..

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance Comments

40. The review of the Connexions Intensive Service has been a detailed review that is effectively an extension of the Service Review for the whole of Education and Children's Services reported to Cabinet in June 2008. The review has largely taken place within the service and department and its direct partners with limited support required from corporate review functions and resources.

41. The saving of £101k referred to in the financial implications are delivered initially through the transfer of functions to the universal advice and guidance contract already approved by Cabinet in July 2008 and are consistent with the revenue budget proposals for 2010/11 presented to elsewhere on this Cabinet agenda.

42. The subsequent realignment of posts within the department to better support identified areas of need is due for implementation in September 2010, and the full year effect of this reorganisation may result in a further savings for 2011/12 beyond those identified in the financial table in Appendix 2. This will be monitored as part of the Business Improvement Delivery project for Education & Children's Services.

Corporate Procurement

43. The comments and recommendations made in this report are noted and supported by Corporate Procurement. Enablement of the recommended organisational and supplier changes advised by this review will need to be made in accordance with the appropriate terms and conditions of the relevant supplier contracts, for example notice periods and relevant TUPE conditions.

Where appropriate, revised scope and specification of services to be provided will need to be incorporated into revised supplier contracts to ensure that the outcomes of these recommendations are successfully monitored and delivered.

Legal Comments

44. Under the Education and Skills Act 2008 as amended the Council is under a statutory duty to provide Connexions support services to young people aged 13 – 19 and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities up to the age of 25 within the borough; there are approximately 23,000 young people within this age banding who may receive support from the Service, either in School or through intensive support provided through a number of agencies.

45. This report is proposing a re-organisation of the intensive aspect of the service which will involve a significant change in the way in which it is delivered but will also yield significant savings. Under the Council's Constitution it is Cabinet that has the appropriate authority to agree this recommendation.

Relevant Service Groups

46. All relevant service groups have been engaged in the consultation process and continue to be involved through the stakeholder groups overseeing the provision of Connexions services.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Available upon request:

Background document one: Connexions Service specification

Background document two: Connexions Service segmentation proposal

Background document three: NEET patterns and trends

Background document four: Contract monitoring report

Background document five: Equalities Impact Assessment

Background document six: Consultation summary