

**Positive Destinations
Report by Kenneth Lawrie, Chief Executive****1 Purpose of Report**

The aim of this report is to inform Council on the action being taken to address the issue of Positive Destinations and to make recommendations for further action.

2. Background

Despite continuing progress in recent years in reducing unemployment levels amongst school leavers, Midlothian was the second poorest performing Community Planning Partnership area for school leavers in Scotland (4.2% below national average) in March 2013. The overall percentage of Midlothian school leavers going to positive destinations has increased from 78.4% in 2009 to 85.7% at 2013.

For the last five years, Midlothian has consistently had higher than the national average percentage of leavers going into employment, training and voluntary work while the numbers of young people going into Higher and Further Education remains below the national average with very wide variations between the secondary schools.

3. Action being taken

The issue of positive destinations has been identified as one of three key early priorities in the Single Midlothian Plan approved by the Council in March 2013 and agreed by the Community Planning Partnership. The partnership has a critical role in ensuring that the activities of all partners are focused on improvement in this important area. The Midlothian Opportunities for All (OFA) Board has developed a local youth employment strategy. This partnership plan is available through the Community Planning pages of the council website.

In Midlothian, the model of delivery is one of partnership. The public, voluntary and private sectors provide services to support young people to achieve positive destinations, funded by a variety of partners. The council has made significant use of external contract funding and partnership working to enhance the range of opportunities available to young people.

The short term focus of the partnership is on securing positive destinations for the 2012/2013 cohort of school leavers whilst also laying the foundations for significant improvements for the medium to longer term.

Key short term actions include:

- Proactive activity across the partnership to ensure that information on this year's group of school leavers who are at risk of negative destinations is robust. Action planning around each child to find appropriate solutions is in progress.

- Links with Further Education Colleges have been strengthened to increase accessibility for young people. This has included better information on courses at Borders College as well as Edinburgh College.
- The implementation of the new “vocational academies” on offer from the Queen Margaret University / Edinburgh College partnership as a result of the £4.5 million grant awarded to them. The initial Midlothian academies will be Tourism and Hospitality and Health and Social Care. Very early planning work is underway.
- Significant progress has been made across council services in delivering the council’s own commitment to offering work placements for young people. New offers of work placements have been made by a range of services including Roads, Libraries, Community Care, Housing, Human Resources and Landscape Services. To date 60 new placements have been made available. Further development work continues to broaden the number of post school placements for unemployed young people across the range of occupational types within the Council.
- Agreement has been reached to ensure that posts identified through the current ‘MiFuture’ recruitment process at entry level are offered as potential training places to participants in council training programmes who meet basic entry requirements.
- Significant success has been achieved in the recent Lasswade High Centre School procurement. The project created three modern apprenticeships, 10 school work experience places, and 96 new jobs for Midlothian residents. The Council Procurement Strategy includes provision for community benefit clauses targeted at securing training and development opportunities and work is underway to strengthen these in an updated Procurement Strategy to ensure greater opportunities over the range of contracts let by the Council.
- Sixteen additional Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) have been advertised by Corporate Resources to date, and work is developing to increase the number of MAs that can be funded by Skills Development Scotland in Midlothian Council.
- Proposals have been developed to establish a 25 place ‘council only funded’ post school vocational training programme to add to the Skills Development Scotland programmes currently operated by Midlothian Training Services (MTS). This is similar to the model currently operated by the City of Edinburgh Council, under the banner of the Edinburgh Guarantee; with many of the trainees placed within the council adding value to the organisation by delivering aspects of required work whilst in training and receiving a trainee allowance. This approach has a proven track record of successful delivery and positive destinations for participants in the programmes operated by MTS. It is recommended that this year a 25 place additional programme is funded for one 14 week period as a pilot. Introducing the pilot this year will represent a one off cost of £55,000.

- The council has been successful in securing £300,000 of additional resources to offer recruitment incentives to local employers. Funded by Scottish Government and the European Social Fund, this will be available between August this year and September 2014. This will provide up to 100 additional employment opportunities for young people in Midlothian.

In the medium term a range of new school age interventions will be implemented. They include:

- An increased focus across all schools on the early identification of young people at risk of negative destinations. A hub for interagency pupil centred planning will be implemented in all secondary schools. Active attendance policies that target these pupils and maintain their engagement will reduce the numbers of disengaged pupils who may have had months of inactivity before they leave school.
- Targeting the lowest academically performing 20% with a tailored programme of Level 3 courses, work experience and staged interventions.
- The redesign of the schools vocational programme. This will include the development of a coordinated menu of vocational options for all schools to offer links to the local labour market. It fits very well with key Curriculum for Excellence principles and links young people to the world of work more directly.

In addition through partnership working with the Higher Education and Further education sector the range of accessible opportunities for young people in Midlothian will be increased. Edinburgh College is currently exploring the delivery of a modern apprenticeship level qualification in Life Sciences, linked to the Edinburgh Science Triangle and future employment in the Bio Quarter development at Little France. This is a precursor to the introduction of a life science academy. These developments will increasingly reflect the changing economic environment in Midlothian that will provide more and better employment opportunities for our young people.

In the longer term, achieving positive destinations for all of our young people is inextricably linked with how we develop and improve our schools and the quality of education we offer our young people. Key factors in this include raising expectations of all involved, including all stakeholders and partners. The place of parents and carers in this is important, too. Raising attainment for all of our young people will be a crucial element in our longer term plans.

The locus of this improvement activity will rightly be within schools, and in order to support this work, it is proposed to reintroduce the role of Quality Improvement Manager for a fixed two year period to help lead and drive this improvement.

It is proposed that a further report will be made to the Council later in the financial year setting out progress in respect of positive destinations and any further actions proposed to further improve the performance of the Council and the Community Planning Partnership in respect of this critical issue.

4 Resource

4.1

In addition to the reintroduction of the Quality Improvement Manager post existing staffing resources will be reprioritised to support the continued improvement in positive destinations for young people. The anticipated cost in the current year is £45,000 and this can be met from within the existing Children and Families budget, by utilising the Scheme of Devolved Budget Management Carry Forward from 2012/13. Future years costs will be reflected in the base budget.

The introduction of a 25 place post school vocational additional programme for one 14 week period as a pilot. will represent a one off cost of £55,000. This cost would need to be met from reserves.

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4.2 Risk

The Community Planning Partnership have identified positive destinations as one of the three main priorities they wish to address. The challenge is to achieve additional progress within a very challenging labour market, fewer resources in key partners, and a shifting policy framework of overlapping UK and Scottish agency strategies.

The demands of Curriculum for Excellence and reductions in promoted posts may currently be reducing the ability of secondary schools to focus on taking greater responsibility for post school destinations.

The demands placed on secondary schools at a time of reductions in promoted posts may present short-term challenges in this area. This is a risk that needs to be carefully managed.

The refocusing of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) on ICT based delivery may lead to greater focus on 'at risk' pupils, but this is being combined with reduced staffing resources at a local level.

Scottish Government expects two strategies and action plans which appear to overlap- one "opportunities for all" targets 16-18 year olds, the other "youth employment" targets 16-24 year olds. The DWP now also has a set of UK Government introduced youth employment measures and programmes. There is a risk that these overlapping policies make delivery agencies less clear what is expected of them. It will be important for the council and its partners to manage this effectively at a local level.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☒ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The council and CPP have committed to tackling the positive destinations agenda and reducing youth unemployment.

The Scottish Government statement setting out 'Opportunities for All' recognises that local employability partnerships are best placed to understand and respond to challenges specific to their areas. Partnerships work hard to ensure that their provision is aligned to the needs of local labour markets and to reduce duplication between the supports they offer young people and that offered by national agencies such as Jobcentre Plus.

The Scottish Government has made Community Planning Partnerships key strategic partners in the allocation of European Social Funds to support employability and skills delivery. This has helped locally developed and locally led approaches to be implemented in different parts of Scotland.

4.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The new youth employment strategy local component will need to be developed with the CPP partners. Engagement with schools remains a challenge in terms of achieving collective approaches that enable external partners to deliver from a single programme to a variety of school settings in an equitable and consistent manner. Further work is required to establish a sufficiently flexible single system working with schools and post school agencies that is person rather than establishment centred. The role of parents as partners has not been adequately developed in this area of work, and further work is required to engage them constructively in the interests of their children.

4.6 Ensuring Equalities

The intention of a youth employment strategy is to reduce poverty and disadvantage, and in doing so to promote inclusion. The use of EQIA to assess the impact of the new strategy will ensure appropriate scrutiny of the

extent to which the needs of protected characteristic groups have been taken into account.

4.7 Supporting Sustainable Development

The development of local employment and training access points reduces carbon footprint, the emphasis on local employer links similarly reduces travel to work times and promotes the development of sustainable local economic growth in line with the CPP theme “Sustainable Growth Midlothian”.

The current failure of the SDS national data hub to launch effectively so far leaves a gap in data sharing between the post school providers and Councils. Integrated data systems for work placements have not been able to be developed in the post school environment due to competitive outcome based funding which discourages providers from sharing placements that they have developed through long term customer relationship management with other who might then be able to take a commercial advantage.

4.8 IT Issues

Improved internal arrangements for single system working are required to ensure council staff working with young adults have access to relevant personal data held in these systems to improve their ability to deliver effective interventions in full knowledge of challenges faced by participants.

5 Recommendations

Council is requested to:

- Note the progress that has been made by the council and its partners on improving positive school leaver destinations, and specifically the extension by council services of the range of work placement offers to young people.
- Endorse the council-specific actions set out in the report, and seek a further report on progress later in the financial year.
- Require further development of current council community benefit procurement processes, requiring all managers to consider how their contracting activity can assist local employment and vocational skills development.
- Approve a one off supplementary estimate of £55,000 to fund the pilot vocational training programme,

Date 13/3/13

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Background Papers:

Appendices 1