

<b>Committee</b> <b>Overview and Scrutiny</b>	<b>Date</b> <b>9 November 2010</b>	<b>Classification</b> <b>Unrestricted</b>	<b>Report No.</b>	<b>Agenda Item No.</b> <b>8.1</b>
<b>Report of:</b>  <b>Acting Joint Service Head, Scrutiny &amp; Equalities</b>  <b>Originating Officer(s):</b>  <b>Keiko Okawa</b> <b>Scrutiny Policy Officer</b>		<b>Title:</b>  <b>Scrutiny Challenge Session - Raising Participation in Post 16 Learning in Tower Hamlets</b>  <b>Ward(s) affected: All</b>		

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Raising Participation in Post 16 Learning in Tower Hamlets held on 23 September 2010.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and agree the outcomes of the scrutiny challenge session.

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### LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

#### LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background papers

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

None

N/A

### **3. Introduction**

- 3.1 This report provides a summary of the scrutiny challenge session on Raising Participation in Post 16 Learning in Tower Hamlets. This session examined issues around educational participation of 16-18 year olds in Tower Hamlets and the effectiveness of local strategies to raise post 16 participation.
- 3.2 The session was attended by 29 stakeholders, including residents, representatives from schools and Tower Hamlets College, Third Sector organisations that work with young people. Councillors who attended the session were Cllr Rabina Khan (Chair), Cllr Sirajul Islam (Lead Member Regeneration & Employment), Cllr Judith Gardiner, Cllr Anwar Khan, Cllr Kabir Ahmed, Cllr Ahmed Omer and Cllr Shelina Aktar.

### **4. Purpose**

- 4.1 Challenge sessions are designed as a quick way for a group of members to get to grips with key policy issues and to make recommendations for the further development of the policy.

The objectives of this scrutiny challenge session were to:

- Increase understanding of the national and local post 16 participation policies;
- Develop understanding of barriers to certain 16-18 year olds remaining at education, and;
- Make recommendations for the further development of the policy and full engagement in learning as a preparation for adult independence and success.

- 4.2 The challenge session was structured as follows:

- Chaired by Cllr Rabina Khan (Scrutiny Lead – Prosperous Community);
- Wendy Forrest (Director, the Hub) introduced issues around Participation in Post 16 Learning and four main activity strands in Tower Hamlets;
- Shah Hydar (Deputy Young Mayor) presented on the barriers to 16-18 year olds remaining in education;
- Break away sessions - Attendants split into four groups. First, each discussed priorities of each strand below. Then, the groups looked at other groups' priorities and agreed top priorities across all the four strands:
  1. Improve early educational experience
  2. Offer new qualifications and routes to success
  3. Offer personalised and integrated support
  4. Effective LA leadership
- Group feedback of the discussion outcomes.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1 Ensuring all young people stay in education and training is crucial to their development and employability in the future, which could help mitigate and break the cycle of poverty. Evidence shows that people leaving learning at the age of 16 are disproportionately from poor families and there is a strong correlation between becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) and engaging in risky behaviours, having poor health and low income. In a fast changing global economy, by 2020, there will be three million fewer low skilled jobs in Britain than there are today. Responding to this, the Government established the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) policy, which is that all young people will continue in education or training to the age of 17 from 2013 and to the age of 18 from 2015.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.2 Local authorities have responsibility for the planning and strategic commissioning of provision for 16-19 year olds and young people up to the age of 25 where a learning difficulty assessment is in place. The Coalition government has promised flexibility of 14-19 provision but recent announcements remove the funding of 16-19 learning from local authorities and so potential leverage to improve educational participation of young people.
- 5.3 Tower Hamlets has a strong record of educational improvement; however, youth unemployment continues to be amongst the highest in London and this educational success is not matched by success in the labour market. At 18, young people in Tower Hamlets appear to have a higher chance of claiming benefits than they do of progressing to university.
- 5.4 There are groups in the borough whose participation is of greater concern. In Tower Hamlets, boys are less likely to remain in learning than girls<sup>2</sup> and white young people participate less than Bangladeshi youngsters and are over-represented in the NEET cohort. Vulnerable young people – those with learning difficulties, involvement with the youth justice system or with caring responsibilities – are all at greater risk on becoming NEET.
- 5.5 In Tower Hamlets, schools identify the Year 11s most at risk at dropping into NEET and these young people receive special transition mentoring to bridge the move from compulsory to post-compulsory learning. In 2009, 144 Year 11s received this support and  $\frac{3}{4}$  progressed successfully. These young people were far more likely than their peers to move on to college rather than school, vocational rather than academic programmes and to foundation or Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) rather than Level 3 (A level equivalent) study. The same level and type of provision is needed in order to address the learning needs of the most challenged young people at 17 and 18.

## **6. Key discussion points**

- 6.1 At the meeting participants were given presentations by Wendy Forrest (Director, the Hub – Tower Hamlets 14-19 Partnership) and Shah Hydar (Deputy Young Mayor). The participants were introduced to the four main activity strands (see 6.6) to improve participation in post 16 learning and training in Tower Hamlets.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=57&pid=547&ctype=none&pctype=contents>

<sup>2</sup> This is also a national trend. See, for example, *Policy that works: widening participation for higher education – Working class boys into higher education* (2006) by Action on Access.

- 6.2 It was highlighted that participation in learning and attainment of 16-18 year olds in Tower Hamlets had been considerably improved. Participation in learning of 16 year olds has increased from 84% (2004/05) to 92.6% (2008), and; NEET has decreased from 13% (2004/05) to 6% (2008/09). The increase in participation has improved educational attainment of young people – 19 year olds who attained Level 2 have increased 54% (2004/05) to 70.5% (2008/09).
- 6.3 However, challenges still remain. First, between the ages of 16 and 17, many young people drop out of learning in the borough, even though they continue to participate in learning at the age of 16. In 2008/09, while 92.6% of 16 year olds were in learning, 17 year olds in learning were 86.6%. Second, there is a need to increase post 16 participation in learning further. In 2013 all young people in England will be required to continue in education or training to the age of 17. Tower Hamlets aims to increase 16 year olds participation rate to 98.5% by 2011/12.
- 6.4 The Deputy Young Mayor gave a presentation on barriers for 16-18 year olds remaining in education from young people's point of view. He highlighted financial burden that young people are likely to owe during university education and lack of aspiration for learning and development as the key barriers. He added some young people are more interested in satisfying their desire quickly, such as getting a job to buy a car, rather than studying in university for three years.
- 6.5 He suggested ways to overcome these barriers were to widen course options, support parents and provide varied apprenticeship schemes. Widening course options will help young people choose suitable courses. Parents, once they know the importance and advantages of education, can encourage children to participate in learning further. Various apprenticeship schemes also widen possibilities for young people to succeed in their future development.
- 6.6 The Hub, a partnership of all organisations that offer 14-19 learning in Tower Hamlets, has delivered a shared local learning offer that gives all young people a choice of relevant and stimulating routes to successful and fulfilling lives. For example, the Hub supported the establishment of the Cambridge Heath Sixth Form, the Barnardo's and Old Ford Construction Centres and a wider range of options in school sixth forms to ensure more learners can make a local choice. The Hub has also increased the number of employer-led apprenticeships available to 16-19 year olds, ensuring that more young people are appropriately recruited and supported to succeed. Some of the Hub's key successes on the four activity strands are listed below:

**1. Improve early educational success**

- Supported 130 disaffected learners on the Engagement Programme two days per week to progress into post 16 learning.
- Engaged 10 schools in the Passport to Employability programme. Consequently, 710 learners gain the Work Skills GCSE equivalent qualification.

**2. Offer new qualifications and routes to success**

- Increased apprenticeships for 16-19 year olds and managed a borough-wide recruitment drive. Five hundred young people will take up apprentice places this year.
- Launched new Foundation Learning provision in three sixth forms, the Tower Hamlets College and five work-based learning providers.

### **3. Offer personalised and integrated support**

- Piloted intensive progression support in five schools, supporting 450 learners at risk and provided a transition mentor for more than 150 students.
- Supported 400 NEET young people into learning through the 14-19 Working Neighbourhood Fund programme.

### **4. Effective local authority's leadership**

- Developing local priorities for 16-19 learning based on a thorough needs analysis and planned with all providers.
- Improved the ways in which young people, their families and advisers can explore their opinions and make the right choice.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 All groups strongly agreed the importance of parents and carers' supporting role in young people's decision on their future. Parents and carers need relevant information on young people's future routes, including information on financial support for learning. Such information may be provided through information events such as career evenings for young people and their parents and carers.
- 7.2 It was mentioned that some parents need to become aware of positive outcomes that education can bring to their children. For example, some parents may need to understand young people's social mobility and relocation for study is to be encouraged. Once parents understand the value of learning and training, they can help young people make informed choices when they decide their directions.
- 7.3 Participants also suggested a possibility that parents who received the information could share it with their peer parents and carers. The Council and its partners, including parent support teams, could help parents create forum to discuss and support each other to develop their children's future opportunities. This may help parents continue to support their children for longer term.

**Recommendation 1 – That the borough review and revise their parental engagement policy and develop a more innovative and effective approach to engaging parents in their children's post 16 education.**

- 7.4 Participants touched upon the issues of worklessness in the borough and the effectiveness of Level 3 apprenticeships. The Hub has successfully increased apprenticeships for 16-19 year olds and 500 young people will take up places this year. However, some participants mentioned the lack of Level 3 apprenticeship places in the borough and agreed these should be of high quality and provide clear progression routes to employment.

- 7.5 It was discussed that there is a need to bridge the gap between obtaining qualifications and getting a job for young people. Working more closely with employers may make Level 3 apprenticeships employment opportunity oriented.

**Recommendation 2 – That all partners continue to work with employers to develop and deliver a range of Level 3 apprenticeships, providing young people with clear progression routes and increasing employment opportunities by involving more employers through a more effective partnership.**

- 7.6 In this current financial climate, resources need to be targeted to maximise its effectiveness. Participants stated that it was important to target the resources to those who are most at risk, including those involved with the criminal justice system and those with learning difficulties and caring responsibilities. It was also stated that financial support for learning need to be maintained despite this financial climate. Early interventions and support to those at the most risk will reduce the cost to the state in the long term. To prevent children with those issues from becoming more vulnerable, it is important to find their problems and effectively supported as early as possible.
- 7.7 It is important to engage proactively with the most vulnerable young people, including those who dropped out of learning. Engagement allows local authorities to identify their individual needs and to provide support and advice effectively. It was noted that highlighting and promoting the success of vulnerable young people will provide motivation for other young people.
- 7.8 It was stated that ‘hard to reach’ communities and/or families need to have equal access to services. However, such communities may be left out, because some parents may not have the skills or understanding to access appropriate services to support their child. To help young people of the communities from becoming vulnerable, special attention need to be given to the ‘hard to reach’ groups in the borough and break down barriers to such groups.

**Recommendation 3 – That the borough target resources to the most vulnerable learners, which needs to ensure proactive engagement with those young people and identify their needs to provide integrated effective support.**

- 7.9 The Hub piloted intensive progression support in five schools. Participants stressed the need of personalised road map to progression of young people, which enables local authorities to provide them with timely support. Many participants emphasised that not only academic routes but vocational options should be widely recognised and accepted as progression routes among young people and their parents and carers. To broaden their choices, wider curriculum – both academic and vocational – need to be available, and young people and their parents/carers should be aware of all the possibilities. Participants also felt that there was a need to revitalise vocational experience at Key Stage 4.
- 7.10 Development of personalised road maps to success requires robust and appropriate information. For example, clear and honest guidance about young people themselves and their choices of courses helps them and their parents/carers make

informed choices. Some students drop out of courses soon after their enrolments because of the gap between their expectations and the reality of the courses. Participants noted that there might be a gap between their original course choices and offers they receive. Introducing robust 'sample' weeks and more taster courses prior to starting post 16 courses, including at Key Stage 2, will help young people have reasonable expectations of the courses and prevent them from dropping out.

- 7.11 Participants noted that it was necessary to make accurate labour market information, such as oversupply of labour in a particular industry, available to young people when they decide courses. Such information is useful for young people to choose their routes more appropriately and to avoid mismatching between their skills and market demand.
- 7.12 It was stated that there was a need to develop integrated plan, especially for NEET young people. The integrated plan can follow the idea of the 'Care Plan' approach for elderly people. This integrated plan links together services covering issues young people face, including school, health and housing. This close collaboration of services enables different services to share a common information management system and support young people effectively.

**Recommendation 4 – That the borough and Hub partners consider further developing personalised progression support, which help young people develop personalised 'road maps' to progression.**

**Recommendation 5 – That the borough examine the effectiveness of the integrated plan for young people with a view to developing it further in consultation with appropriate stakeholders.**

- 7.13 Participants argued that services for young people should focus on long-term effectiveness, rather than short-term outcomes. The most important outcome for young people is that they become able to be independent and seek success in the future, rather than local authorities achieving short-term targets. This is particularly important in the current climate to ensure maximum impact from reduced resources.

**Recommendation 6 – That the borough identify services that provide long-term effectiveness and consider shifting resources to such services.**

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 The Challenge Session was an opportunity for Councillors and other stakeholders to understand issues around post 16 learning participation. It was noted that through the education partnership, the Hub, Post 16 participation and achievement had improved considerably in the borough. In particular the range of offer available to young people means more young have an option to continue in education or training. The key achievements are highlighted in paragraph 6.6 of this report.
- 8.2 However, it was agreed that further work was needed to ensure more young people were accessing and remaining in post 16 education and in particular to achieve the government's Raising the Participation Age Policy. The recommendations from this session focused on the important role of parents, link between education and

employment, developing personalised services, advice and guidance for young people and supporting the most vulnerable young people in the borough. The Scrutiny Members hope this session will help the Hub continue their good work in supporting young people to access and remain in education and training.

## **9. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)**

- 9.1. The Council is required by section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for the executive to provide a response.
- 9.2. The report makes recommendations concerning work by the Council to raise post-16 participation. The Council has broad statutory functions in relation to provision of such education. The Council has a duty under section 13 of the Education Act 1996 to secure that sufficient primary, secondary and further education is available to meet the needs of the population of Tower Hamlets. Under section 15ZA of the 1996 Act, the Council must secure that enough suitable education and training is provided to meet the reasonable needs of persons in Tower Hamlets who are over compulsory school age but under 19 and persons subject to learning difficulty assessment who are aged 19 or over but under 25. The Council must, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, co-operate with other authorities to promote the well-being of children in Tower Hamlets. Section 85 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 makes it clear that the duty to co-operate under section 10 of the Children Act 2004 extends to the provision of 14-19 education or training Tower Hamlets. Accordingly, these recommendations appear capable of being carried out within the Council's statutory functions. If the executive were minded to accept the recommendations, then it would be for officers to ensure that they are carried out lawfully.

## **10. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer**

- 10.1 This report describes the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Raising Participation in Post 16 Learning in Tower Hamlets held on 23 September 2010.
- 10.2 Recent government announcements about funding reductions to the Council in 2010-11 and for the next four years will affect any recommendations agreed and any additional costs that arise from the recommendations must be contained within directorate revenue budgets. Also, officers will be obliged to seek the appropriate financial approval before further financial commitments are made.

## **11. One Tower Hamlets Considerations**

- 11.1 Ensuring all young people stay in education and training after Year 11 and reducing NEET 16-18 help alleviate poverty. Considering that people leaving learning at the age of 16 are disproportionately white young boys, vulnerable young people and



from poor families, examination of post 16 learning policies will contribute to mitigate inequalities in the borough.

- 11.2 Recommendations of this Challenge Session included support of the most vulnerable young people, breaking down barriers to 'hard to reach' groups, making personalised road maps to young people and considering integrated service plan for especially NEET young people. Outcomes from these recommendations will contribute to reduce inequalities in the borough.

## **12. Risk Management**

- 12.1 There are no direct risk management actions arising from this report.