

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 13th April 2026.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Hugo Stratton, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley and Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: Ian Caley, Vanessa Housley (Children Services), Fallon Dunleavy (Regeneration & Inclusive Growth), Aishah Waithe, Junita Agyapong and Michelle Gunn (Corporate Services)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr John Gardner and Cllr David Reynard

PEO/1/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/2/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/3/26 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/4/26 Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision

The Committee received a presentation regarding the Post 16 Partnership Careers Strand from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Careers Team Manager and Employment and Training Hub Manager. The presentation included:

- Careers activity in schools, which for the last 10 years had followed the Gatsby Benchmarks, with encounters with employers and employees and experiences of workplaces being particularly important. SBC's Careers Service had been asked to carry out a specific piece of work to identify demands and facilitate the sharing of best practice.
- Key priorities for schools and colleges and how SBC teams could assist. The Careers team and the Employment & Training Hub Team were working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), who were relaunching their Business Directory which included employers who engaged well with school aged young people, and would help schools to access this. TVCA were also offering advice, guidance, and coordination of accessing work experience placements for Key Stage 4 and the Careers Service would be working with them to ensure schools were receiving this information. A further priority for the Careers Network was to develop activities and toolkits for Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week. SBC would then consult with schools to choose whether to deliver this inhouse, teams across SBC including Careers and Employment & Training Hub to deliver it for them, or the SBC broker businesses to deliver it. The content for a

- parent and carer's guide to careers had been agreed and was in design and production stage.
- The work of the Employment & Training Hub in helping young people and to ensure they remained in education, employment or training. This included a range of initiatives that targeted young people at risk of disengaging and/or required support in identifying appropriate pathways for themselves. Key points highlighted were:
 - Since its launch in October, the Care Experience Recruitment Coordinator had supported over 50 young people and 27 of those had found employment.
 - The Youth Trailblazer was the only Trailblazer programme in the Tees Valley that was offering paid work experience.
 - The Skills for Success Programme, developed following school leaders raising concerns that students were struggling in a school environment and, while they were attending, their issues with anxiety and confidence meant they were not present. The industries involved in the initiative were generous with their time and knowledge and the activities were interactive. At the end of the course the students were aware of the industries and opportunities on their doorstep and their confidence had increase, with 100% stating they felt more confident. A celebration event was held, and students had to each give a pitch for themselves at the celebration. The programme had proven to improve behaviour as well their progress for English and Maths.
 - The Excellence for All Post 16 initiative was targeted to students who were not carrying on to university and did not know what their next step was. It focussed on personal skills such as time management and confidence, raising aspirations, and included study skills and revision session. The programme connected students with professionals from local industries and utilised social value hours that businesses may have had.
 - Careers Guidance in schools that included targeted support and universal support. Targeted support to young people in Year 11 was personalised and included 1:1 guidance, home visits, chase up via texts, etc. The Careers Service aimed to ensure that young people knew what they wanted to do after school by the end of February each year, and support was offered until they were settled in Year 12. The number of young people receiving targeted support was increasing and the supported needed more complex. Schools must provide universal support either inhouse, or via an external careers information advice and guidance provider, one of which was SBC's Careers Team. The Not in Education Employment of Training (NEET) rate for 16-18 years olds varied depending on who provided the guidance, with the rate being lower for those who received SBC's universal careers guidance. SBC's Career universal Guidance offer was a traded service and therefore had full cost recovery.
 - Career Guidance in colleges. All colleges had careers staff available for support, and SBC's Careers Service had Progression Advisers in colleges proactively offering support at the beginning and end of Year 12 when dropout rates were higher. They also offered support as and when requested. For colleges with higher rates of NEET, the Careers Service had a weekly presence which aimed to offer support as early as possible when issues were arising, such as declining attendance.
 - The increase in NEET, which was at 7.3% overall. There were national issues including attendance, mental health and a variety of factors impacting on school

leavers not being ready to progress, however this did not explain the increase in Stockton-on-Tees Borough. There had been a huge increase in the number of school leavers in the Borough and the provision of places had not kept pace. For example, 16/17 year-olds competing with 18/19 year-olds for apprenticeships, and employment opportunities, with the older cohort being more successful in gaining apprenticeships and jobs. Students were also more likely to choose the vocational course route, and while the Sixth Form Colleges were offering vocational as well as academic courses to try to meet the need, participation in learning at school sixth forms and sixth form colleges had dropped significantly in recent years. In addition, dropout rates were higher for vocational than academic courses. For those in employment, there had been an increase in this only being part-time rather than full-time employment. More students were asking for Maths and English courses, with colleges offering these as stand-alone courses and the Employment & Training Hub team, working with the Careers Team, had procured online provision which students welcomed and were well attended. The impact on NEET of additional staffing within Employment & Training Hub and the Care Leavers team for Care experienced young people had not yet been seen. Some impact on NEET for young people with SEN had been evidenced and Year 2 of the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer would include 16 and 17-year olds so it was anticipated that this would also impact upon NEET

Work experience was discussed, with members questioning if the health and safety and risk assessment requirements impacted on the ability to secure placements for young people. Officers noted that some schools had been paying outside providers to carry out the checks required however this was not necessary, as copies of the business's insurance was usually adequate. The Careers Team was working with TVCA to provide standardised advice and support to schools. Members further questioned the value and benefits of Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week and officers explained that the week was often split over the different year groups, e.g. two days each in Years 7, 8, and 9, which built upon each other and focused on the skills needed for different industries. The Key Stage 4 work experience week did not need to be a full week with the same employer, e.g. a young person may have a two-day placement and three days carrying out activities such as visiting different employers. It was the school's decision how they wished to arrange their provision, and some schools could target students who were uncertain of their career path to carry out a range of activities while other students with clear career goals could be given a week placement. Officers further noted that work experience was a useful tool in re-engaging students with students, explaining why they needed to focus at school.

Members asked if there were any issues with the turnover of career leaders in school. Officers explained that there was a national issue of careers leaders leaving the role, with a third changing each year, and this was despite careers leaders needing to complete specific training which took approximately one year. It was suggested that the budgets allocated to careers within schools was relatively small compared to other departments.

Members questioned the gender split for NEET and informed that it was 55/45 male/female. There was a small amount of Entry level students leaving courses to NEET, however the majority roughly divided into thirds who leave level 1, level 2 and level 3 provision. There was a further issue in that a sizable number of those students were not accessing the support they needed.

The pressures on Further Education were discussed with a member with teaching experience noting that the pay scales did not attract people within trades to teach, and therefore the ratio of students to lecturers were higher. It was suggested that this impacted on the support students were receiving and therefore students were dropping out. There was also pressure to remove students who were not engaging from courses.

Officers noted that sharing the information on increased cohort via the Post 16 Partnership would aid providers to better prepare for larger applicant and learner numbers going forward.

The Senior Project Manager also presented information on the links between the Committees review and the Outcome Based Review (OBR) taking place regarding Opportunities for Young People into Employment (OYPE). The OYPE review would be considering how the systems and career support offer had changed in a five-year period and aimed to deliver a new service model, staffing structure options, savings proposal and operational redesign to better respond to NEET. The links between the two reviews were highlighted as follows:

- NEET reduction
- Improving awareness of local opportunities
- Strengthening transition, enhancing careers guidance

The OYPE review was at the discovery stage, where the context for the data and understanding of the issues would be considered, along with the outcomes of the wider Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Provision.

AGREED the information provided be noted.

PEO/5/26 Chair's Update and Work Programme 2026-27

Consideration was given to the Committee's work programme. It was noted that the Committees next Scrutiny Review had been agreed at Executive Scrutiny Committee and would be Procurement and Tendering Processes. The review would commence after the Committee completed its current review.

AGREED the work programme be noted.

Chair: