

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

21st June 2011

**Work Experience Opportunities Task and Finish Review – Final Report**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	<b>Councillor Carole Gandy, Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership</b>
Relevant Head of Service	<b>Ruth Bamford, Head of Planning and Regeneration</b>
Wards Affected	<b>All Wards</b>
Non-Key Decision	

**1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

This report contains the final proposals of the Work Experience Opportunities Task and Finish Group. The Group is proposing five recommendations which are designed to increase the provision for young people to undertake work experience placements in Redditch.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that

- 1) **the current work experience scheme, which provides work experience opportunities for 14 and 15 year olds at Key Stage 4 at school, should be continued locally;**
- 2) **Worcestershire County Council should plan immediately for an increased number of pupils at schools across the County due to the raising of the participation age in 2013 and 2015;**
- 3) **the continued function of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership should be supported by the Council;**
- 4) **a greater number of local employers should show a commitment to visit schools in Redditch to provide presentations on life in the workplace; and**
- 5) **there should be a central RBC Officer point of contact for schools to arrange work experience placements at Redditch Borough Council.**

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**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Work Experience Opportunities Task and Finish Group was established in October 2010 to find out what provision is available locally for young people to undertake work experience placements and what could be done to increase these opportunities. Four members were appointed to the review: Councillors Peter Anderson; William

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Norton; Mark Shurmer; and Andrew Fry. Councillor Anderson was appointed to chair the review. Following Councillor Norton's resignation from the Group early in the review, Councillor Andrew Brazier was nominated as his replacement.

3.2 The review was prompted by concern that Redditch possesses a disproportionate number of young people relative to the size of the town who are neither in education, employment, or training. In December 2010, 5.7 per cent of 16-18 year olds in Redditch, 127 people, were recorded as being NEET which was amongst the highest rates in Worcestershire. The average across the County was 5.3 per cent. The West Midlands average was 6.1 per cent. The national average was 5.9 per cent.

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3.3 Work Experience is a key component of the work-related learning programme which became a statutory requirement of the Key Stage 4 (years 10 and 11) curriculum in 2004. Work related learning is defined as a "planned activity which uses the context of work to develop skills, knowledge and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work" (Department for Children, Schools and Families).

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3.4 The intention of work-related learning was to give school pupils at the age of 14 and 15 a greater opportunity to develop their employability skills in preparation for employment at 16 and beyond, increase their knowledge and understanding of employers and employment, and to learn from direct experiences in the workplace.

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3.5 91.7 per cent of applicable year ten students from schools in Redditch undertook work experience en bloc during the 2009/10 school year, a percentage that was comparable with the national average.

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3.6 In September 2010, Professor Alison Wolf of King's College London launched an independent review into vocational education opportunities across the country. The review was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP. Professor's Wolf published her proposals in March 2011.

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3.7 Within her final report, Professor Wolf recommended to Government that 'helping young people to obtain genuine work experience...should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years'. Professor Wolf also recommended that government should 'remove their statutory duty to provide every young person at KS4 (Key Stage 4) with a standard amount of "work-related learning". Professor Wolf supported this recommendation with the following comments:

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'Fewer and fewer employers are willing to accommodate young people under the age of 16 on their premises; and the paper work associated

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with placements has increased exponentially. For that reason the blanket requirement to give all KS4 pupils 'work experience' – or, as it has officially become, 'work-related learning' – has served its time. It is very expensive: typically, for a school, the equivalent of at least half a full-time teacher's salary a year plus substantial administrative support. Too often, now, this does not even involve being in a workplace, as schools admit defeat and arrange something 'work-related' (and largely pointless) on school premises.'

- 3.8 The Report's essential rejection of the value of work related learning at Key Stage 4 was discussed at length by the Group with expert witnesses during the review.

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#### EVIDENCE GATHERING

- 3.9 The Group met with local stakeholders who are either responsible for providing work experience opportunities for young people in Redditch and neighbouring areas, or had a clear interest in work experience opportunities to be widened for young people. The Group obtained evidence to support its recommendations from face-to-face meetings with and written correspondence from local schools, businesses, education agencies, and students. The Group has also obtained information on work experience and the situation of NEETs from a number of research documents.

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#### Consultation with local schools

- 3.10 The Group interviewed the work experience coordinators and lead teachers from the four senior schools in Redditch: Trinity High School; St Augustine's Catholic High School; Kingsley College; and Arrow Vale Community High School to establish how work experience is currently arranged by the schools and to discuss what was achieved by a young person participating in a placement. The Group also sought advice on how work experience opportunities could be expanded locally.

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- 3.11 The Group was informed during its discussions that the process for arranging work experience placements at the four senior schools was broadly similar. The process is complicated, with a number of checks being necessary and parental permission being required before a placement could be approved. Placements could be undertaken outside of the County, however this had cost implications.

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- 3.12 Students had the opportunity at some schools to undertake extended placements for ten day periods at Key Stage 4 where the student's attitude was positive and their work schedule allowed, whilst further work experience opportunities were made available for sixth formers who were in need of practical experience to augment the course that they were undertaking. Typically, this would be for one day a week. Some placements were also provided on demand for sixth form

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students and also extended placements for one or two days per week if this was practically possible.

3.13 Often, however, the students' existing commitment to course work and preparation for examinations reduced the possibility of additional placements being arranged.

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3.14 The Group learnt that the success of the student's placement was largely dependent on their own attitude and willingness to make the most from their placement. The Group was advised that it was often the less academically gifted students who adapted most easily to the changed environment by drawing upon their interpersonal and practical skills. It was also reported that many students became noticeably more confident and mature after undertaking a placement.

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3.15 A successful placement could also enable the student to develop good contacts with potential employers. The Group also heard that students often benefited from being given real responsibility during their placement.

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3.16 There were several reasons why a company might refuse to provide a work experience placement. Some companies were currently sensitive to being seen to bring in work experience students while redundancies were an issue. Solicitors were said to be reluctant to accept students due to the confidential nature of their work. Other companies reportedly had issues with health and safety checks because there was insufficient time to do the necessary training or the risk was seen as too great. It was also reported that some companies had insisted that they did not currently possess the necessary resources to host a work experience placement.

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3.17 Some companies were reluctant to continue participating in the process based on negative experiences in the past, whilst it was reported that others simply did not appreciate the positive benefits that might result from hosting placements. It was felt a lot more could be done to convince companies that working with students was in their long term interests.

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3.18 An important element of work related learning was to give the student a practical opportunity to further improve their job application skills. Elements of this included successfully completing applications forms as instructed; developing their interview technique; and being advised how to construct a curriculum vitae. Company visits were sometimes arranged to give the students another taster of life in the work place.

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3.19 The Group heard that it was vital for the student to have the support of their parents when undertaking a work experience placement. The personal preference of the parents could be very influential in where the placement was undertaken. The parents were also responsible for

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their child's transportation and ensuring that they arrived each day on time.

3.20 It was suggested that the attitude of parents towards employment could have a huge influence on the student's attitude towards a placement. The Group heard that students were less likely to recognise the benefits offered by a placement in terms of helping them to enter the world of work if their parents had only a limited work ethic. An important role of the schools in these instances was to advocate the value of work experience to the parents.

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3.21 Schools' representatives interviewed after the release of the Wolf Report expressed deep concern with the proposal to remove the statutory requirement for students at Key Stage 4 to undertake work related learning. Many of the students had little or no understanding of the workplace environment, and discontinuing the process would be detrimental to their personal development. It was felt that this might ultimately lead to an increase in the number of NEETs in the local community.

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Consultation with education partners and agencies

3.22 The Group consulted with the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership, an organisation that encourages employers and schools to work together to help build the aspirations and work related skills of young people.

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3.23 The Group was advised that the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership had been set up by Worcestershire County Council to support the work related learning activities throughout the County. This involved supporting over 120 schools and sixth form colleges in Worcestershire. The Partnership carried out a requirement for all work experience placements to be checked and to ensure that the company hosting a placement had a clear understanding of the roles of both the mentor and the student. Their staff ensured that the companies had an identified person directly responsible for the student and possessed a defined work schedule for the student.

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3.24 A member of staff of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership would visit the host company and checked that the employer's liability insurance was in place and that Health and Safety requirements would be met. If the placement was outside the locality, another education business partnership would be requested to undertake these checks. The Partnership also provided insurance against personal injury to students, a feature that is apparently not universally available in other counties.

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3.25 The Partnership hosted an electronic database that contained the information on all past and present placements that had taken place in

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the County since the Partnership's inception in 2005. This was demonstrated to the Group. The database contained over 9,000 registered opportunities for work experience placements, complete with the details of status, contact person, and an indication of the type of business involved. The database also possessed a facility to search for a particular type of job within a chosen geographical location. Therefore, a database user would have the ability to gain details of a specific range of work experience providers within a very short time period.

3.26 The database provided by the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership was regarded by all of the school representatives that were interviewed as a very valuable resource in arranging work experience placements, especially in terms of having an up to date list of companies that were likely to offer placements.

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3.27 The Partnership was sometimes unable to facilitate sufficient placements because of the disproportionate demand for placements in: forensic science; sport; computer game design; website design; fashion design; law; media; journalism; and the medical profession.

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3.28 The Partnership also worked to find placements for students doing courses that possessed a requirement in the curriculum for work experience placements to be undertaken. Students preparing for some university or professional courses were often required to undertake additional placements. Furthermore, some students required extended placements as part of a BTEC (Business & Technology Education Council) or similar courses.

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3.29 The Worcestershire Education Business Partnership arranged school visits from local companies to give students a greater idea of the skills that were required in the workplace. Unfortunately, the Group was advised that these visits were not taking place very frequently in Redditch.

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3.30 The Group was informed during the latter stages of the review that the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership would no longer be funded from April 2011.

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3.31 The Group also met with Forward Consortium, a partnership that consists of all the high schools, special schools, FE colleges and training providers in North East Worcestershire. Its remit is to help the pupils to access the best of a number of vocational courses in the local area. The Consortium had worked with schools to set up vocational facilities where these did not previously exist.

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3.32 Forward Consortium now concentrated on delivering diplomas across a range of disciplines for students between the ages of 14 to 19. The diplomas offered a mixture of classroom work and hands on

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experience, of which an extended work experience placement was a key component. The diplomas had been introduced by the previous government to deliver a world class qualification.

3.33 Experience showed that all pupils needed to understand the work environment and have access more frequently than the present arrangements allowed. It was suggested that young people should also be better educated in terms of the skills that businesses sought.

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3.34 The Group was urged to support the work of Connexions in providing guidance and assistance for those who were NEET, and also the work of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership. It was considered imperative that, in the current state of flux, local bodies must work together to develop a common agenda in order to move forward together.

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3.35 Having also met with Connexions Officers who worked directly with local NEETs, the Group was informed that the service had limited resources, but ran a 'New Chances' programme for twenty-five young people who generally preferred practical learning experiences and were extremely keen for practical work experience opportunities to help develop both practical skills and, more crucially, their self-esteem. The Group was encouraged to help provide further practical work experience placements for these young people.

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Consultation with students

3.36 The Group attended a meeting of the Redditch Student Council on 31st January 2011 and enjoyed a lively discussion. The Student Councillors commented that they were given little choice when choosing work experience placements and found it difficult to gain a placement in an area of work that was of interest to them. It was also the general view of the Student Council that work experience placements often entailed basic tasks and at times did not offer genuine opportunities to explore the possibilities for future employment. They also broadly agreed that had they been able to identify sources of relevant work experience then they may have regarded their placements as more worthwhile.

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3.37 A number of Student Councillors suggested that some students would be willing to take advantage of more work placements. It was felt that the most appropriate time to undertake these would be during the summer holidays following the period of GCSE examinations. Others were of the opinion that many students would be unwilling to give up their own free time to voluntarily do more work experience. They also expressed a preference to work in commercial businesses rather than the voluntary sector.

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3.38 The Group also met with a student who had decided to undertake a work experience placement within the Legal, Equalities and Democratic

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Services Department at Redditch Borough Council. The student had arranged three work experience placements on her own initiative. The Group was informed that the work experience placements were very useful in allowing her to make a more informed choice on the career that she wished to follow.

Consultation with local businesses

3.39 The chair of the Review, Councillor Peter Anderson, issued a letter on behalf of the Group to a number of local companies inviting their thoughts on the value of work experience. The local companies had been identified as regular providers of work experience placements. The Group received a number of responses that are referred to within the recommendations section of the report.

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**4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**4.1 Recommendation 1: The Group recommends that the current work experience scheme, which provides work experience opportunities for 14 and 15 year olds at Key Stage 4 at school, should be continued locally.**

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4.1.1 The Group strongly feels that work experience opportunities for 14 and 15 year old pupils in school at Key Stage 4 should be retained. During the course of the review, the Group found that considerable support existed locally for the continuation of the work experience scheme at Key Stage 4.

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4.1.2 There was no doubt that this aspect of a pupil's education was considered a high priority by all of the schools and gives substantial benefits to those who take part. For those students without a clear idea of how they wished their career to proceed, the Group learned that a placement was an ideal opportunity for a student to develop their employability skills and to mature as an individual. The Group was provided with the following quote concerning the importance of work experience from a Head Teacher at a local senior school:

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“Our students very much value their work experience placements and time away from school. It helps them confirm future life choices and makes them more focused on their studies and their examinations on their return to the classroom”.

4.1.3 The Group was regularly advised that a work experience placement represented an ideal opportunity for a student to test their current career plans and make informed decisions about their future. It was often reported that students had benefited from a work experience placement. It was further observed that a negative placement could be beneficial to a student by preventing them from further pursuing a particular career that was not suitable to them.

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4.1.4 The Group received a number of responses from local businesses expressing their support for the continuation of the work experience scheme. The businesses that provided feedback ranged from huge multinational firms to a small local family business. The emerging view was that work experience produced many benefits for both the employer and participant and that, if possible, more opportunities for work experience placements should be provided.

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4.1.5 The Wolf Report suggested that work experience at Key Stage 4 is an excessively costly exercise that too often fails to provide young people with an opportunity to gain genuine work experience. The evidence that the Group obtained locally did not support this view largely because the support provided to schools in Redditch was significantly better than that mentioned within the Wolf Report.

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4.1.6 The Wolf Report recommends that work experience should be one of the highest priorities for 16-18 education policy in the next few years. Whilst the Group welcomes the potential increase in future opportunities for 16-18 year olds to undertake work experience, the Group does not feel that this should be at the expense of the current opportunities that are provided for 14 and 15 year olds. The Group was informed during its discussions that it was often the less academically gifted students who benefited most from a work experience placement. The Group therefore feels that it would not be helpful to many students if work experience opportunities were delayed.

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4.1.7 The Group was made aware of the Government's *Get Britain Working* initiative that was launched in January 2011. The initiative is aimed at 18-21 year olds who are claiming Jobseekers Allowance and possess little or no work history with opportunities for two to eight week experience placements. However, the initiative does not currently target any areas in Worcestershire for increased work experience opportunities for 18-21 year olds.

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There is real concern, therefore, that work experience opportunities for young people in Redditch might be significantly restricted in the event that the statutory requirement is removed for work related learning at Key Stage 4 and few other opportunities are provided.

4.1.8 The Group does not believe that continuing work experience opportunities for Key Stage 4 students will necessarily be sufficient in itself to reduce the number of young people who are NEET in Redditch. It strongly feels that abolishing work experience opportunities for 14 and 15 year olds would be hugely detrimental for the progression of many young people, especially those who are less gifted academically, and would very likely result in a significant increase the number of NEETs in Redditch in the short to medium term. The Group therefore urges the Council to work with schools and partner organisations to

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support the continuation of the Work Experience Scheme at Key Stage 4 and to increase further opportunities.

**4.2 Recommendation 2: The Group recommends that Worcestershire County Council should plan immediately for an increased number of pupils at schools across the County due to the raising of the participation age in 2013 and 2015.**

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4.2.1 The Education and Skills Act 2008 increased the minimum age at which young people in England can leave learning, thus requiring them to continue in education or training to the age of 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015. The current Government has since made clear its own commitment to this. The raising of the participating age will not necessarily require young people to remain within school until the age of 18. Young people will also have the choice to undertake work based learning, including apprenticeships, or part-time education and training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for more than twenty hours a week.

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4.2.2 The Group took every opportunity to ask about this policy and its likely effects for young people in Redditch, especially those who are NEET or are thought to be at risk of becoming NEET.

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4.2.3 The Group feels that effective planning must begin at the earliest opportunity to increase the number of work based learning opportunities locally. The Worcestershire Education Business Partnership has played a central role in providing young people with work related learning opportunities since its inception in 2005. The Group is therefore very concerned that a vacuum will emerge in facilitating work based learning opportunities should the Partnership be discontinued. The Group feels that the Partnership is a key resource that must be retained and enhanced to enable the requirements of the extended business relationships to be achieved within the expanded remit of the schools.

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4.2.4 The Group is also concerned that raising of the participation age will create new demand on school facilities and resources that the Group is unable to identify. Local reports recently stated that there are currently more than 500 young people between the age of 18 and 24 in Redditch who are unemployed. In another documents, the Group was informed that the numbers are biased towards the lower ages. Using this information, it is not unreasonable to suggest that schools in Redditch will have to support and administer hundreds more pupils by 2015.

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4.2.5 Evidence collected by the Group leads it to believe that returning the pupils to the classroom, either within a school or college, is not an option that will effectively address the problem. The need is to provide a pathway that leads to long term employment, rather than just another certificate. This implies that schools must increase their involvement

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with employers comprehensively. The Group recommends that this work should commence at the beginning of the 2011/12 school year.

#### **4.3 Recommendation 3: The Group recommends that the continued function of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership should be supported by the Council.**

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4.3.1 During the course of the review, the Group was regularly referred to the role of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership in terms of providing young people with the opportunity to experience life in the workplace. Principally this was achieved through the facilitation of work experience placements. The Group was hugely impressed with the electronic database function run by the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership to arrange work experience placements. The database was regularly referred to by the work experience coordinators and lead teachers from local schools as a crucial resource for arranging work experience placements.

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4.3.2 The Worcestershire Education Business Partnership also undertook a number of essential tasks to facilitate work experience placements, including health and safety checks of the employer. Crucially, its work is a cost effective way of arranging work experience placements.

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4.3.3 The Group was also informed that the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership helped to bridge the gap between education and business by providing further opportunities for young people in Redditch and across the County to sample a taste of life in employment. This was predominantly achieved through visits from local businesses to local schools. The Group was therefore very concerned to learn that the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership funding would cease altogether from April 2011.

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4.3.4 The value of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership's function has also been recognised by local businesses that were contacted during the course of the review who had built up strong relationships with the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership over recent years.

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4.3.5 The Group therefore recommends that the continued function of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership should be supported to help ensure that school pupils in Redditch will continue to be provided with opportunities to experience life in the work place in a cost effective manner.

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#### **4.4 Recommendation 4: The Group recommends that a greater number of local employers should show a commitment to visit schools to provide presentations on life in the workplace.**

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4.4.1 During its investigations, the Group was informed that a number of local companies visited schools in Redditch to provide presentations on life in the workplace. The Group learnt that these presentations typically offered both the visiting company and students a range of important benefits.

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4.4.2 For the students, the presentations provided further information on what essential skills were required to succeed in the workplace. Significantly, it also gave students a clearer indication of the relevance of their school work to future employment. For the local companies, the presentations predominantly offered longer term benefits of creating a direct dialogue with potential future employers at a minimal cost.

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4.4.3 Enabling industrial representatives the opportunity to give presentations at schools was found to be an effective means of countering the negative perception of manufacturing and commerce held by many students. This is particularly significant in Redditch given its traditional manufacturing base.

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4.4.4 The Group suggests that more local employers should therefore be encouraged to deliver presentations to local students for their own benefits as well as the students, and to strengthen the existing links between schools and local industry.

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**4.5 Recommendation 5: The Group recommends that there should be a RBC Officer central point of contact for schools to arrange work experience placements at Redditch Borough Council.**

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4.5.1 Redditch Borough Council is a regular provider of work experience placements for young people in the local community. Many students in Redditch have been given the opportunity to develop their employability skills by experiencing life in employment in one or more of the Council's many departments. Close to two hundred placements have been undertaken at the Council since 2008. The Council's support for work experience was greatly valued by the work experience coordinators and lead teachers interviewed by the Group.

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4.5.2 It was suggested to the Group, however, that the process for arranging work experience placements at Redditch Borough Council could be improved if there was a central point of contact at the Council for schools to liaise and arrange work experience placements. The Group was advised that some work experience coordinators would contact each Council Department separately to arrange a placement. A Human Resources Officer at Redditch Borough Council would eventually be contacted when administrative clearance was required once the placement had been verbally agreed between the work experience coordinator and contact person with the Council department. The

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whole process was regarded as unnecessarily lengthy and overly bureaucratic.

- 4.5.3 The Group therefore feels that the process for arranging work experience placements at Redditch Borough Council should be streamlined. It is proposed that all requests from local schools for work experience placements at the Council should be directed to a central point of contact within the Human Resources Department who would be responsible for assigning the request to each of the Council's departments. This would alleviate the current requirement for schools to contact each department individually. A more efficient process could increase the number of work experience placements provided by Redditch Borough Council as it would ensure that all departments would be regularly contacted in future to arrange a placement.

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#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

It is not currently possible to establish how much it would cost to implement recommendations relevant to Redditch Borough Council. However, it is likely that providing support to the continued function of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership will have financial implications. This would require further consideration when the specific actions were agreed

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#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

No legal implications have been identified.

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#### **7. SERVICE / OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Group's recommendations are designed to help ensure that young people in Redditch have sufficient opportunities to develop the skills that are required to succeed in the workplace. The Group feels therefore that this would help the Council to meet the corporate aim to be an enterprising community.

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- 7.2 The Group suggests that increasing opportunities for local young people to participate in work experience is consistent with one of the aims of the *Raising Educational Achievement and Aspirations Action Plan* as part of the *Redditch Sustainable Communities Strategy* to 'raise awareness of the opportunities on offer to children and young people in Redditch'.

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- 7.3 Offering further work experience placements at the Council to local students, as part of both the Human Resource Delivery Plan and the Leisure Services Plan, is an agreed action within the Redditch Economic Development Strategy 2009-2018. It is felt that the Group's proposals would help the Council to achieve this by raising awareness

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of the value of work experience and by supporting the mechanisms that facilitate work experience placements in Redditch and neighbouring areas.

- 7.4 It is understood that having a central RBC Officer central point of contact to coordinate work experience placements at the Council, as recommended within the report, was previously in place at the Council. It is therefore felt that reverting to this previous practice will not have significant operational implications.

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**8. CUSTOMER / EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct equalities and diversity implications.

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**9. RISK MANAGEMENT**

There are no direct risk management implications

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**10. APPENDICES**

None

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Learning and Skills Network, 'Changing the NEET mindset' (2010).

Owens Consulting, 'Young people in Worcestershire who are NEET Available: a research study' (2011).

UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 'The Employability Challenge: Full Report' (February 2009).

CBI, 'Time Well Spent: Embedding employability in work experience' (March 2007).

Christian Percy, 'Exploring the impact of formal work experience and term-time paid employment using longitudinal data from England (2003-2007)' (February 2010).

IPSOS Mori, Young People Omnibus 2009: Wave 15 – A research study on work-related learning among 11-16 year olds on behalf of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (January – April 2009).

Alison Wolf, 'Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report' (March 2011).

Institute for Education Business Excellence, 'Policy Update Special Edition: Wolf Review of 14-19 Vocational Education' (March 2011)

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Institute for Education Business Excellence. 'Students' Perceptions of Work Experience: Report of a Survey carried out by the National Support Group for Work Experience, 2007-08 (2008)

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