



NEET STRATEGY 2007-08

1. Introduction

1.1 This Strategy aims to:

- Explain the background to the Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets to reduce the percentage of young people aged 16-18 in the Borough who are Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET);
- Outline the progress made to date in addressing this key issue for the Oldham Partnership;
- To provide evidence that targeted interventions are narrowing the gap; and
- Outline new proposals for the achievement of the NEET stretch target by January 2009 which the Children & Young People and Economy Partnerships have been asked to consider.

2. Background to the LAA NEET targets

2.1 Overall workless-ness in the adult population and the NEET rate for young people remain a priority in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) “refresh” for the Oldham Partnership overall and both the Children & Young People and Economy Partnerships.

2.2 The issue is recognised strategically by the wider Oldham Partnership (LSP) because of its impact on:

- Health and emotional well-being;
- Crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Economic activity particularly in the retail, service and entertainment sectors;
- Housing and homelessness; and, crucially,
- Community Cohesion.

2.3 The reduction of the percentage of young people aged 16-18 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) was negotiated as a “stretch” target in the three year LAA between The Oldham Partnership (LSP) and HM Government commencing in April 2006.

2.4 This anticipated, successfully, the emphasis placed on the measure by the DfES which has since included NEET as a mandatory measure in the recently-published National Indicator Set.

2.5 The NEET stretch target was negotiated in February 2006. At that time the NEET rate was 7.0% (using the DfES agreed “census point” which takes the average of the November, December & January rates) and set as the baseline, with trajectory milestones as follows:

Nov 05 – Jan 06 average (baseline)	7.0%
Nov 06 - Jan 07 average	6.9%
Nov 07 - Jan 08 average	6.6%
Nov 08 – Jan 09 average	6.3% (5.8% stretch)

2.6 Two further measures were attached to this target, which were a condition of receipt of the full reward grant if the stretch was achieved. These were:

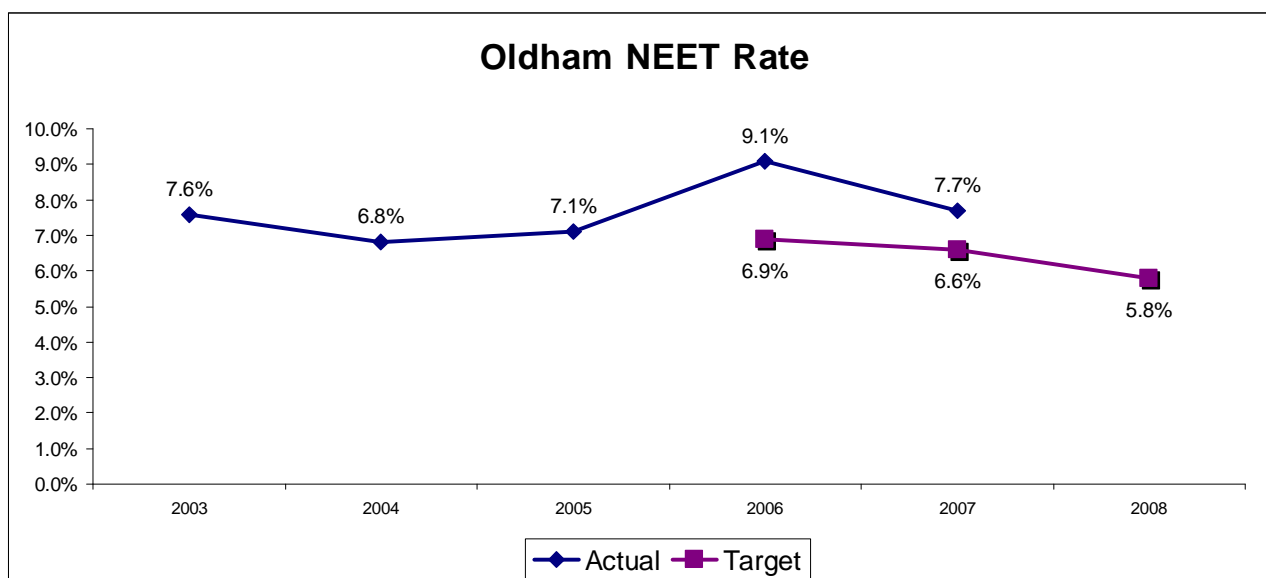
2.6.1 Payment of 50% of reward grant conditional on lowest performing ward – Alexandra achieving no higher than the following percentage (a “narrowing the gap “ measure):

Nov 05 - Jan 06 average (baseline)	15.5%
Nov 06 - Jan 07 average	14.5%
Nov 07 - Jan 08 average	13.5%
Nov 08 – Jan 09 average	11.0% (10.5%% stretch)

2.6.2 16-18 year olds recorded as ‘Unknown’ were to be no higher than 5% otherwise reward grant agreed for this measure would be lost. The unknown rate has consistently remained **below 5%** since the LAA was established and **it is not anticipated that this performance will change over the lifetime of the LAA.**

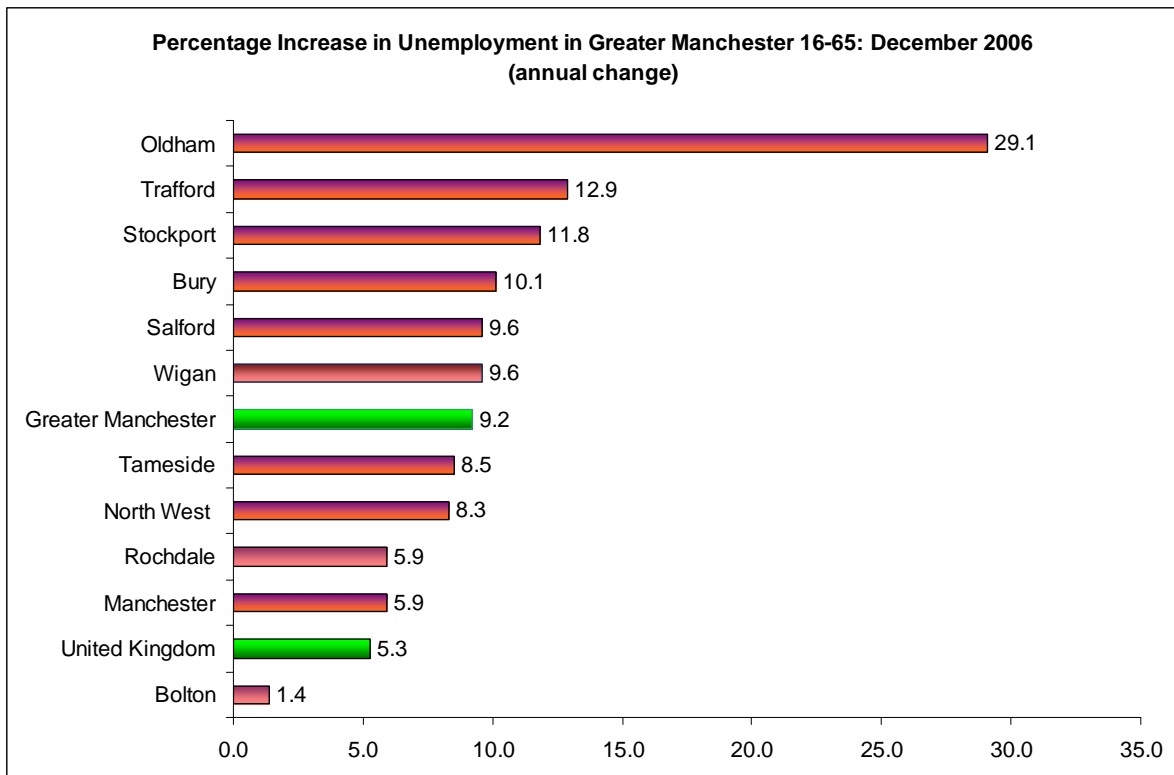
3. Performance 2006-07

3.1 The interim and stretch targets for the 16-18 NEET rate were set on the assumption that the downward trend in NEET would continue. Using the nationally agreed “census point”, the graph below shows the trend from 2003 to 2007 (blue) along with the LAA target (purple line).



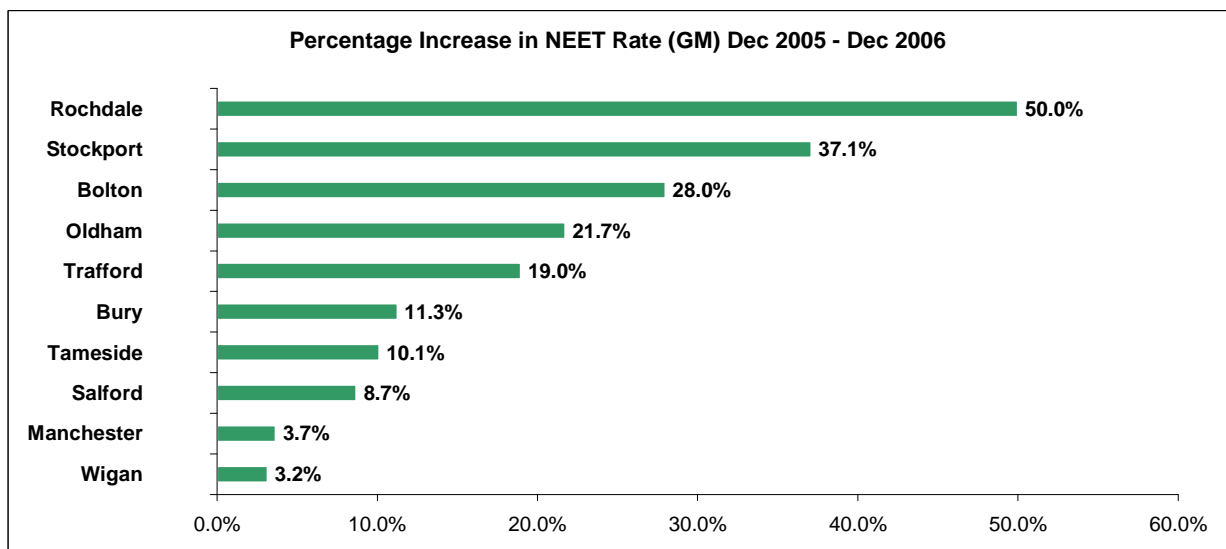
Source: National Connexions Management Information System [NCCIS] (DCSF)

3.2 During the 12 month period between December 2005 and 2006, the **overall unemployment rate** (16-65) for the Borough increased by **29.1%**. The bar chart over page shows Oldham’s percentage increase compared with other Greater Manchester Authorities, the North West and England. Oldham’s increase was more than three times that of Greater Manchester and almost six times that of the national increase.



Source: Greater Manchester Unemployment Bulletin (Manchester Enterprises)

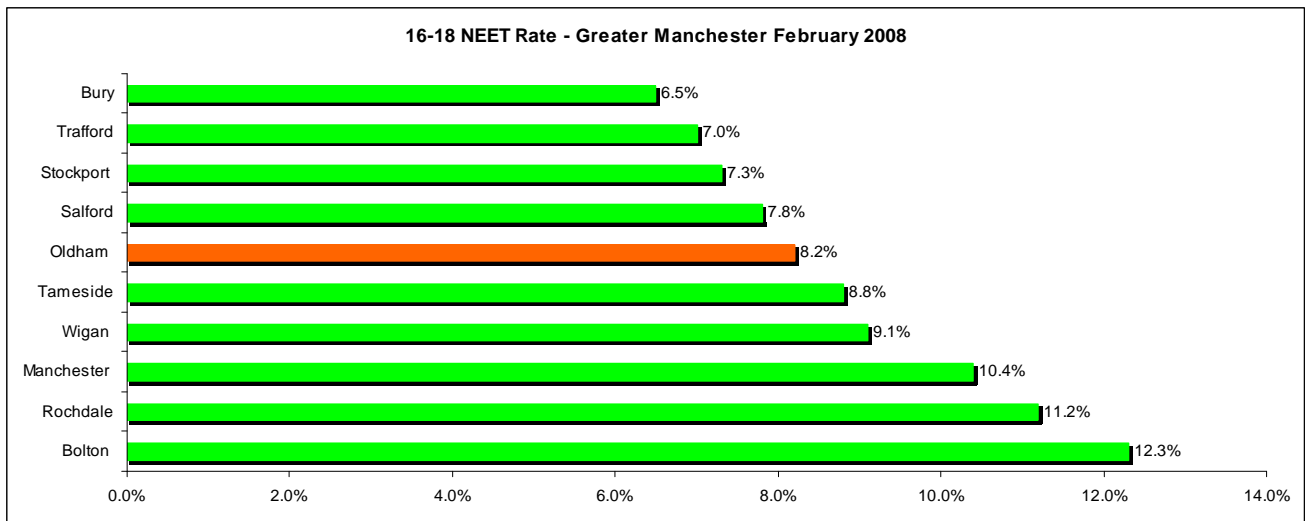
3.3 Over the same 12 month period the percentage increase 16-18 NEET rate in Greater Manchester was as follows:



Source: CCIS (Greater Manchester Connexions [2005], GM Connexions Residual Body [2006])

3.4 Oldham is not unique, therefore, in seeing an increase in the NEET rate. However, despite experiencing the highest increase in overall unemployment in Greater Manchester, the increase in NEET rate was only the fourth highest.

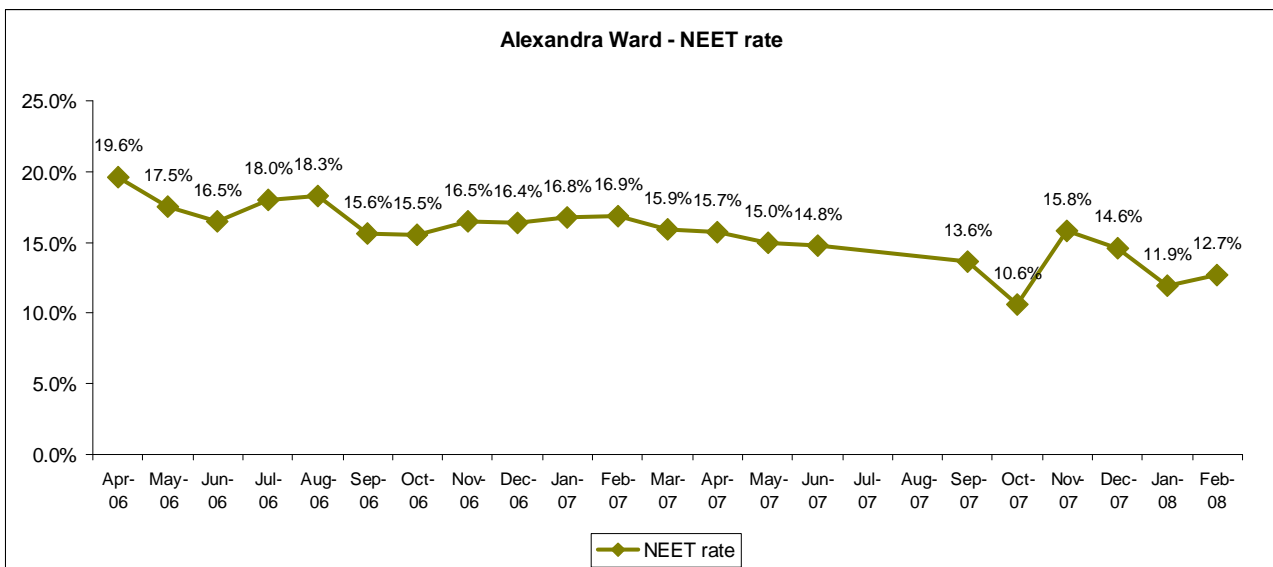
3.5 More to the point, the most recent comparison available in the percentage NEET rate for Greater Manchester authorities (February 2008) placed Oldham with the fifth lowest NEET rate, behind Bury, Trafford and Stockport which are significantly less deprived (IMD 2004).



Source: NCCIS (DCSF)

3.6 Turning now to the first “condition” of the stretch target – the “lowest performing ward”. The baseline established Alexandra as the ward with the highest NEET rate at the December 2005 “census point”. However, performance at the December 2006 count (against a target of 14.5%) was 16.8%, 8.4% above the original baseline.

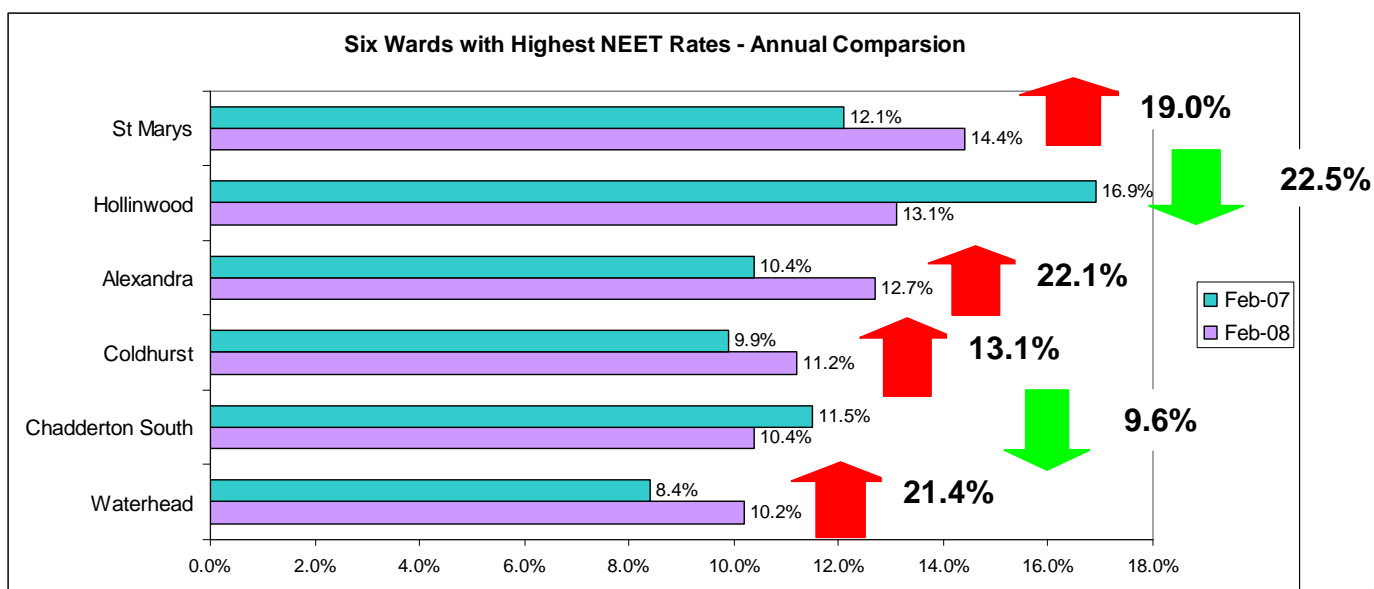
3.7 Despite this set-back, there are now clear signs that the increase in staffing and other resources targeted at Alexandra ward are paying dividends. The graph below shows the NEET rate in Alexandra over 22 months, which shows a 35.2% reduction.



Source: CCIS (Positive Steps Oldham)

3.8 Furthermore, there is now compelling evidence to show that, where additional resources have been made available in three specific areas, (including Alexandra) a “narrowing of the gap” has begun to occur. But, over the same period, simply **maintaining the same level of resources** in another three areas has resulted in an **increase in the NEET rate**. Indeed, St James and St Mary’s are now approaching the rate in Alexandra as it falls.

3.9 The bar chart overleaf indicates the comparison in NEET rates in the top six wards in February 2008 over twelve months with the percentage increase and decrease.



Source: CCIS (Positive Steps Oldham)

4. Alexandra – A Multi-agency Approach

4.1 Since the re-organisation of ward boundaries in 2004, Alexandra has emerged as the Borough's "hot spot" against a host of Every Child Matters outcomes as well as NEET, particularly focussed in the Holts Estate:

- 4.1.1 It heads the Borough in youth crime statistics, ASBO and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (Oldham Youth Offending Service launched the South Alexandra Initiative in 2007 to combat these trends);
- 4.1.2 It has some of the lowest levels of educational achievement at all key stages;
- 4.1.3 It has the lowest staying on rate at 16 and the lowest rate of entry into Higher Education at 18/19;
- 4.1.4 It features frequently in headline health deficits and, in particular, teenage conception rates are over twice the Borough average.

4.2 This last statistic is very significant because of its impact on NEET rates. 12% of NEETs in the ward are teenage parents.

4.3 Additional Connexions personal adviser and other support has been provided in Alexandra which enables an intensive approach to contacting and engaging the young people who live in the area including:

- 4.3.1 Additional Outreach activities;
- 4.3.2 Focused Activity Allowance targeting;
- 4.3.3 Prioritised recruitment onto the Connexions-funded teenage parents' group at Brook;
- 4.3.4 An 'Alexandra' focus group has been established to ensure PSO is working collectively and to brainstorm problems being faced; along with a multi-agency group to plan focused and targeted interventions;
- 4.3.5 Research into the NEETs in Alexandra funded through Extended Services;
- 4.3.6 Using Extended Services and LSC combined funding launching Project A4A (Activities for Alexandra) using the Activity Agreement model, without paying the financial incentives that the National Pilot does. But still providing practitioner-based commissioning by a lead professional with an individual budget of £400 per participant for bespoke purchasing of provision for individualised pathway planning once young people have been NEET for 6 weeks or longer.

5. Vulnerable Groups

5.1 In addition to locality targeting a new, more intensive, approach is now needed narrow the gap between identified vulnerable groups of young people across the whole Borough. Suffice to say that many of these live in “target” localities.

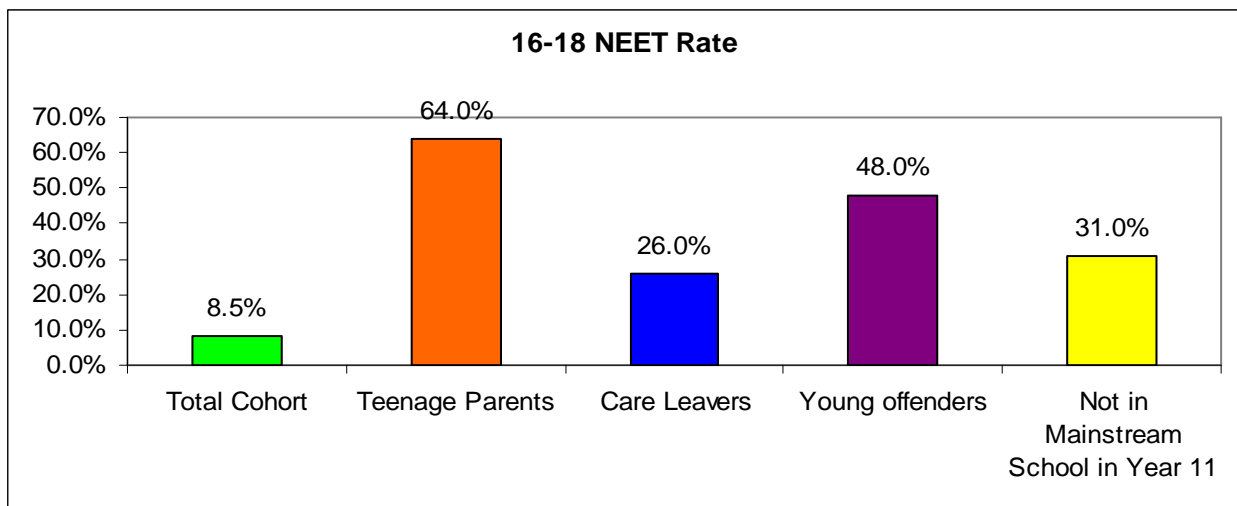
5.2 Over recent years specialised provision has had some impact (Alternative provision pre-16 and Pre E2E and E2E for post 16), but given the downward trend in the job market, many young people from these groups are now failing to progress into work.

5.3 Data from the Connexions Client Information System (CCIS), from March 2007, identified four particularly vulnerable groups of young people aged 16-18 with NEET rates which we significantly higher than the Borough Average. These groups were:

- 5.3.1 Teenage Parents – almost exclusively young women who were either pregnant beyond 28 weeks or young mothers;
- 5.3.2 Care Leavers – young people aged 16-18 who were in the care of the local authority on their sixteenth birthday;
- 5.3.3 Young Offenders – young people who were either: currently subject to a court disposal or final warning; or who had, at some point between the age of 10 – 17, been in the youth justice system; and
- 5.3.4 Young people who at the point of reaching statutory school leaving age were either: not on a mainstream secondary school roll; or who had become persistent non-attenders in the final months of Year 11.

5.4 It is important to note that these groups are, of course, **not mutually exclusive**.

5.5 The table below shows NEET from these groups as a percentage of the total 16-18 year olds in each group.



Source: CCIS (Positive Steps Oldham)

6. Proposals for 2007-08 and beyond

6.1 These proposals operate in a 17 month timeline commencing 1st September 2007 and ending in 31st January 2009.

6.2 In considering additional funded approaches to addressing the NEET issue, we believe that a balance needs to be found between prevention, pre-16, and intervention with the post-16 NEET cohort.

- 6.3 Students starting Year 11 in September 2007 will be the last school cohort to impact on Oldham successfully achieving the December 2008 stretch target. Of those who are already 16, around 75% of the 2006 leavers and all of the 2007 leavers will still remain in scope. These proposals recommend a balance between: **prevention** - targeting the Year 11 cohort in the academic year 2007-08; and **intervention** - tackling the issues causing those who are NEET to progress into learning or jobs.
- 6.4 The business case is **not** predicated on the assertion that any **significant** injection of staffing resources will be needed. Rather the proposals are aimed at progressing further, existing successful practitioner-based commissioning, developed through the Activity Agreement pilot. This enables Connexions personal advisers and other key workers to “spot purchase” personal and social development and engagement activities **which are not already funded or only partially funded** and create a bespoke programme to suit individual needs for: the 2007-08 Year 11 cohort; and the 2006 and 2007 leaver cohorts who are NEET.
- 6.5 **Year 11** – It is proposed that 75 young people who are vulnerable to successful progression in their last year of compulsory education and due to leave in 2008 are identified and targeted.
- 6.6 These will be drawn from the four vulnerable groups identified in section 5. They will be allocated a practitioner-based “activity fund” of up to £1,500 each to be used to spot purchase activities which have a proven track record of removing barriers to successful progression at 16.
- 6.7 These activities will include provision which is **not funded** or only **partially funded**. The activity fund will also support travel and other costs.
- 6.8 Examples will include:
- College and other learning provision;
 - Personal and social development including: sport; life-skills; basic skills; use of neuro-linguistic programming processes; anger management; ESOL; self-esteem etc.
 - Interview techniques and opportunity-seeking skills;
 - Simple economic awareness and travel to work patterns; and
 - Extended work experience.
- 6.9 **16-18 NEET** – It is again proposed to utilise the practitioner-based commissioning model to provide a fund of up to £500 for 100 16-18 year olds who are NEET between 4 and 16 weeks. This fund will be used to provide support prior to eligibility for the Activity Allowance at 20 weeks. Provision purchased will be similar to the activities described in 5.6.
- 6.10 **Subsidised Transport Costs** – Arrangements will be made with Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive to provide free bus and rail travel passes for a period of 13 weeks to 100 young people who enter full-time jobs outside the Oldham Borough.
- 6.11 **Public Sector Corporate Responsibility (PSCR) Initiative** – This element proposes the appointment of a 0.5 FTE Manager post to develop training and job opportunities across the public sector in the Borough aimed specifically at the four identified vulnerable groups. Existing LSC, Activity Agreement and Learning Agreement funding will be utilised to support both employer and employee.
- 6.12 It is anticipated that this initiative will extend to large private, voluntary and independent sector companies.

Tim Mitchell
Chief Executive, Positive Steps Oldham (February 2008)