

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 21st September 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director of Environment

SUBJECT: Barriers to Work Topic Group

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide a progress report on the Barriers to Work Topic Group.

2. RECOMMENDED:

2.1 That the Board notes the progress made by the Barriers to Work Topic Group in considering the findings of the employment focussed research undertaken in the Neighbourhood Management areas.

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Neighbourhood Management areas covers six Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) where worklessness is higher than 25%. To help understand why worklessness is so high in these areas (Kingsway, Riverside, Castle ward, Windmill Hill, Palace Fields and Hallwood Park) research was commissioned by the Employment, Learning and Skills Specialist Strategic Partnership and the Neighbourhood Management Partnership through the Merseyside Information Service. (The results of which are detailed in Appendix 1).

3.2 A Topic Group was established in October 2008 to analyse and better understand the research findings and to make appropriate recommendations as to how local services could be improved to address the barriers to work identified.

3.3 The Topic Group comprised of the following membership:

Cllr Eddie Jones	Chair
Cllr Sue Edge	Member
Cllr David Findon	Member
Cllr Frank Fraser	Member
Cllr Harry Howard	Member
Cllr John Stockton	Member
Trish Cooney	Employment Development Manager, HPiJ
Gerry Fitzpatrick	Head of Enterprise & Employment
Lynsey Thomas	Employment Development Officer, HPiJ

- 3.4 The Terms of Reference for the Topic Group:
'The PPB Topic Group will be responsible for considering the research findings of the recent employment focussed research on the perceived barriers to employment undertaken in the neighbourhood management areas on behalf of the Employment Learning & Skills PPB.'
- 3.5 The Topic Group has met on five occasions between October 2008 and April 2009 and held an Evidence Day Workshop at The Stobart Stadium on 25 March 2009 when key partners involved in employment, learning skills and enterprise provision were invited to consider and comment on the perceived barriers contained in the report of the Halton Neighbourhood Employment Focus Groups Summary. (A summary of the Workshop table discussions is outlined at Appendix 2).
- 3.6 The emerging issues raised by the Topic Group are outlined below:
- the transition from education (school, college, university) to work and appropriate provision of information advice & guidance to young people from Connexions service;
 - better understanding of why Halton has high levels of young people that are NEET (not in education employment or training) with a focus on:
 - (i) NEET pipeline i.e. secondary school children participating in alternative curriculum provision that are at risk of becoming NEET,
 - (ii) why young people drop out early from education, employment or training to become NEET,
 - (iii) examine long-term persistent NEET why young people do not take up employment, education or training opportunities;
 - opportunities for apprenticeships, graduate trainees and employment in the Council for young people
 - Corporate Parenting & Employment Policy for Care Leavers - why are care leavers not being employed
 - Understand the correlation between staff turnover, vacant posts, the salary churn and the use of agency staff versus the potential for the Council to recruit unemployed residents and save agency costs.
- 3.7 The next step is for Topic Group to meet with a group of local employers to get their views on the perceived barriers to employment identified in the research findings and to determine if those employers have any difficulties in recruiting, training or retaining staff.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Worklessness agenda is a key priority within the Corporate Plan and the Local Area Agreement.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No other implications.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton.

Halton has one of the highest levels of NEET in the country and the Topic Group is keen to understand the reasons for this and to recommend remedial action to improve the prospects for young people in the borough.

6.2 Employment Learning and Skills in Halton

The work of the Topic Group focuses on the effectiveness of local employment, enterprise and learning programmes to support unemployed residents back to work.

6.3 A Healthy Halton.

Poor health and disability have been identified by the focus groups as a barrier to work. A Disability Employment Network has been established with the aim of improving access to employment for local people with health conditions or disabilities and carers. A Healthy Halton Employment Topic Group under the joint chairmanship of Cllr Eddie Jones & Cllr Ellen Cargill has been established to investigate best practice and develop more effective ways of supporting disabled service users that are known to the Council to access employment and learning opportunities.

6.4 A Safer Halton

No implications identified at this time.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

No implications identified at this time.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The biggest risk is not seizing the opportunity to improve employment learning and enterprise opportunities for local resident priority groups otherwise worklessness will remain high in our most deprived localities.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The work of the Topic Group covers priority customer groups including young people, carers and disabled people, older people, offenders, those with low skills and loan parents.

9. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

Appendix 1

Halton Neighbourhood Management Employment Focus Groups Summary

Introduction

Mott MacDonald MIS were commissioned by Halton Borough Council to undertake an exploratory study to find out why unemployment persists in certain areas of Halton, despite various Government Initiatives to reduce unemployment in those areas.

Methodology

Eight focus groups were carried out with unemployed residents across Halton to gather qualitative data on their knowledge and experiences of the New Deal Programme, where they go for support in finding work, their perceived barriers to working and factors that would encourage them to work.

Finding work

Participants discussed where they have gone to get help in finding work. They mentioned:

- Halton People Into Jobs
- Job Centre
- Action for Employment (A for E)
- Crosby training
- Employment Agencies
- Connexions
- Youth Centres
- Counsellors
- Lighthouse Foundation
- Shaw Trust
- Link Up

Attitudes to working

Most of the participants maintained that they would like to work. The benefits of working they described included:

- Pride
- Motivation
- Sense of worth
- Financial benefits
- The social aspect

Self employment

Overall, most participants did not feel that being self employed was an option for them due to the record keeping and accounting involved, start up costs and the lack of job security.

Type of Work

Participants hoped to get the following types of work:

- Legal administration, clerical/Office work/reception

- Retail
- Plastering
- Parks and garden work
- Hospital porter work
- NVQ Assessors
- Work with O2
- Paramedic
- Hairdressing
- Holiday rep.
- Work with young offenders/probation
- Agricultural/ranger/parks and gardens
- Work with children/Nursery nurse
- Tiling
- Pub landlady
- Sales and marketing
- Computer engineering
- Security
- IT
- Railways repair
- Training
- Engineering Customer service
- Building/Construction
- Factory work
- Jobs dealing with people
- Warehousing and production
- HGV/Truck/lorry driving
- Homeless people/Drug and alcohol problems/Care work

Barriers to Working

Participants discussed reasons why they are prevented from working and finding Work:

• Low minimum wage

Participants maintained that they could not afford to work because with the cost of living, they would be worse off financially if they worked than if they stayed on benefits. They claimed there is no financial incentive for working.

• Lack of Support

Some felt that they did not receive any support in finding work.

• Lack of Jobs in Local Area

The group complained that there is a lack of work locally, within a reasonable travelling distance from their homes. They explained that there is a Job Centre rule that they should be able to travel one and a half hours each way to work and back but they thought this was unrealistic, especially if they have to pay for childcare.

• Cost of Travel

They further commented that the cost of travelling to and from work and work placements is a barrier to working. They argued that they are limited to

searching for jobs in certain areas due to the cost of travel. It was explained that on some work placements, travel expenses can be refunded if they are paid and claimed back but that it is difficult to pay in the first place.

- **Public Transport**

Furthermore, in relation to travel, the participants maintained that there is inadequate public transport in their area and this has an effect on what jobs they can get to, what time they can reasonably get there and how long they have to travel for.

- **Lack of Driving Licence**

Participants felt that not being able to drive was a barrier to working because it is more difficult to get to work and also, many jobs require you to have a driving license.

- **Lack of Experience**

Participants felt that their lack of experience was impeding their search for a job. They maintained that placements are supposed to address this issue but they are so often provided in the wrong field of work that they do not succeed in affording participants with valuable experience after all.

- **Health issues/disability**

Due to health considerations, some participants could not perform certain jobs.

- **Fear of interviews/lack of confidence**

Some participants felt that they lacked the confidence to find a new job after being made redundant and others lacked the confidence or grew nervous at interviews.

- **Age**

Participants in a number of groups felt that their age was a barrier.

- **Childcare/family commitments**

Finding jobs that fit around children was seen as difficult by participants. They complained that it is not easy to find childcare that provides care in the evenings or weekends. Furthermore, some felt that it is difficult to leave their children with a childcare provider as their children's behaviour changes if they are put in childcare and they have guilt associated with leaving their child and not spending enough time with them.

- **Criminal record**

Some participants felt that their criminal record is a barrier to finding work. They felt there should be more support for people with criminal records.

- **Stigma of a YMCA address.**

Participants in the Runcorn YMCA group felt strongly that they were stigmatised for living at the YMCA. They argued that employers do not want to interview them or offer them a job when they see they are living at the YMCA.

- **Lack of relevant jobs**

Participants complained that there is a lack of jobs in the area they would like to work in or are trained in. One participant had been on a course with the Social Partnership, to train to be a community worker, working with people with drug and alcohol issues. He commended this course, however, there are reportedly no jobs in that area. The Job Centre has since advised him that he needs to widen his search to encompass further types of jobs but he has been trained in a particular field and wants to work in that field.

- **Illiteracy**

Participants did not feel there was enough support for people with literacy problems.

- **Lack of feedback**

It was also explained that it is very frustrating when the effort had been put in to apply for a job and employers do not even have the courtesy to reply to their application.

- **Lack of financial support**

Some participants felt that there is a lack of financial support or funding for interview clothes and licences and training required for certain jobs. One participant, in the Central Widnes Over 35 group, commented on the lack of financial support for buying interview clothes. She maintained that most of her clothes were casual and that it would not be possible to attend an interview in such clothing.

- **Lack of information about help that is available.**

Participants were not clear about what help they could access and how to access this help.

- **Lack of joined up thinking**

One participant had come off incapacity benefit and went onto job seekers allowance and was left without money for a period because the two departments did not correlate the information. He felt that if he had known that he could not simply transfer from one benefit to another he would not have come off incapacity benefit.

- **Immigrants**

Participants also complained that there are fewer jobs in their local area because there are many immigrants who are willing to work for less money who take their jobs.

Encouragement to work

Participants discussed what would encourage them to find work.

- **More qualifications**

Participants felt that it was important for them to be able to gain more qualifications, in order to get better jobs.

- **More training/skills**

Several participants were of the opinion that improving their skills or retraining would help them to get back into the workplace.

- **Voluntary work in the relevant field**

Participants felt that there should be more voluntary work organised, in the fields that people want to work in, to give them experience. They advocated help with training, and experience, to achieve the type of job they wanted to do rather than just any job.

- **More jobs in local area**

Participants stressed the need for having a job that is in an area that is accessible for them via public transport or walking, due to cost of travel.

- **Transport**

Many felt that they would need their own transport to get a job, as public transport is not always available at shift times.

- **More support and empathy**

Participants felt that staff at the Job Centre and other employment organisations should be more friendly and understanding of their plight.

- **More support for people on incapacity benefit**

Participants felt that there should be more support for those on incapacity benefit, as often they are just left alone and they should still be encouraged and assisted to find work.

- **Support to find jobs in relevant area**

Participants argued that they would like help to find jobs in the specific area they are interested in, not having to apply for any job. One participant commended Halton People into Jobs for searching for a job he would actually like.

- **More financial support**

They also advocated more practical financial help by way of milk tokens, food tokens, free bus/rail pass/travel expenses.

- **Support when you sign off**

The participants advocated financial assistance when they sign off benefits as there may be a month period before they get paid from a new job.

- **Funding for self employment**

Funding for self employment would be useful for some participants.

- **Childcare**

Participants highlighted that with the 3 hour travelling distance that is expected of them, they will have to pay an extra 3 hours childcare, when they are not earning in those hours.

- **More flexible working patterns**

Participants called for more family friendly jobs.

- **Affordable wage/financial incentive to work**

Participants felt that in order to be better off working, the minimum wage needs to be increased or better paid jobs made available.

- **Support from local businesses**

Participants felt that local businesses should be more committed to training and providing experience. They felt that local businesses could be more supportive by offering paid training, placements and work trials and also being more relaxed on the experience they require.

- **Apprenticeships**

Participants advocated more apprenticeship schemes, regardless of age as many consider that they are too old for a traditional apprentice scheme but would still like to learn a trade.

- **More support and jobs specifically for older people**

Participants felt that older people may need more support to find jobs and some may need jobs with lighter duties because they may not be as fit as younger people and may have health issues.

- **Confidence building**

Participants in a number of groups advocated more help in building their confidence and interview techniques, in terms of returning to the workplace and taking part in interviews.

- **Access to the same information for everyone**

Participants felt that all job seekers should have access to the same information, such as placements, training, grants, other financial support, access to schemes etc. There was some confusion in some groups about what help was available and to whom.

- **Joined up/partnership thinking in relation to social initiatives**

Participants argued that areas are being regenerated, with new housing being built and community facilities, but the people living in them still have no jobs. They called for a more joined up way of looking at regeneration, where all social issues are addressed, health, housing, unemployment etc, with more jobs and more affordable housing.

Group Comments

The following section is just a sample of the comments that people made during the sessions.

- Positive aspects of the service :
- Regular meetings are good
- Providing benefits advice before you come off

- More informal meetings
- Being encouraged/getting training in something you want to do
- The HPIJ Charter course (motivation and skills)
- Paid job placements
- JCP job points easy to use
- Work trails
- Help with barriers e.g. disabilities
- Some people like websites

Not so good:

- Being trained where there are no jobs afterwards
- Not being trained in what I want to do
- Trained but then placed in an unrelated field
- Trained but no work experience
- Directing people to agency work
- Leaving people to fill in forms but literacy problems
- More training for some staff on CV preparation
- Have to use the phone in JCP
- Left on your own
- Long waiting times to see someone
- Staff do not have enough time to help
- Staff are simply processing claims
- Some just promote certain courses
- They do not listen to what you want to do
- Push people to apply for jobs not in the correct field
- Need more empathy
- Lack of privacy when talking to an advisor
- Job quality
- Minimum wage
- It all depends on how good the advisor is
- No cash incentive to take work placement so can be worse off after travel and food costs
- Placements 9 out of 10 do not get a job
- Lack of support on certain courses – just left to get on with it
- Connexions – lack of clarity who they help

Appendix 2

Barriers to Work – Partner Workshop – 25th March 2009

Summary of Table Workshops Discussions

Table 1

- Poor confidence – with completing forms and sharing personal details
- Earlier interventions – it was suggested that the numbers of people in receipt of incapacity benefit are used to hide unemployment figures
- Segmented customer base – it was agreed that partners need to be smarter about the different customer bases to better support individuals and tailor services to meet their needs (i.e. where do they live, what benefit they receive)
- Identify priorities for the borough – JCP provide a universal (national) service, more flexible monies are available to tailor services (locally/regionally) to better meet demands (i.e. WNF/NWDA)
- How organisations communicate with individuals – this should be reviewed for those that do not regularly access mainstream services (i.e. carers, incapacity benefit claimants, individuals who receive pension credits)
- Budgetary confidence – need to consider the ability for individuals to manage budgets within the home and where needs be invest in this area
- Focus on moving from inactivity to activity – need to recognise the need for a longer journey i.e. voluntary work/learning to enable positive progressions towards employment
- Re branding of services – it is recognised that individuals may be reluctant to access JCP. Neutral territory is much more effective – are there organisations that can act as intermediary bodies for JCP?
- Don't rely on people coming to us – services need to be taken to the people
- Seek to address family issues – apposed to individual issues
- Need to raise aspirations of people
- Directory of services in the borough – to be accessed by all and kept updated

Table 2

- Lack of support – very little support to individuals under 6mths unemployed. Need to focus on newly unemployed/redundant workers to avoid growing numbers of long-term unemployed
- Referrals and signposting to services and support is only being done at mandatory stage – individuals not receiving advice about help when they first claim benefits/access JCP services are more likely to become long-term unemployed
- Services available need to be more flexible i.e. available at evenings/weekends
- Lacks of experience – previously placements sourced were anywhere and everywhere with very little emphasis on whether it was suitable for

the individual. Now placements are sourced where there is the opportunity of a real job at the end

- Permitted work – can be used as a progression route for individuals who have a health condition
- Funding for employers – New Deal/ILM incentives used to move local people into local employment
- Fear of interviews – interviews need to be conducted by employers in a much more constructive and appropriate manner to avoid further damaging
- Lack of feedback - feedback is vital in order to help people improve their chances of gaining suitable employment
- Suggestion to involve employers in ‘mock interview’ days would be beneficial
- Support to be included throughout school (10-16yrs) to better prepare school leavers for the world of work
- Criminal records – lots of specialist support available to ex-offenders to help them apply for work, portraying their criminal record in a more positive way
- Employers need to be educated about offences/criminal records and the relevance of those for their vacancies
- Illiteracy – issues not being identified or addressed before individuals are mandatory referred to provision by JCP. There is lots of support currently available for Skills for Life issues
- Voluntary work – should remain voluntary and the reason for doing voluntary work should be the right reason i.e. to give something back, develop skills/experience. Mandatory referrals to voluntary sector is not voluntary and individuals are less likely to give back the sector
- More support for people on incapacity benefit – existing support should be more widely promoted i.e. 104 Linking Rule/Return to Work Credit/Pathways Support
- Joined up partner thinking – a good example used is that of HPIJ/Neighbourhood Management/Housing Associations working together to recruit and Neighbourhood Employment Officers – to be based within the community, knocking on residents doors and signposting to services available for those wanting to move into employment, learning or enterprise

Table 3

- Lack of jobs available – the decline in the number of vacancies available has impacted on the numbers of people securing employment
- Cost of travel – currently bus passes/advisor discretion fund available for transition into work. At what point does this stop and individuals have to be self-sufficient?
- Public Transport – access to some ‘employment hubs’ is limited as traditionally employees that already work there have own transport
- Driving Licenses – are there any schemes that fund driving licenses, aware that there is a scooter/moped scheme?
- Childcare/Family commitments – cost of childcare impacts on the ability to move into work particularly for Lone Parents. Childcare providers are not flexible enough to meet some individuals needs i.e.

evenings/weekends. Work needed to be done with employers/children's information services for employers to be more flexible/family friendly

- YMCA – historically there is a stigma attached to those accessing service available from the YMCA. Employers can make assumptions about prospective employees. YMCA is positively addressing lots of issues. Consider a name change?
- Immigration – EU Workers – stats show an influx of migrant workers to Halton. The perception is that generally this group of people are working below NMW and generally in TEMP factory/process roles. So are they just filling a gap locally were local people don't want TEMP work, or are local jobs being taken?
- Qualifications – is it just a perception that people need qualifications, do employers value strong work ethics instead
- Training – individuals may not be aware of the vast and wide ranging support available because they are not being told i.e. Train 2 Gain/NVQ's/Route Ways/Job Brokering/Apprenticeships
- Support in relevant areas – partnership work to meet individuals needs "joined up approach"
- Marketing if services – marketing of each others services is more effective than a huge marketing campaign
- Employer Matrix – Business 2 Business trading

In summary

- 1) Information should be communicated to individuals and employers at an appropriate level
- 2) Front line services need to be improved to the end customer to provide services at the earliest possible intervention
- 3) Consistent levels of information should be given to all customers
- 4) There is lots of support and provision in place to customers from day one of unemployment, people just need to be told about it and how to access it
- 5) A joined up approach needs to be taken to improve the life chances of local people wanting to move into learning, employment or enterprise
- 6) Services need to be taken to local people rather than relying on local people going to the services