

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

DATE: 30th January 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director Economy, Enterprise &
Property

PORTFOLIO: Employment, Learning and Skills, and
Community

SUBJECT: Department of Work and Pensions Restart
Contract Update

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with an overview of the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Restart Programme contract currently being delivered by Halton People into Jobs, including achievements to date, income and expenditure.
- 1.2 To provide opportunities to members to raise any questions with regards to the DWP Restart Programme.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) **the report be noted**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background information

- 3.1.1 In June 2021 Halton Borough Council entered into a subcontracting arrangement with Prime Contractor (G4S) who had been tasked with delivering the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) new Restart Programme. Indicative start profiles estimate that 1992 Halton residents will be supported through this programme. Referrals and starts will be received up to June 2024.
- 3.1.2 The programme is a mandatory programme for individuals that have been unemployed and in receipt of benefits for 9mths or more. Referrals to the programme are made via Jobcentre Plus (JCP) for individuals that are on Universal Credit within the All-work-related activity group (individuals in this group have to do all they can to find a job or earn more. This includes looking for jobs, applying for jobs and going to interviews).

- 3.1.3 The programme offers 'Payment by Results', which are received on achievement of sustained job outcomes.
- 3.1.4 An employed job outcome payment is paid when a participant starts employed work and accumulates earnings that are equal to or exceed the equivalent of someone working for 16 hours per week for 26 weeks, earning the National Living Wage (NLW) (earnings threshold). DWP use real time earnings information (RTI) data supplied by HMRC to identify achievement of employed job outcomes. Payment decisions are based solely on the RTI data supplied, no additional evidence or requests to review will be accepted.
- 3.1.5 Those referred to the Restart Programme have been unemployed for a minimum of 9mths and would benefit from a tailored package of support to help address multiple/complex barrier and progress them closer towards employment.
- 3.1.6 Participants can access the programme for up to 52wks. They are supported by their Advisor throughout the duration of the programme. Participants are also offered a full service offer when they move into employment to help them retain their new job. In addition to regular one to one appointments with their Advisor we provide a wraparound service including job matching support, training and access to appointments with a Health Trainer.
- 3.1.7 Signposting to specialist organisations to address specific barriers forms part of the action planning process throughout their time on programme i.e., welfare rights (debt/money worries), MIND/talking therapies (mental health), Housing Solutions (housing/homelessness).

3.2 Performance/achievement

- 3.2.1 Contract delivery commenced in June 2021.

Performance is comprehensively managed and monitored through a range of internal and external measures.

- 3.2.2 Performance to date – June 2021 to December 2022:

- 747 customers have started on the Restart Programme
- 192 authorised first job starts have been achieved to date
- 79 sustained job outcomes have been achieved to date

- 3.2.3 In addition to the contractual targets we are required to achieve including number of starts on programme, job starts and sustained job outcomes the contract is also measured against the following customer service standards (CSS's):

CSS 1. Providers must ensure that a Face-to-Face Initial Meeting is conducted with a Participant and a start is recorded as a minimum:

- (a) 90% of cases within 28 working days of referral and
- (b) 70% of cases within 15 working days of referral.

CSS 2. For all Participants who 'Start' on the programme an initial Diagnostic Assessment must be completed and recorded within 28 days of the referral.

CSS 3. For all Participants who 'Start' on the programme an Initial SMART Action Plan must be completed and signed by the Provider and the Participant within 28 days of the referral

CSS 4. For all Participants, the Provider must deliver 1-2-1 support at least fortnightly.

CSS 5. For all Participants, the Provider must conduct a 1-2-1 Face to Face review meeting no less frequently than every 4 weeks.

CSS 6. For all Participants the Provider must formally reassess the Diagnostic Assessment no less frequently than every 3 months. This must include evaluation of the Participant's circumstances/barriers, with agreed next steps reviewed and recorded.

CSS 7. For all Participants the Provider must review and update the SMART Action Plan no less frequently than every 4 weeks. Action Plans must be signed by both parties and include agreed next steps and activities reflective of Participant and Provider activity and the Participants Diagnostic Assessment.

CSS 8. Providers are required to achieve a high overall Customer Satisfaction rate based on a Customer Satisfaction Survey. Success will be measured relative to other CPAs.

3.3 Income and expenditure

- 3.3.1. Income is generated from a monthly service delivery fee and from job outcome payments. An employed job outcome payment is only paid when a participant starts employed work and accumulates earnings that are equal to or exceed the equivalent of someone working for 16 hours per week for 26 weeks, earning the National Living Wage (NLW) (earnings threshold). DWP use real time earnings information (RTI) data supplied by HMRC to identify achievement of employed job outcomes. Payment decisions are based solely on the RTI data supplied, no additional evidence or requests to review will be accepted.
- 3.3.2 Income and expenditure is closely monitored through a combination of internal and external mechanisms, to ensure that contracts are delivered efficiently.
- 3.3.3 Where possible, access to other available services and/or funding streams are maximised to support the delivery of the Restart Programme contract and their challenging targets. The Restart Programme is delivered by HPIJ, and the services delivered by the rest of the Employment, Learning & Skills Division within which HPIJ sits

provide valuable opportunities for Restart Programme clients at nil cost.

- 3.3.4 Income from the Restart Programme has enabled us to work collaboratively with other council departments i.e., Health Improvement Team to enable the participants to benefit from a fuller offer.

3.4 Key Successes

- 3.4.1 Mobilisation and implementation of the contract was achieved within a short timescale ensuring that the contract 'go live' date was met on 27th June 2021.
- 3.4.2 Performance against the 8 customer service standards has improved over the last quarter (Oct-Dec 22) and the required number of customers into work (initial first earnings) has improved towards the end of the last quarter. Now that staffing levels have increased in December, we expect that we will continue to see further improvements in these areas.

3.5 Key issues

- 3.5.1 Ongoing recruitment of sufficiently qualified and experienced front-line staff to deliver the programme by the required timescales. The contract has been significantly impacted by two annual recruitment freezes since we went live in June 2021. We have been reliant on recruiting temporary agency staff where possible which has not always been sustainable. This resulted in us being placed on a formal Enhanced Performance Regime (EPR) in October 2022 to improve performance against specific contractual targets and customer service standards.
- 3.5.2 The number of referrals to the programme has been lower than the anticipated profiles. Referrals and programme start need to increase to meet the contracted (indicative) profiles. This is a national issue (not just local to Halton/Merseyside district). However, we are working closely with both of our local Jobcentre Plus offices in Runcorn and Widnes to maximise where possible the quantity and quality of suitable referrals to the programme.

3.6 Concluding comments

- 3.6.1 The Restart team have worked very hard with limited staffing resources to implement, deliver and sustain the contract during very challenging times. Performance is improving which has been recognised by the Prime Contractor. Quality and compliance standards have also improved month on month during the previous quarter. Now that staffing levels have increased significant focus needs to continue on supporting our job ready and able customers into suitable and sustainable employment to increase performance against our DWP

contractual targets. Progressing customers furthest away from the labour market will also be key to ensuring their job readiness improves whilst on programme.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None identified at this stage.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

DWP contracts are closely monitored to ensure sufficient income is being generated to cover the full delivery costs of provision.

HBC internal audit conduct annual audits on externally funded provision across the Employment, Learning and Skills Division.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Some Restart Programme customers engage with other projects across Halton that complement each other in supporting local residents and their families with a range of issues.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

The fantastic achievements that have come out of the various Work Programmes delivered by Halton Borough Council's Employment, Learning and Skills Division getting so many people into work are a very positive outcome for the local economy. Many of the individuals that have accessed the programme have also gained vital maths, English, IT and employability skills along the way, in addition to sector specific qualifications such as SIA licences, FLT, CSCS etc. Signposting to partner organisations to support individuals furthest away from the labour market has been a key part of the programme. Delivery of the Restart Programme will continue to build on the success we have had previously.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Restart Programme customers will be signposted to various health and wellbeing initiatives that are delivered by Halton Borough Council and other external agencies including the Health Improvement Team to support individuals with a range of complex health barriers.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The management of the Restart Programme contract has been meticulous and close monitoring both internally and externally ensure any risks identified are carefully mitigated, with clear action plans in place to address any underperformance, quality and compliance factors.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.