

TITLE: VALUING EMPLOYMENT NOW

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REASON FOR ITEM

1. Policy Overview Committee on 16th December 2009 requested an information report on the national strategy to improve employment prospects for adults with learning disabilities, Valuing Employment Now (2009).
2. This report provides an update on the Council's response to the strategy and the work undertaken to promote the employment of people with learning disabilities.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMITTEE

3. To note the contents of the report.
4. To support proposals to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

INFORMATION

Background

5. *Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with learning disabilities*, is a national government strategy with the goal of radically increasing the number of people with moderate and severe learning disabilities in employment by 2025. The current employment rate for disabled people as a whole is 48% whilst for people with learning disabilities it is estimated to be about 7%. In real terms, to close the gap would mean around 45,000 more people with learning disabilities gaining employment. National targets and milestones to move towards this will be published during 2010.

6. This is a cross-government strategy that seeks cultural change to increase aspirations and expectations and clearly states the requirement for major changes in approach throughout the system: from health and social care, schools, colleges, employment agencies, employers, people with learning disabilities themselves and their families.

7. The Delivery Plan, sets out the key priorities, with roles and responsibilities for implementation at regional and local level. The proposals are for change in a number of key areas:

- **Growing the presumption of employability.** The single most important thing is to raise expectations about work through campaigns with parents, workforce training and demonstration sites.

- **Joint working across agencies to create employment paths for individuals** that map out a clear pathway into full time jobs.
- **Better work preparation at school, college and adult learning.** Work aspirations need to be reinforced through good career and skills preparation at school and college. The new Foundation Learning Tier will allow for job coaching to be included.
- **The benefits system, promoting self-employment and encouraging employers to see the business case.** Clearing up confusion about benefits. Public sector to lead by example and become exemplar employers of people with learning disabilities.

8. Employment provides not only financial independence for the individual but also shifts the dependence on benefits and the impact that has on the wider economy, as well as improving health and well-being. There are currently about 650 adults with learning disabilities known to services in Hillingdon and changing the employment status of even a small percentage would have long term financial impacts across a range of budgets.

Current Position in Hillingdon

9. Within directly provided services, Employment Link offers support into employment, with a small staff team based in day services, working with users to develop CVs, ensure they have undertaken training and develop potential opportunities for employment. They have had success with a work experience programme with BAA at Heathrow, which started in September 2009, offering eight week placements for one individual at a time, providing skills development opportunities in areas such as Customer Care and Health and Safety awareness.

10. Employment Link also support the UPWARD Group, (Understanding People Who Are Different) comprising about 18 service users who provide training and awareness on a paid, sessional basis to a wide group of agencies in the borough, including Hillingdon Hospital, GPs, schools and the Council.

11. Currently work is underway to develop vocational profiles for service users, identifying their strengths and abilities and clearly identifying routes into employment for them. Within Personalised Services, some work experience is going to be offered in administration tasks but as most standard recruitment and selection processes are difficult for people with learning disabilities, an alternative to interviews is being piloted. This will take the form of work practice for a given number of days – allowing people to try out the job and for interviewers to ‘assess’ their suitability.

12. The Rural Activities Garden Centre provides horticultural training and experience for 25 service users, offering opportunities to gain experience in dealing with the public, working in the shop and developing work related skills. This has been the subject of an independent Options Appraisal and is now a

project established to launch it as a social enterprise focusing on expanding employment potential. Opportunities are being explored for this service to be involved in contract work obtained through Green Spaces.

13. The borough also commissions Perfect Start, a preventative resource service, operated by an independent organisation, United Response and this helps to signpost people with moderate needs into education, leisure and employment. They support 23 adults with learning disabilities, in mostly part-time paid employment, sustained in the Library, Yes Dining and local businesses. In addition, eight people work on a voluntary basis in such as a dining club, charity shop and local church.

14. The Hillingdon Outreach Project, run by Owl Housing provides support to people with moderate learning disabilities ranging from social engagement to independence skills – travel training, personal safety and helping people to become work ready.

15. Sessional employment is growing with service users taking part in one off paid opportunities with the Transformation Team, including two photo shoots to develop banners to promote the 'Support, Choice & Independence' programme and to create a photo library for future use in publications etc. A total of 14 clients received payment as a result of this work.

16. The UPWARD group has provided bitesize sessions to Council staff. This presentation team is made up of service users who talk about their disabilities and give the audience an insight and understanding of partial sight, what it is like to use a wheelchair, to have epilepsy, to be deaf, etc. They have highlighted the importance of 'Valuing Employment Now' in these sessions. They have also delivered sessions to The Department of Works and Pensions, Social Work Students at Bucks University, Key Stage 2 Primary School Children, leisure facilities within the Borough, Hillingdon Hospital for the Learning Disability Awareness Day. This is a continuing source of ad hoc employment for this group of service users.

17. As the Transformation Team continues to roll out self-directed support and undertake further stakeholder engagements, they will often offer employment to service users as and when available.

Developing Proposals

18. In response to Valuing Employment Now, an officer led Employment Strategy Group has been set up with the aim of increasing the number of people in real paid work. A cross agency approach is being taken, to ensure that all are working together with the same aim, avoiding duplication and developing a robust network. This involves all agencies contributing to this agenda including Adult Education, Healthy Hillingdon, Human Resources, Learning and Development, Transformation, Specialist Services, as well as DASH, Perfect Start and in-house Employment Link. It will expand to include the Department of Work and Pensions, Job Centre Plus who are expected to

help individuals with the job search and maintenance. This will be led by the Joint Commissioning Team in ASCHH.

19. The strategy group has already identified a number of initial workstreams aimed at improving performance in this area including:

The Council as an employer:

20. Valuing Employment Now makes the point that it is essential that the public sector leads by example in recruiting people with learning disabilities. Hillingdon could work towards this by:

- adjusting recruitment procedures to make them more appropriate, improving accessible formats, alternatives to standard interviews
- using supply chains or agencies and identifying opportunities for contractors to employ people with disabilities, for example gardening contracts
- using the in-house apprenticeship scheme for people with learning disabilities
- agreeing targets in Workforce Strategies, taking a fresh look at opportunities and carving out areas for people with disabilities.

21. Valuing Employment Now is part of the ASCH&H Workforce for the Future Project Plan 2009 - 2012 and currently sits within the Recruitment & Retention Workstream. Alan Galloway as project manager for the workforce plan will take the lead for ASCH&H.

22. A request has been made to the Senior Policy Officer, Equalities & Diversity to see if corporately they plan on undertaking any work regarding this project.

Increasing the Presumption of Employability:

23. Valuing Employment Now is aimed at raising expectations about the potential of people with disabilities to work and the benefits that result:

- this needs to start in schools and with parents, but employment should also become a recognised aim in the support planning process, embedded as part of assessments, reviews, care plans and Person Centred Plans.
- With the increased flexibility of personal budgets, support can be bought in by way of job coaches or personal assistants to help individuals into sustainable employment.
- Creating opportunities - Healthy Hillingdon, a Council and NHS Hillingdon Partnership, has been working with local schools on culture change and creating opportunities for people with disabilities to work in the emerging Extended Schools programmes. A proposal is being developed with the aim of matching people and skills to real employment. The option being developed includes supported work within creative curriculum activities, community events, grounds

maintenance and co-ordination of school allotments and environmental conservation programmes.

Benefits system:

24. The benefits system is often perceived as an obstacle to employment in the way that it works.

- There are some examples of case studies from other boroughs showing that people are financially better off through working at least 16 hours per week and these need to be promoted locally.
- Government are developing information as part of a new Valuing People website shortly to go live, as well considering adjusting the benefits process to allow for people to move into jobs.

2012:

25. Using the opportunities presented by the Olympics.

- Looking for opportunities as a result of the Olympics and their legacy, whether for people to become self-employed in small scale enterprises, or through employment in larger contracts.
- Linking with any project groups set up by the Council to pursue employment opportunities

26. This is work in progress and will continue through the current difficult financial times. Finding employment, and sustaining people with disabilities in employment, tends to be a circular process rather than a linear progression and depends upon changing those attitudes and processes that are barriers to employment, including the currently low expectations of service users and their families.