Tackling Worklessness

Purpose

1. To receive a report on progress against the key actions in the West of England Tackling Worklessness Plan.

Background

2. The following key developments have taken place since the submission of the original report to the Skills and Competitiveness Board on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2010. The Tackling Worklessness Plan formed the basis of that report.

   a. The announcement of the main or “prime” contractors for the DWP Single Work Programme was made at the end of November, with DWP aiming to go live between April and July 2011.
   b. DWP are no longer able to devolve the funding or commissioning of the Work Programme (Co-commissioning). DWP believe it will be crucial that the Work Programme suppliers work effectively with partners to join up provision and overcome barriers.
   c. At their last meeting Learning Partnership West (LPW) formally agreed to take joint responsibility for the Young People Action Plan, contained within the Tackling Worklessness Plan. A member of the worklessness team is now embedded part-time within LPW to facilitate both the action plan and long-term joint working, ensuring the two organisations are closely aligned.
   d. The Skills Funding Agency recently announced the removal of all targets from Further Education (FE) colleges, thus freeing them to set their own priorities. Joint working with the FE colleges on employability skills through the joint planning process is essential.
   e. The Comprehensive Spending Review and its impact on local authorities and FE spend will impact on support for tackling worklessness in the most disadvantaged communities.

Update on the current position

3. The Tackling Worklessness Plan set out actions in the following four areas. The remainder of this report provides a progress update for each of these areas:

   - Tackling multiple deprivation (especially in disadvantaged areas)
   - Skills for employability
   - Young people
   - Employer engagement
Tackling Multiple Deprivation in disadvantaged areas

4. **Develop a Multi-Agency Approach** – Due to the potential impact of the introduction of the DWP Single Work Programme we have concentrated most of our resources on this objective. To this end the Partnership successfully held four events aimed at ensuring those organisations that support the workless are both informed and able to participate in the Single Work Programme (SWP):

   a. First Event – Presentation from DWP on the SWP and its potential impact at sub-contractor level. Presentation from the Skills Funding Agency on the likely impact of the higher minimum contract levels now to be operated. Over 100 small providers and voluntary sector organisations attended the event at the Council House, Bristol.

   b. Second Event – A potential prime DWP contractor briefed voluntary sector organisations on how they would envisage working with local providers.

   c. Third event – Working with Voscur and CVS South Gloucestershire a workshop was held in St. Werburghs to support the voluntary sector in contract negotiation skills.

   d. Fourth event – An event bringing together potential prime SWP providers with potential sub-contractors to facilitate joint working. Twelve prime providers and over 50 voluntary sector organisations attended.

The specification for the Work Programme allows maximum flexibility for the bidders to develop innovative tenders to meet the needs of localities. Bidders are encouraged to work closely key local stakeholders to fully understand the local picture and the existing provision so they can develop good quality proposals. This requirement is reflected in the Work Programme Framework specification as an important aspect of any bid.

We have therefore focussed our activity on engagement with bidders. We have developed local supporting information for supporting bidders on local issue, which was presented at a successful ‘Building Relationships’ event, which was attended by the 4 UA’s together with 9 potential prime contractors. We also presented at a DWP South West regional event to inform the potential prime providers of the priorities and challenges in tackling worklessness across the West of England.

Going forward DWP recognise that a strong ongoing relationship between Jobcentre Plus, Prime Providers and local partners will be key to the successful delivery of the programme.

We continue to meet individually with the potential primes to build relationships for future collaborative working. Currently there appears to be a real appetite amongst Prime Providers for collaborative working, including accountability, in the future.

5. **Develop pilot activity to support separate cohorts from areas of multiple deprivation and test the Customer Journey** – Pilot activity has been commissioned and will work with those furthest from the labour market. Activity will concentrate on identifying and removing barriers to employment such as childcare, skills and debt in:

   - Bristol East & Central – Refugee & Migrant Communities
   - Snow Hill, Bath – Chronic IB Claimants
   - Weston-super-Mare South & Central – Lone Parents
This project aims to move workless people from exclusion to inclusion. It is recognised that the six month life of the project is not necessarily long enough to move those furthest from the labour market into jobs and that they may enter mainstream provision which leads them into work. After a competitive tendering exercise the pilot is being delivered by Working Links and CSV Avon working in conjunction with Westonworks.

**Employer Engagement**

6. *Develop a graduate improvement programme between employers and universities to reduce graduate worklessness and improve graduate utilisation* – A meeting was held on 12th January with all four universities plus City of Bristol College and Weston College to discuss the different approaches in addressing graduate utilisation. The group will pull together and build on existing activities that may be able to be enhanced through sharing best practice and exploring opportunities to build more collaborative provision. The group will seek in particular to provide a framework for collaboration not simply between Higher Education Institutes, Further Education and public authorities, but also with employers and employer’s organisations.

Future areas for collaboration included placements, the advertising of vacancies and better connections with SME’s.

The next meeting will be scheduled for late Feb/early March to which some key employers will be invited to in order to discuss how to improve direct links between employers and HE providers.

7. *Revise & update the support for business document* – The Support for Businesses leaflet, which was first published in spring 2009, has been revised and covers opportunities for growth, recruitment, skills and managing during a downturn. The leaflet will be circulated with the non-domestic rates by all four UA’s in early 2011 and will be available in pdf form for electronic distribution.

8. *Increase the engagement of businesses in the tackling worklessness agenda* – Work on the first stage has begun and relevant agencies that are already operating business engagement strategies attended a workshop on 27th January to discuss how best to encourage businesses to engage with initiatives to reduce worklessness.

A series of ideas came out of the workshop including:
- setting up an online network for agencies (LinkedIn)
- holding breakfast sessions immediately before jobs fairs to engage exhibiting businesses
- utilising existing networks, and case studies to promote engagement

9. *Create a common approach to planning processes to increase the availability of work experience placements and apprenticeships within the construction phase of new developments* – Information has now been gathered from each UA on their current processes for employment and skills. The next meeting will be held in
February 2011 to discuss best practice and, through using the shared information, highlight gaps and areas for development.

**Skills for Employability**

10. *Improving the provision of labour market intelligence to providers* – The first edition of ‘Forward Thinking’, a labour market information newsletter aimed at improving providers’ knowledge of both the current labour market and future trends, was circulated on 1 November 2010. The newsletter can be viewed at: [http://www.westofengland.org/media/197211/forward%20thinking%20nletter.pdf](http://www.westofengland.org/media/197211/forward%20thinking%20nletter.pdf)

11. *Developing an effective skills pledge proposition to ensure that vulnerable people already in work are supported and retained, especially within the public sector* – The existing public sector HR directors Workforce Partnership met to identify ways to develop a co-ordinated and sustainable approach to intermediate skills development in the public sector.

12. *Promoting a ‘wrap around apprenticeship service’, offering flexible entry for workless people into apprenticeships and also progression to Level 3, thus improving sustainable employment* – In conjunction with the National Apprenticeship Service, Learning Partnership West (including Shared Commissioning Services) and both City of Bristol College and Weston College, we are developing a ‘Jobs without Training Pilot’ aimed at 16-18 year olds currently in jobs without training which will test out flexible entry to apprenticeships. A series of meetings have taken place to agree processes and resolve data and funding issues and the pilot will begin during February to be evaluated in July 2011.

**Young People**

13. Learning Partnership West (formerly Connexions) have agreed to take on joint responsibility for the Young People objectives within the Tackling Worklessness Plan and therefore some redrafting of the plan is currently taking place.

14. *Targeting remaining 300 Future Jobs Fund (FJF) places within deprived areas inc. exit strategy* – Activity has taken place to ensure that current FJF placements are turned into apprenticeships wherever possible. Processes are being developed to facilitate this progression into sustainable jobs.

**Recommendation**

That the Board members consider the report, give their views and endorse the progress made.

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