

## WANDSWORTH EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS PARTNERSHIP (WESP)

Minutes of a meeting of the Wandsworth Employment and Skills Partnership held in Room 140, Town Hall, Wandsworth, SW18 on Monday, 18th July 2011 at 10.00 a.m.

### PRESENT:

Councillor Cousins – Chairman (Council’s Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Business Partnerships)

Mike Adeleke (MA) – TWIN

Mike Brook (MB) – Wandsworth Borough Council (WBC) Economic Development Officer (EDO)

Giovanni Coppa (GC) – A4e

Steve Diamond (SD) - WBC EDO

Martin Fisk (MF) – STC

Georgios Fella (GF) - Reed in Partnership

Santino Fragola (SF) – WBC Children’s Services Department

Gareth Jones (GJ) – WBC Administration Department

Amy Mackinder (AM) – Ingeus

Annie McDowall (AMc) – SHARE Community

Nesh Naicker (NN) – CDG

Jashoda Pindoria (JP) – Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

Josephine Ross (JR) - WBC – Housing Department

### APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence received from Amber Shotton (A4E) and Stephen Charlery (SW London & St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust)

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed the partnership representatives to the meeting and invited those present to introduce themselves. He then outlined his vision for future partnership working.

### 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th May 2011 were confirmed as a correct record.

Following up some of the action points from the previous meeting - a written update on Work Choice Provision from JP was tabled (copy interleaved).

Further information on DWP supporting Youth Employment and the recently announced Innovation Fund can be viewed on the DWP website [www.DWP.GOV.UK](http://www.DWP.GOV.UK).

On the issue raised on MENCAP not taking referrals, JP confirmed that the capacity issues had now been resolved and there should be no waiting list from October.

### 3. RATIFICATION OF WANDSWORTH EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY (WESS)

SD explained that Draft 3 of the Strategy (circulated) had been updated to incorporate targets and comments from the partnership. This had been referred to the Council's Strategic Planning and Transportation Committee and had been further updated to address some concerns of the Committee. This included a new Chapter 4, which detailed the role of local partners (and he asked the meeting to let him know their views on this) and Chapter 5 had been modified, in conjunction with the Council's policy unit, to set targets.

The two principal targets would be 1) - the efforts to increase the employment rate and 2) - to reduce the number of people claiming out of work benefits in the 6 worst performing wards. Partners had expressed the desire to see actual numbers given as targets rather than just the percentage rates, so these had been included. SD asked the question was this deliverable? He suggested that the target set for an employment rate of 80% in 3 years might not be achievable but asked for views regarding the indicative figures for moving off benefits.

Data on skills levels had also been included but the measurement was not accurate as it was based on a small local sample and was to be used as an indicator of progress rather than a target. Comparisons with other London Boroughs had also been included but this was for benchmarking purposes as there was no intention of competing with other inner London boroughs.

MF asked if the figures for working age population qualified at Level 2 or below was based on a 16+ or 18+ age group, if it was 16+ then the figure of 4,000 upgrading their skills each year was realistic.

JP felt the targets for increasing the employment rate were ambitious, JCP had seen a recent drop in job vacancies and there needed to be a more realistic and flexible approach to setting this target.

MB agreed to damp down the figures.

JP said JCP were dealing with ESA customers who had been assessed as fit for work but finding that this was not always proving to be the case. SF noted that JSA figures had gone up by 26K nationally, JP said JCP had just seen a dip in Wandsworth and now had 98 less customers.

MB added that it was not a good sign if the vacancy rate was dropping. JP added that job opportunities would increase as the Nine Elms redevelopment got underway but thought the Olympics were unlikely to have a significant effect for long term unemployed.

SD asked how many new customers JCP were getting as a result of the benefit changes to ESA and JSA. JP said she did have the figures available and would circulate.

JP Informed the meeting that the Flexible Support Fund (FSF) had been devolved to district level and JCP were looking at ways this could be used. However, this could not include the Work Programme. There was also the possibility of match funding but whatever project was funded had to compliment and not duplicate existing services.

MB asked if JCP could look at supporting an outreach project working with the housing sector.

In response to a question from JR, JP explained that the purpose of the FSF was to move people closer to work. JR suggested providing a Financial Health Check for those customers losing benefits. JP said they could investigate the options of running roadshows and workshops around the topic of financial management.

SD asked whether the figures for reducing the number of people claiming benefits over the next 3 years, 850 across the borough and 570 from the worst performing neighbourhoods, was a realistic target. JP said she thought this was achievable.

In response to a question on whether there were figures for the different benefit types, SD responded that they had not gone into that level of detail but it was possible to report changes for these (noting the time involved in bringing all the information together).

JP added that JCP were involved with the Family Recovery Project and will be bringing a dedicated advisor into the new team.

The Chairman confirmed that the figures would be looked at again, the principle headlining targets would be to increase the employment rate and to reduce the number of people claiming benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods, and, if any of the partners had concerns regarding Chapter 4, to let EDO know by 19th August.

(Action – EDO/All partnership members)

#### 4. Taking forward the WESS strategic objectives

SD introduced the report and circulated a summary of the proposed Task and Finish Groups (TAF) for each strategic objective including suggested milestones.

The suggested T and F groups are as follows-

**SO1 Employer engagement and meeting recruitment/skills needs**

Employers, employer facing organisations, skills providers, job brokerage providers, careers advisors. SD suggested that the Chamber of Commerce may wish to lead on this.

**SO2 New ways of working in partnership to deliver at the front line**

Neighbourhood based organisations and front line staff, outreach organisations, providers of social housing, health providers, GPs, etc. - SD suggested this needed a measured approach as to what is achievable and was open to involvement from a range of partners.

**SO3 Information and communication between partners**

Strategic organisations/staff, advice services, front line staff who often make referrals, 'gateway' organisations, any client facing organisation. SD added that EDO were willing to take this one forward.

SD asked who wanted to take forward, lead and develop each of the task and finish groups with a view to having a scoping exercise (what we would like to do, barriers, ambitions, resources) completed by the end of the year and EDO would co-ordinate the groups.

JR added that she was pleased to see 2 and 3 in the strategy particularly the focus on an integrated joined up approach.

MB indicated that an integrated approach was evident in the child poverty strategy and the various locality groups which brought together a wide range of organisations.

The Chairman asked why EDO were not volunteering for SO2, MB responded that they would find this difficult without extra resources but would consider their involvement if there were no other volunteers.

JP added that JCP were committed to outreach work but would also be offering more services online, they did not want to be seen as a benefit advice service but one that helped people into sustained employment. JR added that it needed to be kept simple with a "one stop" approach offering rounded advice from a number of organisations.

JP informed the meeting that the Job Centre in Hammersmith and Fulham did offer Housing Benefit Advice on the premises and this made it easier to fast track customers when all the services were available at one location. Once the customer had their HB issues dealt with they were more eager to look for work or educational training. This could be trialled in Wandsworth but JCP needed to find new premises as their current lease was about to expire. Another option was to look at having a housing partner desk in the job centre and to have an advisor on the premises to offer help when going in to work. It could help prevent customers becoming longterm unemployed if they could be supported at the benefits claim stage.

SD appreciated that it would be difficult to finalise the group memberships at this stage as not all the partners were in attendance, however, the initial membership of the groups from volunteers at the meeting would be as follows-

On **SO1**, Lifelong Learning and STC volunteered to work on this group and JP indicated that Alison Francis from the Battersea Job Shop would also be part of this group.

On **SO2**, JR - WBC Housing Department, Benefits Team, JCP and Councillor Cousins volunteered. (Note – EDO subsequently agreed to lead this group)

On **SO3**, EDO volunteered to lead this group. (Note – WBC Housing Department subsequently agreed to lead this group)

The Chairman indicated that the proposed membership of the groups would be drawn up and circulated to partners by 27th July.

SD added that there would be an interim report to the next meeting of the Partnership Board, scoping would be completed by the end of the year and a final report on the implementation plans would be submitted to the January meeting.

(Action EDO/All Partnership members)

## 5. FORMALISATION OF WESP MEMBERSHIP AND PROCEDURES

The report proposed formalising a core membership to attend meetings and make decisions and a wider membership which would be more of an information network which would be engaged through e-mail bulletins and involvement on an ad hoc basis, for example through the Strategic Objective working groups. The proposed annual conference would be a way for the WESP Board to engage with the wider membership.

SD introduced the report, the suggested Partnership Board comprised of 18 members, this needed to be a workable number but since the agenda despatch, Kelly Pegrum, who covers substance misuse for NHS Wandsworth, had indicated that she would like to be included. This opened up the possibility of two health representatives – one from substance misuse and one covering other health barriers. The current proposal also does not include careers provision through Next Steps or Connexions (delivered by Prospects) it would probably be sensible to add them to CAB covering advice and guidance.

Consideration also needed to be given to the involvement of the third sector in the overall membership of the board and how best to effect this.

The Chairman added that the Partnership Board needed to be a workable number and whether any of the organisations could be dropped.

MB suggested that Wandsworth Business Partnership could be removed but the Chairman added that they should be included as this was a good opportunity to strengthen private sector involvement.

It was suggested that consideration could be given to inviting a representative from the Skills Funding Agency (the replacement body for the Learning and Skills Council), initially they were not interested but SF thought this might change as they had now become too remote.

SD undertook to finalise the proposals for the membership of the Partnership Board.

A wider WESP membership would be established based upon the information exchange network model set out in the report.

An annual conference would be arranged for the wider network, (possibly including the members of the Wandsworth Business Partnership), starting in spring 2012.

(Action EDO)

## 6. SKILL UPDATE

### **South Thames College**

MF gave an update of activities at the College -

1,000 places should be available on Growth Employability Courses in 2011/2012 this would be in partnership with JCP to find new short rolling pathways to support JSA and ESA clients in work.

Individuals on inactive benefits will be able to continue to study at the college with the college supporting the student's fees. This will enable those on low skills to continue to study or gain access to HE.

Growth of Apprenticeships for 16 -18 and 19+. STC had ambitious plans for 2011/12 to double apprenticeship delivery. Motor Cycle, heating and ventilation, catering and retail, civil engineering, dental nurses, building services and creative digital media courses had 320 new starts. STC would be interested in working with local employer networks to support apprenticeship growth.

Investing in the creation of an employment agency to support progression into work, building on current employer networks and tracking destinations.

They will continue to offer fulltime Level 2 and 3 vocational training at the college or study in employment with SMEs. Progression entitlement for those below Level 2. Continuing to support English Language skills through ESOL or Literacy to meet local demand. STC would be willing to consider

expanding vocational provision where locally employers/partners felt there was a demand.

More facilities would be open at weekends and evenings. Training salons and sports facilities would be available on Saturday's.

To increase the range and availability of Adult Community Learning Courses.

STC EMA's to continue to support local young people in study with January starts in key vocational areas to address NEET. STC would like to increase this provision working with local partners.

### **Lifelong Learning**

SF reported that the apprenticeship target was 160-180 for next year. Employers who might be concerned about offering apprenticeships in the current climate could be enticed with the £3,900 a year allowance. The scheme would apply to the 16-19 age group, minimum wage levels would apply after that.

Areas covered by Lifelong Learning include Business, Admin, IT, customer services, health and social care.

MF added that the apprenticeship scheme offered 16-18 year olds an alternative to university. SF pointed out that there were also a variety of pre-apprenticeship courses operating through ESF monies.

JR asked whether there was any merit in looking at unemployed households as a whole rather than individuals. SF mentioned that the Family Recovery Project will be dealing with this issue and would go live in Wandsworth on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

### **INGEUS**

AM informed the meeting that, INGEUS had been up and running from 1<sup>st</sup> June. In that time they had 119 referrals from Wandsworth Jobcentre Plus with 3 job starts to date. An English Language class starts tomorrow, the Accessible Community Experts (ACE) network is ready to work along side Ingeus to provide specific support to overcome barriers to work and the Self Employment stream is ready to go live. 4 customers had gone on to Vocational Routeways (where they receive 18 weeks of training and a work placement) and things were generally working well.

### **TWIN**

MA informed the meeting that TWIN had received 102 referrals since start up and were expecting more from Kingston. 90% of the referrals were on JSA. Their customers were mostly seeking positions in retail, distribution, admin and general construction, and their consultants were actively tapping

into the vacancy database and contacting employers across London. They would be interested in working on SO1 Employment Engagement.

#### **CDG**

NN informed the partnership that CDG had been operating for 1 month from their new premises in Hardwick's Square. They had 81 referrals, 47 starts and 2 job outcomes. The Employee Relationship Manager works with the Business Manager to identify vacancies. They are strict on appointment attendance and sanctions.

#### **REED**

GF explained that REED were currently involved alongside the other five Prime contractors on a "Work Programme Single offer", specifically at this stage with TFL and Crossrail. The main rationale behind this is so the customer experience is one of positivity. Through a concerted, structured approach the Work Programme can be branded as an alternative recruitment approach and through this methodology a reduction in duplicating calls / visits to one employer will occur.

#### **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting will be Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> October (venue to be confirmed). The following meeting would be in January 2012 (day to be confirmed).

(Action EDO/Secretary)

Meeting ended 11.40am.