

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

24 AUGUST 2010

FINAL REPORT – UPDATE REVIEW OF IMPROVING THE LEVEL OF EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide the Board with information regarding the recent review of the previous investigation into Improving the Levels of Employment for People with Disabilities. If Members are in agreement with the report's contents then it will be submitted to the Executive in due course.

BACKGROUND

2. When the panel undertook the review its aim was for the investigation to consider how the Council was working with people with a disability to help them into paid and meaningful employment and ensure that people had the opportunities and support to enable them to enter the world of work.
3. The panel had focussed its attention specifically on those people that the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities was designed to help. That included the 2,000 people from the hardest to reach groups who had mental health problems, learning disabilities and physical disabilities.
4. When the panel undertook its review between July and November 2008 the FORWARDS team was in its infancy and the panel therefore asked to receive an update on their work after a six-month period. An update was provided in July 2009 and following that update the panel put forward three further recommendations to the Executive.

The Panel's Recommendations

5. At the time of the update the Health Scrutiny Panel had been considering Stroke Services in Middlesbrough and as part of that review had considered how victims of stroke could be helped back to work. The panel therefore wanted to ensure that links between James Cook Hospital and the FORWARDS team were strengthened.

6. The panel recommended that the FORWARDS service should ensure that there is an appropriate referral system with the James Cook Hospital to enable the service to provide a facility to support people who have had a stroke back into work.
7. Members were informed at the time of the update that employment of people with learning disabilities in the public sector is lower than in the rest of the economy. The panel recommended that the Council considered the option of ensuring that any vacancies within Middlesbrough Council are submitted to the FORWARDS team prior to their publication for the team to assess if they are suitable for people with disabilities.
8. The panel also wanted the Council to be seen to be leading the way in providing opportunities for people especially in the use of 'job carving' (separating elements of a job and matching them with people's abilities). The team had been working in partnership with other Council departments in order to assist with achieving job carving. However progress had been slow and the successes had mainly been within the Social Care Department.
9. The panel recommended that a 'champion' be appointed in each Service Department to help ensure that the Council is at the forefront of initiatives designed to help people with disabilities into work.
10. Officers from the FORWARDS team attended a panel meeting on 22 July to provide an update in respect of the three additional recommendations.

UPDATE

11. The panel found that since the review the FORWARDS team had strengthened its links with James Cook Hospital and other key agencies within the town who are working with stroke patients. In 2009/10 the FORWARDS team received four referrals for people who had suffered a stroke and to date one of these clients has successfully gained paid employment. The team is continuing to work with all of these clients and continues to raise awareness amongst those working with stroke patients of its work to support people with disabilities into work.
12. The possibility of the FORWARDS team receiving any vacancies within the Council prior to their publication had been discussed by CMT. With the outcome that FORWARDS will receive any information about new vacancies at the time of publication.
13. The team has increased its partnership working with other Council departments to assist with job carving and 'champions' have been appointed in the Departments of Regeneration, Environment and Children, Families and Learning to take this initiative forward. In 2009/10 the number of posts created through job carving has slowly increased and 13 people with disabilities have secured employment with the Council via this approach.

14. The panel was informed that Middlesbrough Council currently has in place a guaranteed interview scheme for anyone with a disability who meets all the essential criteria. The FORWARDS team is keen to promote the benefits of this scheme and is disappointed that the Council's Strategic Partner Mouchel has not adopted this scheme as part of its recruitment procedures. The panel felt that given the close partnership arrangements in place between the Council and Mouchel the benefits of the scheme should be promoted.
15. The panel heard from two service users who have successfully gained employment with the support of the FORWARDS team. Members were very impressed with the work undertaken by the team, as well as the effort and determination shown by the service users in securing and retaining employment. Both service users stated that gaining employment had given them a real sense of achievement.
16. When asked about the difference that having a job has made Susan replied:

"I am very proud of myself."

Lauren replied:

"Working has given me my confidence back, I get to meet people everyday and I have direction in my life. My parents, family and friends are proud of me for getting this job."
17. With regard to the support received from the team Lauren stated that:

"Everyone in the FORWARDS team is friendly and they have given me lots of encouragement, helped me with my interview skills and I still get support from the team now. Everyone was pleased I got the job."
18. The Panel heard that in 2009/10 the FORWARDS team received 197 referrals and has been successful in helping 26 people with disabilities to gain paid employment. The team has secured a further 43 work placement / voluntary opportunities for people who had no previous employment experience because of their disability and helped a further 75 people with disabilities to access training.
19. One of the issues discussed when the Panel undertook its initial review was whether people with disabilities would be better off financially if they secured employment. The Panel heard that 'Better Off in Work' benefit calculations have been undertaken for 148 of the people referred to the team. The 'Better Off in Work' calculations are undertaken by the Citizen Advice Bureau on behalf of the FORWARDS team and this work is jointly financed by the Council and the PCT.
20. Reference was made to the Government's recent announcement that in the future GP Consortia are to be handed control of 80 per cent of the NHS budget, which was previously awarded to PCT's to commission services. Given the significance of these changes the panel felt that action needs to be taken now to raise awareness of the joint commissioning arrangements that are currently in place.

21. Members emphasised the need to flag up with the PCT, Local Medical Committee and influential GP's within commissioning circles that these initiatives have been commissioned as joint pieces of work and that the Council is keen for this to continue in the future.
22. The Council's currently funds its share of the 'Better Off in Work' calculations via the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF), which is due to cease on 31 March 2011. Consideration needs to be given to where funding can be secured to ensure that the 'Better Off in Work' calculations post 2011 can continue to be undertaken.
23. The FORWARDS team has been successful in helping people with disabilities secure employment in the public and private sector, in large and small organisations, proving that with support and the right attitude people with disabilities can gain real jobs in all sectors of the employment market. The panel was encouraged to hear that in the majority of cases those successful in gaining employment had secured permanent positions.
24. In terms of taking the service forward the overriding concern relates to the future funding provision in respect of 3 of the 6 Job Coach posts within the team. The panel was advised that 3 of the Job Coaches are on 2-year fixed terms contracts financed via the Working Neighbourhood Fund (WNF) until 31 March 2011.
25. The panel is firmly of the view that although difficult in this current financial climate, it is vital that funding is identified to continue the service with its current capacity.
26. The FORWARDS team is a real success story and an evolving service, which is having a real impact on the lives of real people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

27. Following the information received at the meeting the panel agreed that they would like to make the following additional recommendations:

(DRAFT TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING)

- i) That efforts be made to identify the necessary funding to continue the FORWARDS service at its current capacity.
- ii) That the initiatives commissioned as joint pieces of work with the PCT, namely the 'Better Off in Work' calculations be flagged up with the PCT, Local Medical Committee and influential GP's within commissioning circles and it be emphasised that the Council is keen for this joint arrangement to continue in the future.
- iii) That consideration be given to where alternative funding for the Council's contribution to the 'Better Off in Work' calculations can be secured in order to ensure that this service can continue to be provided to people with disabilities post 2011.

- iv) That the Executive / Chief Executive write a letter to Mouchel highlighting the benefits of the guaranteed interview scheme for people with disabilities and requesting that Mouchel give consideration to introducing the scheme into their recruitment policy.
- v) That the Council seeks to promote the benefits of the guaranteed interview scheme to its key contractors and those organisations that receive grants from the Council.

**COUNCILLOR PETER PURVIS
SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- (i) Improving the Levels of Employment for People with Disabilities – Final Report, November 2008
- (ii) Update review of Improving Levels of Employment for People with Disabilities, October 2009

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