

JOBCENTRE PLUS

Report of the City Solicitor

Strategic Links: Prosperous City; CIO3

1. Why has this report come to the Committee?

- 1.1 This is an update report to outline how Jobcentre Plus is working with partners to address worklessness within the city and support the achievement of LAA indicators NI152/NI153.
- 1.2 David Hardy, Local Partnership Manager at Job Centre Plus will be in attendance at the meeting to answer member's questions.

2. Background

- 2.1 There has been significant progress in tackling deprivation in recent years. Investment in public services – schools, hospitals and children's centers – in deprived areas has increased significantly. Across the country, the success of the welfare to work programmes has been critical in raising employment rates to a historically high level. Departments now have a clear focus on deprived areas, and many of the innovations delivered through Neighborhood Renewal Funding have been mainstreamed into public services.
- 2.2 However, concentrations of deprivation remain, and despite rapid improvement in some of the most deprived areas, worklessness in particular remains persistent in some local communities. Many of the most disadvantaged people in the labour market also live in the most disadvantaged places.
- 2.3 As part of a concerted drive to get people off welfare and into training and work the Government decided to establish a Working Neighborhoods Fund which focuses on the most deprived areas and supports local authorities and communities in their efforts to tackle worklessness and the other elements of deprivation.
- 2.4 The Working Neighborhoods Fund is not just about money. It is about new ways of working. Through the new Local Government Performance Framework and reforms to local government finance, local authorities have greater flexibilities to achieve the objectives which are most important to them and to local people. At the same time changes to the welfare to work programmes are ensuring they can be more tailored to the needs of individuals and communities.
- 2.5 The Regional Employability Framework (REF) outlines how WNF funding should be used in conjunction with mainstream funding in order to engage with those clients who are furthest away from the labour market.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 Jobcentre Plus has worked alongside the City Council's Economic Development Team to develop the WNF strategy to ensure a complete wrap around service for residents.
- 3.2 In recent years Jobcentre Plus has embarked upon a series of customer engagement activities that, although marginally successful have not lead to significant increases in participation in back to work programmes. Although participation in these programmes is voluntary, evidence does show that once engaged individuals continue to develop and a high percentage move into employment and/or training.
- 3.3 Within the City there are currently over 22,500 customers who are claiming an inactive benefit (Income Support / Incapacity Benefit/Employment Support Allowance (ESA)) and are not engaging with Jobcentre Plus, these are split down into the following;
- Lone Parents – 3,764
 - Incapacity Benefit / ESA – 18,763
- 3.4 Although Lone Parents are expected to attend a Work Focused Interview (WFI) as a condition of entitlement, they are not required to engage in the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) Programme. Similarly some customers who are in receipt of Incapacity Benefit / ESA are expected to attend a series of WFIs but do not always fully engage in the Pathways to Work Programme.
- 3.5 The aim of the WNF strategy is to engage with these individuals at a community level, getting them to the point where they are then able to engage with Jobcentre Plus. The term “engagement” means that they are at the point that they wish to join one of the back to work programmes on a voluntary basis.
- 3.6 The WNF strategy is now at a crucial stage; JCP have a place on the WNF Programme Board. This board will form an integral part in the monitoring process, ensuring added value and removing duplication.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Sunderland's WNF strategy supports the Regional Employability Framework and mainstream delivery. Through strategic engagement JCP will ensure maximum penetration rates, thus ensuring a move from inactive to active benefits. This will place Sunderland residents in a strong position come the economic upturn.

5. Recommendation

5.1 The Committee is requested to consider the outlined activity and endorse the approach in relation to its role in reducing the number of working age people claiming out of work benefits in Sunderland.

6. Background Papers

Sunderland Local Area Agreement
Working Neighbourhood Fund Strategy

7. Glossary

LAA Local Area Agreement
NI National Indicator
WNF Working Neighbourhood Fund
REF Regional Employability Framework
ESA Employment Support Allowance
WFI Work Focused Interview
NDLP New Deal for Lone Parents
JCP Job Centre Plus

Contact Officer: David Hardy, Local Partnerships Manager, Jobcentre Plus
david.hardy@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk