

**Washington Area Committee People Board: Employability Support Services**

**Report for Washington Area Committee and People Board**

**Priority: A Local Approach to Employment and Enterprise.**

**Background/current position**

Area Committee/People Board has already identified a need to provide local residents with access to appropriate 'employability' support and help those residents who experience problems accessing JC+ provision.

The People Board has requested the drafting of a project proposal following a similar initiative being implemented in the West of the city – which seemed to identify the same priority and need for support for residents as was being considered for Washington.

The DWP attended both the September and October Area VCS Network to provide an update with regards to Welfare Reform changes at Job Centres (Claimant Commitment) re digitisation, and the Social Justice Initiative.

At both these meetings VCS partners identified a number of issues regarding support for residents re IT and meeting their claimant commitments. VCS organisations are currently being inundated by local people needing intensive support just to be able to fulfil the initial requirements re getting an email account, registering on Universal Job Match and producing CVs. On a practical level one of the key issues is the inability to save any work/CVs etc. onto 'public' computers etc. The VCS also raised concerns with regards to the level and quality of support being provided at Job Centres.

In the West of the City the Community Work Club initiative has been implemented resulting in high levels of clients trying to access their services. Following the highlighting of similar issues as raised in Washington re incorrect referrals, IT support etc. a project evaluation is underway to assess the success of the work clubs and whether the project meets the needs of the community – and if those sector organisations such as the DWP and work programme contractors were providing claimants with what was expected. It is anticipated 'lessons learned' can be transferred to other areas. As part of the project evaluation it was agreed that those lessons learnt will be shared with the DWP at regular intervals to ensure service provision is shaped around the real gaps and needs – at a local level.

It is now recognised that both the SCC's Local Strategic Framework (Fiona Brown leading) and the DWP need to be made more aware of where local services are not being delivered to support those most in need – as well as how the current 'referral' systems is being implemented at a local level – resulting in local VCS organisations having difficulty in coping with the number of residents coming to them for help and the level of intensive and more long term support some residents require.

This capacity of the VCS in Washington was discussed at Area Committee in October with a request for Fiona Brown and/or a representative of the DWP to attend the next AC meeting with a report identifying the support being provided for those residents most in need, the methodology for referrals being adopted in Washington, and the level of need re sanctions/ clients with multiple barriers in Washington.

## **Proposed Next Steps**

- **Working Group established**
- **Understand 'lessons learnt' from West Project Evaluation**
- **VCS to be provided with relevant information re agreed referral pathways to improve communication between the VCS, local residents and DWP/JCs. Ensure the recognised pathways are used to enhance partnership working and to encourage the VCS to signpost residents appropriately. At the same time the DWP needs to ensure its staff refer customers/clients to the correct support pathway and that advice offered is correct at the initial point of contact.**
- **Consider how Referral Pathways & information to be provided to relevant VCS organisations**
- **Consider how local VCS organisations who wish to provide support to local residents do so utilising the Referral Pathways information**
- **Links be made with Social Justice Coach for Washington to ensure a co-ordinated approach to clients with multiple barriers is provided**
- **VCS organisations to be asked to document and record over a given period the number/level of requests for support and to identify if incorrect referrals continue to be made. All potential issues to be recorded in order to determine where the real gap in services exists in Washington – and more importantly who should be filling those gaps and re shaping service provision. Data collected to be shared with SCC & DWP to ensure longer term communication and joint working**
- **Report to December Area Committee outlining the recognised pathways, support and mandatory requirements re client support. Also consider determination of any gaps that still exist, what they are and if Area Committee has a role in helping delivering the required support.**
- **Determine if the local community needs to be supported in relation to additional 'employability services' via the VCS/other partners. This could include training and upskilling current staff and/or volunteers in local projects to support local residents and deliver a localised, tailored approach to this issue.**