

## **Employment and Employment Support for People with Learning Disabilities**

### **Purpose**

This paper recommends that Birmingham City Council develop a vulnerable person's employment strategy for the City with a primary focus upon learning disabilities. The definitions and activities will include a range of preparatory activities including job related training, skills development, confidence and workplace orientation, volunteering, apprenticeships, taster sessions, as well as paid work.

### **Issues**

Employment is a key priority for the following reasons:

- The Labour Manifesto promises to increase employment.
- Service users tell us that employment and being supported to gain and retain employment is important to them. Currently performance in the city for supporting adults with a learning disability is very low, less than 1% of that cohort is in paid work.
- Financial inclusion and income maximisation is a key prevention first outcome set out in the Putting Prevention First: Delivering the Vision for Adult Social Care Cabinet Report November 2017.
- The improved employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities must be integral to supporting any future model for day opportunities.
- Employment is a priority in the West Midlands Combined Authority, particularly in relation to mental health.
- Employment is integral to supporting adults to enjoy wellbeing, economic stability and recovery. To deliver the vision for Adult Social Care, we need to ensure we have an appropriate range of employment support options for citizens. This therefore needs to be embedded into practice via the new social work model.

### **Current Position**

- There no shared vision or strategy across partners in the City as to how we will collaborate to support employment for vulnerable people furthest away from the labour market including those with learning disabilities.
- Work to review the current Day Opportunities provision in the city has shown a lack of pathways for employment, a lack of evidence based employment support, and a lack of service to support people to be ready for employment.
- There is no join up of commissioned employment support service for vulnerable people in the City. A number of historic services aimed at the most vulnerable citizens have ceased to exist. Similarly, there is space for an improved dialogue with DWP. Therefore whilst there is significant learning across the local authority and with external partners which has not been drawn together for maximum effect.

- There are a number of externally funded initiatives currently in place or due to be awarded shortly for access into employment, training and volunteering which are not being maximised in a coordinated way (European Funding ERDF/ESF). The funded model includes historic learning from across a range of agencies, support providers and citizens themselves in terms of what success looks like, the barrier that may be faced by people with learning disabilities and some evidence based practice on how these might be overcome.
- The short term nature of funding streams, lack of capacity or lack of expertise within employer organisations alongside a lack of impetus to drive the cultural change needed within organisations has contributed to low levels of employment across the country for people with learning disabilities.

### **Some further background**

Performance for employment for adults with a learning disability in Birmingham is poor. The proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment (2016-17). The actual number is 21 and this is 1%. The England average is 5.7%.

Learning from historic employment projects for people with learning disabilities shows the following are crucial to successful engagement:

- 1) Onsite support within the employment environment to persons with learning disabilities
- 2) Onsite support to the employer
- 3) A systematic approach to generating paid employment opportunities. This could be across partner agencies (public and private sector) including commissioned providers and organisations doing business with the local authority and other key strategic partners.

There is currently a lack of social work ethos in systematically addressing employment as part of the assessment and support planning process. This is being addressed via the three conversation work to develop social work practice.

There are nine Day Centres in the City. The centres are currently being reviewed by an external agency (NDTi) who has particular expertise in employment and day opportunities. This review will inform the Day Opportunities Strategy which Cabinet will consider in June 2018. It is expected that this will recommend how elements of day services will be reshaped to better support employment. The review is not complete, but has found that pathways to employment are broken and there are poor links between different employment schemes commissioned.

### **The Health and Wellbeing Board can provide support in a number of ways including:**

1. Retaining oversight of the delivery and outcomes of all external funded projects and providing support through Health and Wellbeing Board member influences to ensure that the projects deliver to maximum effect. For example, the organisations

represented at Health and Wellbeing Board offering employment placements and providing a robust cross agency challenge and dialogue.

2. Provide influence to commissioned and non-commissioned organisations across the City to support this agenda.
3. Oversee the development of a sustainable vulnerable person's employment strategy for the City. There is also a read across to the work of the Combined Authority, West Midlands Wellbeing Board and West Midlands Mental Health Commission (Thrive Action Plan).
4. As per the recommendations below; consider the establishment of targets for an employment indicator for people with learning disabilities. This could be framed within the context of the employment strategy action plan.

### **Recommendations**

- It is recommended that work takes place between Adult Social Care, Place and Economy Directorates, DWP and wider health partners to develop a vulnerable persons employment strategy which builds upon the learning so far both locally, nationally and across the European Funded Projects (where appropriate).
- It is also proposed that the delivery model set out in the pending ERDF for £6m is either adopted in its entirety or in part as the approach for improving the employment indicator for people with learning disabilities. The timescales for the ERDF funding as with any European Fund projects are tight and therefore by their nature provide an opportunity to focus on this important issue.
- It is recommended that Health and Wellbeing Board adopt a new indicator for the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for employment for people with learning disabilities. That a further dialogue takes place to propose targets and outcomes to help monitor progress.