



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 27TH JUNE 2019

SUBJECT: WHQS LOCAL EMPLOYMENT FUND

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR FOR HOUSING & SOCIAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise members of the work undertaken in relation to the WHQS Employment Fund.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the ballot in February 2012, the Council agreed that it would deliver the promises made in its Offer Document to tenants and deliver WHQS by 31 March 2020. It also gave a commitment to delivering numerous additional benefits which, which would add value to the WHQS programme and help deliver the Council's ambition of using the WHQS investment as a catalyst to Transform Homes, Lives and Communities.
- 2.2 These additional benefits included the commitment to create a Local Employment Fund to support the development of local community employment projects that aimed to support tenants to move from unemployment / inactivity into sustainable employment.
- 2.3 At the time, employment support provision was dominated by the Department for Work and Pensions, Welsh Government and projects that were delivered by agencies in receipt of European funding. There were very few 'community' employment support projects in existence that could benefit from the Local Employment Fund. As a result a decision was made (2nd April 2015) to allocate an annual budgetary contribution of £50,000 to support and add value to the delivery of the WG funded employment support provision delivered at that time by Communities First.
- 2.4 Following the demise of Communities First in March 2018 the £50,000 has continued to be allocated adding value to the new Welsh Government employment support programmes (Legacy and Communities4work and Communities4 Work Plus) on the basis that the individuals and families that the team are dealing with on a daily basis are predominantly Council tenants.
- 2.5 This report outlines the activities undertaken by the Community Regeneration team as a result of the WHQS investment provided.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members note the contents of the report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide members with an update regarding the WHQS Local Employment Fund.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 In the Offer Document presented to tenants in 2012 as part of the housing ballot process, the Council agreed to provide a series of funds designed to support Council tenants with the long term aim of sustaining tenancies and creating vibrant, cohesive communities. The funds, which were created from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) included a Local Employment Fund, A Community Improvement Fund and a Fund which would be made available to community groups to address issues of anti social behaviour in their community.
- 5.2 The commitment made in the Offer Document by the Council was to allocate £50,000 per annum to each of the Funds for five years (coinciding with the period of the Council's WHQS improvement programme). Following extensive advertising and marketing of the Community Improvement Fund and a lack of interest from partners regarding the Anti Social Behaviour Fund, a decision was taken by Cabinet on 30 March 2016 to absorb the two funds into the environmental programme budget which is also funded from within the HRA.
- 5.3 The commitment to provide £50,000 per annum via the Local Employment Fund however has continued.
- 5.4 Initially the Local Employment Fund was used to support the partial refurbishment of Hafod Deg, Rhymney as a community hub from which employment related services were delivered; the employment of a Passport Support Officer to support young people accessing the programme and receiving placements via the Council's WHQS programme and also the delivery of a pre-Passport scheme delivered from the White Rose Centre for young people in New Tredegar.
- 5.5 Between 2015/16 and 2017/18 the Funds were used following CHTG and Cabinet approval to add value to and support the delivery of the Welsh Government's LIFT programme which sought to support people furthest from the labour market in the Upper Rhymney Valley and the Caerphilly Basin areas. The report was discussed and endorsed by the CHTG on the 19th February 2015.
- 5.6 Between 2015/16, 156 adults of working age within the Upper Rhymney and Caerphilly Basin areas engaged in the programme. 60% (97) confirmed that they were Council tenants and benefited from training courses specifically linked to a participant's employability or support into direct employment and volunteering which led to a recognised qualification appropriate for work (some of which were provided by WHQS contractors as a result of contractual community benefit obligations).
- 5.7 A total of £36,687.59 was claimed during the period 2015/16.
- 5.8 During 2016/17 a total of 57 tenants were enrolled in the LIFT programme 16 of which successfully obtained employment and the remainder (41) received basic skills support, vocational training and work placement / work trial opportunities. A total of £4,350.43 was claimed by LIFT for 2016/17. Please refer to 5.18 for a note regarding the differences in spend.
- 5.9 In 2017/18, the LIFT programme supported 27 tenants of which 3 were supported directly into employment and £15,892.76 was claimed from the Local Employment Fund.
- 5.10 Following the end of Communities First in March 2018, the Welsh Government launched a number of new employment support programmes including the Legacy, Communities4Work and Communities4Work + programme. The programmes provide a range of support to encourage and enable individuals to overcome complex barriers in order to access training and employment. The programmes seek to promote 'Employability' and ensure that 'communities are ready and able to work'; provide intensive mentoring support for unemployed individuals in the most deprived areas of the county borough and endeavour to 'fill the gaps' by providing mentoring based employability support to address the many complex barriers to employment experienced by those furthest from the labour market.

- 5.11 During 2018/19, the Local Employment Fund has supported the Communities4Work programme to work with a total of 24 tenants to attend training, work placements and receive bespoke support to help access employment delivered by the Communities4Work team. Of the 24 tenants engaged with, 17 participants had successfully found employment by March 2019.
- 5.12 In addition, the 2018/19 spend included a contribution towards the refurbishment of Cefn Hengoed Youth Centre where the Mid Valleys West employment team are delivering Work Clubs and drop in sessions. Due to issues with poor internet access, heating and the availability of appropriate space for 121 consultations and job search activity the team were at risk of having to move further afield from the cohort they were seeking to engage. As a consequence of the Local Employment Fund monies the building has been redecorated, the heating system fixed, the internet connection improved and more desk space made available for employment search and CV writing activities. The sessions continue to run at the centre with 69 residents attending of which 32 are tenants. Activity is on the increase since the refurbishment and numbers seeking support are anticipated to grow.
- 5.13 Improvements were also undertaken at the Graig Y Rhacca Resource Centre where minor works have been undertaken to upgrade the internet connection for employment searches and CV templates etc. A new IT suite was also provided as a result of monies from the Local Employment Fund being matched with WG funding and a local residents group are running IT sessions. In the month following the completion of the improvements 17 residents attended the employment support sessions, all of whom were tenants.
- 5.14 The Local Employment Fund has also contributed to improvements at the Lansbury Park Community Office where the ground floor has been remodelled to create a more welcoming space for local people and enabling the employment team to provide a better customer experience. A private room has also been created to allow for 121 consultations. The table below provides an indication of the number of people seeking support and the type of support sought during the second half of 2018/19. The majority of those seeking support were tenants.

Month	Employment	CAB	WHQS	Housing	Other	Total
September	16	14	25	2	7	64
October	31	8	22	8	19	88
November	24	8	11	5	4	52
December	10	10	7	2	8	37
January	8	5	14	7	10	44
February	16	13	14	1	14	58

- 5.15 Funds have also been expended on the 'Suits You' project that has been evolving in the north of the borough. The project aims to provide workwear to individuals participating in the employment support programmes. People furthest from the labour market sometimes do not have suitable clothing to attend training and employment interviews and the 'Suits You' project provides used workwear to those who require it. Donations of workwear have been made via a campaign within the Council and work has been undertaken to create a suitable 'boutique' space in the Furniture Revival Centre, Rhymney. A carpentry course was run in conjunction with the creation of the boutique space and 5 changing rooms were created. As a result, 5 tenant participants were able to obtain several qualifications and practical carpentry experience. A painting and decorating course is currently being arranged so that participants can receive practical experience through the further decoration of the boutique space. The course will be run in partnership with Coleg Y Cymoedd and 8 participants are already booked to attend. The launch of the boutique will take place in July 2019 and a number of volunteers have expressed an interest in running the boutique. A customer service programme is also scheduled to be arranged in order to upskill those interested and develop transferable employability skills.

- 5.16 During 2018/19 a total of £36,888.49 was claimed by the Community Regeneration team from the Local Employment Fund.
- 5.17 Over the course of the period that the Local Employment Fund has been available, a total of £93,819.27 has been claimed out of a total budget of £250,000.
- 5.18 The underspend should not be viewed negatively as the need to access the WHQS Employment Fund and the level of expenditure would have been dependant on the individuals receiving support and their particular barriers and needs. Expenditure from the Local Employment Fund was only sought if the Welsh Government programmes were unable to fund the support or interventions required. Any underspend has simply been absorbed back into the Housing Revenue Account.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Local Employment Fund has been an invaluable source of funding which has added significant value to the Welsh Government employment support programmes delivered by the Council's community regeneration team. It has ensured that support to overcome complex barriers and needs has been made accessible and available to Council tenants. The engagement activities delivered by the Community Regeneration team are predominantly located in areas where there are a significant number of tenants.
- 6.2 Members are requested to note the contents of the report and the outcomes achieved as a result of the WHQS Local Employment Fund.

7. ASSUMPTIONS

- 7.1 There are no assumptions made with regard to this report.

8. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 8.1 **The Corporate Plan (CCBC, 2018-2023) - Well-Being Plan Objective 2: Enabling Employment** – The pledge by Council in 2012 to create a Local Employment Fund demonstrates the commitment to delivering against this particular objective. Through combining the monies available via the Housing Revenue Account with those available via Welsh Government the team have been able to provide enhanced support to tenants and residents seeking employment and reducing the impact of poverty.
- 8.2 **Caerphilly Homes Service Plan (2018-2023).** The provision of a Local Employment Fund links directly with the aims of the Caerphilly Homes Service Plan, priority Objective 7 which seeks to sustain tenancies by providing a range of housing related services and support.
- 8.3 **Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales (Welsh Government, 2010),** The provision of a Local Employment Fund and the support given to tenants is coterminous with the recommendations contained within the Improving Lives and Communities Strategy which acknowledges the importance of providing employment related support services to tenants.
- 8.4 **Prosperity for All: The National Strategy (2017):** The provision of a Local Employment Fund aligns with the Welsh Government's commitment to drive the Welsh economy through tackling inequality and enabling people to fulfil their ambitions and enhance their well being through secure and sustainable employment. The strategy notes the desire to break down the barriers that many face to getting a job which is exactly the aim of the Local Employment Fund, the Legacy and Communities4Work programmes.

9. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 9.1 The provision of funding to add value to and support existing employment programmes is coterminous with each of the 7 well being goals.
- 9.2 The Local Employment Fund seeks to contribute towards the development of a skilled and well educated population through providing access to employment opportunities and wealth thereby contributing to the prosperous Wales objective.
- 9.3 Some of the opportunities created as a result of the support given have related to improving the built and natural environment in order for future generations to enjoy and utilise thereby contributing to the creation of a more resilient Wales.
- 9.4 Through the provision of quality employment support, placements and opportunities participants have noted improved health and well being outcomes.
- 9.5 The support available enables people to overcome any barriers and fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances thereby contributing to a more equal Wales.
- 9.6 Communities where unemployed individuals are able to access opportunities to undertake work placements, apprenticeships and access employment opportunities are more viable, attractive, safe and resilient.
- 9.7 The support available includes engagement projects that promote and protects the culture and heritage of Wales together with encouraging individuals to participate in the arts, sports and recreation.
- 9.8 The commitment to create a Local Employment Fund and the way it has been delivered through integration with the Welsh Government employability programmes and collaboration with the Community Regeneration team is consistent with the Future Generations Act and specifically the five ways of working.
- 9.9 The employability programmes together with the Local Employment Fund provide the opportunity for people themselves to consider their own long terms needs and those of their families. It enables people to upskill and to provide a route to sustainable employment which if obtained will influence the way in which they and their children are able to access opportunities in the future. The activities supported by the programmes and Fund are also preventative. They facilitate the opportunity for individuals participating to access advice and support on matters concerning not only employment but also their mental health, parenting ability, basic skills and financial literacy thereby helping to prevent problems from occurring or getting worse.
- 9.10 The activities that are run by the Community Regeneration as a result of support from the WHQS Local Employment Fund are informed and designed by potential participants. Communities and individuals are capable of determining their own needs and have the opportunity to shape the provision on offer via the programmes.
- 9.11 Moreover, the integration of the funds and the collaboration between Council services and partner organisations together with the involvement of participants at the outset, demonstrates a more joined up, cohesive approach to delivering public services as advocated in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 An EIA screening document has not been completed as this report is for information only. However, the services provided as a consequence of the alignment of WHQS funds with Welsh Government Funding outlined in this report are made available to everyone who is unemployed and lives within the county borough regardless of protected characteristics.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The commitment made by the Council in 2012 noted in its Offer Document to tenants advised that £50,000 would be made available per annum for a five year period to support local employment projects that sought to help support tenants into work.
- 11.2 Of the £250,000 budget allocated for the 5 year WHQS programme period £93,819.27 has been spent to date.
- 11.3 £50,000 will therefore be made available during 2019/20, in the final year of the WHQS programme to continue adding value to employment support programmes operating within the county borough that provide sustainable opportunities for tenants to upskill, obtain work experience, volunteer and provide a route to an apprenticeship or employment.

12. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no personnel implications arising from the report.

13. CONSULTATIONS

- 13.1 Comments received have been taken into consideration within the report.

14. STATUTORY POWER

- 14.1 This report is for information only.

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