



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK AND FINISH GROUP TO CONSIDER YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE ON WEDNESDAY, 27TH JULY 2011 AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

H.A. Andrews, J.O. Evans, D. Hardacre, K. James, G. Jones, K.V. Reynolds, and Mrs. M.E. Sargent

Together with:

G. Hardacre (Head of People Management and Development), E. Rogers (HR Service Manager – Strategic and Operational Services), A. Bolter (Group Manager – Strategy and Funding), M. James (HR Development Team), J. Bennett (Group Manager – Advisory Services), V. Doyle (Policy Officer – Statistics and Funding), C. Forbes-Thompson (Security Research Officer) and D. Phillips (Partnership Support Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from representatives of the Hub Youth Project and the Senior Youth Workers who were unfortunately delayed in travelling to the meeting.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest

2. ELECT CHAIR

Members nominated and elected Councillor G. Jones as Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

3. AGREE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW

Mrs Forbes Thompson outlined the details of the draft Terms of Reference for the Committee.

Members requested that there be a reference to include external agencies such as Job Centre Plus. Officers reported that this would be the intention in order to achieve a holistic approach.

A member also expressed the need to benchmark and to be aware of what is currently being done to address youth unemployment.

The Task and Finish Group agreed with the draft Terms of Reference but asked that it also include reference to what external partners can do, and agreed the following schedule of future meetings: -

Meeting 2 – A mapping exercise

(Suggested that the Training and Education Forum could provide information to the Group)

Meeting 3 – Businesses – Discuss skills gap

Final Meeting – to discuss findings and make recommendations.

4. PRESENTATION ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS

Mrs Vicki Doyle, Policy Officer –Statistics and Funding was welcomed to the meeting and provided members with an overview of youth unemployment statistics using current available information.

Information given included: -

- Claimant Count (all claimants) -showing higher unemployment in the county borough when compared to Wales as a whole.
- Claimant Count (16-24 age group) – showing the county borough above the Wales average. It was clarified that for 16 – 18 year olds, only those people estranged from parents or in hardship are counted. This is because 16-18 year olds living at home cannot claim job seekers allowance.
- Claimant Count – duration of claim. Members requested more detail including the average duration of claim. , Also information on where are they after their job seekers allowance (JSA) claim ended, if they move into training or work experience do they go back to JSA afterwards.
- Wider Definitions of unemployment for age 16-24 – the statistics on allowance claimants in the 16-24 range show a reduction in numbers over the period June 2009 to December 2010 but these may not be due to the recent changes in welfare benefits but by claimants moving on to training schemes and alternative benefits. Members also learned that there is a difference between the economically inactive and unemployed.
- School Leavers Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) – at present the figure for the county borough are around the all Wales average, after dropping below the average during 2009. It was suggested that Pathways are invited to a future meeting to discuss this in more detail.
- Business Register & Employment – the review group received information on the main areas of employment for the county borough in comparison to across Wales.

A member asked if the data is available at ward level. Officers explained that the data shown was from an external source and that it would not be possible, however it was suggested that Job Centre Plus may have more detailed statistics. The review group were informed that it may be useful to consult local colleges for information on what employers are looking for.

Members discussed the types of jobs that are available and questioned if skills can be matched with unemployed. Officers stated that it is difficult to gain all of this information as many employers recruit directly, although Job Centre Plus may have details of local vacancies.

Members enquired about likely trends, in terms of employment. AB discussed the report on tackling worklessness in Wales and agreed to e-mail further information on this to Members.

5. BACKGROUND ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT – Mrs Elizabeth Rogers (HR Service Manager – Strategic and Operational Services)

The review group were informed of the details of those not in education, employment or training classed as NEET. Members were informed that 12-14% of the 16-18 cohorts are estimated as NEET and this rises to 38% for the 16-34 age group.

Members noted that the aspirations of the NEET group are similar to other young people however their expectations of achieving this were lower. However they are reluctant to enter full time education, preferring to find a job.

The group received information on Caerphilly Pupil Destinations for 2010 – (Year 11) and noted that out of 2278 pupils only 24 entered employment, 6.5% entered non employed Work based training with 0.4% (8 pupils) entering work based training (apprenticeships). The majority 81.7% remained in full time education. The remaining 6% were NEET. Members were interested to know what were the outcomes for those entering non-employed training. Members asked how many left the training only to remain unemployed until the next training opportunity came along.

The review group discussed some of the challenges of youth unemployment, which has been significantly affected by the current economic climate. Officer commented on the main challenge, which is to communicate to the groups. Members were informed that it is important to break the cycle of unemployment in some families, as some of these pupils are 3rd and 4th generational unemployed. There are no role models for them, meaning there may be a need to work with the parents as well.

6. Recruitment and Employment Law – Gareth Hardacre (Head of People Management and Development)

The review group received information given on the impact of Equalities Legislation in respect of setting out to devise means to tackle youth unemployment, local authorities must be mindful that any programmes they devise cannot discriminate positively for one group to the detriment of another.

Members were informed of the requirements under employment law in respect of drafting job descriptions and person specifications, requirements on qualifications and advertising of positions.

Officers explained potential solutions for the Council by ensuring terminology is consistent, engaging with organisation such as Careers Wales and local schools and colleges. Members were informed that by speaking to colleges they had identified that they were experiencing problems finding placements for students which are

necessary for them to complete their courses. This could be an area where the Council could assist, specifically in areas such as the care sector.

Member discussed the funds identified to support a work experience and traineeship project within the Council. Officers stated that the planned programme needs to be both sustainable and creative to ensure the aims of the funding are achieved. There programme will need to identify which apprentices will be needed after they qualify.

Officers informed the review group that the Council presently has a workforce of which over 30% are over 50 years old and only 4% of the workforce are aged between 16-21. This means that the council could be exposed to a skills gap unless career opportunities and pathways are created. If an employee retires there may be an opportunity for an apprentice or trainee in that post.

7. Challenges

The review group were informed that there are very high numbers of applicants for each post advertised, meaning that there must be criteria for each post to enable shortlisting.

The Housing Stock Transfer may have an affect on the local workforce.

Members were informed that the Council is involved with a group of local employers from a human resources perspective. It was thought that some of the larger employers are more likely to contribute to this agenda and an invitation to come to a future meeting will be issued

The review group enquired where will the £485,000 allocated funding be spent. Officers indicated that this will be discussed at the next meeting and it was noted £10,000 has been committed so far. Officers stated however that it is likely that this is a one-off budget.

Members stated that consideration of how other agencies are addressing the issue. They gave examples of the Fire Authority, which has a Young Fireman's Club and Gwent Police have a Cadet scheme. This enables them to encourage young people to consider a future career in these areas.

Officers stated that the new work programme payment scheme may encourage training providers to focus their efforts on those unemployed people who are more employable as opposed to NEET's who have few skills and qualifications, because it is focussed on outcomes.

The review group were also informed that the new Communities First programme which is due to start in April 2012 will focus on the economy, education and health. This could have an impact upon the youth unemployment agenda in terms of future project bids.

- 8.** Meeting closed at 6.10pm. The next meeting will be on Monday, 19th September 4.30 p.m. in the Sirhowy Room.