

Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No. 6**

DATE: 19 November 2009

**Report: Links to Work; Preparation and Supported Employment Service
– Update on future of the service.**

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Barbara McCracken – Social Care and Inclusion

Summary of report:

This report provides an update in respect of Links To Work as a response to the direction provided by Cabinet July 09

1. Cabinet approved the approach to restructure Links To Work, specifically the reduction by 15 posts of the existing 32 posts.
2. Cabinet also directed that we should do all we can to maintain a service for those service users with a learning disability who currently attend Links to Work.
3. That Social Care and Inclusion, explore opportunities available to the Council and its partners to provide sustainable employment opportunities to people with disabilities and for this to include a review of the future role of Links to Work.

The report highlights the development of a whole system strategy to address the long term employment needs of people with disabilities.

Panel are asked to note progress to date.

Background papers:

Links to Work Preparation and Supported Employment Service – Decision on the future of the Service – Cabinet Report October 2008.

Health Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny Panel – March 2009
Links-to-Work work Preparation and Supported Employment Service. Update on the future of the Service.

Links to Work - Work Preparation and Supported Employment Service - Decision on the future of the Service – Cabinet Report July 2009

Reason for scrutiny:

Scrutiny requested this information to assess and understand the impact of the restructuring of Links to Work. Specifically the impact of changes to identify the number of posts at risk and any impact on service users.

In particular Scrutiny wanted to be updated on the Human Resources Strategy designed to support employee's with disabilities.

This report therefore advises Scrutiny that their concerns were considered and a range of HRD measures have been initiated

24 at risk posts will be replaced by 9 new posts resulting in the reduction of 15 agreed by Cabinet July 09. The 9 new posts are directly responsible for the supervision of the 80 people per day who attend Links to Work, 147 in total.

An information pack has been sent to all employees containing current and proposed staffing structure charts, job descriptions, corporate redeployment policy (agreed with Trade Unions), and an expression of interest letter offering the opportunity for voluntary redundancy and or early retirement and contact details of various independent employment organisations that could offer impartial advice.

Managers have met with all Links to Work employees to explain the contents of the information packs and reassure and inform them of the support on offer.

The Council has offered a 29 weeks redeployment package, this means that employees at risk and registered for redeployment can continue to undertake job trials following the formal 17 week period for a further 12 weeks rather than taking lieu of notice.

Employees were notified on the 19th October that they are formally at risk; this will mean that staff have 29 weeks to actively find alternative posts within the Council once the HRD process is complete. HRD have commenced consultation meetings with individuals to assess their skills, experience and employment history, appropriate interpreters are available to assist employees with visual and hearing impairments.

HRD have agreed to analyse all council vacancies to identify "potential suitable" vacancies so this could increase the number of redeployment opportunities.

Any formal redundancy would be early in the new financial year. Consultation via the JNC forum and directly with staff (to include none union members) is continuing.

Resource and legal considerations:

The recycling operation has now closed and the staff reassigned to Packing Links, new packing work has facilitated this move and also ensured that the service users who were involved with recycling have alternative work.

The underlying costs at Links to Work have been reduced by further efficiencies that will deliver a full year savings of £36k on vehicles and plant equipment, associated primarily with the recycling operation.

No reduction in Service User attendance has occurred or is planned. Assessment of future work is continuing to ensure that the opportunity to help people find employment and independence via direct employment, training, work experience or external placements continues. This is essential to meet the “Valuing People” White Paper requirements.

A review has began to identify the viability of all work streams to identify opportunities to create potential Community Interest Companies that will develop partnerships with the voluntary sector and provide real employment opportunities for our service users in line with current Government Strategy.

The general economic position of Links to Work has stabilised and no further reductions in income (other than recycling) have occurred since the last update. The forecast end of year Budget Deficit (at Month 05) is £386,759.

Further work continues to improve the financial health of Links to Work, this includes a review of current property liabilities to reduce this commitment .

All the changes will be implemented and managed within existing policy and procedures and will not have any legal implications.

Citizen impact:

The agreed approach is the development of future services designed to minimise the impact on service users who attend Links to Work.

The proposals also facilitate the long term stability of the service which should re-focus on creating real employment and very sheltered employment opportunities

At risk staff have been identified, some individuals can be assimilated into new roles others will undertake a selection process to include reasonable adjustments reflecting their disability needs.. HRD have arranged the necessary skills match interviews with the 24 employees who have been informed that their posts are at risk.

Twelve people have expressed an interest in voluntary redundancy, discussions began week commencing 12/10/09. Initial outcomes indicate that take up of voluntary redundancy options will be minimal

Environmental impact:

There are currently none.

Performance management:

There are key performance indicators that are affected by the operations at Links to Work. These indicators link to the council's overall performance rating.

- N1 132 – Timeliness of social care assessment (18+)
- N1 133 – Timeliness of social care package (18+ from 2009/10)
- N1 136 – People supported to live independently through social services.
- N1 146 – Adults with learning disabilities in employment.

Links to Work offers support, tackles inequalities and encourages independence through the acquisition of skills and progression to open employment. This service is intended to be in line with key government directions outlined in 'Our health, our care, our say – a new direction for community services', 'Putting People First' and 'Valuing People Now'.

However the historical model is outdated and does not offer real work as required by Public Service Agreement (PSA 16) and the numbers of people progressing to open employment is very low. To meet the aspirations of the cross government strategy 'Valuing Employment Now' there is a need for a radical increase in the number of people with moderate or severe learning disabilities to be in employment, the Government wants as many as possible of these jobs to be at least 16 hours per week

This requires the development of a whole system employment strategy at Walsall Partnership level to be effective

The vision for Walsall in 2021 states that people are our strength and have the

skills and attitude required by employers. Links to Work has a key influence on the council's performance to make this vision a reality.

Equality Implications:

The two key equality implications are:-

- The loss of employment for adults with disabilities.
- Potential loss of a key service to support adults with disabilities.

An equality impact assessment has been initiated.

Consultation:

- Disability Services Senior Management Team, Finance and Human Resource Officers have been consulted throughout the progress since the Cabinet view in July 09.
- All staff including Unison Stewards has been made aware of the Cabinet view and the need to change. Feedback generally accepted that there needs to be changes but there is anxiety regarding the future of their jobs.
- Membership of Local JNC has been agreed and consultation is in progress, regular meetings are scheduled.
- The agreed approach is the development of future services designed to minimise the impact on service users who attend Links to Work.
- At risk groups have been identified.
- Employees were notified on the 19th October that they are formally at risk
- Some individuals can be assimilated into new roles others will have to undertake a selection process.
- HRD have commenced consultation meetings with individuals to assess their skills, experience and employment history.
- The Council has offered a 29 weeks redeployment package which is unprecedented, the extended period is designed to increase the opportunities for training and work trials.
- Twelve people expressed an interest in voluntary redundancy, discussions began week commencing 12/10/09
- A review has began to identify the viability of all work streams to identify opportunities to create potential Community Interest Companies that will develop partnerships with the voluntary sector and provide real employment opportunities for our service users in line with current Government Strategy.

The Health & Social Care Scrutiny Panel will be briefed on a regular basis regarding developments at Links to Work.

Contact Officer:

John Greensill – Head of Disability Services

 . 01922 658390

greensillj@walsall.gov.uk