

DATE: 18th January 2010

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

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor 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 2009

1. Cabinet approved the approach to restructure Links to Work, specifically the reduction from 32 to 17 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. Cabinet instructed Social Care and Inclusion to 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.

Background papers:

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

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

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

Reason for scrutiny:

The Scrutiny and Performance panel requested this update to assess and understand the impact of the restructuring of Links to Work, specifically the impact of changes, the number of posts at risk and any impact on service users.

In particular the Panel wanted to be updated on the Human Resources Strategy designed to support employees with disabilities. This initiative continues to be implemented across the Council and has been recognised in our approach.

Citizen impact:

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

Maintain a service to provide employment related activities, modernising the approach to maximise service user's strengths and develop social inclusion.

The proposals also facilitate the long term stability of the service which should re-focus on creating real employment and employment related experiences / activities.

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.

How 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.

Equality Implications:

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'.

The two key equality implications are:-

- The loss of employment for adults with disabilities.
- Potential loss of a 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 2009.

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 JNCC 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.

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1. Current Position

1.1 Impact of Change.

- 1.1.1 24 at risk posts will be replaced by 9 new posts resulting in the reduction from 32 to 17 posts agreed by Cabinet July 2009. The 9 new posts are directly responsible for the supervision of the 80 people per day who attend Links to Work, 147 in total.
- 1.1.2 The workforce has now been downsized by 10.
The remaining 8 people at risk are subject to the Local Authorities Redeployment process.
- 1.1.3 There remains 3 vacant supervisor posts within the new Links to Work structure, 3 of the 8 remaining people will be skill matched into these roles, leaving 5 to continue with the redeployment process an option of VR/ER at 17 weeks remains or continue and complete the 29 week process, at which point they are eligible for their redundancy settlements.
- 1.1.4 Nine people have confirmed their decision to accept retirement and redundancy settlements as part of a “go now” package.

2. Human Resources Strategy

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 The 29 weeks redeployment package is unprecedented; the extended period is designed to increase the opportunities for training and work trials.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 HRD have agreed to analyse all council vacancies to identify “potential suitable” vacancies so this could increase the number of redeployment opportunities.

- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 A review is underway 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.
All the changes will be implemented and managed within existing policy and procedures and will not have any legal implications.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 Twelve people had expressed an interest in voluntary redundancy, discussions began week commencing 12/10/09. Initial outcomes indicate that take up of the voluntary redundancy options would be minimal however just prior to the agreed conclusion date for expressions of interest 8 people confirmed their decision to accept VR/ER settlements.
- 2.10 The final package offered was a “go now” offer requested by Unison and agreed as a local arrangement, consisting of the remaining weeks of the redeployment process in these cases 13 weeks plus 12 weeks pay in lieu of notice and the individuals redundancy, early retirement settlements. This arrangement was at no extra cost to the local Authority.
- 2.11 Two further posts were deleted for reasons not associated with the Cabinets approved restructure Links to Work; one person retired due to ill health and the remainder was unsuccessful in his request for redeployment.
- 2.12 HRD have concluded consultation meetings with individuals to assess their skills, experience and employment history.
- 2.13 The skills match process for the roles of supervisor have been delayed due to an appeal against selection of “at risk”. The person, persons associated with the appeal are seeking assimilation into said role. A hearing is scheduled for 02 February 2010.

3. Further Reports.

- 3.1 A review has began to identify the viability of all work streams to develop opportunities to create potential Community Interest Companies that will build partnerships with the voluntary sector and provide real employment opportunities for our service users in line with current Government Strategy.
- 3.2 The Health & Social Care Scrutiny Panel will be briefed on a regular basis regarding developments at Links to Work.

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