

Council– 20th May 2013

Notice of Motion – Unemployment

1 Introduction

The following notice of motion has been submitted by Councillor Smith:

“Given the higher than national average level of unemployment in Walsall, the on-going pressure on benefits and the drive to get those on benefits back to work, this Council commits to looking into legally acceptable ways and means of the Council as an employer, giving employment opportunity priority to unemployed people who live in the Borough of Walsall for appropriate job vacancies, also commits to using its influence on Agencies that provide workers for Walsall Council services to do likewise and finally commits to using its influence to encourage private sector employers to do likewise.”

2. Position

There are currently 27,110 (16.2% of working age population) residents in Walsall claiming an out of work benefit, compared to 11.4% in England (March 2013). In terms of our recruitment processes, 5,964 applications (non school based) were received from Walsall residents which represented 55.48% of all non school applications received and 67.73% of all successful Walsall Council applicants (including schools) lived within the Walsall area.

3. What we are doing and what we could do

Walsall Council as an Employer

Recruitment - The council currently uses a range of methods to advertise vacancies as set out below but it could be placed at risk of challenge if vacancies were only advertised to Walsall residents, particularly from an equality and disability perspective, from people who live outside the borough. In addition to this the council would also be working contrary to the disability two tick symbol by advertising our jobs to Walsall Residents only. This would apply to all vacancies that the council advertises including apprenticeships, recruitability and school vacancies.

Advertising – The council uses a system of targeted advertising which positively encourages applications from all Walsall residents:

- Adverts appear in Walsall Council Job Centre
- Paper based Jobshop available for collection from First Stop Shop
- Jobshop online on www.walsall.gov.uk
- Circulation of Jobshop to Libraries, schools and other municipal buildings

Outreach – The council also engages with a number of key partners to advertise vacancies:

- Use of key Walsall venues namely Walsall Art Gallery and Walsall College for events such as Recruitability and Apprenticeship Schemes.

- First Stop Shop bus which engages with residents across the borough
- Career Fayres in Walsall Borough Schools.

Other actions that we have and can take include:

- Offer Apprenticeships for young people
- Quality Work Placements for up to 8 weeks for unemployed adults
- Job Fairs targeted in wards with high unemployment

Agency Contract (Starting Point)

Whilst we cannot specifically insist on Starting Point engaging only Walsall residents, there are things that do assist in outcome delivery:

- Starting Point is a Walsall company whose head office is located in the Walsall town centre
- The tender process for selection asked specific questions about what steps would be routinely taken to ensure that Walsall candidates would get access to any temporary vacancies.
- They contract with many other recruitment agencies that are based in Walsall or have branches within the Walsall area.
- Regular review of outcomes for Walsall residents, including a case study conducted in July 2012 which focused on a particular service area which utilises agency workers for cover and seasonal employment, revealed that 86.92% of the engaged workers lived within the Walsall area.

In contrast to publicly listed recruitment businesses they have wider aims around social and economic regeneration which primarily involves helping Walsall residents back into work. They work closely with training organisations to access people who are “work ready” and include Walsall residents who have been long term unemployed and assist them to get back into employment. To support this Walsall Council can work more closely with Starting Point in that it can assist the unemployed to register with them and to access opportunities or training which may be available to help them with work opportunities.

Private Sector

Walsall Works - is an investment by Walsall Council which symbolises the vision for creating sustainable employment growth within our Walsall based businesses by subsidising apprenticeships for young people. Its key aims are to raise the ambition and aspiration Walsall’s young residents who are currently not in education, training or employment.

The programme is currently operating to support the private sector to recruit young people but the Council could consider whether it wishes to focus the programme on creating new apprenticeship opportunities within the public sector including the Council, in particular in service areas where there is a ageing workforce and a real need to encourage young people into specialist roles.

Procurement – the Council currently encourages an ethos of social, environment and economic benefits in all contracts, large physical regeneration and procurement of services provided by the Council and its contractors through the ‘Think Walsall’ programme. It also actively encourages local companies to tender for local contracts and services through the ‘Find It’ portal.

Whilst these mechanisms are in place to encourage participation there may be a need to strengthen the monitoring of activity to ensure that the Council and its approved contractors are adhering to the principles of the programmes.

4. What works for our residents

Since last summer we have met with residents at the four one stop employment shops (Bloxwich Work on the Horizon, Darlaston Jet, Caldmore and Walsall One Stop Employment Shop), work programme providers (Steps to Work, Inspire to Independence) and Job Centres to find out what was helpful and unhelpful in their search for employment. We found that some key barriers into employment are skills gaps, fear of entering into work, less disposable income and travel costs

By listening to residents and finding out what matters to them we learnt that what works is helping the individual in the way that they need to be helped (rather than pushing pre-planned programmes on to them). The Council has therefore starting experimenting by working with different ways of providing support.

The council ran a three week Employment Support Shop pilot at the First Stop Shop in conjunction with partner organisations such as Caldmore Accord to help our residents. It is proposed that with our learning the Council can now work towards adapting our support to fit residents’ needs. As part of ‘Help me with my Money, my Home, my Job’ review, we are now working with residents and helping them with practical issues such as setting up e-mail accounts, on-line job searches, helping with CV’s, helping to access employment support provision within the borough and supporting those interested in self-employment.

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