

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills, Executive Director for Environment and Economy

Report to:	Economic Scrutiny Committee
Date:	18 October 2016
Subject:	Lincolnshire County Council and Department of Work & Pensions Joint Working

Summary:

This report focuses on the strategic priorities and current business plan of Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Work Services, the directorate responsible for delivering face to face services through the national network of Jobcentres.

Actions Required:

Members are asked to:

1. consider further areas and opportunities for Lincolnshire County Council and DWP collaboration, and identify common priorities for action.
2. identify what opportunities there are for Lincolnshire County Council and DWP colleagues to facilitate the right relationships with employers and partners to ensure that we help connect local people without jobs, to local jobs without people.

1. Background

DWP Department Priorities

DWP's main objective is to ensure that the support available helps as many citizens as possible move beyond the needs for welfare support, by supporting an effective labour market where all those who can work do so. DWP will do this by supporting people to find, retain and increase their earnings in work, support disabled people and people with long term health conditions to get in and stay in employment, ensure young people are earning or learning and supporting people from ethnic minority backgrounds into employment.

The DWP focus is on delivering a service that moves people quickly from unemployment into sustainable work; and ensures people progress in employment to achieve their full potential, thereby protecting people from poverty and

supporting people to transform their lives. This will contribute to a stronger competitive economy, tackle poverty and improve life chances.

The Central England geographical district within which Lincolnshire Jobcentres are situated have defined this as:

- A high performing team that is highly engaged, to secure all claimants a job as quickly as possible.
- We will continue to work with the claimants who start work, in order to support them to progress in work towards their dream job.
- Low self-esteem is *the* greatest barrier to employment. A job, even for a short time can make a real difference.
- We will create an environment where employers and agencies feel like part of our team.

DWP have set an ambition to achieve full employment and half the current 40% gap between the employment rate is between those without disabilities and people with disabilities. At the end of 2015, the employment rate for people with disabilities stood at 40%, compared with 80% for non-disabled people. Ensuring that people in work stay in work, and that people out of work get back into work is an important goal for the Government. Figures show that getting people back to work could increase UK economic growth by up to £3.9 billion.

DWP 2020 Vision

The vision set is that jobcentres should be far more than places where people sign on and receive out of work entitlements; they should be welcoming places of true transformation, where motivated and skilled teams support positive change in people's lives. Increasingly, DWP are interacting and delivering services in different ways – through group information/actions sessions, on site job clubs and employers are encouraged into jobcentres to deliver group sessions. Wi-Fi is available, as well as computers for customers to use/undertake job search/digital learning. Work Coaches are expected to have expert knowledge of the labour market and encouraged to develop relationships with employers so that they can confidently “advocate” with employer, secure “warm handover” for their customers, arrange “mock interviews” and interact with their customers digitally, exhibiting an understand of smart phone devices and digital job search.

Local Jobcentres now provide day one access to 0-4 week Job Club to support customers into a job as quickly as possible.

Jobcentres provide access to a wide range of work experience opportunities for all customer groups, especially helpful where the customer has no work experience or recent work experience on their CV.

Local services include the ability to deliver Sector Based Work Academies, i.e. pre-employment training to meet employer recruitment needs by providing training to enable customers to be able to compete effectively for the job.

DWP Coaches have access to a Flexible Support Fund to remove barriers to employment in order to support customers in meeting childcare costs, fares/travel expenses.

Jobcentres also work with employers and partners to run Jobs Fairs to respond to seasonal demands and requirements within the labour market, and to bring together jobseekers and employers in a single venue.

Universal Credit

The DWP 2020 vision places the citizen at the heart of the service provided. From May 2017-2018, there will be a staged rollout of the new Universal Credit interactive digital full service for all new claims to benefit. Universal Credit is currently only available in Lincolnshire to single non householders. Between 2018 and 2022, “stock” existing benefit cases will be migrated.

DWP will be working with a wider customer group; including employed people, self-employed people, people claiming housing benefit only, child tax credits only and working tax credits only. DWP will be supporting people already in work to help them increase their hours, reducing under-employment and will be developing use of remote technology (journal, web chat, etc.)

DWP will increasingly expect customers to provide information on line, and will automate services to enable this, thereby providing a more responsive service to customers. Customers will be able to interact in a range of ways, through the internet, on their phone, on their tablet, or through a phone call. By accessing services on line, our customers can find information and complete applications in their own time and location. However, face to face interactions will remain crucial, both to offer tailored support to our most vulnerable customers, and to assess effectiveness of decision making.

Increased data gathering and fact finding on line and the automation of many current processes will facilitate greater focus on individual customer needs.

A major part of Welfare Reform will be building Work Coach skills in coaching claimants to improve their digital skills. The role of the Work Coach has been expanded to deal with claimants as individuals, tailoring support based on their needs, rather than the benefit they receive.

In order to deliver a more flexible and accessible service that meets the needs of our customers, DWP employees have opted in to a new Employee Deal, to increase their flexibility re the hours they are available to work. The expectation is that employees will be available to work on a rota system up to 6.30pm from February 2017, with the expectation that this will be extended to 8.00pm and Saturdays from October 2017.

Employers and Partnerships

DWP are participants at the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GL LEP) Employment & Skills Board and are beginning to explore ways of

collaborating to further joint priorities. An area identified for further examination is the mental health and disability agenda, and the impact on Lincolnshire for both people in receipt of health/disability related benefits and for those within the workplace, and the support available for employers. Greater Lincolnshire LEP funded a joint Logistics Skills show in conjunction with DWP on 23 September 2016.

DWP will launch a new Employer Strategy in Autumn 2016. DWP will be increasing engagement with partners and stakeholders, recognising Devolution and localisation as a key opportunity for further collaboration and joint working, in order to improve the offer to customers.

DWP will be seeking more co-locations with Local Authorities and more partners in sites, e.g. health professionals – to focus on “into work.” There will also be a rollout of the “Pathfinder” for Jobcentre Plus support for schools.

Devolution may provide an opportunity to develop schemes through local agreements, and we should explore what funding may be available to develop “innovative local pilots” in the coming months.

The new Work & Health Programme (to be delivered by Local authorities) is set to replace the DWP Work Programme when contracts end next year. Devolution represents an opportunity to integrate local services and provide signposting to effective local support mechanisms so that people can access the right support.

In Greater Lincolnshire, around 45,000 people are currently claiming sickness/impairment related benefits; around half because of mental health problems, so there is a financial impact on the local economy.

Helping more economically inactive and unemployed/sick/disabled people is crucial to boosting local growth, productivity and reducing the welfare bill.

Building Capability

DWP are focusing on building capability and professionalism both as a business, across every aspect of service, and in individuals. Work Coaches and managers will be professionally accredited to certificate level, which will be externally recognised through City and Guilds and the Chartered Management Institute. New work coach learning route ways are being developed as part of a new formal accreditation to build evidence of professional skills and standards, which will become an integrated part of training, and not an additional optional element.

DWP are outlining further development of capabilities around the new Health & Work Conversation, ESA Claimant Commitment, JSA Weekly Work search/increased intervention in the early part of the claim and DWP conversation and approach to motivate claimants beyond 12 months unemployed.

2. Conclusion

This represents a significant cultural change, as for the past few years once claimants reach the 12 month point, claimants have been referred to the Work Programme, delivered by contracted providers. This means that DWP will need to integrate new attitudes, ideas and processes into milestones within the customer journey, to prevent people falling into long term unemployment.

Halving the Disability Employment rate gap is a key challenge.

The development of digital skills within the population, to enable them to access services and increase their employment opportunities, is a further area of significant challenge.

Forecasts show there will be around 200,000 job vacancies in the next decade in Greater Lincolnshire, and a potential shortfall of available people to fill those vacancies, which combined with the rural nature of the county represent a unique challenge.

3. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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