

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **9th December 2021**
 Report Subject: **Regional Approach to Employability**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D Davies, Deputy Leader / Executive Member
 Regeneration and Economic Development**
 Report Submitted by: **Bethan McPherson, Team Manager Connected
 Communities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
19.10.21	21.10.21	26.11.21			08.12.21	15.12.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to seek BGCBC endorsement of the regional paper and the principles of a locally delivered, regionally co-ordinated approach to employability (appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The paper presented in appendix 1 has been developed with contributions from each of the 10 Local Authority areas within the Cardiff Capital Region. This report is specific to the regional paper; however, consideration to the “Blaenau Gwent Employability Provision – Position Statement” report, presented separately, should be made.

2.2 All 10 local authorities in the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) currently deliver employability activity to support our residents into employment or to help them progress to more sustainable or better paid employment.

2.3 At its core, employability is about removing or minimising an individual’s barriers to finding, maintaining or progressing in sustainable employment whatever that barrier may be. Depending on the individual, this could be any combination of **skills** (general or occupationally specific), it could be job **readiness/awareness**, or it could be the availability of **support**.

2.4 Since 2014, across the CCR, employability provision has supported over 50,000 residents to secure a qualification and has helped almost 15,000 long-term unemployed into employment. An indication of the residents supported within Blaenau Gwent are incorporated within the performance section of this report.

2.5 The complex geographical and delivery arrangements have led to over 15 separate projects operating concurrently in different areas within the CCR.

2.6 Employability provision since 2007 has largely been funded from the European Social Fund (ESF); having now left the European Union this

funding stream will no longer be available; and ESF programme delivery will cease 2023 at the latest. It is not yet known whether the UK Government's replacement for EU funds (Shared Prosperity Fund) will support employability activity or whether this will continue to be separated into objective-led projects. Nor is the amount or delivery mechanism known at this stage.

- 2.7 Therefore, in advance of any funding bids to Shared Prosperity Fund, the 10 CCR Local Authorities have sought to create a single, clear, consistent framework for future employability projects in the region based on a shared vision, shared principles, and common tools.
- 2.8 In 2019, the CCR Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) adopted an Employment and Skills Plan. This sets a clear vision of the future skills needs of the City Region and the activities that regional partners need to deliver to achieve this, with employability featuring strongly.
- 2.9 With the impact of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic now being felt in the economy and labour market, employability is more important than ever.
- 2.10 To build on this, the employability leads from the 10 local authorities have produced a *Framework for Future Employability in the CCR* to shape a shared vision for an employability service which is:
- Responsive enough to rapidly changing employability trends / priorities;
 - Flexible enough to still address individual barriers;
 - Still aligned to local circumstances and still delivered by local teams;
 - Engaged with industry to support people into more sustainable roles;
 - With a particular focus on the following challenges:
 - Poverty arising from unemployment, under employment and unsustainable employment
 - Early Interventions for young people at risk of NEET
 - Barriers to high quality sustainable employment faced by adults
 - Priority Industry Engagement
- 2.11 The proposed employability framework is based on the following shared principles (defined fully within the main report), which reflect on the lessons learnt from 20 years of employability projects:
- Subsidiarity works (LA/trusted delivery bodies are well embedded)
 - Trusted bond (delivery leads, businesses and participants)
 - Prevention over profitability
 - Continuity of provision is valuable and cost-effective
 - Shared learning adds value
 - Decades of progress towards real change
 - Simplified costs have reduced bureaucracy
 - Assess participants for their “employability” journey, not their “project” journey
 - Flexible outcomes

- One framework, but not necessarily one project
 - Not just a job, but a *sustainable* job: closer alignment with industry
- 2.12 Delivery of the *Framework for Future Employability in the CCR* relies on the use of common tools / approaches, particularly at 5 key transition points:
1. The interface with Pre-16 NEET prevention activity
 2. Recruitment & engagement of participants
 3. Triage and caseworker allocation: *understanding the goal and the support available.*
 4. Client assessment process: *assessing barriers & what a participant can do*
 5. The menu of support & intervention: *co-designing and delivering the interventions*
- 2.13 Having a common approach and toolkit is designed to simplify the experience for both residents and employers.
- 2.14 To test this new approach, all 10 Local Authorities have submitted a bid jointly, led by Torfaen, to the UK Government Community Renewal Fund. This will test key aspects including:
- Mobile & digital outreach (recruitment & engagement)
 - Shared Triage trial (understanding the goal)
 - Aligning employability to the CCR's priority industries (assessing the barriers)
 - Try before you qualify (co-designing and delivering the interventions)
- 2.15 Concurrently, further work will be undertaken in autumn 2021 to co-produce the detail of each shared tool / approach through a series of workshops led by LA Employability leads and inviting NEETs leads and other employability partners from the Regional Skills Partnership (Working Wales, third sector groups, Department for Work and Pensions, TUC and WG Skills and Employability team).
- 2.16 Moving forward any regional funding bid to support future employability services would be reported locally for endorsement and approval as appropriate.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
- 3.1 Option 1 Endorsement of the regional paper and the principle of a locally delivered, regionally co-ordinated approach to employability
- Option 2 To note the contents of the report only
4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan – Pathway to Prosperity

- Blaenau Gwent Employment and Skills Plan – Blaenau Gwent Prospers
- WG Employability Plan
- CCR Regional Skills Strategy
- Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

ESF programmes are externally funded and therefore there are no/limited immediate financial implications or pressures. In the medium term programmes will end which presents a redundancy risk associated with staff employed to deliver the programme. A proportion of the redundancy costs will be met through the funding mechanism though there will be proportion for which the respective department/organisation will need to identify a budget for. The risk would be mitigated through successful redeployment to a new employment programme or alternative employment within the organisation, as appropriate. Relevant service areas are aware of the risk and associated cost implications.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

- 5.2.1 As the priorities for the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) have not yet been announced, there is a risk that the proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR will not align to these priorities.

To mitigate this risk, officers have carefully reviewed the priorities within the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) which is seen as a precursor to SPF

- 5.2.2 Other regional / national entities deliver employability activity and there is a risk for mis-alignment / duplication. This includes the recent procurement by the Department of Work and Pensions of providers to deliver the Restart project.

To mitigate this risk, officers have started engagement with other employability agencies operating in the region, including Welsh Government (Skills & Employability), DWP, Working Wales and the third sector. All are supportive of the concepts set out in the proposed.

- 5.2.3 It is not yet clear whether the same level of financial resource as is currently available from the ESF will be made available from the SPF.

At this stage, the proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR is not a funding application – it is a strategic document setting out the principles of how employability activity should be delivered within the region and what it should seek to achieve. Any funding application/s will need to be scaled to the resources available.

- 5.2.4 Without certainty on the timescales for a funding decision from the SPF, there is a risk that funding from the ESF may end before replacement funding is in place. This will have implications for staffing levels.

At this stage, the proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR is seeking to agree the principles of how employability activity should be delivered. The implications for any gaps in provision would be considered as part of any subsequent applications for funding once more detail is released on post-EU funding streams.

5.3 **Legal**

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct staffing implications associated with this paper specifically.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

An example of the successful outcomes associated with ESF programme delivery across the CCR to date are captured within the main report (Page 2/3)

In respect of ESF programme delivery within Blaenau Gwent an outline of the performance data available at the time of the report is presented below:

Bridges into Work (unemployed and economically inactive) has engaged 540 participants, with a 27% job entry rate. 56% have gained a level 3 or below qualification: 48% have participated in meaningful voluntary placements.

Working Skills for Adults² (employed with under a level 2 qualification) 72% have achieved a level 2 or below qualification.

Nurture, Equip, Thrive 152 Under-employed participants 44% have an improved labour market situation i.e. promotion, more hours, new job, 38 Underemployed participants with a work limiting health condition 23% have an improved labour market situation. 25 participants who were long term absence due to illness, 56% have to a substantive role.

Inspire 2 Work (16-24 year olds): 314 young people enrolled so far, with 71 (23%) supported into employment, 57 (18%) gaining qualifications and 71 (23%) supported into education and training.

Inspire 2 Achieve (11-16 year olds): 910 enrolled so far and of the 431 closed, 195 (45%) have reduced their risk of becoming NEET, 118 (27%) have been supported back into full time Education, 38 (9%) into work based training and 83 (19%) gained additional qualifications.

(* Communities for Work figures to be supplied)

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

There are a range of employment and skills related outcomes for participants as outlined in the diagram below:



6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR has been presented to both the Regional Skills Partnership and Regional Business Council.

The proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR has been endorsed by the 10 Local Authority Directors with responsibility for Economy / Skills / Regeneration.

Initial discussions have been held with DWP, Working Wales and Welsh Government (Skills & Employability). In addition, Local Authority officers have supported the development of the paper.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The paper presented outlines a regional strategic framework, with local delivery; based on the lessons learnt and best practice from previous programmes. In addition, it makes consideration to future business needs in respect of skills and employment opportunities of the future.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The paper presents a proactive approach to develop key guiding principles to inform future delivery; early consideration has been made to best realise continuity of service in the medium to long term, ensuring those requiring access to support and services are able to do so.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR has been presented to both the Regional Skills Partnership and Regional Business Council.

The proposed Framework for Future Employability in the CCR has been endorsed by the 10 Local Authority Directors with responsibility for Economy / Skills / Regeneration.

Initial discussions have been held with DWP, Working Wales and Welsh Government (Skills & Employability). In addition, Local Authority officers have supported the development of the paper.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

This is a regional paper, discussions are being replicated locally with a close working relationship between Regeneration and Education to ensure locally delivered services, aligned to regional principles are aligned to local need.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The report contents to not relate specifically to this agenda; indirectly a regional approach to employability will make consideration to:

- People having the opportunity to work close to home
- How public and integrated transport can support access to employment
- Employment and skills requirements relating specifically to the decarbonisation agenda

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

The report relates to employability provision and ensuring all residents requiring support at any stage of their employment journey have appropriate access.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***
N/A

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

7.1 Monitoring arrangements will be put in place relating to any future funding opportunity.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 – Regional Paper*