



Report of the Director of Place

People Policy Development Committee - 26 January 2022

Employability Programmes Update

Purpose:	To provide the People PDC with an update of the Employability Programmes
Policy Framework:	Swansea Bay City Region Economic Regeneration Strategy.
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For information	

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the key employability, skills and training programmes being delivered by Swansea Council, to provide a summary of the achievements to date and to highlight opportunities and challenges going forward that should be taken into consideration in the development and securing of funding for successor projects, post-EU funding.

2 Background and Context

- 2.1 Since Wales began receiving EU structural funds in the year 2000, the opportunity to extend employability support has been taken by a range of organisations. Welsh Government has been able to 'double-up' national schemes in education and skills, and regional and local projects covering a range of issues have been implemented over this time. Some projects such as Workways have evolved during this time and developed with each successive funding round, adding features based on experience and need. A variety of smaller more specific engagement and skills projects take place via WCVA through the 'Active Inclusion' fund and its predecessors.

2.2 Currently Swansea Council operates five employability projects within the County, namely:

- Workways+ (WW+)
- Communities for Work (CfW)
- Communities for Work+ (CfW+)
- Workways+ STU
- Kickstart (commenced Dec'20 in response to Covid-19)

Until very recently (July'21), the Council also delivered the Cam Nesa (CN) project which operated for a 3-year period. See Appendix 1 for a summary of this provision. It is also worth noting that the Council's Beyond Bricks and Mortar initiative works closely with all projects to set up placements and training weeks with a range of Council contracts.

2.3 Aside from the aforementioned employability projects the Council also delivers the Cynnydd project in conjunction with the Education Department. The project operates within secondary schools and provides support for pupils that are at risk of becoming NEET.

2.4 All projects, with the exception of CfW+ and Kickstart are funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). CfW+ is funded by WG, whilst Kickstart is funded by UK Government via the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Each of these projects target and supports different cohorts of individuals or participants from age 11 up to retirement, in line with national funding programme priorities and objectives, with service delivery tailored to address local needs, within the constraints of regional and national policies.

2.5 The EU funded projects were developed as part of the new 2014-2020 EU funding programme. A number of European Social Fund (ESF) employability projects were developed on a national and regional basis with the aim of delivering services within Local Authority areas to tackle poverty through sustainable employment. In terms of larger projects, at a national level Welsh Government developed the Communities for Work project whilst regionally the Workways+ and Cam Nesa projects were developed by a consortium of Councils including Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Ceredigion.

2.6 In February 2017 Welsh Government announced that the Communities First Programme would end and that there would be an increasing focus on 'employment, early years and empowerment' – the Communities for Work Plus project shortly followed in 2018.

2.7 Whilst each project targets a very specific cohort of participant, the typical offer of support across the projects includes:

- Community outreach and engagement
- Dedicated intensive employment mentoring
- Initial triage and assessment of needs
- Action plan development

- Support to overcome barriers, e.g. confidence building or work limiting health conditions
- Training and qualifications
- Volunteering placements
- Paid Work Opportunities
- Job search support and mapping skills to jobs
- Work trials
- Welfare support and advice

2.8 During late 2020, and in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Kickstart scheme was established as part of the UK Government's Plan for Jobs with the aim of creating hundreds and thousands of new, fully funded jobs across England, Scotland and Wales. Swansea Council applied for funding to become an Employer and Gateway:

- As an Employer the Council has set up fully paid 6-month work placements for NEETs (16-24 year olds) across a number of departments internally.
- As a Gateway, officers in the Economic Development Team have established fully paid 6-month work placements with SMEs in Swansea.
- As part of both functions the young people on placement are provided with wrap around support from an Employment Mentor during their contract of employment with the Council or SME.

There is also extra funding to support young people to build their experience and help them move into sustained employment after they have completed their Kickstart Scheme funded job.

2.9 More recently, in July 2021, the business plan for the delivery of the City Deal supported Skills and Talent Programme was approved by Cabinet on 15th July 2021.

2.10 The City Deal funding will fund a programme team that will develop a Skills Barometer for the region, the Barometer will identify the skills gaps that exist in the region and identify the new skills required to meet the existing and future needs of the City Deal projects across the five key themes of Construction, Digital, Energy, Health and Wellbeing and Smart Manufacturing.

2.11 The Skills and Talent programme is required because the region suffers from a series of overarching economic issues including low GVA, lack of well-paid job opportunities, skills shortage, high levels of economic inactivity and outward youth migration. The region is characterised by a higher proportion of individuals with no qualifications when compared with national averages. A high number of individuals in the region are currently in low skilled, low paid and unstable employment and subsequently a lower-than-average level of individuals are in higher paid, meaningful employment. The programme will help address the skills gaps by working with the City Deal projects and regional stakeholders to develop and deliver the skills needs for the future in the region. The programme provides an opportunity to build on the work of existing employability programmes.

3 Current economic and employability issues and outputs

3.1 Swansea Council has recently developed its Covid Economic Recovery Plan which seeks to provide employability support to those in need now who have been impacted by the pandemic, but also to support businesses to bounce back and crucially support employment and our local economy. During **2020 UK Output fell by 9.8%**, however the Bank of England does expect growth of 7.25% during 2021 to bring the economy back to 2019 levels.

4 Since the start of the pandemic the Council has provided over **£160m of WG Covid-19 financial support to businesses** and has now launched the new Business Swansea service. As part of this service a business start-up grant has been established, and the very first start-up grant was awarded to a participant of one of our employability projects.

4.1 Through the combined effort of these projects we have supported **over 4500 people over the past 5 years, of which over 1700 people have been supported into employment**. These projects are backed by and work closely with other Council services such as welfare rights, lifelong learning and business support, as part of our collaborative working approach.

4.2 Since the start of the pandemic **Swansea Council has supported 1,263** people through its employability programmes, of which over **500 have been helped back into employment**, despite the current economic picture in Swansea where we witnessed a steep increase in unemployment levels in April 2020.

4.3 As of June 2021 the **unemployment rate in Swansea** stands at **5.0%** (5.0% Welsh average, 5.6% UK). The Bank of England unemployment projections for 2021 have been reduced recently, and the trend in Swansea is gradually following that projection. Unemployment in Swansea was at 5.3% in May 2021, which reduced to 5.0% in June 2021 but is still higher than the rate of 3.4% in June 2019.

4.4 As of September 2021 the **claimant count in Swansea** stands at 4.6% (4.4% Welsh average, 5.0% UK). This figure of 4.6% is up from the pre-pandemic figure of 3.4% in March 2020, but has fallen from the pandemic high point of 6.0% in August 2020. It is worth noting that the claimant count figure is defined as all people who claim Jobseekers allowance (JSA), plus claimants of Universal Credit (UC) who are required to seek work and be available for work. Under UC a broader span of claimants are required to look for work than under JSA. Enhancements to Universal Credit as part of the UK Government's response to the coronavirus pandemic mean that an increasing number of people became eligible for unemployment-related benefit support although still employed. Consequently changes in the Claimant Count will not be due wholly to changes in the number of people who are unemployed. It is not currently possible to identify to what extent people who are employed or unemployed have affected the numbers.

- 4.5 During 2020 as a **Kickstart Gateway and Employer** working with existing relationships with SMEs and businesses the Council was able to **setup 260 placements with 61 employers**, and also setup **over 60 internal placements within our Place** department. Of the total placements established over **80 participants** are on placement at present, with 10 more pending. Internal placements are in Building Services, Parks, Waste Management, Housing, Social services and facilities whilst external placements are with a range of employers in the care sector and construction. All young people in building services or construction placements are being upskilled and supported to achieve CSCS cards.
- 4.6 As part of Kickstart the Workways+ employability team have attended the Job Centres twice a week to support 16-24 year olds and the Work Coaches in providing wrap around mentoring support for those on placement. The team has also attended 2 jobs fairs to promote placements and support.
- 4.7 Through Swansea Council contracts and its social benefits team (**Beyond Bricks and Mortar**) in 20/21 a total of **6,380 training weeks were created**, with many of these filled by participants of our employability projects. Participants have benefited from being offered **placements and jobs with contractor Buckingham Plc** who are currently building our **£135m Copr Bay Phase 1** scheme which includes a 3,500 seat arena.
- 4.8 Currently, 18-months into the Covid-19 pandemic it is clear the employability landscape has changed. Whilst furlough has recently ended on 30th September 2021, we are facing a situation where there is an abundance of job vacancies across a range of sectors, yet there is a shortage of people to fill those vacancies. This is an issue faced by many employability support providers, including EU funded schemes, Job Centre/DWP provision.
- 4.9 At present, the reason for the shortages of those looking to enter the job market is unknown, and it may take some time for the reasons to transpire following the end of furlough. It is possible that following the end of furlough there will be an increase in redundancies and a need for people to re-enter the labour market. However, currently those claimants known to DWP aren't engaging with work coaches or employability support providers and it is unclear if this trend will change – more will be known in the coming months. In the event that this happens, there will continue to be a labour shortage in areas such as HGV, construction, hospitality, etc. All employability programmes internal and external remain geared up to support those seeking employability mentoring, training and career advice.
- 4.10 As noted above, there are some labour shortages in specific areas, Health and Social care, retail & hospitality, construction and HGV driving. To respond to this the RLSP is working with projects such as Workways+ to set up events in Carmarthenshire and Swansea to promote opportunities and develop pathways to work. Links have been made for example with a local transport company who need to fill 150+ jobs, our Workways+ ELOs are facilitating training and will pay for the HGV licence providing applicants sign a 2-year contract with Owens. A Recruitment Fair is being planned once ATG take

possession of the Arena. They have started their recruitment for positions that can/need to start before the handover happens.

5 Opportunities and Challenges

- 5.1 Whilst the Council currently delivers five employability projects, they were all developed in a variety of ways, from top-down nationally conceived projects to bottom-up locally designed and delivered regional partnerships. As a result of this there exists a number of differences in the operational delivery of each project, yet synergies do also exist. By way of example, each project operates different outreach and engagement strategies, marketing and social media approaches, along with different paperwork and monitoring systems.
- 5.2 Unfortunately these complexities not only cause some level of inefficiency in the delivery of projects but as there are three separate 'brands' of provision this also complicates the landscape for the individual looking for support. Thankfully this was recognised by Welsh Government in early 2018 with the launch of their Employability Plan which sets a strategy to simplify the landscape, in part by developing the Working Wales programme that provides support to all cohorts in need of employment support.
- 5.3 Funding for the EU funded employability projects (CfW+ and WW+) is due to end in 2022, at which point there will be a significant gap in provision to support those in need. As outlined above the Council led employability projects were developed since 2016, many of which were in response to the commencement of a new EU funding round. Workways+ and other employability projects also existed under the previous EU funding programme, but ended abruptly at the end of the funding cycle. This led to the loss of staff, knowledge, systems and trusted brands of support. The project restarted two years later along with others, all of which took time to re-establish in the community and gain momentum. An opportunity exists to secure funding via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help develop a new employability programme that will work alongside the Skills and Talent programme but utilising Local Government tried and tested structures in order to maintain employability service provision and prevent knowledge loss.

Pathways to Work Project – UK Government Community Renewal Fund

- 5.4 Whilst the end of EU funding poses a major risk to employability provision in Swansea, the UK Government launched a call to develop bids for the Community Renewal Fund in Spring 2021, which will serve as the precursor to the Shared Prosperity Fund. A collaborative employability project proposal was developed and submitted to UK Government, which sought to build on the gap in provision caused by the end of Cam Nesa and to pilot a new joined up approach to provision. The Pathways to Work project will see the Council delivering a single project that targets a range of cohorts in conjunction with the third sector and Gower College Swansea to create career pathways. Partners included the teams within Place, Social Service, Education, YMCA, SCVS, Gower College and Swansea University. This project will serve as a pilot approach to test new ways of working, to address skills gaps and develop

pathways to employment and volunteering. The 6 month pilot project has been approved by UK Government and will commence in January 2022.

Swansea Council Paid Work Placements Project – Economic Recovery Fund

- 5.5 The DWP funded Kickstart paid placement programme is due to end in March 2022, which would see the end of a successful programme of placement opportunities. With the end of scheme there will be a notable gap in employability support in terms of paid placements.

A proposal was submitted to the Council's Economic Recovery Fund in Dec'22 to set up a new Placement and Training project to create paid work opportunities for those who are or at risk of long-term unemployment. The project recently secured funding (Jan'22) to establish 50 fully paid 6-month work placements with associated training and wrap around mentoring support within the Council. As part of the scheme, placements will be established in a range of work areas within the Council, which as one of the largest employers in Swansea is able to offer employment and training opportunities in a wide range of work areas and disciplines, from social care roles to finance and building services and waste management.

- 5.6 Currently work is also underway with colleagues in Education to identify future employability service provision for not only 16+ but those in secondary schools. This is in the context of a new curriculum being adopted, along with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Work is also commencing to evaluate the delivery of the Cynnydd project and the needs of those at risk of becoming NEET – again to look at what provision is needed and how this can be funded. Given the above opportunities to reshape employability provision post EU funding, this is also an opportune time to review post-16 education and skills needs in order to align with any new integrated employability programmes and the City Deal Skills and Talent programme.

6 Summary and Next Steps

- 6.1 The Committee will note that this report is for information since the current employability programme is dependent on grant funded programmes in that they are fixed in shape and design to work with certain cohorts/demographic. This is intended by the grant awarding body to provide specific support to individual's in-line with grant objectives, terms and conditions etc. and as such there is little opportunity for the council to set a policy around this area at this time.
- 6.2 However there is a question about the provision going forward, when EU funds and our current programmes end in Dec'22, what the council would we like to see in the future and how should any new programmes look, subjecting to funding. It is hoped that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is expected to have less constraints and requirements than EU funding (although perhaps too early to say for sure), so we may have more freedom to shape and develop more localised solutions building on the work we've undertaken for the past 5-10 years and the Skills and Talent programme going forward. A precursor to

this is the recent Community Renewal Fund employability project, as mentioned in the report, is an example of how we have designed a new collaborative programme with partners, linked to BBM, Regen schemes and Business support.

- 6.3 It is therefore suggested that whilst this report is for information a further report could be brought back to the PDC towards the end of 2022 to link in with this future policy agenda. Any initial thoughts from the committee on how this might look would be welcomed.

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 As this report is for information there are no additional financial implications falling on the authority,

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 As this report is for information there are no additional legal implications falling on the authority.

9 Integrated Assessment Implications

- 9.1 **As this report is for information** there is no requirement to undertake an IIA.

Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Employability Provision Chart