

Worklessness Group Meeting Minutes

**Held on Wednesday 13th January 2010, 9:30am
Larkbeare House, Exeter**

Present:

Name	Organisation
Janet Sinclair (Chair)	Job Centre Plus
Andrew Lightfoot	Devon County Council / Devon Economic Partnership
Alison Dandridge	Access to Employment
Carole Pilley	Exeter Community Initiatives
Chris Stocks	Exeter City Council
Christine Wardle	DPT
Daniel Bailyes	Devon Economic Partnership
David Norman	Connexions
Gary Pitman	Devon Enhanced Housing Options
Ian Pearson	NHS Devon
Lisa Jennings	DSHG
Liz Wood	DCC Learning Disability
Max Jowlett	Wheels 2 Work / Wheels 2 Learn
Philip Oldfield	Exeter City Council
Richard Slaney	Transform- Healthy Town Coordinator
Sandra Armstrong	Government Office South West
Sue Parr	Job Centre Plus
Steve Opie	South West Pound
Steve Turner	Devon County Council
Tim Tod	Young Devon
Vincent Wilson	Devon Welfare Rights
Kate Bourke	Robert Own Communities

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

Janet opened the meeting by thanking all those in attendance for coming, especially given the challenging travel conditions brought about by the weather. It was Janet's hope that this meeting would enable complementary aspects of each others agendas to be brought together. Following the welcome, introductions were made around the table.

2. General Update

The country is officially still in recession and unemployed in Devon rose slightly last month from 9645 in October to 9837 in November. This increase is probably due to the increase in claims from people whose seasonal jobs finished at the end of October. There are 2 worrying trends:

1. Disproportionate number of young people;
2. Increasing % of long term unemployed, measured at 6 and 12 months of unemployment. The average for Devon is 24.9% and 95 respectively; Torridge has the highest % at 30.1% and 13.2%, and North Devon the lowest % at 18.3% and 5.4%.

The Government's White paper 'Building Britain's Recovery' focuses on young people- this is the top priority.

In the 1980 and 1990 recession, unemployment continued for a long period after the recession ended - youth unemployment continued to rise for 4 years after the 1980 recession. The Government has challenged us to get youth unemployment falling by summer 2010.

The White paper supports the pace of Welfare Reform:

- the new work capability assessment;
- more lone parents required to look for work;
- plans for partners of unemployed people to look for work;
- 07/12/089 the launch of the Carer's Strategy;
- the Mental health Strategy.

Future plans include:

- A single contractor responsible for getting people into work regardless of the type of benefit they are on;
- A single out of work benefit;
- Support and funding will go with the individual and not be dependent on the benefit.

Regarding the carers' strategy Sue Parr had a number of words to share. Having taken advice from various carers' organisations there is a real need to support carers. Many want to work, not only for the income but also the independence that employment also brings. Work Focused Support for Carers (WFSC) seeks to offer, on a voluntary basis, work centred support while offering replacement care costs during the training regime. However, due to a lack of publicity, take-up is unsurprisingly low. It is hoped that as the programme becomes better known that its use will increase.

Action (all): It is hoped that members of this group will aid the spreading of this information.

More information is available on the Devon Economy website. The link to documents related to this group is provided here:

<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/worklessness-group-minutes>

9. Update from Sub-Groups – Mental Health (Ian Pearson)

Please read the report which is can be downloaded from the Devon Economy website on the above link.

There were a number of discussions following Ian's report. The issue of multiple approaches to employers from various agencies was raised. For example, at the moment an employer could receive an approach from an agency linked to carers', and a separate approach from an agency focused on delivering services to those with mental health issues. Janet argued that a long term objective of the recent government white paper (discussed above) is to introduce a single contractor.

It was also raised that employment for disadvantaged groups e.g. those with learning difficulties, ought not to be tackled individually, but rather to bring these issues under the 'worklessness' umbrella. Andrew pointed out that the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) would be a good way to do this.

4. Enhanced Housing Options (Lisa Jennings)

There are plans in effect to strengthen housing and employment advice co-ordination. The idea is to launch the Devon Home Choice website with links to employment and training opportunities. That way the obvious links between worklessness and housing can be brought together. There is currently a mapping exercise taking place of training provision in Devon.

Action (all): Should anyone have any further information that may be helpful, please contact Lisa.

The 'Productive Skills 4 Devon' (PS4D) group was proposed along with 'Supporting People'. Tim also put Jane Balentine's name forwards as a useful contact.

Liz mentioned that easier to understand information would make it easier to access for those with learning disabilities. Lisa will be happy to work with those concerned on this issue.

5. Future Jobs Fund (Steve Turner)

Devon County Council is the current accountable body for the first phase of the FJF. The current bid, which became operational in November, aims to create 137 jobs by April – with a further 20 by May. Various organisations are involved, with some employing between 30-40 people.

The package comes with a range of support that is particularly valued by the smaller businesses who cannot afford to support the employees themselves. The support package is put together by PLUSS who organise visits on a monthly basis to evaluate progress and to provide support where necessary.

Steve is also considering another FJF bid (phase 2) and is therefore keen to here from anyone who would like to be involved. The DWP are keen for new bids to be submitted as soon as possible. Moreover, for those currently employing on this scheme, should the company currently achieve an 80% delivery target, then new bids can be streamlined to save time.

Action (all): Get in contact with Steve if there is interest in the FJF.

On this theme Sandra pointed out that the regional target for the FJF is around 6,000. However, Devon is only achieving around 55% coverage. How can more opportunities be created? There was the possibility raised of the health sector, as the largest employer, taking on recruits through the FJF.

Tim argued that the length of employment is what leads to a real success – has there been any academic research into this? Should we look into doing so? What do people do in the months after the FJF finishes? In response, Andrew reported that SLIM have been commissioned by PS4D to look into these kind of issues.

7. Wheels to Work / Wheels to Learn (Max Jowlett)

Operating now in its 10th year and has recently landed a contract with Devon County Council to deliver a Wheels to Learn service. Currently the service is under used, but it is hoped that over time it will become more widely known.

The Wheels to Work service is at its busiest yet. A new motorcycle trainer has arrived with the hope that road safety will be improved, while also delivering long term savings in the form of reduced vehicle damage.

Max reported also that they had worked extensively this year with the probation service. However, the service had to be withdrawn because of the large debt that

resulted. He reported that Devon Wheels 2 Work is having cash flow issues and that they are working towards solving the problem.

However, providing that they can get through this year, there is a system in place which should ensure a good long term future.

Action (all): If anyone has any ideas where funding can be sources from by March, please contact Max.

3. PSA 16 (Sandra Armstrong)

Sandra's report was based on a presentation that had been handed out to those present. For a copy, please click on the link below:

<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/worklessness-group-minutes>

9. Update from Sub-Groups – Learning Disability (Liz Wood)

NI 146 continues to meet and is currently looking into ways of filling in gaps in provision e.g. self-employment. Liz has met with Chris Redding at Business Link and Peter Stacey at A4E.

There are a number of linkages still to be made, and the focus is increasing to achieving employment at more than 16 hours work per week.

6. Young People – a review and look at next steps (David Norman)

Firstly, David explained that Careers South West is the umbrella organisation for both Connexions (13-19 years) and Next Step (the adult service). David works for Connexions. This was explained to quell any confusion that may have existed among those present.

For the first few years after the school leaving age Connexions organise a large follow-up exercise to find out what young people have moved into. This year there has been a big response, so the figures can be held to be fairly well representative of the whole.

Unlike perhaps what would have been expected from the figures, it appears as though the percentage of NEETs is higher in urban areas than it is in rural areas. This may be due to specific areas of deprivation within urban areas.

Those young people who remained in the NEET category were more likely to be those who had been excluded from school, those on pupil referral, educated at home or who had been diagnosed with conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

A current government priority is to provide a guaranteed offer of employment for those currently out of work. It is also likely that the profile of those unemployed will slide up from 16-17 to 18. It is therefore crucial for young people's services to link well with adult services. Connexions are in contact with Job Centre Plus staff sharing intelligence on, for example, what has worked in the past for each individual.

A large number of young people have either moved into further education or further training as a possible result of the recession. However, eventually these young people will have to move into the real world of work. Small businesses are still worried about the high up front costs involved. Moreover, those with learning disabilities are simply delaying the process of becoming a NEET.

Andrew raised the Future Jobs Fund, with its £2,500 available for businesses taking on apprentices. However, a number of private sector firms have been ruled out of the process because of the community benefit criteria.

8. News from DCC – RIEP post, priorities within economy etc. (Andrew Lightfoot)

The new Employment Strategy introduced by Devon County Council has unfortunately drastically reduced the number of new appointments that can be made by the Council. In order to help support the Worklessness agenda there is a need influence the private sector and, importantly, DCC's contractors.

Andrew reminded the group that it is part of the Devon Economic Partnership and signed up to its Economic Strategy (more information is available on the Devon Economy website: www.devoneconomy.co.uk). The next DEP meeting is on 17 February. A report is going to be given on the work of the group, particularly on how it relates to the work of the Local Area Agreement. Andrew also asked the group whether anyone would like to comment on the targets which are to be refreshed.

Andrew also reported that the Productive Skills 4 Devon (PS4D) group has been granted £1.4m in reward grant money to spend. Of that, £50k has been allocated for research on skills / worklessness. Funds will also be going to support Devon's Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs) and Workforce Development Groups (WDGs). Further details can be found on the Devon Economy website (<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/productive-skills-for-devon2>).

10. Issues from around the table

Janet brought to everyone's attention two reports that may be of interest to those present. The first summarises the governments New Approach to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). The second was produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Again, both can be downloaded from the Devon Economy website (<http://www.devoneconomy.co.uk/new-approach-to-esol>).

Update by Paula Sudbury, St. Loyes in Devon

Regarding the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) we have two contracts and are currently over target, so going well. We are also providing an information hub for the Devon group, and are considering offering more employment if/when the second application goes in.

As for Jobcentre Plus Support Contracts – we have taken on yet more office space at The Courtyard on New North Road, Exeter to accommodate delivering the new sub-contract from Working Links that has just gone live.

Future plans are to also develop this accommodation into a Personal Development Centre – more information next time!

Next Meeting

Wednesday 17 March, 0930-1300, Larkbeare House

Wednesday 19 May, 0930-1300, Creber Room, Coaver Centre, County Hall