

POLICY & RESOURCES CABINET BOARD

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND THE HEAD OF RESOURCES AND COMMISSIONING

16TH OCTOBER 2014

SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

WELFARE REFORM – LOW INCOME FAMILIES PROJECT - EMPLOYMENT

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

1. To report the outcomes of the evaluation of one of the three pilot projects that have been undertaken as part of the Local Service Board's - Low Income Families Project.

BACKGROUND:

The Council, on behalf of the Local Service Board, has drawn down European Social Fund Grant in the sum of £590, 948 which has been used for funding new ways of working in collaboration. A condition of the Grant is the completion of an evaluation of the impact of the use of the Grant money which has to be completed by 31st December 2014.

The monies drawn down have funded the following three Projects:

1. Low Income Families Project (three pilot projects)
2. Promoting the Independence & Wellbeing of Vulnerable Adults – Intermediate Care (AFIC)
3. Vulnerable Families

The purpose of today's report is to provide Members with the outcomes of the evaluation (full evaluation report is attached at Appendix 1) of one of the pilot projects initiated under the Low Income Families Project:

One stop help and support for people to improve their employment prospects.

Context:

Demand collected from partners during an exercise carried out in April 2013 identified that there was a significant informal referral system from the Job Centre to the Library in Port Talbot for supporting clients to complete CVs, on line application forms and job searches as well as assistance with basic IT skills. This resulted in an unsustainable level of demand and a lack of resources to assist clients. The numbers of job seekers asking for assistance in the library increased when Universal Jobmatch (UJ) started as people were then obliged to do a certain number of hours job seeking each week or could risk the non payment of benefits.

The Pilot Project:

From 11th December 2013, staff from the Job Centre attended Port Talbot library on a Wednesday for a 6 month period. As of the 24th January 2014, sessions began to run on a Friday as well. Get NPT Online attended the sessions initially to offer basic IT support but due to staff changes, were unable to continue. However, they had recruited a volunteer to offer this support and he has remained with the pilot project, attending every session. Cyrenians attend to offer 1-2-1 support with CVs and this has been done by the Employment Coach who has attended the Wednesday sessions since February.

The Learner Support Officer from Lifelong Learning has also been attending the sessions since April to offer support to job seekers wishing to find out about training.

The sessions take place in the training room at the library. Job Centre Plus advisors refer their clients to attend the library on either a Wednesday or Friday if they need support to access a UJ account or sign up to it for the first time, assistance with writing or updating their CV, help with basic IT skills such as uploading their CV onto a USB stick or attaching it to an email or setting up an email account.

Clients who attend a session are welcome to return again for further support or to job seek and anyone who drops in for support without having been referred is also welcome.

The key findings of the evaluation of this pilot were:

- 99 of the 191 clients referred to the Library for support attended
- On average, 5.6 clients attended each session (includes both referrals and returners)
- As part of the evaluation 44 clients were interviewed and almost half of clients felt more confident in using UJ and writing their CV having received support. 93% of those interviewed said they had got what they wanted from attending
- Clients and the agencies involved in the project like the location and environment the library offers for this work and commented that it provides a more relaxed atmosphere for clients

Due to the success of these sessions, the arrangements have continued after the end of the pilot period (Dec 13 – May 14) and have been extended to Neath Library (starting on Wednesday 8th October). Discussions are underway between the Library Service and Job Centre Plus to extend the availability of this service to other libraries across the County Borough.

RECOMMENDATION:

To endorse the continuation of these arrangements.

REASON FOR PROPOSED DECISION:

To formalise the partnership between the Library Service and Job Centre Plus.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary of the Evaluation of the Low Income Families Project.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS: Low Income Families Project Evaluation – Full Report

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COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

WELFARE REFORM – LOW INCOME FAMILIES PROJECT (EMPLOYMENT)

(a) **Implementation of Decision**

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

(b) **Sustainability Appraisal**

Community Plan Impacts:

Economic Prosperity	Positive
Education and Lifelong Learning	Positive
Better Health and Well Being	Positive
Environment and Transport	Positive
Crime and Disorder	Positive

Other Impacts:

Welsh Language	Neutral
Sustainable Development	Positive
Equalities	Positive
Social Inclusion	Positive

(c) **Consultation**

This item is not subject to external consultation.

**Building Capacity and Capability to accelerate
service transformation from the citizens'
perspectives**

EVALUATION

Low Income Families Project

**One stop help and support for people to
improve their employment prospects**

October 2014



Executive Summary

Pilot Project No.3 – One Stop help and support for people to improve their employment prospects

Aim

To help local job seekers and citizens improve their employment prospects by developing skills, particularly in relation to online CVs, application forms and job searches.

Context

Demand collected from partners during an exercise carried out in April 2013 identified that there was a significant informal referral system from the Job Centre to the library for supporting clients to complete CVs, on line application forms and job searches as well as assistance with basic IT skills. This resulted in an unsustainable level of demand and a lack of resources to assist clients. Library staff were assisting where possible as they were aware that job seekers were unable to access this type of support elsewhere. The numbers of job seekers asking for assistance in the library increased when Universal Jobmatch (UJ) started as people were then obliged to do a certain number of hours job seeking each week. The library were only able to help clients to a certain level but support with job seeking and UJ wasn't available elsewhere.

The Pilot Project

This is a partnership approach between the library, JobCentre Plus (JCP) Get NPT Online, Cyrenians, Lifelong Learning and the Low Income Families Project.

Staff from JCP attended Port Talbot library on a Wednesday from 1.30-3 commencing on the 11th December for a 6 month period. As of the 24th January, sessions began to run on a Friday as well. Get NPT Online attended the sessions initially to offer basic IT support but due to staff changes, were unable to continue. However, they had recruited a volunteer to offer this support and he has remained with the pilot project, attending every session. Cyrenians attend to offer 1-2-1 support with CVs and this has been done by the Employment Coach who has attended the Wednesday sessions since February.

The Learner Support Officer from Lifelong Learning has also been attending the sessions since April to offer support to job seekers wishing to find out about training. This support could assist clients in later moving into work.

The sessions take place in the training room at the library. JCP advisors refer their clients to attend the library on either a Wednesday or Friday if they need support to access a UJ account or sign up to it for the first time, assistance with writing or updating their CV, help with basic IT skills such as uploading their CV onto a USB stick or attaching it to an email or setting up an email account.

Clients who attend a session are welcome to return again for further support or to job seek and anyone who drops in for support without having been referred is also welcome.

Findings

Over the course of the 6 month pilot project, 191 JCP clients were referred to the library for support. Of these, 99 (51.8%) attended. JCP referred a maximum of 7 clients per session.

Over the same period, 104 returners were logged, this included anyone who had previously attended but also includes some of the same clients returning on many occasions. Including the number of returners, an average of 5.6 clients attended each session.

The most likely reason for referral was for support with using UJ, followed by help with CVs.

The library feel that the introduction of UJ has led to an increase in the use of their computers and estimate that 50% of computer use in the library is by job seekers using UJ. Fortunately, the sessions run by JCP have given people more confidence to use computers by themselves and has led to less pressure on library staff to help people with their job seeking requirements. People do ask library staff for assistance on days when the sessions aren't running and library staff will help them as much as they can to get them started but then suggest that they return on a Wednesday or Friday, to one of the designated JCP sessions.

A Learning Support Officer from the Councils' Lifelong Learning Service began attending the sessions in the library on a Wednesday afternoon at the beginning of April to offer advice to clients on training and volunteering opportunities and how this can contribute to finding employment. From the 2nd April to the 4th June (the part of the pilot project she attended) she saw 13 clients who attended for a range of reasons. Having the Learning Support Officer present in the library was an asset to the pilot as although this was not the reason that clients are referred from JCP, some wish to speak to her once they know she is there as they may be interested in acquiring new skills to assist with their job search or in changing direction in their career.

Client Feedback

44 people were interviewed in the library of which, 29 were spoken to both before and after receiving support. 31 were only spoken to before receiving

support and 2 were only spoken to after receiving support. The type of support clients who were interviewed had attended the library for was predominantly help with CVs (16 clients) help with using UJ (14 clients) help with IT (9 clients) and help with online job seeking (4 clients). Some clients had attended for more than one reason.

Of the 42 clients interviewed prior to receiving support, 31 (73.8%) had been referred to the library by JCP, 10 had previously visited the library to receive support (the reason for their original visit was not asked) and 1 was referred by the Shaw Trust.

All clients were asked how confident they felt regarding a range of issues regardless of what they had come in for support with. The area that clients were most likely to report feeling extremely confident in was in doing their CV, followed by using UJ.

Further to receiving support, clients were only asked if they felt any more or less confident about a particular issue if they had received support for that issue (regardless of what support they stated they had come in for initially). All clients were asked if they felt more confident in looking for employment or in finding a job as any of the support received may have had an impact on this.

Of the 31 clients interviewed after receiving support in the library, almost half (14) felt more confident in using UJ and doing their CV (13). The majority of those interviewed felt neither more nor less confident after receiving support about looking for employment or in finding a job. Given that most clients only attended the library for a relatively short period of time (between half an hour and an hour) it would be unlikely for there to be a big change in their levels of confidence on these issues. That said, 11 (35.5%) of those interviewed did say they felt more confident about looking for employment having received support. 10 of those 11 also felt more confident in either using UJ or doing their CV, therefore the support they received in those areas may have been what in turn, made them feel more confident in looking for employment if those were the skills that they felt they had previously been lacking.

Clients who had given their consent at the time of being interviewed in the library, were contacted some time after having received support (between 2 and 3 months) to find out if they had secured employment and if so, whether they felt that the support they had received had been beneficial to them. Of the seven people who responded, three had found employment, two on a permanent basis and one was unsure whether it was temporary or permanent as it was through an agency. One stated that the support they had received in the library (using UJ) had definitely helped them to find a job as they had found the job through the UJ website and applied for it there as well as becoming more computer literate through receiving support in the library. One said that although the support had not helped him to find a job (he had found the job through Workways) he still felt that the support may help other people be successful in their job search.

Of the 31 clients interviewed after they received support, 29 (93.5%) reported that they had got what they wanted from attending. Clients had on the whole, received the support they had come in for, with many receiving support over and above what they had stated they had come for on arrival at the library. This is positive as it demonstrates that clients were generally clear on what support they had come to the library for and went away feeling that had been achieved. This view was supported by staff in the pilot project who felt that the pilot is meeting the needs of their clients and that clients seem to be going away happy with the support that they have received.

27 of the 31 (87.1%) clients interviewed before leaving the library reported that there wasn't anything that they thought should be done differently, with the same number reporting that there wasn't any other support they felt it would have been helpful to receive in the library. All of the above indicators demonstrate that the majority of clients were happy with the support that they received and the environment in which they received it and that it was helpful to them. The number of repeat visitors further backs up this conclusion.

Agency Feedback

Staff involved in the pilot from the participating agencies were interviewed and felt that clients are benefiting from the pilot as they are getting support that they wouldn't get elsewhere and the pilot project is moving people on towards employment and helping to remove a barrier to that happening. Staff members also spoke of clients returning on several occasions which was not something they had anticipated would happen.

The environment that the pilot project is carried out in has proved to be an important factor in the success of it. One member of staff commented that the casual approach works well and being away from the Job Centre is positive as clients speak more freely. There can be a stigma attached to going into the Job Centre whereas away from that environment there is a different atmosphere. Another also commented on it being a nicer environment than the Job Centre and that clients are more relaxed and don't feel the pressure that they feel in the Job Centre. One spoke of the facilities being good, with the library staff being really helpful and the library being a good central venue. Another commented that there is no pressure on clients and they can leave when they want to. The library are also aware of the benefits of the pilot taking place there and recognise that clients are more willing to come to the library.

The timing of the pilot was raised as a possible barrier to clients attending, as although it runs on two different days, a different time of day was suggested so as not to interfere with the school run. Two sessions is seen as good although the library and JCP would like to offer a morning session but the room isn't currently available. Some staff acknowledged that Friday afternoon isn't the best time to run this type of session. The sessions haven't been advertised outside of the library as it was felt that this could cause capacity to be exceeded. For the Learner Support Officer, the length of the sessions can be restrictive depending on how many clients need support each time as she can spend up to an hour with one client.

Staff from the agencies participating in the pilot, felt that they are able to meet the demand for the service although some would like to refer more clients but recognise the limitations in terms of capacity and space in the library to assist more people. It is being considered whether to stagger arrival times for clients as currently anyone referred is asked to arrive at 1.30 when the sessions begin.

The pilot has evolved since it started. Whilst staff said that it is what they expected it would be, there have been developments over the course of the 6 months. At the start of the pilot, the planned support with writing CVs was not able to be offered as the organisation who were going to offer this support were unable to due to capacity issues. Cyrenians were brought into the pilot in February to offer this support. This has been in high demand and after support with UJ, has been the most requested form of assistance with 59 attending for support in writing or updating their CV in the 4 months since that type of support commenced being offered.

The other development in the pilot has been that Lifelong Learning (Learner Support Officer) now attend the Wednesday session. The Low Income Families Project Manager brought that service into the pilot in April and the benefits of this have been clear with the Learning Support Officer being busy with clients most weeks, seeing clients from across a range of levels of educational attainment, some of whom have low literacy skills, others who are highly skilled. Staff involved in the pilot project suggested other support organisations who it would be beneficial to also have at the library sessions such as the Money Advisory Service or running specific courses in the library. Currently the space available to the pilot however, may limit the option for other agencies to attend.

One of the less obvious beneficial outcomes from the pilot project has been the networking between agencies and their learning about the work of each other. The Learner Support Officer will soon work out of the Job Centre on a regular basis in order to offer support at that location to clients wishing to access training opportunities. The pilot has enabled her to understand more about the work of JCP and for them to increase their awareness of how she can help their clients.

It was felt by staff that for the moment most skills are covered by the pilot project in that clients can access support with CVs, UJ, courses and email/ IT skills which covers all of the skills needed to job seek and to meet the requirements of JSA. One staff member saw the library pilot project as a place to refer the, 'quick wins,' to so the clients whose queries can be resolved fairly quickly. They also acknowledged that there is other, more in depth support available elsewhere if required and clients can be referred onto this.

Conclusion

- 191 clients were referred to the library from JCP for support during the 6 months of the pilot project running.
- 99 (51.8%) of those referred attended the sessions.

- An average of 5.6 clients attended each session (including those referred and returners)
- Main reason for referrals from JCP to the library was for support with UJ, followed by help with writing CVs and then job searching advice
- 93% of those clients interviewed said that they had got what they wanted from attending
- Added benefit of having the Learning Support Officer present who can offer advice on training, courses and volunteering – advice often over and above what the client had come in for
- Almost half of clients interviewed felt more confident in using UJ and writing their CV having received support
- A large number of clients returned to the library for further support, some on many occasions
- 87% of clients interviewed reported that there wasn't anything that they thought should be done differently
- Clients and the agencies involved in the project like the location and environment that the library has offered for this work and commented that it provides a more relaxed atmosphere for clients
- The agencies involved have found the project to be beneficial in terms of networking and learning about each other's work