

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting20th December 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

Report of Regeneration and Transport Select Committee - Review of Employability

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report of the Regeneration and Transport Select Committee following its review of employability. The review had focussed on three main issues:

Firstly, the Committee was tasked with examining how to improve the overall employment rate, especially for those living in wards with the worst labour market position, and reduce the number of people claiming key government benefits.

The Committee identified problems of the benefits and tax credits system that may discourage people from entering employment. Although these were considered outside the Committee's direct sphere of influence, the Committee wished to highlight them at the appropriate level. The Committee also identified that assisting more people currently claiming Incapacity Benefit into employment should be a priority in measures to reduce the overall number of claimants.

Those with no or low qualifications were also identified as a priority in efforts to improve employment rates. People with no or low qualifications also tended to be concentrated in the wards with the worst labour market position. The Committee, therefore, considered that Stockton's young people should continue to be encouraged and assisted to develop skills and gain qualifications, especially as the Council would soon become one of the bodies responsible for the new 14-19 learning strategy.

The Committee identified that the Council, as one of the largest employers in Stockton, could develop its employment practices in order to target more residents from under-represented groups or from wards with the worst labour market position, and / or claiming key government benefits. The Committee was pleased to note that a great deal of work was currently undertaken by the Council in relation to this, and other developments were currently being made. A series of initiatives from

central government and examples of other local authorities' strategies informed the review which could potentially be utilised in Stockton to complement and develop current work.

The Committee also received information on the economic development currently taking place under the Tees Valley City Region initiative. The Committee was pleased to note that employability was considered a key element of the initiative, and the review highlighted the programmes currently available in the Tees Valley and coordinated by its local authorities. The Committee considered that there may be scope to develop this work.

The second key issue of the review was consideration of long term funding post-March 2008. Members noted that the current situation of many of the funding streams, utilised for employability related activity in Stockton, remained unknown. The Committee received information from a range of Voluntary and Community Sector bodies and other groups involved in delivering initiatives through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the Deprived Area Fund, the European Social Fund, and Single Programme funding and were pleased to note the range of initiatives available and the many beneficial outcomes for Stockton residents. The Committee subsequently considered that the Council should continue to maximise funding for employability wherever possible and highlighted the Supplementary Business Rate as a possibility for future funding or a potential source of other employability related activity.

Finally, the Committee considered how to support those considered the 'hardest to help' into employment. The new Stockton Employability Consortium (responsible for formulating an Employability Strategy for the Borough) was identified by the Committee as a strategic body that could facilitate greater holistic working amongst the various service groups who are involved in employability. Those considered the 'hardest to help' often experience multiple barriers to employment, which made work to develop their employability increasingly complex. There was a range of expertise available within the Borough and examples of joined-up working amongst many of the groups in Stockton, which the Committee felt should be developed further.

The Committee also considered that the Council, as a major employer was well placed to inform the work of the Employability Consortium and the development of activity within the Borough designed to assist the 'hardest to help'. Equally, the Employability Consortium could provide greater information and assistance to Human Resources and service groups within the Council in relation to extending the use of employability initiatives, which were currently available and designed to assist the 'hardest to help'.

The Committee also identified potential scope for the Council to act not only in terms of its own employment practices, but also influence the employment practices of its partners. For example, where existing or potential good practice had been identified, the Committee considered that there was scope to share this with partners, especially those who comprised Stockton Renaissance, and as part of the Tees Valley City Region initiative. The Council's influence could also be utilised through its contracts, planning and development agreements, and procurement practices. This could all serve to improve the employability of many Stockton residents.

Following consideration by Cabinet an action plan would be submitted to the Select Committee setting out how the approved recommendations would be implemented, detailing officers responsible for action and timescales.

RESOLVED that

1. the Council write to Frank Cook and Dari Taylor, as Members of Parliament representing Stockton-on-Tees, who will be able to highlight problems examined during this review surrounding the benefits and the tax credits systems and funding for employability related initiatives with the relevant Ministers.
2. the Learning and Skills Council include a focus on retention and engagement within the new strategy for 14-19 year olds.
3. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the Learning and Skills Council continue to promote and develop youth employment and apprenticeships in Stockton Borough.
4. the Chair of the Regeneration and Transport Select Committee offer to present the findings and recommendations of this report to the Tees Valley Unlimited Employment and Skills Board and Stockton Employability Consortium.
5. work with existing Incapacity Benefit claimants be considered by the Council and its partners as a priority for inclusion in any future employability related funding.
6. the Council sign a Jobs Pledge and enter a Local Employment Partnership, and continue to support the Corporate Alliance strategy for ex-offenders.
7. the Council market itself more specifically as an employer of choice to

disadvantaged and under-represented groups in Stockton. This should be informed by an investigation into practice in other local authorities, including practice considered by the Select Committee in this review.

8. the Council, in consultation with the Trade Unions, explore implementing the 'Slivers of Time' initiative while funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government is available.

9. Targeted Recruitment and Training be embedded in Council corporate policy on public sector contracts, planning and development agreements wherever possible and practicable.

10. the Council and its partners continue to seek to maximise funding for employability initiatives.

11. the Council consider an investigation of the introduction of the new Supplementary Business Rate in Stockton as this may offer opportunities for employability related activity to be included as part of it.

12. the Committee recommends that Stockton Employability Consortium promote itself and its work to all relevant stakeholders as soon as is practicable.

13. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Human Resources and service groups such as Direct Services be invited to attend meetings of Stockton Employability Consortium as necessary and appropriate.

14. Stockton Employability Consortium be encouraged to consider the enhancement of in-work support for people considered the 'hardest to help' and increase the awareness amongst employers of the organisations who currently offer this support.

15. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council give consideration to job carving as a potential way to assist more people with disabilities into employment. This should also be promoted through Renaissance.

16. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and its partners consider strengthening support for social enterprise through its procurement practices.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The review was undertaken in recognition that the overall employment rate in the Borough is below the national average. The review relates to the Community Strategy priority to tackle worklessness by removing barriers to employment and enterprise.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Cunningham declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in this item as he was a member of the Regional Development Agency Board.

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By no later than midnight on Thursday 3rd January 2008

Proper Officer
21 December 2007