



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**17<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2019**

**EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2019/21**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR WELLBEING AND PROSPERITY, COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS**

**Author(s):** Wendy Edwards, Service Director Community Services – 01443 425512

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is provide Members with an opportunity to consider the proposed Rhondda Cynon Taf Employment Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2021.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves the Employment Strategy and Action Plan 2019/21.

**3. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Developing a strategy for employment is important for several reasons. It will:

- Focus limited resources and support on those most in need so that they can improve their own and their families' futures;
- Consolidate the link between learning/training provision and local and regional labour market needs;
- Ensure that Council services and partners are clear about the direction of travel and the outcomes that we will be working to achieve;
- Identify any gaps in provision so that they can be addressed;
- Help us to jointly prepare for the introduction of new national initiatives and the ending of some current funding sources so that there is a smooth transition for the benefit of communities and individuals.

- 3.2 Local data indicates that there remains a need to improve skills and qualifications and increase employability.

3.3 The Strategy and Action Plan have been scrutinised by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee who were supportive of the proposal.

#### **4. CONTEXT**

4.1 Employability is defined as the combination of factors and processes that enable people to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and progress in the workplace.

4.2 Increasing employability is essential to improving prosperity and reducing inequality. People are less likely to live in poverty if they are in employment and if they can sustain and progress in employment. There is evidence to suggest that even short-term unemployment can have a significant long-term impact on an individual's financial security and wellbeing.

4.3 Worklessness is the short-hand term used to refer to people who are currently out of work and looking for employment as well as people who are claiming benefits and who are economically inactive and may not be in a position to look for work.

4.4 People who fall into the economically inactive category include:

- Students;
- Retired people;
- People looking after a home or family;
- People who suffer from long-term sickness;
- People who are temporarily sick;
- People who are 'discouraged'.

4.5 The rate of economic inactivity for people aged 16 – 64 years has reduced steadily over the last 3 years and in July 2019 stood at 35,200 which was only 0.3% higher than the percentage for Wales. Compared to the previous year there has been a reduction in the number of students (from 8,500 to 7,800); the number of people looking after a home/ family (from 7,300 to 5,100); and a slight reduction in the number of long-term sick (from 13,500 to 12,100) who are claiming benefits.

4.6 It is notable however that fewer people who are currently economically inactive identified they wanted a job in 2018/19 than in 2017/18 (6,500 compared to 10,800). It is not clear why this is the case.

4.7 The annual unemployment figures (that is, people who are registered as actively looking for work) has seen a slight increase during the past 3 financial years with the figure for April 2018 - March 2019 indicating 6,800 people had been unemployed and looking for work. The claimant count in July 2019 was 4,385 which is 2.9% of the working age population. This is consistent with the percentage for Wales. The rate of unemployment in the age range that is higher than the comparative data for Wales is that for

young people aged 18-24 years and specifically 18-21 years where the percentage difference is 1.1%. (NOMIS)

- 4.8 Skills and qualifications are an important determinant of a person's ability to gain and sustain employment. The most recent data (January-December 2018) indicates that 16,100 people in Rhondda Cynon Taf aged 16 – 64 years have no qualifications. This amounts to 10.8% of the working age population compared with 8.6% for Wales. (NOMIS) It is important to address this issue as well as to ensure that there are pathways for people who have lower level qualifications to enhance their qualification level and progress to higher level learning.
- 4.9 The changing nature of employment requires people to be flexible and to develop skills and qualifications throughout their life-times if they are to remain in work and progress in employment. It is important therefore that training and advice providers have a good understanding of labour market needs and provision in their areas and that relevant learning/training programmes are developed to ensure that individuals gain the skills and qualifications they need to fill those vacancies. Similarly there needs to be a synergy between employment support programmes and learning programmes if limited resources are to be used to maximum effect.

## **5. CURRENT SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES**

- 5.1 Our aim is to work with partners to provide a joined up approach that will ensure that there is access to relevant learning and training programmes that reflect the needs of employers and effective employment and advice services to support individuals to gain, stay and progress in work.
- 5.2 Rhondda Cynon Taf's Employment Pathway has been designed in collaboration with training provider partners (Appendix 1). This is a strategic approach that ensures that services and organisations work together to ensure that people have the opportunity to access the learning and skills required to improve their employability, alongside the mentoring and employment support to gain and sustain paid employment. This has had a positive impact on provision and ensured that limited resources have been used to maximum effect. The current range of skills and employment support programmes delivered by the Council are outlined in Appendix 2.
- 5.3 In 2018 a Strategic Employment Group was established with representatives from the following organisations:
- RCT Community Services;
  - RCT Education, Employment, and Training;
  - RCT Regeneration and Prosperity;
  - RCT Youth Engagement and Participation Service;
  - RCT 21<sup>st</sup> century schools;
  - Coleg y Cymoedd;

- Department of Work and Pensions;
- Careers Wales;
- Trivallis;
- Rhondda Housing Association;
- Newydd Housing Association;
- Hafod Housing Association;
- Rhondda Housing Association;
- Cynon Taf Housing Association;
- Prime Cymru;
- Adult Community Learning Partnership;
- Citizens Advice Bureau.

The purpose of the group is to ensure that we work together to map provision, share information on new initiatives and good practice as well as to explore opportunities to apply for additional funding when available

- 5.4 All these organisations have, at their core, a commitment to provide the best learning, advice and employment support for their customers. This common commitment will be of vital importance in the coming years as ESF funding which supports a significant amount of skills and employment support ends.
- 5.5 The proposed Employment and Skills Strategy has been developed in consultation with this group.

## **6. EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY 2019-21**

- 6.1 The Strategy has been guided by themes identified by the Welsh Government in their strategic documents and also informed by regional priorities as identified by the Regional Skills Partnership and Cardiff City Deal developments. The strategic priorities contribute to the Council's 3 themes of Prosperity, People and Place as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2016-20.
- 6.2 The Strategy (Appendix 3) proposes the following vision:

We want to live in a community where:

- All people have access to the support they need to develop their skills and knowledge so that they can achieve their potential and live healthy and rewarding lives;
- Everyone who wants to work is supported to gain and stay in employment;
- Those who want to progress in work are able to benefit from opportunities to further develop their skills and gain promotion;
- There is access to training and learning throughout a person's life as a commitment to lifelong learning is essential for prosperity.

6.3 The aim is to achieve the following outcomes:

- There will be an improvement in the self-esteem and confidence of customers who engage with our programmes;
- An improvement in the health and well-being of people participating in learning programmes;
- An increase in individual skills and qualification so that the percentage of people with no qualifications in Rhondda Cynon Taf will be lower than the average for Wales;
- Training programmes offered will be relevant to the skills needs identified by employers;
- More volunteering options will be available;
- More people will benefit from good quality work experience opportunities;
- More in-work support will be available to people once they have entered employment;
- Customer satisfaction with the level of support offered will be increased;
- More opportunities will be available for people who have a disability or a long-term health condition to re-enter, gain or sustain employment.

## **7. THE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS ACTION PLAN**

7.1 This proposed plan outlines activities that will be delivered in order to meet the priorities highlighted in the strategy and achieve the required outcomes. It can be seen at Appendix 4.

7.2 It is recognised that this action plan will need to be flexible as developments in relation to skills and training at a national level will be introduced over the next two years which may require significant re-modelling of provision. This includes the implementation of Job Support Wales, the creation of a national strategic body for adult community learning and the ending of ESF programmes as a result of Brexit.

7.3 The action plan will be regularly monitored by the Strategic Employment Group and reports on progress can be provided to Members as required.

## **8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 This strategy and action plan is designed to ensure equal access to learning and employment support and to reduce the barriers to employment and personal development. There is an emphasis on supporting more people with disabilities and long term health conditions to re-enter or sustain work as this is an area of concern at a Wales wide level.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 Training and advice provider partners who sit on the Strategic Employment Group have been consulted on the proposed strategy and action plan. Representatives of Learning Disability service users and their carers have also been consulted due to their expert knowledge of the barriers experienced by people with learning disabilities in relation to learning and employment.
- 9.2 The Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed Employment Strategy and Action Plan on 4<sup>th</sup> November and were supportive of the recommendations that were made in the report presented to them.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report. The strategy and action plan are designed to ensure best use of current and future resources.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report. There is no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to deliver adult community learning. However, S.22 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires Local Authorities to ensure there are sufficient facilities within their area for part-time adult learning provision.

## **12. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 12.1 The strategy and action plan link clearly to the three main themes of the Council's Corporate Plan with its emphasis on prosperity, people and place. Developing skills and gaining and sustaining employment is the main way in which people can improve their own prosperity and enhance their health and wellbeing, while the level of employment in an area has an impact on the whole community.
- 12.2 A significant number of organisations have been involved in the development of the strategy and action plan which will require collaborative action to achieve the outcomes identified. It is likely to result in a further integration of programmes over the longer-term as funding sources and contractual obligations are changed in response to national developments. Ensuring meaningful programmes to support the development of skills and enable people to gain employment and stay in employment will improve the lives of individuals and their families preventing them from falling into poverty or helping them to rise out of poverty.

12.3 This report relates to the following Wellbeing goals:

- A prosperous Wales – improving learning and skills and supporting people into employment will reduce the level of poverty in the County;
- A more equal Wales – the strategy ensures that people of all backgrounds and abilities have an equal chance to access the learning and support they need;
- A healthier Wales – ensuring access to learning and employment is recognised as having a positive impact on health and well-being;
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language – there is a commitment to provide learning and improve confidence through offering access to provision in the medium of Welsh and also using arts as a vehicle to improve employability.

### **13. CONCLUSION**

13.1 As indicated in the report, there are significant reasons why a strategy and action plan for Employment is required at this time. The vision, priorities and outcomes included in the strategy have been agreed by the Strategic Employment Group while the Action Plan indicates the actions that Council services will implement to contribute to the achievement of the strategy.

13.2 The Strategy and Action Plan were considered by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee in November and Members were supportive of the recommendation to approve their implementation.



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2019**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY  
SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR  
WELLBEING AND PROSPERITY, COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS**

**Item:** Employment Strategy and Action Plan 2019-21

**Background Papers**

Background papers should be a List of documents relating to the subject matter of the report which in the officers opinion will:

- a) Disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- b) Which have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report

But does not include published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information

**Officer to contact:** David Batten, Head of Leisure, Parks & Countryside – 01443 562202