

# tackling worklessness

a series of 'how to' guides  
for councils and their partners

using the public sector



## 1. introduction

This guide explores some of the main ways in which the public sector can develop employment opportunities as a way of tackling worklessness. The core approaches outlined in this guide are illustrated with good practice case studies from around the UK.

## 2. why adopt this approach to tackling worklessness?

- councils and hospitals are often the main employers in a local authority area
- employment is one area in which the public sector can have a significant direct impact and influence
- the public sector is a major employer, particularly for women, and can provide secure employment with real routes for progression for those who often start out in flexible jobs
- local authorities have a duty to promote equality and can provide opportunities for those who are disadvantaged or discriminated

against in the labour market

- by leading through example, public sector employers can have an impact on the employment practices of private employers and the voluntary and community sectors.

## 3. different approaches to tackling worklessness through public sector employment

### A. workforce planning

Workforce planning is crucial to identifying, attracting and retaining the right people to deliver a public sector body's vision. It involves gathering robust population, labour market and workforce data to develop a comprehensive picture of current and future recruitment and retention needs. It also supports the identification of the needs and career paths of employees.

Workforce planning helps public sector employers to assess employment options, define objectives and identify the appropriate workforce to meet these

objectives. There is a pressing need for the public sector to build capacity in its workforce for the future.

One of the easiest ways for local authorities in particular to achieve this is by working closely with other public sector bodies (such as the police, the fire service and the NHS) to look at innovative ways of recruiting, developing, retaining and rewarding employees.

### case study 1

#### Improvement and Efficiency Partnership West Midlands

Cross-Region Public Sector Workforce Development Project is an 18-month project to assess the extent of cross public-sector working around workforce issues and to encourage and explore opportunities for developing good working practices. It aims to find out more about the issues that face local authorities when they take a cross public-sector approach to addressing local workforce challenges.

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## B. recruitment and local employment partnerships

There are a number of innovative ways in which public sector bodies can approach recruitment. All public bodies should advertise their vacancies with Jobcentre Plus, who will advise on the recruitment process to attract a wider audience, which may also include further advertising. Public bodies can also work with Jobcentre Plus on pre-employment training modules.

New recruitment and skills development strategies may be required to reach those furthest from the labour market. This may include a greater focus on what applicants can do rather than what they can't, in order to 'assess workless people in' rather than 'assessing people out'. Improving perceptions of working in the public sector might also be necessary, which can be achieved through effective marketing and PR.

For local authorities in particular, committing to a local employment partnership with Jobcentre Plus is an effective way of furthering strategic policy aims and can result in job-ready applicants who live locally and will be committed to the local public sector.

### case study 2

#### Somerset County Council

Somerset County Council has developed a Local Employment Partnership (LEP) with Jobcentre Plus which is considered to be best practice. The LEP supports disadvantaged people to get work with Somerset County Council after a long-term absence or illness. So far the council has helped over 104 people move from long-term benefit into employment with the council.

Most importantly, being a LEP employer has enabled the council to engage more widely within its communities and reach under-represented groups. It has also enabled the council to further its partnership work, and take a more cohesive approach to recruitment and skills.

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### C. apprenticeships

Apprenticeships allow people to work alongside experienced members of staff in order to gain job-specific skills, and are often attractive for those who want to combine training with paid employment. Apprentices bring new skills to the workforce and are often highly motivated and eager to learn and progress.

Within a local authority, for example, apprentices may develop skills in front-line service areas such as joinery, plumbing, highway maintenance work or social care. Advanced apprenticeships may also be on offer, for example in business administration and IT. This paid work experience is complemented by training with a local college, typically one day a week, where apprentices can work towards qualifications such as the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ).

Councils can offer taster apprenticeships over a short period leading to full apprenticeships. This is beneficial to both parties in that the apprentice gets some work experience and the employer knows what the recruit will be like. *The Houghton review* urged councils to take on many more apprentices.

### case study 3

#### Coventry City Council

Currently there are 45 participants taking part in Coventry City Council's apprenticeship scheme in a variety of occupational areas including business administration, early years' childcare, IT, craft and finance. The programme provides structured work-based training for young people giving them the opportunity to work towards an NVQ.

The programme is highly successful with approximately 75 per cent of participants finding employment within the council, while many others are finding employment externally or go on to further education.

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## D. work experience placements

Work experience placements within the public sector can be an effective way of introducing an individual to the workplace. This may take the form of placements developed in partnership with schools, or as part of the new diplomas in schools and further education colleges, or with universities. This can involve work simulation, shadowing, tasters and curriculum-linked visits. Alternatively, these may take the form of work experience placements for adults, ie work trials, usually involving the participant remaining on benefit.

These are time-limited but useful for those who have been out of work for some time due to ill health or disability. In addition, some councils offer transitional labour market schemes, such as the Future Skills Dudley work with Green Care, the council's grounds maintenance direct services organisation, in **guide 10**. Work experience allows participants to gain new skills and confidence and can be an important first step towards paid employment.

## case study 4

### Kirklees Council

Kirklees Council offers training placements for disabled people living in Kirklees. The initiative is part of the council's strategy to boost employment rates amongst the disabled community, and to develop a representative workforce. Trainees work in a council service and receive on-the-job experience, personal development training and a qualification where required.

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[www.kirklees.gov.uk/  
employment/workingforcouncil/  
placements.shtml](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/employment/workingforcouncil/placements.shtml)



## E. adult skills and training

A key theme emerging from recent policy is a move beyond finding employment for workless individuals to longer-term career progression and continued learning, which is part of the government's wider strategy to nurture skills. The public sector offers good opportunities for career progression. Local authorities in particular have multiple levels, staff often being promoted from within. Clear career paths through the public sector enable staff to progress from entry-level jobs to higher level jobs, and creates opportunities for new job seekers.

Signing up to the National Skills Pledge is also a good way of helping staff to develop new skills in order to progress, and helping public sector bodies develop a competent, skilled and adaptable workforce. By January 2009, 137 councils had signed a Skills Pledge, as in the example of Norfolk County Services in **guide 10**. For individuals, a clear progression route and the opportunity to learn new skills can be highly motivating.

### case study 5

#### Hartlepool Borough Council

The Together Project was established in 2002 and is a partnership between Hartlepool Borough Council, trade unions and Housing Hartlepool. The joint trade unions branch is led by UNISON. The aim of the project was to engage employees into learning and develop skills within the workforce.

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## F. promoting diversity

Equality legislation has helped challenge much discrimination and prejudice, but there are still big equality gaps. Councils and their public sector partners have a real opportunity to challenge inequality, promote diversity within the workforce and reduce unemployment among disadvantaged groups, see **guide 11** on ethnic minorities. Strategies to achieve this include:

- working with local community and faith leaders to identify the needs of local residents and the barriers they face to employment
- holding interviews and open days in accessible venues
- offering work experience in order to overcome any misconceptions that community members might have about working in the public sector
- re-thinking recruitment strategies, for example, advertising in local ethnic minority media or liaising with local religious leaders to relay messages about job vacancies
- ensuring that all contractors and sub-contractors have agreed equal opportunities plans and equality policies
- offering those with care responsibilities flexible working opportunities and childcare facilities.

## case study 6

### Liverpool City Council

Liverpool City Council Diversity and Social Inclusion programme, which came to an end in December 2008, aimed to tackle under-representation in the workforce of those from certain black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, disabled people and young people, using work experience and traineeships.

From 2005 to 2008, 370 trainees participated in the scheme with 111 people moving into employment within the council. Approximately 85 per cent of participants worked towards/achieved a qualification. 40 per cent of the programme's participants were from BAME communities, while 21 per cent had a declared disability.

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## 4. potential challenges

Implementing these types of approaches in the public sector can be demanding. Some of the key challenges are listed below:

- reviewing and changing recruitment strategies may be demanding in terms of resources, both as regards time and effort, and in the short-term it may be comparatively costly. Changes to the status quo may not be well received by current members of staff who may feel threatened. Therefore, a key challenge is to convey a strong message as to why change is important
- work experience placements and apprenticeship programmes can be demanding for current members of staff. They might not have the skills to deliver on-the-job training, or may not wish to be shadowed. Such placements also require a high level of management to be successful. Training and development for staff involved in running such programmes is essential
- there may be negative preconceptions of trainees/ apprentices among employees. It is therefore important that public sector bodies have strategies in place to inform the workforce about why they are taking on trainees/apprentices
- the recession may deter public sector bodies from taking on additional staff due to declining income. However, it is important that the public sector continues to provide employment opportunities through turnover, and there is a good business case to assist the long-term unemployed or those recently made redundant in the private sector.



## top tips

commit to a Local Employment Partnership (LEP), ensure it is embedded within the organisation and sign up to the skills pledge

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rethink the recruitment process and provide opportunities for flexible working to accommodate child care commitments.

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conduct a skills audit in a way that increases buy-in of staff

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review and evaluate: gather feedback from participants and monitor their progression

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mentoring and support will ensure that all staff understand the value of the initiative and have access to training to help them support new staff

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get the participation of local partners, including local schools.

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## 5. glossary

- **Building Schools for the Future (BSF)**

BSF oversees the distribution of the biggest ever schools investment programme to local authorities for the rebuilding, maintenance and improvement of school buildings as part of the government's educational reform agenda.

- **Diplomas**

Diplomas are a new qualification for 14 to 19 year olds that provide a mix of class work and hands-on learning. There are three levels: Foundation, Advanced and Higher.

- **Public sector**

The public sector is the portion of the economy that is financed and controlled by government at the national, regional or local level. It includes local authorities, health services (such as primary care trusts), education and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).

- **Local Employment Partnership (LEP)**

Employers agree to work with Jobcentre Plus and its partners to provide more job opportunities for people often overlooked in the labour market. LEPs are based on a deal:

- » The government, through Jobcentre Plus and its partners, takes steps to understand employers' requirements and to help disadvantaged people to get ready for work.
- » Employers with vacancies give people a fair shot at the job.

- **National Skills Pledge**

A voluntary, public commitment by the leadership of a company or organisation to support all its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2.

## 6. further resources

- adult skills and training:  
More information on Hartlepool Borough Council's Together Project.  
[www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=6070602](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=6070602)
  - apprenticeships:  
For more information see the Directgov website.  
[www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/rainingAndWorkplaceLearning/DG\\_4001327](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/rainingAndWorkplaceLearning/DG_4001327)  
  
[www.apprenticeships.org.uk/](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/)
  - diplomas:  
For more information see the Directgov website.  
<http://yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas/>
  - Local Employment Partnerships:  
For more information see the Jobcentre Plus website.  
[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Employers/lep/index.html](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Employers/lep/index.html)
  - National Skills Pledge:  
HM Government (2007) Skills Pledge: A Leaflet for Employment.  
[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/skillspledge\\_foremployers.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/skillspledge_foremployers.pdf)
  - National Vocational Qualification (NVQ):  
For more information see the Directgov website.  
[www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG\\_10039029](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_10039029)
- Further information can be found on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website.  
[www.qca.org.uk/14-19/qualifications/index\\_nvqs.htm](http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/qualifications/index_nvqs.htm)

- promoting diversity:  
Office of Government Commerce  
(2008) *make equality count*.  
[www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/  
Equality\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Equality_Brochure.pdf)

For more information see the  
Department for Work and  
Pensions (2006) *Talk on trial: job  
interviews, language and ethnicity*.  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/  
rports2005-2006/rrep344.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep344.pdf)

- the Houghton Review:  
*Tackling worklessness: a review of  
the contribution and role of local  
authorities and partnerships – final  
report of the houghton review*.  
[www.communities.gov.uk/  
publications/communities/  
tacklingworklessnessfinal](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/tacklingworklessnessfinal)
- workforce planning:  
For more information see IDeA's  
*Workforce planning guide*.  
[www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/  
page.do?pagelid=5676708](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=5676708)





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