



Community Services, Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	9 th November 2020
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Westminster Employment Service: the Council's approach to employment, training and skills in light of COVID-19
Report of:	Debbie Jackson, Executive Director, Growth Planning & Housing
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Cllr Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business & Planning
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All and Economic Recovery The Westminster Employment Service promotes opportunity for all through supporting residents into training and sustained employment. Outcomes which the Service supports include healthy, active lifestyles; economic independence; improved mental health and wellbeing; and reduced isolation.
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the council's approach to employment, training and skills since April 2019 and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The report focuses on activity led by the Westminster Employment Service (WES or the Service) and our joint work with other services and providers, including the Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES).
- 1.2 Background information is set out at Appendix I, including details of our approach for the year ahead. Key matters for the Committee's consideration are set out below at paragraph 2.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

The Committee is asked to consider:

- I. the contribution which the Westminster Employment Service has made to supporting local residents in response to the emergency;
- II. the strategic priorities and activities for the year ahead; and
- III. the evaluation of the Service which will be completed next spring. To assist with this, the Committee may also consider nominating a Councillor to provide a critical friend function to officers as the evaluation progresses.

3. Background

Our approach to employment, skills and support during the emergency

- 3.1 The economic impacts on residents during the COVID-19 pandemic are apparent – the rates for residents claiming workless benefits have increased significantly, especially for younger people and the over 50s. Overall claimant rates have moved from 2% to 5.5%, representing over 10,000 adults, though this remains lower than London averages.
- 3.2 In the most affected wards in Westminster, one in nine adults is now actively seeking work. Almost 30,000 residents in Westminster at the end of July were furloughed and advertised vacancies have reduced by 50%.
- 3.3 The council's approach to providing support for residents impacted has been led by the Westminster Employment Service, working across council departments, in collaboration with the Jobcentre and local businesses. This scrutiny committee and its predecessors have previously received reports regarding the work of the Service. Information set out in this report and accompanying presentation provides both a recap of the offer and how the team has adapted to meet community need.
- 3.4 During lockdown, the WES team rapidly adapted to community need, playing a leading role in Westminster Connects. Over half the WES team were involved in setting up, managing and supporting the delivery of the programme; mobilising volunteers; connecting business to local projects; and establishing the weekly Community Intelligence Forum.
- 3.5 There was an evident need for financial capability scale up in response to the pandemic. The Financial Capability Officer in the WES supported the formation

of a team of redeployees from the Libraries Service by training them up to respond to and assist Westminster businesses affected by the pandemic, many of whom have no recourse to public funds.

- 3.6 Throughout this period, the WES has continued to deliver its core business of supporting clients in need through regular welfare and check-in calls and at a time of increased levels of anxiety. Recruitment activity by most employer partners has been significantly reduced; however, a notable achievement during this period includes our work with housing. Our work with Housing colleagues, local hostels and charity partners has helped the street homeless, who had been housed locally into employment, as illustrated below in the Appendix (*See Our Reconfigured Service offer*).

Our approach and priorities for the next year

- 3.7 Based on community need, feedback from our employer partners and experience of harnessing volunteers effectively through Westminster Connects, our strategic priorities and approach for the year ahead are:

- ***To focus on growth sectors and deliver short training and re-skilling courses designed and delivered with local employers.*** New courses have commenced working with WAES and our aim is to help 360 residents to re-skill and train for roles in health, social care and green industries, including cycling and horticulture.
- ***Harnessing Westminster Connects volunteers as mentors and to support our clients.*** Our objective is to enhance our offer and manage increases in demand for our Service by making use of volunteers from across the City, including from contractors, developers and local businesses.
- ***Strengthening support for Young People not in education, employment or training.*** We have reallocated coaching support to provide increased capacity to work with growing numbers of young people impacted by the downturn. Other programmes developed in partnership with WAES and local charities will deliver support for young residents at risk of being involved with crime. We will also employ residents within the council, harnessing the Kickstart wage salary being made available by DWP.
- ***Partnerships with local charities & businesses.*** All our work is delivered in partnership and our approach is to work as an effective network with other providers. We co-ordinate our work through a monthly provider network, supporting front-line staff from local charities with training and by helping charities impacted by the downturn by directing resources offered from businesses.

- 3.8 The ambition of the Service is to continue to improve the offer, focused on access to skills, training courses and our core coaching offer, which has underpinned our approach to successfully supporting residents over the past four years.

- 3.9 A full evaluation of the Service is underway and will be completed by April 2021. The evaluation presents the Service and this Committee with an opportunity to understand in greater depth how the Service is meeting local need and the effectiveness overall and some of the adaptations made in recent months. As stated, member input would be valuable and the Committee may wish to nominate a councillor to be involved in the evaluation process, reporting back to the Committee in due course.
- 3.10 Appendix I sets out further information regarding the Westminster Employment Service and for consideration by Committee:

Section	What the Section covers
Introduction	Overview of the purpose of the Service, who we help and a recap of the Business Case
Context	Demand for our Service from residents & employers and the changing nature and characteristics of those needs since April 2020
Our Reconfigured Service	Our work with Young People, wellbeing and volunteer-led support; training and re-skilling courses and partnerships with and support for local charities and providers
Targets and indicator measures	Our targets for 2020/21 and other indicators which we track to assess our impact and effectiveness
Look ahead and strategic priorities	Including milestones for evaluating the Service and projects the team is currently designing to improve the offer to residents
Further information	The section introduces how the service will be evaluated and provides further information on the value for money of the Service

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Tom Harding
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Background Papers

Appendix I.