

**Report to:** Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 12<sup>th</sup> July 2012

**Lead Officer:** Lead Sponsor, New Work Connections

**Report Author:** Regional Manager, New Work Connections

**Title:** New Work Connections

---

### **1. What is the report about?**

Taith i Waith/New Work Connections project is supporting people who, through a range of disadvantages, are economically inactive or unemployed into education, training and employment. This regional project covers the four local authority areas of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire and Gwynedd with Denbighshire as the Lead Sponsor. The project secured £26 million over four years (1<sup>st</sup> March 2010 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2014); £13.8 million from the European Social Fund (ESF) through the European Union's Convergence programme administered by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The project is aligned to Priority 2, Theme 1 of the ESF Convergence Operational Programme:

- Priority 2; increasing employment and tackling economic inactivity
  - To raise levels of employment and economic activity, and secure higher participation in the labour market
- Theme 1; helping people into sustainable employment
  - To increase employment and tackle economic inactivity by bringing more people into employment. This will be achieved by:
    - Implementing active labour market policies and supporting people to overcome a wide range of barriers to sustainable employment
    - Helping to address specific barriers faced by disadvantaged groups

### **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To provide information regarding the New Work Connections Project.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

For members of the Partnerships Scrutiny to consider:

- Compliance with Denbighshire County Council policies and procedures
- Compliance with Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) Terms and Conditions
- Appropriate governance arrangements
- Adequate alignment to Denbighshire County Council priority areas
- Monitoring and evaluation and risk management processes
- Effective and efficient use of funding
- Achievement of Targets and Indicators

- Development of an Exit Strategy for the Project

#### **4. Report details**

As project sponsors, Denbighshire are responsible for delivering the project in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the approval letter received from the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO). This regional collaboration is governed by a Partnership Agreement signed by all 4 authorities. A Regional Partnership Board was set up from the outset to ensure compliance and structures are also in place locally. The project also reports to the North Wales Social Services Improvement Collaborative ensuring provision of corporate leadership. To date the project has faced a number of complex challenges, some of the main issues include:

- Recruitment of key staff and project set up (*Database and Documentation*)
- Introduction of the Work Programme
- Complexities of required procurement processes
- Responding to ongoing adjustments to project requirements

Despite these challenges, and there have been many, the project continues to go from strength to strength, much to the credit of the staff involved. Their determination and passion for the project to succeed has enabled the project to be in the strong position it is in today. This innovative and essential project is enabling individuals to achieve their full potential. There is a staggering range of activities in place for participants and the project is unique in that the participants are considered as individuals and bespoke support is provided to meet their needs which has resulted in some great successes.

ESF projects are subject to a number of audit visits throughout its life and well after its completion. Audit teams likely to visit include WEFO, Welsh Government and European Commission auditors. Quarterly Lead Sponsor Visits are carried by the Regional Team to ensure compliance and to provide support and guidance. A Monitoring and Evaluation Plan has been implemented regionally to ensure the timely delivery of the project's key actions; derived from the Business Plan. A robust methodology supports the Plan and includes Status reporting, Exceptions reporting and Risk Management.

The project has regular review meetings with Project Development Officers at WEFO; an excellent working relationship with no major issues identified to date. The project's procurement processes were commended by WEFO who asked to share them with other ESF projects as best practice. WEFO have also commented on the monitoring and evaluation plan and methodology stating that it was an impressive process.

The majority of the New Work Connections project is being delivered in-house, with the exception of specialist provision which has been procured. A specific commitment that WEFO has made to the European Commission is that ALL training must be procured ensuring education and training providers are given the opportunity to tender for service delivery contracts on a fair and transparent basis. The project in Denbighshire has procured a number of

providers to deliver training and education via a Training and Education Framework.

Regionally the project is required to provide support to 4,555 individuals and to date the project has supported 1573 individuals of which 962 have achieved at least one positive outcome with some individuals achieving as many as 8 positive outcomes (*Appendix 1 Regional Newsletter*).

The project is undergoing an external evaluation by Wavehill consulting; chosen via a procurement process. The evaluation is a crucial element and will play an integral part in explaining the reasons behind the project's successes and failures in order to share good practice with others and identify what may work better next time. The project has a strong emphasis on the development of processes and protocols, aimed at streamlining the current wide range of services. Increased collaboration will contribute greatly to making efficiencies and therefore, to the sustainability of services. It is expected that greater collaboration between; social care, health, education, training, employment services, and third sector bodies will result in more holistic services for participants. This should improve effectiveness in meeting needs and therefore the evaluation aims to demonstrate the need for this type of support to continue at the end of the funding period.

The above forms the basis of the Exit Strategy included in the Business Plan; options currently being explored in more detail include:

- No more funding available
- Continuation of ESF funding
- Alternative sources of funding (internal and external)
- Premature Exit

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

The corporate priority of addressing Demographic Change is directly addressed by the New Work Connections project. In Denbighshire there is an increasing number of both older people and people with disabilities and the project aims to support and assist both of these population groups to enhance their skills and ultimately their lives by supporting them into training, education and employment. The aim is to support people to gain independence and control over their lives; allowing them to work and learn for as long as they want to and also to make an active contribution once they retire; the project is unique in that it does not have an upper age limit.

The overall aim of the New Work Connections project is to assist 4,555 people across the 4 authorities, by providing employment opportunities, encouraging business start-ups and reducing the number of people who are economically inactive and on benefits, thus assisting the corporate priorities of Regeneration; reducing deprivation and economic sustainability. The project aims to empower people to realise their full potential which will inevitably contribute to the economy of the region. The project contributes to Denbighshire's BIG Plan in that it enhances people's chances of being healthy and having a sense of wellbeing and directly increases their chances of being able to afford to meet their needs by becoming self sustainable through the support provided by the project.

One of the Core aims of this project is to promote independence amongst people with social care needs helping them to engage with training and employment which is in line with a number of UK and Welsh Government Strategies.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

The only affect this project will have on other services is to complement them and add value and potentially reduce the drain on the statutory services in the long term.

## **7. What consultations have been carried out?**

In developing the New Work Connections project, there has been consultation with the following stakeholders:

- Welsh Assembly Government officers, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Other WEFO funded projects, North Wales Public Health Service, Job Centre Plus, Various Training Providers, City Strategy, Range of Third Sector organisations, Social Services officers, Further Education providers, North Wales Social Services Improvement Collaborative

Presentations have been made regarding the project at two major conferences. All have been fully supportive of the project.

## **8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

This is a significant regional project with match funding implications. The profiled expenditure and outcomes are being closely monitored and reported to funding providers.

## **9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

Locally, risks are identified and scored by their likelihood and severity then recorded and monitored regularly. Risks are reviewed during the Local Delivery Group meetings and action required to eliminate or minimise the risk determined and undertaken as required/appropriate. The identified risks are collated onto the regional risk register which is reported to the Regional Partnership Board on a quarterly basis for review. An exceptions report is completed where RED risks have been identified (*not on track and not in control*). Residual risks are included in the Risk Log which are monitored and reviewed regularly.

Some of the major risks highlighted include the impact of the economic downturn, the duplication of projects across the region, the impact of the Work Programme and changes to the project. In light of this, WEFO have emphasised the need for the project to demonstrate it is doing everything it can to support people on their 'journey' into education, employment and training. The Work Star outcomes tool is used to enable Support Workers to measure and summarise the achievement of 'softer outcomes'. This has

provided an invaluable framework for staff and enabled more systematic, measureable and consistent support provision across the region.

## **10. Power to make the Decision**

Article 6.3 of the Council's Constitution.

**Contact Officer:**

Regional Manager New Work Connections

Tel: 01745 353494