

Report to: Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 18th July 2013

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Social Care and Children's Services/Lead Sponsor, New Work Connections

Report Author: Local Manager, New Work Connections

Title: New Work Connections (NWC) update

1. What is the report about?

Taith i Waith/New Work Connections support people who, through a range of disadvantages, are economically inactive or unemployed, helping them to move towards education, training and employment. The project covers the four local authority areas of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire and Gwynedd with Denbighshire as the Lead Sponsor. The project originally secured £26 million over four years (1st March 2010 to 28th February 2014); £13.8 million from the European Social Fund (ESF) administered by the Welsh Government. Following re-profile this amount has been reduced to £16,741,880.

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

- Priority 2; increasing employment and tackling economic inactivity
- Theme 1; helping people into sustainable employment

The expected outcomes are improved long term employment prospects for residents who acquire new skills and qualifications through the project. This in turn will assist the local economy and reduce poverty, deprivation, dependency on state benefits and council services.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report provides updated information and monitors progress and performance of New Work Connections from the perspective of positive sustainable outcomes for Denbighshire residents and from the Council's perspective as project lead sponsor.

3. What are the recommendations?

That members of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee consider and comment on:

- Compliance and alignment with DCC policies, procedures and priority areas and Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) terms and conditions
- Appropriate governance arrangements, monitoring, evaluation, risk management processes, use of funding, achievement of targets and indicators
- Development of the exit strategy, given that funding ceases on February 28th 2014.

4. Report details

As project sponsor, Denbighshire is responsible for delivering the project in accordance with the terms and conditions set out by the Welsh European Funding Office. This regional collaboration is governed by a Partnership Agreement signed by all 4 authorities. Regional and Local Partnership Boards ensures compliance. The project also reports to the North Wales Social Services Improvement Collaborative (NWSSIC) ensuring provision of corporate leadership.

To date the project has faced a number of challenges including:

- Recruitment and retention of staff (with particular reference to time scales and redundancy implications)
- Setting up effective documentation and database and responding to Welsh European Funding Office's ongoing adjustments to project requirements
- Introduction of the Work Programme
- Complexities of required procurement and match funding processes

Despite these challenges, the project continues to make significant progress and all elements are pulling together to ensure that participants are enabled to meet their full potential. There is a wide range of activities available to help people to overcome the barriers they face and we are delighted to see the triumphs of many of those involved.

European Social Fund projects are subject to a number of audit and monitoring visits throughout their life and well after completion. To date, we have not had a visit, but hope to do so before the project starts to wind down. Quarterly Lead Sponsor Visits are carried by the Regional Team to ensure compliance, provide support and guidance. A Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (MEP) is completed quarterly to ensure the timely delivery of the project's key actions. A robust methodology supports the Plan including status reporting, exceptions reporting and risk management. *Appendix 1 Denbighshire MEP May 13*

The project has a good relationship with officers at the Welsh European Funding Office with regular communication and review meetings. The most significant issues to date have been around responses to the Work Programme & Match funding requirements. Both have been resolved, with only a small amount of work around match funding outstanding.

The project's procurement processes were commended by Welsh European Funding Office who shared them with other European Social Fund projects as best practice. They also commented favourably on the monitoring and evaluation plan and methodology process.

The majority of the New Work Connections project is being delivered under the umbrella of DCC Adult & Business Services, with the exception of 2 specialist provisions which have been procured. North Wales Women's Centre and Hafal provide the specialist provision. Welsh European Funding Office insists that all training is also procured, thus ensuring that all providers are given the opportunity to tender for service delivery contracts on a fair and transparent basis.

Following a recent re-profile, regionally the project is required to provide support to 4306 individuals (previously 4555). To date the project has

supported 3551 participants. Denbighshire increased its target from 1615 to 2236 as it has already supported 1851 participants. (*Appendix 2 Target achievement figures May 2013*)

The project has developed processes and protocols which have helped to streamline services. Collaboration with other schemes and initiatives within social care, health, education, training, employment, housing and benefits services, including third sector providers has resulted in joined-up working and a more holistic provision for our participants. Working in this way, we have been able to effectively meet individual needs, to contribute to efficiencies and therefore, to the sustainability of services.

The project has gained valuable feedback from 3 external evaluations by Wavehill consulting. The final evaluation, expected shortly, should help us to share good practice and to identify lessons learnt. The evaluation begins to demonstrate the need for this type of support to continue at the end of the funding period, and informs the Exit strategy but of course, in this economic climate, finding an alternative source of funding is proving increasingly challenging. The only suggestions thus far in terms of future funding have involved developing small social enterprises, but we have ruled out the option of a premature exit, since we are on track to meet most targets and feel comfortable about the re-profile being realistic. (*Appendix 3 Denbighshire targets Feb -May 2013*)

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

The previous corporate priority of Demographic Change was directly addressed by this project. The project now contributes towards the new corporate priorities of developing the local economy, improving the quality of education and ensuring that vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible. In Denbighshire there is an increasing number of older people and people with disabilities and difficulties. New Work Connections supports these groups, helping them to develop skills and to move into training, education and employment. We help people to gain independence, control over their lives; allowing them to work, learn and to make an active contribution to the community.

The overall aim of the New Work Connections project is to assist 4,306 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 empowers people to realise their full potential and thus to contribute to the economy of the region. The support we provide contributes to Denbighshire's BIG Plan by enhancing people's chances of being healthy and having a sense of wellbeing, both contributing to their capacity to be self sufficient.

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 UK and Welsh Government Strategies.

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

New Work Connections complements other services, adding value and

potentially reducing the drain on the statutory services. Funding is all external. *(Appendices 4a and 4b Revised Summary Profile Financial report to NWSSIC)*

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

Whilst New Work Connections supports many participants who share protected characteristics we are not in this instance asking for a decision or making a proposal for change.

8. What consultations have been carried out?

An initial report was taken to this Scrutiny Committee in July 2012 and received an encouraging and supportive response. A similar response was received by the Modernisation Board in June 2013. In developing the NWC project, there has been consultation with the following: Welsh Government, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Other Welsh European Funding Office funded projects, North Wales Public Health Service, Job Centre Plus, Training Providers, City Strategy, Third Sector organisations, Social Services officers, Further Education providers, North Wales Social Services Improvement Collaborative.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The project needs to ensure it meets the requirements of Welsh European Funding Office and the Welsh Government and that it develops a clear exit strategy.

10. 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 to eliminate or minimise risk determined and undertaken as required/appropriate. Identified risks are collated onto the regional risk register which is reported to the Regional Partnership Board on a quarterly basis for review. 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, changes to the project and match funding requirements. The Work Star outcomes tool is used to enable support workers to measure and summarise the achievement of 'softer outcomes', which has mitigated against the risk that we will not find our participants as many full time jobs as originally anticipated. This has provided an invaluable framework for staff and enabled more systematic, measureable and consistent support provision across the region. *(Appendix 5 Workstar Report, Appendix 6, Regional re-profile Risk Analysis)*

11. Power to make the Decision

Article 6.3 of the Council's Constitution.

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