



ISLINGTON

# **Policy and Performance Scrutiny Review**

## **REPORT OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY- REVIEW OF BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT TEAM (BEST)**

London Borough of Islington  
September 2015

## **CHAIR'S FOREWORD**

In view of concerns expressed by some residents concerning the service offered by the BEST team and the fact that this would shortly be merged with the Islington Learning and Working service, the Committee decided to carry out a short scrutiny review to see how the new service could learn lessons from BEST and improve the offer to residents.

Whilst the Committee heard evidence that the BEST team had worked well in a number of ways, it also felt that there were a number of areas that could be improved upon. These are particularly in relation to offering training and support to applicants, publicising the services on offer and also publicising its achievements in finding sustainable work. This would help encourage residents to seek assistance and our recommendations relating to the youth employment agenda will also assist young people to enter and experience the world of work, through collaboration with businesses.

The Committee feel therefore that there is the need to engage with partners and businesses to develop these opportunities and to develop a strategy to be able to do this.

The Committee has also made a number of other recommendations that it feels will enhance the service to residents, encourage sustainable employment and a positive experience in the workplace and requests that these be adopted by the Executive.

# **BEST Team Scrutiny Review**

## **Aim**

To establish the extent to which the BEST team currently assists residents that need help securing employment, including those who are young, over the age of 50, parents, sick/disabled, ex-offenders, and BME residents.

## **Evidence**

The review ran from March 2015 until September 2015 and evidence was received from a variety of sources:

1. Presentations from witnesses – Two witnesses who had been assisted by the BEST team
2. Presentations from council officers – Lela Kogbara – Assistant Chief Executive, Strategy and Partnerships, Nicky Freeling, Business Engagement and Employment Support Manager
3. Presentations from local community based partners/Agencies which use the services of BEST to support their clients– Ken Kanu, Help on Your Doorstep, Sheri Lawal – Choices

## **Main Findings**

The Committee commenced its review on 2 March, however on 1 April 2015 the BEST service was merged with Islington and Working, as part of the new Learning and Skills and Employment section within the Chief Executive's Department.

The Committee focused on identifying the gaps in the BEST service provision to unemployed residents, reviewing the plans in place to fill gaps, as part of implementing the recommendations of the Employment Commission, and to make recommendations that can be taken on board by the new Learning, Skills and Employment team.

The BEST team was established in January 2012 to operate a Single Employer Face, as recommended by the Islington Fairness Commission. It acted primarily as an employer facing service that sought to coordinate efforts to get more employers to recruit disadvantaged residents, as well as encouraging corporate social responsibility to support employability through activities, such as mentoring.

Following the recommendations of the Islington Employment Commission, a team has now been introduced to implement these recommendations and this team is drawn mostly from existing resources.

The Council has also successfully bid for approximately £2M from the London Enterprise Panel (New Homes Bonus top-slice), to provide resources until March 2017, to support the employment agenda. This has meant that the Council has resources to develop the work of BEST, Islington Working for Parents and careers work in Children's Services.

Consultation has been completed on a new organisation structure to deliver the ambitions of the Employment Commission. The result is that BEST will be merged with Islington Learning and Working from 1 April 2015 to form a new Learning, Skills and Employment service. This new structure brings together the strategic business engagement functions, the job brokerage and

recruitment functions and the front line employment support functions, together with Adult and Community Learning.

The Committee, given the new structure, focused on what lessons could be learnt from the BEST team experiences and how they can be incorporated, in order to build on its' progress to ensure the new service is a success for residents and assists them into sustainable employment.

The Committee received evidence concerning the new service, named the i Work team, which is funded for the next 2 years, to work closely with Job Centre Plus and other partners to provide a strong targeted approach, with the objective of supporting long term unemployed and ESA claimants into employment.

The service includes 10 Islington Council coaches, incorporating job brokerage, which is tailored to meet client needs and aspirations. Brokerage is intended to link to growth sectors and be sector led. Supporting the Council delivery is a formal partnership of organisations, working across a series of community locations, to support ESA and long term unemployed claimants into employment. Through this partnership the i Work team will work closely with a cadre of partner coaches, operating as a team across Islington and developing models of best practice.

The i Work service is located within the Learning Skills and Employment service, which offers a wider range of specialist support, including adult learning, employer engagement, youth employment and apprenticeships.

The Committee received information on the performance of the BEST team and the candidates placed into paid positions by BEST over the period 2012-15.

The Committee noted that 16-24 year olds were consistently the largest age range amongst successful candidates and whilst the number of over 40's assisted by BEST into jobs is low, it has increased from 2012/13 and BEST have undertaken work in the past year to increase the number of residents aged 45+ that have secured paid employment. This has included partnership working with Adult Community Learning, in order to run a series of workshops, providing targeted employability to this group.

The employment situation of people with learning disabilities is particularly concerning. Only about 10% have paid work, despite the fact that many learning disabled people complete work focused college courses and this group do a great deal of unpaid work experience. In view of this, a pilot was set up in 2012, to show that people with a learning disability could be employed and play an active part in the local labour market and this had focused on 18-24 year olds, but did not exclude others, who were job ready. It was agreed that paid employment would not necessarily have to be full time, as even a small number of hours worked, can have a very positive impact for someone with a learning disability.

The project saw some successes and 26 residents over a two year period with learning disabilities entered paid work and a project to support parents and assist them in guiding learning disabled children into employment was launched in February 2014. Considerable work also took place to improve support systems for people with learning disabilities and a database is maintained which can identify residents with learning disabilities, aged 18-24, and the services that support them.

The BEST team, in 2014/15 also supported 81 parents of children, aged 0-15, into employment. Of these, 66 were lone parents, who had been out of work for more than 2 years. The average age of this cohort of parents is 36.

The Committee noted that there were 1.3 jobs for every resident in Islington and there is a need to persuade employers to give young people a chance. However, some employers kept raising the

qualifications for jobs and employers were also able to recruit skilled staff from an increasingly global market.

The Committee considered evidence that some groups had proved difficult to get into employment, such as those with mental health disorders, and that some residents were being excluded from employment, as they had BME names. It was noted that even within the Council there is a lack of advancement for BME staff to higher graded posts. Measures to address this are being taken by instituting an inspiring leadership programme for BME staff, which applied to all grades.

During the Committee's questioning of the witnesses that had been assisted by the BEST team, the Committee welcomed the evidence that these particular witnesses had felt that they had received excellent assistance from the team and overall their experience had been good. It was also noted that the new iWork team that has been established would be more client facing, whilst still dealing with employers, which had not previously taken place.

The Committee were pleased to note that the Council were now training and employing apprentices, so that they can, after a year, move onto business opportunities and links were being made with employers so that the apprentices were work ready and could be employed by businesses after this first year. In addition, discussions were taking place with Job Centre Plus, to see whether some of the functions of the JCP could be linked with the iWork team, with more of a focus on residents with a disability in the future.

The Committee were concerned that the employment being found is low skilled and low paid and we were informed that initially there had been a focus on low paid entry jobs, however where there are Section 106 monies available there is an opportunity to create more jobs across the salary range. In addition, the new job brokerage arrangements will be more suited to matching people with particular skills.

Members of the Committee did however note comments that the BEST team had in some instances been unable to offer job seekers the support that they needed to succeed in submitting successful applications and to sustain work. The Committee noted that there had been an issue of capacity in the BEST team to assist all the unemployed residents in the borough. This was because the BEST team were not client facing, and there was no other client facing service in operation, apart from the parent team who could only work with parents of children under 15.

The Committee welcomed the introduction of the new i Work team, which will provide a service for those who need it most, adults unemployed for 6 months or more, people in receipt of Employment Support Allowance (ESA), and of the new youth employment team, which will support young people who want to go into apprenticeships or other form of workplace learning.

The Committee also considered evidence from Choices, a counselling and advisory support service, who had worked with the BEST team and also with the Job Centre, mostly with claimants on ESA, who were not work ready. Choices were of the view that there needed to be more part time work available to assist these clients. Choices also stated that they held sessions for young people in mock interview situations and filmed them, in order that they can improve their performance at interviews.

The Committee were of the view that the Council should support a work experience programme for residents to gain skills and confidence, with a view to developing these residents ability to move into paid sustainable employment. This scheme should be known as the 'GET SET FOR WORK' scheme and focus on training and a positive experience in the workplace.

As the scheme develops, this should be promoted with local businesses to encourage similar work experience schemes with other large employers, and in particular to strongly encourage council

contractors, as well as VCS organisations, that are in receipt of Council funding, to offer such opportunities.

The Committee also received evidence from Help on Your Doorstep which is an organisation that assists over 1500 residents per year, and employment has been its' main focus. The Committee heard evidence that Help on Your Doorstep works across Islington and is an outreach service that links in with the voluntary and public sector. It is a door knocking service that seeks to engage residents and offers assistance with housing, financial advice, employment issues, welfare rights etc. and signposts them to appropriate services, and residents could also call one of its 5 community based offices.

The BEST team were Help on Your Doorstep's main referral partner for employment support however Help on Your Doorstep did not keep precise details of those clients obtaining employment. There had been challenges to this process and the BEST service had acted as a brokerage for pre-screening and assessment, however those assisted did not often receive feedback. Where feedback from employers was provided it was not always sufficient to support clients to improve their interview performance. The Committee noted that it is felt that there is a need for good quality feedback to be given to applicants, in order to boost their confidence when applying for jobs, whether they were successful or not.

The Committee welcomed the work carried out by organisations, such as Help on Your Doorstep, in contacting 'hard to reach' residents. In order to ensure that the new offer reaches those who need it, the proposed new case loading service established should work closely with partners, such as Help on Your Doorstep, ward partnerships and the Voluntary and Community services (VCS) hubs across the borough and should set up a network of employment practitioners and key strategic partners. This will ensure good practice is shared and that there is equal access to services for residents, wherever they live. The Committee are of the view that the VCS hubs should be encouraged to involve and support similar groups in their areas, forming employment clusters. There should also be the creation of focus groups, in order to ensure residents are able to feedback about the services offered so that, if necessary, improvements can be made.

In addition, Councillors could act as 'mystery shoppers' and champions of employment services, assessing the services at the point of entry, and this would enable the quality of the service offered to be monitored and its effectiveness assessed. Take up of services can be monitored and data shared with key partners in order to ensure that rigorous evaluation and analysis of services and their impact takes place.

The Committee were of the view that not all apprenticeships, both from external organisations and within the Council itself, were satisfactory and led to sustainable employment. One of our recommendations particularly addresses this, including provision for a 2 year offer to 16 year olds wishing to engage in work based learning, up until the school participation age.

The Committee also considered that the Council apprenticeships on offer should also provide a way into sustainable employment and the new youth employment team should work with local employers to promote the same principles.

The Committee consider that the team should also target local employers to offer part time opportunities. This should include Saturday work, which is recognised as a means by which young people can gain experience of the work place, and should especially target groups of young people most at risk of becoming NEET or engaging in illegal earnings.

The Committee were also of the view that, given the large number of construction projects taking place in the borough, there should be opportunities for apprenticeships and work placements to be made available, especially for women, given the shortage of female workers in the construction industry.

In addition, the Committee was of the view that there should be a strong communications strategy established, in conjunction with the Council's communications team and ward partnerships, to ensure that good case studies of residents finding work and being assisted are disseminated widely, in order to influence job seekers and to encourage employers to follow good practice.

## **Conclusion**

The Committee have made a number of recommendations, set out below, that is felt will improve the offer to residents to enable them to enter into employment and also made recommendations that will assist in making young people more ready for work.

This offer will need the assistance of other partners and organisations to deliver it successfully and there is a need to ensure that the availability of this service is publicised effectively.

## Recommendations

### 1. Young People

The Committee are of the view that not all apprenticeships work well and progress to further employment. This is the case in some of the external apprenticeships sourced by BEST and some of the internal apprenticeships organised within the Council.

The Committee therefore recommend-

1. That the Council's apprenticeship programme is revised to ensure that it offers a set of excellent opportunities to Islington young people. The offer should include some 2 year offers to 16 year olds wishing to leave school at the end of year 11 and to engage in work based learning up until the school participation age of 18
2. That all Council apprenticeship opportunities should be designed to offer a real pathway into sustainable employment i.e. with meaningful job roles, strong line management and also opportunities to gain a wide breadth of experience
3. That the new youth employment team, within the learning, skills and employment service, will also work with local employers to promote the same principles, using the Council's programme as a model of good practice
4. That, in order to gain experience of work, the team should develop a campaign targeting local employers to engage with the youth employment agenda, through offering part time employment opportunities for young people from the age of 14 upwards. 'Saturday' jobs are a recognised way that young people gained the work ethic, received earnings and learnt the 'soft skills' that employers say are lacking in young people. This campaign should also target groups of young people most at risk of becoming NEET or engaging in illegal earnings

### 2. Adults

The Committee heard evidence that adults often failed to access the jobs brokered by BEST because they were not sufficiently job ready, or lack relevant work experience.

The Committee therefore recommend that –

1. A work experience programme be developed for residents to gain skills and confidence, supported by the Council, with a view to developing these residents ability to move into sustained employment. This Council programme should be known as 'GET SET FOR WORK' and focus on training and a positive experience in the work place
2. As the Council's own programme develops, Council officers should promote the scheme with local businesses to encourage similar work experience schemes with other large employers
3. Council contractors should also be strongly encouraged to offer these opportunities, together with local VCS organisations, in receipt of Council funding

### **3. Personalised support**

**The Committee, in view of the evidence that they considered, did not feel that the BEST service was best able to offer job seekers the support they needed to succeed in applications and to get into sustainable work.**

**The Committee therefore support that the new service, the i Work team, which has been established should offer a case loading service to those who most need it, adults unemployed for six months or more, people in receipt of ESA, and that the youth employment team will support young people who want to go into apprenticeships, or other forms of work based learning**

**The Committee recommend that -**

- 1. It be ensured that this offer reaches those who need it, and the service should work closely with partners across the borough, particularly with Help on Your Doorstep, ward partnerships and the VCS hubs, and should establish a network of employment practitioners and key strategic partners, to ensure that good practice is shared and that there is equal access of services to residents wherever they live in the borough. The VCS hubs will be encouraged to involve and support smaller groups in their areas, forming employment clusters**
- 2. Focus groups should be organised to ensure residents are able to feedback about services offered**
- 3. Councillors should act as 'mystery shoppers' and champions of employment services, assessing the quality of provision at the point of entry. This will assist in maintaining and monitoring quality**
- 4. Officers should monitor the take up of services using efficient data capture systems, and agree to sharing this information with partners to ensure that rigorous evaluation and analysis of services and the impact can be assessed**
- 5. A strong communications strategy be developed, working in conjunction with the Council's communications team and ward partnerships, to ensure that good case studies and information are disseminated, which will help to influence job seekers and encourage employers to follow good practice**

**MEMBERSHIP OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2014/15 and 2015/16**

**COUNCILLORS 2014/15**

**Councillors:**

Councillor Troy Gallagher (Chair)  
Councillor Una O'Halloran (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Gary Doolan  
Councillor Michael O'Sullivan  
Councillor Martin Klute  
Councillor Kaya Makarau-Schwartz  
Councillor James Court  
Councillor Rakhia Ismail  
Councillor Olly Parker  
Councillor James Court  
Councillor Satnam Gill  
Councillor Jenny Kay  
Councillor Osh Gantly

**Substitutes:**

Councillor Alice Perry  
Councillor Alex Diner  
Councillor Gary Heather  
Councillor Raphael Andrews  
Councillor Paul Smith  
Councillor Clare Jeapes  
Councillor Jilani Chowdhury  
Councillor Richard Greening  
Councillor Robert Khan  
Councillor Nick Wayne  
Councillor Flora Williamson  
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE

**COUNCILLORS 2015/16**

**Councillors:**

Councillor Troy Gallagher (Chair)  
Councillor Una O'Halloran (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Gary Doolan  
Councillor Michael O'Sullivan  
Councillor Martin Klute  
Councillor Kaya Makarau-Schwartz  
Councillor Caroline Russell  
Councillor Rakhia Ismail  
Councillor Jenny Kay  
Councillor Dave Poyser  
Councillor Raphael Andrews  
Councillor Jilani Chowdhury  
Councillor James Court

**Substitutes:**

Councillor Alice Perry  
Councillor Clare Jeapes  
Councillor Nick Wayne  
Councillor Flora Williamson  
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE  
Councillor Theresa Debono  
Councillor Alex Diner  
Councillor Alice Donovan  
Councillor Satnam Gill  
Councillor Robert Khan  
Councillor Paul Smith  
Councillor Nurullah Turan

*Acknowledgements: The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.*

*Officer Support:*

*Peter Moore – Democratic Services*

*Lead officer/s- Lela Kogbara – Assistant Chief Executive Strategy and Partnerships, Nicky Freeling, Business Engagement and Employment Support Manager*

## APPENDIX A – SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT

<b>SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)</b>	
Review: <b>Business and Employment Support Team (BEST)</b>	
<i>Note that with effect from 1 April 2015 BEST will be merged with Islington Learning and Working to as part of the new Learning, Skills and Employment section within the Chief Executive's Department.</i>	
<b>Scrutiny Review Committee:</b> Policy and Performance	
Director leading the Review: Lela Kogbara	
<b>Lead Officer:</b> Ellen Ryan and Pete Courtie	
<b>Overall aim:</b> Establish the extent to which BEST currently delivers for residents that need help securing employment including those who are young, over the age of 50, parents, sick/disabled, ex-offenders, BME.	
<b>Objectives of the review:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify gaps in BEST provision to unemployed residents</li><li>• Review plans in place to fill gaps as part of implementing the recommendations of the Islington Employment Commission</li><li>• Make recommendations to be taken on board by the new Learning, Skills and Employment service</li><li>• To review the lessons learnt from the BEST team to ensure that a more effective service is provided to residents and to look at social mobility in the borough and how this can be improved</li></ul>	
How is the review to be carried out:	(Use separate sheets as necessary for 1-4 below)
Scope of the Review	
Types of evidence will be assessed by the review: (add additional categories as needed)	
1. Documentary submissions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Overview of BEST work to date</li><li>ii) BEST performance data</li><li>iii) Labour market information</li></ul>	
2. It is proposed that witness evidence be taken from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) BEST managers and officers</li><li>ii) Apprentices placed with external organisations</li><li>iii) Young people looking for apprenticeships and/or jobs</li><li>iv) People with learning disabilities that have applied for jobs through BEST – a sample of those that have been successful and those that have not</li></ul>	

3. Visits  
None

**Additional Information:**

BEST was established in January 2012 to operate a Single Employer Face as recommended by the Islington Fairness Commission. It is primarily an employer facing service that seeks to coordinate efforts to get more employers to recruit disadvantaged residents as well as encouraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to support employability through activities such as mentoring.

The Islington Employment Commission report was launched on 26 November 2014. It made recommendations in three areas:

- Creating change for people who need it - expanding and improving the support for available to Islington people to get, keep and enjoy their job;
- Employers creating change - enabling employers to recruit better locally
- Creating change for the next generation - ensuring that all young people get the support they need to confidently pursue their ambitions and get the careers they deserve

In addition there were messages to Government to devolve employment services to the local level, make youth careers a priority and take vocational education seriously.

A team is now in place to implement the recommendations of the Employment Commission, which is mostly drawn from existing resources.

The council successfully bid for approximately £2m from the London Enterprise Panel (New Homes Bonus top-slice) to provide resources until March 2017 to support the employment agenda. This has meant that the council has resources to develop the work of BEST, Islington Working for Parents and careers work in Children's Services.

Consultation has been completed on a new organisation structure to deliver the ambitions of the Employment Commission. The result is that BEST will be merged with Islington Learning and Working from 1 April 2015 to form a new Learning, Skills and Employment service. The new structure brings together the strategic business engagement functions, the job brokerage and recruitment functions and the front line employment support functions together with Adult and Community Learning.

Programme

Key output:	To be submitted to Committee on:
1. Scrutiny Initiation Document	02 March 2015
2. Final Report	17 September 2015