

Final report of the Employment of Adults with Learning Disabilities Task and Finish Group

1. Background

During the spring of 2018 the Scrutiny Team carried out a topic selection campaign that invited members of the community in Richmond to suggest topics for the 2018/19 scrutiny work programme. The Adult Services and Public Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23 October 2018 were presented with the suggestions that fell within its remit from the topic selection campaign. Following discussion and a vote amongst members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group would be commissioned to on the employment of adults with learning disabilities within London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The membership of the Task and Finish group was subsequently established comprising Councillor Samuel (Chairman); Councillor Pollesche (vice-Chairman); Councillor Saunders; Councillor O'Carroll and Councillor Juriansz.

The objective of the Task and Finish Group was to investigate and gather evidence regarding the current situation within the borough and make several recommendations for improvement.

2. Methodology

The Task and Finish group spoke with an extensive range of stakeholders. This included local employers, charities, education providers, commissioned service providers and council employees.

The Task and Finish Group held two meetings with all members present where invited witnesses were invited to give their perspective on what in their opinion were the key barriers and their views on what could be done by the council to improve the employment of adults with learning disabilities within the borough. In addition, as part of gathering evidence a series of visits took place where one or two members of the Task and Finish Group were in attendance along with the scrutiny officer.

The Task and Finish Group held a final meeting where they discussed the findings from all the meetings with expert witnesses and discussed the respective observations they had made during discussions and agreed several recommendations for improvement.

2.1 Visits

Members of the Task and Finish group also undertook a series of visits.

Following the initial meeting with representatives from Richmond and Hillcroft Adult Community College, members visited the college to observe some of the classes and speak to some learners.

Members spoke to representatives from Richmond & Twickenham Job Centre Plus regarding the role of the Disability Employment Adviser and other means of support for adults with learning disabilities.

London Borough of Hounslow was identified as having the highest number of adults with learning disabilities in London in employment. Members visited London Borough of Hounslow to learn about their examples of best practice and discussed their participation in Project Search which is a work-based programme for young people with learning disabilities.

Members visited the Down's Syndrome Association in Teddington. During the visit a discussion was held on how it uses a buddy system to support jobseekers in a placement and provide training for potential employers. It also supports work experience placements and enables employers and interested job seekers to register through their website.

Richmond Clinical Commissioning Group said that there are higher levels of depression amongst adults with learning disabilities and suggested that individual success stories could be promoted more to sell benefits of employing adults with learning disabilities and advise on reasonable adjustments.

During the visits members spoke to business representatives from Marks & Spencer in Richmond, Waitrose in Twickenham and Squires in Twickenham. The organisations were visited as they were identified as being examples of good practice with regards to the employment of adults with learning disabilities. Members learnt about what the business organisations did in terms of recruitment of adults with learning disabilities, work experience opportunities and the support that was provided for employees once in a role permanently. Members further discussed the opportunities for training and continuous development for employees with learning disabilities. Members heard from all organisations that they had employees who had been working for them for several years. Adults with learning disabilities tend to be employed on a part-time basis.

2.1 Meetings

There were two meetings with all members present. The format of the meeting was that invitees presented their perspectives on the current situation of employment of adults with learning disabilities and followed up with further questions for clarification/ further information. The following organisations were represented during these meetings:

- Richmond and Hillcroft Adult Community College
- SSA Richmond and Wandsworth Adult Services
- MCCH
- SSA Richmond and Wandsworth Business Engagement
- RHLT
- Mencap

During the meetings members heard evidence from expert witnesses with regards to the support that is available within the borough for adults with learning disabilities in terms of education, training and supported employment opportunities. Members also gained a perspective from the interviews on what some of the potential barriers are to the employment of adults with learning disabilities and how these may be overcome.

RHACC provides a range of provision and support for adults. There is a training programme for learners to become kitchen technicians at the college. Some learners may not be looking for employment, for example they may be over 65 years old. Learners universally felt that their experience on the course was positive.

Members were presented with the Richmond situation with regards to pan-disability supported employment by Adults Services and MCCH explained the work they undertake as the commissioned employment support provider.

Mencap run a job club with MCCH and RHLT. Organisations place their clients in both work experience and paid employment settings. RHLT run the People Hive, Twickenham run by volunteers and employees with learning disabilities. The Sunshine Café in Twickenham provides a training hub into sustainable employment for adults with learning disabilities and can be a gateway into an industry where it is projected there will be substantial growth both in Richmond and other neighbouring boroughs in the future.

It is often easier to find employment for adult with physical disabilities or mental health difficulties. Mental health difficulties may be temporary. Adults with learning disabilities may need more reasonable adjustments.

It is important the employers do not view adults with learning disabilities as only capable of undertaking menial tasks and support training and progression. There is support in aspects such as

interview skills and completing applications. The application process can be a barrier to adults with learning disabilities. Parents can sometimes lack ambition and be over protective.

Several of the expert witnesses said that participation in education and employment helps to improve health and wellbeing. Gaining employment helps with feeling part of the community and giving a purpose. It was noted that support should be consistent and on-going and that it is important that adults with learning disabilities are matched with the right job and that the recruitment process is realistic. Adults with learning disabilities work better within a structured role. If an employment placement falls through this can have a negative impact on the individual in terms of their self-confidence. Once adults with learning disabilities are in employment they tend to have fewer sick days and are more appreciative of the opportunity.

Witnesses said that it can be the case that smaller businesses are more receptive to adults with learning with disabilities. This can be attributed to larger organisations being more structured and less flexible.

3. Member observations

The third meeting of the task and finish group took place on Wednesday 13 March 2019. Members discussed their observations from information obtained through the previous meetings and visits and subsequently made their recommendations for improvement.

Members were reassured that there was a great deal of good practice happening within the borough. Group members noted that some of the expert witnesses had all identified that there was a positive relationship between employment and mental health outcomes. The employment of adults with learning disabilities also helps organisations assist customers who may also have learning disabilities.

Some of witnesses were of the view that parents of adults with learning disabilities may on occasion not have high aspirations and can be reluctant to push for their child be fully independent. Members were of the view that having high expectations for adults with learning disabilities was crucial.

Members observed that some witnesses had indicated that there was an issue in businesses being able to recruit staff and that adults with learning disabilities are an untapped resource which could help fill vacancies. It was important for employers to encourage employees with learning difficulties and continue to develop them and find out what they were capable of. There may be an issue at the recruitment stage in that adults with learning disabilities may need support in the application process.

There may be an issue for potential employers in that they do not know what support is available to them or whom to go to for any information and advice. Members discussed the possibility of producing a booklet which would list all the agencies and sources of support and how to access further information. It was noted that most businesses including those within London Borough of Richmond upon Thames will be small businesses. Some witnesses felt that there could be more linking in and sharing of information amongst different organisations.

Some witnesses felt larger organisations had the advantage of Human Resources policies and procedures to support the employment of adults with learning disabilities centrally but they are not always implemented at branch level. There may be a reliance on the willingness of individual managers to support employees with adults with learning disabilities.

Members noted that a benefit that was cited by witnesses was that employing adults with learning disabilities encouraged organisations to simplify their existing processes, policies and procedures which was of benefit to all members of staff.

4. The Task and Finish group members made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

- **The council should designate an officer who will be responsible for the delivery of the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group**

The members of the task and finish group felt that it was important to have an individual within the council who would be responsible for overseeing and monitoring the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group and to ensure the employment of adults with learning disabilities remains a priority.

Recommendation 2

- **The council should produce a simple booklet that details what support is available within the borough to businesses with regards the employment of adults with learning disabilities.**

The booklet should be made available and distributed to many different organisations and individuals to promote the support and opportunities that were currently available. Suggestions included business and trade associations, school SENCOs, SEND forums, councillors and Members of Parliament.

Recommendation 3

- **An employment fair should be held to bring together employers and adults with learning disabilities.**

Task and Finish Group Members suggested that this would be an opportunity to publicise what is going on within the borough. This would also be an opportunity to showcase successes and the benefits to employees and employers.

Recommendation 4

- **Consideration to be given by the council to purchasing a licence for the use of Project Search**

Task and Finish Group Members felt that consideration should be given to use of Project Search within the borough. This should be done in tandem with the SSA's commissioned supported employment provider. The initial cost to the council would be in the region of £15,000. There would also be an annual renewal cost of around £1000.

Recommendation 5

- **Consideration to be given as to whether the contracting and procurement process can be used to promote the agenda of employing more adults with learning disabilities**

Consideration should be given when the local authority is looking to into a contracting or procurement process with external organisations as to how this can be used to further promote the agenda.

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- The Down's Syndrome Association, Teddington
- Richmond Clinical Commissioning Group
- MCCH
- SSA Business Engagement
- SSA Workmatch
- Richmond Job Centre Plus
- Wandsworth Workright