

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 15 JULY 2009

REPORT BY HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL SERVICES

9. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WORK SOLUTIONS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: None

'D' RECOMMENDATION – that Members note the introduction of Work Solutions providing work taster opportunities

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 To introduce the services that Work Solutions provide and explain how they operate. To make recommendations as to how the Council could work in partnership with Work Solutions to enable adults with physical and learning disabilities to undertake work tasters at the Council.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives

2.1 Working in partnership with Work Solutions would contribute to the following corporate objectives:

Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities

Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Leading the way, working together

Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.

3.0 Background

3.1 In October 2008 Community Scrutiny approved the introduction of a new Comprehensive Corporate Equality Policy, Scheme and the Action Plan. The new Equality Policy states that "East Herts Council is committed to improving the quality of life for all its residents and employees. The Council values the diversity of the community and

wants to use the community's wealth of experience to create an excellent quality of life in East Hertfordshire."

- 3.2 The Comprehensive Corporate Equality Plan is comprised of five strategic equality and diversity objectives. Working with Work Solutions will help to achieve these objectives by taking proactive measures to promote equal opportunities and increasing diversity awareness in the workplace.
- 3.3 The Council is also recognised by the 'Two Ticks' Disability Symbol through Jobcentre Plus. This means that the Council has agreed to meet five commitments regarding the recruitment, employment, retention, and career development of disabled people. By working with Work Solutions, the Council will be supporting disabled people into work and helping disabled people develop and use their abilities.
- 3.4 A 2008 survey found that 1.46% of employees at the Council had a disability, against a target of 5.21%. By getting an insight into how the Council works through work tasters, it will help the Council to identify any barriers to disabled employees.
- 3.5 Work Solutions is a specially supported employment team in Hertfordshire County Council. Work Solutions help people within capacity benefit claimants and lone parents on income support, get into work. They also assist people who have become disabled whilst working. Work Solutions offer various services to their clients including:
- Advice and guidance;
 - Work skills programmes;
 - One-to-one help;
 - Work tasters;
 - Support in employment;
 - A mentoring scheme, and
 - Occupational guidance

4.0 Report

- 4.1 The Council has shown an interest in working in partnership with Work Solutions to offer work tasters for disadvantaged people, to give them the opportunity to experience the world of work. The Council has already undertaken some Work Solutions work taster placements in 2008, in Communications and Community Development.
- 4.2 The work tasters organised by Work Solutions usually last between one

and two weeks but can last up to a month. They are often arranged on a part-time basis, for example for two days a week for four weeks, as many of their clients have never been in full-time employment, or have not been for some time, and therefore find the experience tiring.

4.3 The client will be accompanied by an adviser from Work Solutions at all times, unless it is mutually agreed by the employer and client that this is not necessary. The level of support provided by the adviser during the work taster is matched to the client's needs; they may be fully involved in helping them to do the job or may just stand back and simply be present for support if necessary. If any special equipment is required for the client to undertake the work taster, Work Solutions will organise this through Access to Work or other similar organisations and any cost incurred will be covered by them.

4.4 Work Solutions would like to clarify how the Council will work with them to organise work tasters for their clients. Work Solutions have suggested that the most efficient way to work with them is to identify roles at the Council that would be suitable for work tasters and then provide them with job descriptions for each of these roles. Then, when one of their clients shows an interest in a type of role that the Council is able to offer, they would contact us to see if a work taster can be arranged. This would prevent them having to contact us ad-hoc and will enable an agreed process to be put into place. Work Solutions have identified the following areas as being suitable for their clients:

- Administration
- Customer Services
- Reception duties
- Post room
- Clerical work
- Data entry
- IT
- Caretakers/ Courier
- Arts
- Sports
- Museums
- Castle Hall
- Waste Services

4.5 It is therefore recommended that Heads of Service identify roles that are suitable for work tasters in their service areas, taking into account issues such as data protection and time needed to accommodate the work taster client. Once these roles have been identified, HR will send

the associated job descriptions to Work Solutions. When their clients show an interest, Work Solutions will contact HR to see if a work taster can be arranged. These will need to be dealt with on a case by case basis as each individual's needs will vary significantly and it is recognised that dependant on work pressures, work tasters may not be able to be accommodated each time they are requested.

4.6 During consultation, both Heads of Service and UNISON were fully supportive of working with Work Solutions but expressed concern about the additional work involved in administering the scheme and having the necessary staff resources available to spend time showing the work taster client what to do.

4.7 It is recommended that the Council trials some work taster sessions with Work Solutions to see how the process works and identify any potential issues. If these are successful, it may be that an agreement can be drawn up between Work Solutions and the Council, explaining how we will work in partnership with them going forward. East Herts will then be used as a flagship to other Councils.

4.7 To summarise, the benefits of the Council working in partnership with Work Solutions are as follows:

- Contributes to the Council's Corporate Equality Plan.
- Helps achieve the five commitments required to maintain the 'Two Ticks' Disability Symbol through Jobcentre Plus.
- Helps to increase employment opportunities at the Council for disabled people and therefore enrich the diversity of the workforce.
- Provide opportunities to disadvantaged individuals from local communities to get back into the world of work.
- Increases diversity awareness across the Council.

5.0 Consultation

5.1 Heads of Service and UNISON have been consulted with.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 None.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 None.

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 As detailed in the report.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 None.

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