

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25 March 2021

DurhamWorks Programme – Youth Employment Initiative



Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the DurhamWorks Programme - Youth Employment Initiative, prior to a presentation by Linda Bailey, Strategic Lead, Progression and Learning, Children and Young People's Services.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives regular updates on the progress of the DurhamWorks Programme, the most recent of which took place on 21 February 2020.
- 3 Linda Bailey; Strategic Lead: Progression and Learning will attend the meeting on 25 March 2021 to deliver a presentation that will focus on:
 - Impact of COVID-19
 - DurhamWorks Performance
 - Programme Evaluation
 - DurhamWorks Grant / Employer Engagement
 - Marketing and Communications
 - New Funded Programmes / Opportunities

A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendations

- 4 Members are asked to note and comment upon the information provided within the report and during the presentation.
- 5 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes a further progress report on the DurhamWorks Programme in its 2021/22 work programme.

Background

- 6 DurhamWorks is a Durham County Council led partnership programme that supports young people aged 16-24 who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) / unemployed. The Programme commenced in 2016 and it is funded through the Youth Employment Initiative / ESF.
- 7 The total funding allocated to support unemployed young people in County Durham was originally £17m, with an anticipated end date for the Programme of July 2018. However, in recognition of the proficient manner in which DurhamWorks was being delivered, the Department for Work and Pensions (the Managing Authority for the European Social Fund in the United Kingdom) allocated an additional £12m of funding and extended the Programme until July 2021. A request has recently been approved by the Department for Work and Pensions to extend the timeframe for utilising this funding until the end of December 2021.
- 8 Therefore, the total amount of funding allocated to County Durham through this Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding is £29.04m, which consists of £21.7m Youth Employment Initiative / ESF, £4.7m Durham County Council match funding, as well as £2.6m match funding from external Delivery Partners. This will result in over 9,000 young people who are NEET receiving support by the time the current Programme ends.
- 9 DurhamWorks is delivered by Durham County Council staff, in conjunction with Delivery Partner and Subcontractor organisations. The DurhamWorks model encompasses a young person-centred approach which enables them to access one-to-one individualised support, engage in a range of activities in order to develop their confidence, resilience and broader skills, as well as access opportunities to enable them to progress into the labour market. There is a strong focus on creating employment based opportunities for young people and, to this end, a DurhamWorks Grant is available for

employers, to support with the costs associated with employing a young person.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

- 10 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on delivery of the DurhamWorks Programme. This resulted in face-to-face work with young people being suspended, with elements of support and learning activity being provided remotely through online platforms where it has been feasible to do so, in accordance with Government guidance. A priority has been to ensure that young people who are being supported by DurhamWorks have access to digital technology to enable them to access support and learning.
- 11 Following the publication of Government guidance ('Roadmap out of Lockdown') on 23rd February 2021, permission was granted to resume face to face activity from 8th March in a controlled and measured manner.
- 12 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate negative economic impact on young people, as demonstrated by an increase in the number and proportion of young people who are NEET / unemployed in County Durham during recent months. In response to this, DurhamWorks has been collaborating very closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to implement national initiatives across County Durham. These include:
 - Kickstart – this is a Government programme to provide six month job placements for unemployed 16-24 year olds who are in receipt of Universal Credit. DurhamWorks has established a 'gateway' to enable employers to recruit young people. Young people will be provided with in-work support whilst undertaking their job placement.
 - Employment Hubs – are spaces that will provide a range of employment and skills support services to young people in a welcoming environment, in order to support them into employment. Partners who will provide services to young people include: DurhamWorks, Jobcentre Plus, National Careers Service, local Further Education Colleges, Apprenticeship and other learning providers. Employment Hubs are being established in Stanley, Peterlee and Bishop Auckland.
 - Intensive Support – is a programme for young people who have recently become unemployed. This consists of guided coaching / mentoring / learning over an initial two week period. There is initial one-to-one engagement in order to assess the young person's job

ready status, as well as their motivation and confidence levels regarding a return to work. This is currently a digital offer, which is being delivered by Citizens Advice County Durham, who are a DurhamWorks Delivery Partner.

DurhamWorks Programme Performance

- 13 The suspension of face-to-face activity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (see paragraph 10) has affected DurhamWorks performance. Therefore, a Project Change Request (PCR) has been submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions to reflect a reduced number of young people who are being supported and are progressing into a positive destination. The latest verified data (December 2020) shows that since the Programme commenced in 2016:
- 8,209 young people have been supported by DurhamWorks (against a revised Programme target of 9,303 following PCR submission).
 - 4,819 young people have completed the Programme (against a revised Programme target of 7,739 following PCR submission)
 - Of those who have completed, 4,156 have progressed into education, employment and training / obtained a qualification on completion of the Programme (against a revised Programme target of 5,689 following PCR submission).

Programme Evaluation

- 14 Evaluation of DurhamWorks has taken place across two phases. Phase one evaluation (as outlined in the report of 26th June 2018) focussed on all elements of the DurhamWorks Programme, with particular emphasis on the type and level of support that young people were receiving. The second phase of evaluation commenced in March 2020 and is focusing on the following priorities (as outlined in the report of 21 February 2020):
- Achieve an understanding of the effectiveness of support provided to young people by comparing the experiences of those who are currently engaged in the Programme with those who have completed and progressed.
 - Research whether DurhamWorks activities have increased employment opportunities for young people and led to an improvement in the perceptions of young people by employers.

- Re-run the Social Return on Investment model, with the addition of distance travelled data that was not included in the original model, to reflect the Programme's value towards the end.

15 The evaluation activities have been impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic and, as a result, timescales have been revised in order to ensure that this important activity can be completed. The interim evaluation report is due to be completed in March 2021, which will enable any initial recommendations to be implemented as soon as possible. The final evaluation report will be produced in November 2021, prior to the Programme finishing in December 2021.

DurhamWorks Grant / Employer Engagement

16 Since the Programme commenced, a grant has been available to SME employers, to support the creation of employment opportunities for young people who are supported by DurhamWorks. This was originally a twelve month grant but the time frame for grant support has subsequently been reduced as the end date of the Programme approaches.

17 The current grant award is worth up to £2,000 for a four month period and can support up to 50% of the young person's salary costs, providing the employer contributes at least £500 towards the salary of the young person. The job opportunity must be for at least 30 contracted hours per week and have some form of training / learning attached to it. This grant will be available until the end of April 2021 and reflects the end date for the Programme.

18 Durham County Council has administered the DurhamWorks Grant during the extension of the Programme, having taken over responsibility from County Durham Community Foundation. The total number of grants awarded since the Programme commenced is 568.

19 Developing employment based opportunities for young people is a key feature of DurhamWorks and will have even greater prominence as the economy slowly reopens from the current period of COVID-19 related lockdown. To support this activity, a new Employer Engagement team has been formed whose role is to work with Jobcentre Plus to establish and develop the Employment Hubs (see paragraph 12), support young people to obtain Kickstart job placements (see paragraph 12), as well as develop more employment and apprenticeship opportunities for young people.

20 The Programme procured new employment sector routeway delivery in March 2020. However, this was immediately affected by the first period national lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employment sector routeways are short programmes which provide young people with an understanding of employment in a particular industry, leading to employment outcomes.

- 21 As the initial period of national lockdown eased during the summer and autumn, there was some delivery in some employment sector routeways, namely: construction, hospitality, ICT and warehousing. This involved a mixture of online and face to face learning. However, as a result of subsequent periods of national lockdown, progressions into employment and training have been severely impacted.
- 22 New procurements are currently in the planning stages including delivery in the sectors outlined in paragraph 21, as well as administration, retail and sales, farming and agriculture, horticulture and gardening, counter service and food preparation, security and sustainability and carbon reduction. These will all start delivery from June 2021 onwards, providing a diverse range of opportunities for young people who are supported by DurhamWorks.

Marketing and Communications

- 23 The routes which DurhamWorks uses to promote the Programme have continued to develop. In addition to press, radio and bus advertising, considerable use is made of the DurhamWorks Facebook page and website. The latter has an online chat facility which enables young people to ask questions about the help they can get from the Programme. The Facebook page is updated regularly with information about employment vacancies and learning provision etc.
- 24 During the COVID-19 pandemic, information about mental health and wellbeing support, healthy lifestyles and keeping active has been promoted. Staff from across the Programme have created video blogs (vlogs) to share information about the support they can offer and Delivery Partners have shared videos about their own DurhamWorks delivery.
- 25 DurhamWorks has a LinkedIn page and this is used to promote the Programme to employers, including the DurhamWorks grant (see paragraphs 16 – 18). Relationships have been strengthened with the Federation of Small Businesses and the North East of England Chamber of Commerce, involving attending meetings and events, as well as sharing LinkedIn and Facebook posts.
- 26 The Programme has received wider attention with DurhamWorks videos being shared at a national conference in February 2021 (Employment Support Sector: Rising to the Youth Employment

Challenge) that was organised by the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).

New Funded Programmes / Opportunities

- 27 The current Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding for the DurhamWorks Programme is available until December 2021. However, new European funded programmes (DurhamDirections and DurhamEnable) have recently commenced and the Department for Work and Pensions has recently opened a call for projects in Youth Employment Initiative / ESF areas.
- 28 An application for ESF funding (under investment priority 1.2) to develop and continue support for young people through DurhamWorks has also recently been approved by the Department for Work and Pensions. The total amount of funding secured is for £10m to support 6,300 young people aged 15-24 in County Durham.
- 29 This consists of a preventative element that will support 2,700 young people aged 15-16 who are identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (through a new DurhamWorks Programme for Schools), as well as a re-engagement element to support 3,600 young people aged 16-24 who are NEET. The Programme will be delivered in conjunction with a number of Delivery Partners
- 30 In terms of timescales, the preventative element is being delivered from 1st August 2020 until 31st December 2023. The re-engagement element will commence from 1st January 2022 until 31st December 2023, following the end date of current Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding on 31st December 2021.
- 31 An application for new ESF funding (under investment priority 1.4) to establish a Supported Employment Service across County Durham has also recently been approved by the Department for Work and Pensions. DurhamEnable is a £3.6m service that will support over 900 individuals who are aged 18 and above and have learning, physical and mental health barriers to employment. Individuals who meet the eligibility criteria for the service will receive support from a DurhamEnable Key Worker. This funding is available until 31st December 2023.
- 32 The Department for Work and Pensions has also opened a call to run a project to help support young people and respond to the economic impact of COVID-19 in the Youth Employment Initiative / LEP areas, including County Durham. Actions in this priority will help to re-engage marginalised young people who are NEET, with a focus on specific vulnerable groups of young people.

- 33 £3.0m Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding has been allocated to County Durham through this open call, to be utilised by December 2023. However, it is a competitive process and there are no guarantees at this stage that DurhamWorks will be successful in securing this additional funding.
- 34 A bid for £5.0m funding has been submitted to the Youth Futures Foundation, in order to support young people aged 14 to 24 to progress into employment and training. The focus is to support young people in specific groups who experience extreme labour market disadvantage. This includes young people who: have received Children's Social Care Interventions, have received SEN Support, have experienced exclusions from education, and / or attended Alternative Education provision. If the application for funding is successful, the project aims to provide intensive support to develop motivation, confidence and work ready skills, alongside creating a range of employment opportunities.
- 35 Although the new European funding is very positive, it is important to highlight that the level of support available to young people who are NEET / unemployed will reduce from December 2021 onwards when the current Youth Employment Initiative / ESF funding ends. Efforts are continuing to attract further funding to support this area of important work, especially at a time when the future employment prospects of young people are being disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

- 36 This report has outlined the significant impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the Programme, with all face to face delivery being suspended during periods of national lockdown. However, elements of support and learning activity have been provided remotely through online platforms.
- 37 Permission has been granted to resume face to face activity from 8th March in a controlled and measured manner, which will coincide with an increase in marketing activity as well as the procurement of additional employment sector routeways for young people. The aim is to create a vibrant employment offer during the remaining months of the Programme supported by the creation of a new Employer Engagement team, who will collaborate with Jobcentre Plus on the development of Employment Hubs, support young people to obtain Kickstart job placements, and create new job and apprenticeship opportunities.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable