

Disability & Employment in Worcester

Call for Evidence – Scrutiny Review

Wednesday 24th February 2016

Panel Members:

Cllr. Joy Squires (Chair), Cllr. Chris Cawthorne & Cllr. Andy Stafford

Officers:

Gemma Poxon & Rich Morris

Key Points

Employee with visual impairment

- Experienced difficulties and the repeat disappointments with finding a job especially regarding the application process.
- Sight concern uses the government's 'Access to Work Scheme' (ATWS). There are three elements to ATWS:
 - i) Transport
 - ii) Specialist equipment
 - iii) Support Worker
- Specialist equipment which can zoom in text on a computer screen is provided.
- Currently applying for a support worker to help carry out some more difficult tasks but finding the application process lengthy as it has been some months since he applied for the support.
- Has had previous employment including O2 who were very supportive.
- Has limited experience of job market in Worcester for people with disabilities, but felt that he had been turned down elsewhere as a result of his visual impairment.
- Indicated that he has to be selective about the jobs he applies for due to the logistics of his visual impairment.
- Confirmed that support workers may be indefinite in the workplace depending on the individual's circumstances but that they do not do the job of those they support but were 'his eyes' in the workplace.
- Ideal job would be working in rehabilitation for the blind college and if he had the option he would like to move to Worcester.
- Feels that Worcester's city centre was quite good for blind people - maybe as a result of having a long history of a blind college in the city.

Deaf Direct - Community Manager

- Suggested that people may struggle to understand ATWS and that for many deaf people the biggest struggle comes during the job search, application and recruitment process. Feels that there is little or no support for deaf people and that there was no provision for interpreters.
- Notes that for many deaf people, English is a second language.

- Feels that that help with the application process is crucial.
- Considers there is a fear about the loss of benefits when applying for jobs.
- Suggested that the Council could start by looking at our own policies.
- Considers that employers may be nervous when receiving an application from a deaf person, are unaware of the ATWS and expressed concerns about eligibility. Suggests that this is a national problems and not relating to Worcester specifically.
- Education of deaf children thought to be a big debating point and that there were arguments for mainstream and special education, but that they had to make the best of what is available.
- Considers that there are enough qualified interpreters, but it is often a challenge to book one at short notice.

Person with a hidden disability and experience of supporting young disabled people

- There were two aspects to consider:
 - i) Physical disabilities
 - ii) Hidden disabilities
- Considers there to be discrimination and barriers facing disabled jobseekers and a fear of declaring a disability when applying for jobs.
- Is aware of employers concerns with regards to applications from disabled people, especially surrounding mental health problems and a general fear of the unknown.
- Small businesses have less support and usually do not have a HR department to deal with disabilities properly.
- Travel is a significant barrier to disabled job seekers, especially in rural areas where bus services had been cut.
- Key to educate both jobseekers and businesses about the diverse skills disabled people can bring to the work place.
- Indicated that the jobs available to many disabled people were generally low skilled.
- Suggested awareness raising was needed to celebrate positive stories and case studies from employers who have employed disabled people.
- With regards to the national 'Two Ticks Scheme', noted that it was mainly public bodies that participate in the scheme although some private sector companies are involved. Scheme considered positive as long as employers are committed to the full criteria.
- Apprenticeships considered important as a supportive way of educating young people with disabilities and teaching them vocational skills but noted that they are only fixed term and often over subscribed.

Worcester Business Improvement District (BID)

- BID are approached by specific disability groups and businesses about disability and employment issues but had been reactive.
- BID welcomed all opportunities for employment in Worcester and it is for the BID to work with any organisation or business to signpost where necessary.
- Happy for the BID to act as a conduit for information.
- Considers larger businesses better prepared to support the recruitment and retention of disabled workers, one of the biggest in the city being Sanctuary Housing. Noted that many Worcester businesses are small.
- With regards to opportunities for disabled people:
 - Cathedral Square development - many bigger names in retail and hospitality are going to be present but employment opportunities would be available to all candidates at the same time. Suggested a possible specialist jobs fair.
 - Worcester Woods proposed development may have up to 500 new job opportunities.
 - New businesses in the city such as John Lewis and Waitrose may have specific openings.
- Suggested a 'charter or pledge' as an option for linking city businesses to promote positivity towards disability.
- Businesses would benefit from seeing evidence of the positives of employing disabled people.

Careers & Employability Service Manager – University of Worcester (UoW)

- Statistics regarding graduate destinations, a list of the job titles from vocational courses graduates and a leaflet issued to disabled graduates with useful contacts and links to organisations were provided to the Panel.
- University required to follow up on graduate destinations after six months of leaving as part of their funding agreement.
- There were two populations at the University: Vocational under-graduates and Academic under-graduates.
- Those completing academic courses were less likely to find employment than those on vocational courses and also more likely to go on to non-graduate level jobs. This trend is more pronounced for those with a disability.
- Students with sensory problems or mental health issues fared worst and wheelchair users were more likely to go on to work part time.
- Commented that students living with Asperger's Syndrome, who can have many talents, often struggle at the first point of the application process.
- Changes are being made to the Disabled Student Allowance and the University are currently looking at the impact of this on disabled students.
- Worcester's Job Centre Plus and the 'signing on' process is a problem.
- Suggestions to help retain talent in the city include:
 - supported work placements and accessibility

- better awareness of unseen disabilities - often not dealt with sensitively.
- Rempoy mentor and support for a number of weeks, but a statutory body needed to refer.
- better joint working between the City Council and the University.

ASPIE – self-help and motivation group for adults with Asperger’s Syndrome. Manager and Trustee of the group.

- Very little support for people with Asperger’s outside of London.
- ASPIE currently has members from ages 17 to 70 and also offer support from an in house counsellor and psychologist.
- A number of areas have started to progress from the Autism Act 2009 including the Worcestershire Autism Strategy.
- Previous conservative estimate of 1/100 people living with some form of Autism had been reviewed at 1/45.
- There is a prevalence of depression among people with Asperger’s leading to greater vulnerability. ASPIE is currently working with the University of Worcester on this issue and early diagnosis is seen as key.
- Consider that Worcestershire County Council would be the body locally best placed to offer greater support for people with disabilities in employment.
- Commented that the Work Choice Scheme (DWP employment programme for disabled people) only ran for 6months, but 46% of people with Asperger’s were no longer in a job after 6months and so support needs to be more long term.
- The biggest challenge is support for interview and recruitment process but cuts to Job Centre Plus’s DEAs (Disability Employment Advisors have resulted in there only being 100 DEAs in the country.
- Suggested that work trials are a better way for a candidate to prove their ability to get a job as many are frightened to disclose at interview.

Job Centre Plus (JCP) - Job Coach

- There are no DEAs in Worcester anymore, but there are three former DEAs who support colleagues.
- Support provided to a number of people over the years who were not in receipt of benefits in terms of signposting.
- When the JCP moves to new premises in July, there will not be private rooms to conduct sessions with disabled jobseekers.
- Support options depend on candidates as individuals and include:
 - Rempoy who can support disabled people in employment over 16 hours
 - National Careers Service
 - Fortis Living – local housing association have been supporting some of their tenants into work
 - Sector Based Work Academies
 - E-response
 - Access to Work – organised by the individual

- Learn Direct who offer interview skills and training
- Mencap
- Noted that jobs are become more demanding, and greater outputs and multi tasking expected which does not always suit people with disabilities.
- JCP has a two Employer Engagement Officers who engage with employers to take on jobseekers. Noted that employers can use ATWS to pay for reasonable adjustments.
- The first phase of Universal Credit is being rolled out in Worcester which will affect single, jobseekers who are non-homeowners. Benefits will be paid monthly and support on budgeting will be given where needed. It will be quicker to re-claim benefits for people who go in and out of short term contract work.

Hewitt Recruitment

- Considered that reasonable adjustments are made but suggested that problems arise when candidates do not declare their special requirements until there are issues later on.
- Most employers use the traditional competency based approach for candidate selection but, in theory, could not see any problems with using other approaches to assess people's abilities.
- Hewitt Recruitment has a wide range of clients and jobs on offer, but were not aware if people with Asperger's in particular would be encouraged or discouraged to use the company.
- Two thirds of temporary employees carry out industrial semi-skilled work whilst the other third are in roles from administration through to Project Management. Permanent placements can be administrators/clerical roles to Managing Director level across all sectors.
- Suggested that employers might not understand issues surrounding mental health and the support available and that these issues were addressed on and ad-hoc basis.
- Not aware of the 'Two Ticks Scheme' but commented that it seemed to have good intentions.
- Stated that 98% of employers in Worcester are Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) who may not have the time and resources to employ / support disabled employees compared to larger companies with dedicated HR departments.

Former disabled jobseeker

- University graduate, but it had taken two years to find a job. Applied for many jobs including under graduate level but struggled to get interviews.
- Despite being given positive feedback from interviews has been rejected for jobs.

- Feels that application forms should enable people to state what their disability is and suggests employers are wrongly frightened to ask practical questions.
- Has been honest about his disability but following rejections decided to be less honest on application forms. This resulted in him being offered more interviews.
- Considered that JCP had been 'useless'. Have to check annually that he still has Cerebral Palsy, despite this being a life long condition. Felt like he had been treated like a 'scrounger' and there was an unwelcoming and aggressive atmosphere. However, he understands that they have a lot of pressures and are very busy.
- Felt that there is a myth amongst employers that reasonable adjustments will be costly, but this was not the case. Suggests that there needs to be more done by employers to remove this misconception.
- Considers that too much emphasis is put on work experience when people actually need proper paid work.
- Current employer employs several disabled people and that stories from employer like his are better evidence than statistics.

Self employed business owner who has visual impairment

- Main problem for disabled people getting in to employment
 - Technology - as it excluded many people who would be better suited to old fashioned model of workshop based work.
 - Getting around and access to transport.
- The following points and ideas were raised:
 - Feels large employers such as NHS are not good employers of disabled people
 - Small/Medium companies are better at employing disabled people
 - Important to educate employers to overcome the fear of employing disabled people and that workshops should be run to overcome this
 - More needs to be done to encourage disabled people to be more confident and positive
 - Awareness- Access to Work have done road shows in the past
 - Work Choice- sceptical that some organisations are using this to generate income and moving disabled people around from place to place
 - Educate individuals – Mentors for self employment are not self employed themselves
 - Charity shops supporting disabled people are not employing disabled people on a paid basis
 - Multi-disciplinary hub for disabled self employed people
 - Bring business back to the more accessible city centre
 - More 'old fashioned' supported workshop style work

Feedback from other contributors

MP for Worcester

- In the process of organising a Disability Confident event at the Guildhall during April to promote more opportunities for employers to take on disabled people and help more disabled people to find work.
- In role of MP regularly engages with disability charities and organisations, and businesses who have positive experience of working with people with specific conditions.
- Welcomes the strong interest from the University of Worcester and commends their work to promote disability sport in Worcester which can make an important contribution to employment prospects for disabled people.
- Supports Justin Tomlinson's objective of doubling the rate of disability employment
- Issues of the challenges affecting people with disabilities in finding work have come up at a number of surgeries over the years so keen to support more local action to improve the situation.
- With the overall unemployment rate at the lowest it has ever been in the city there is a real opportunity to focus on and bring down unemployment for people with disabilities.

Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust -Mental Health – Vocation

- One of the main challenges for people with disabilities is lack of experience and having nothing to put on a CV. Also, there is the general stigma surrounding mental health issues.
- NHS provide a service called individual placement support to help clients into work and to maintain work. The Trust also try to "lead by example" offering work experience and paid placements itself.
- Support for disabled people to gain employment includes the Trust Individual Placement and Support service. Job Retention workers are also just about to be employed.
- Initiatives include *Work Choice* and *Access to Work*.
- NHS services offer support to employers of clients including reasonable adjustments and information to employers in the work place. Also sign posts employers to "The Mindful Employer."
- Would be keen on the City Council getting involved in the 'Exemplary Employer Scheme'.

Speak Easy N.O.W

- Barriers:

- Need for 'job carving' e.g. three people with learning disabilities may be able to do parts of a job. Employers need to take into consideration individual's skills.
- People with learning disabilities need support to help them to settle in at work. Employers could offer a buddying service.
- Loss of benefits. Once people with disabilities come off benefits it is difficult to get them back.
- Opportunities: for people with learning disabilities it is about being given a chance to prove that they can do a good job. For employer it is about education to understand the difficulties that disabled people face every day.
- Available support
 - Employment Opportunities group and an employment skills course for all disabilities run by HOW college in Worcester-
 - Micro Enterprise initiative supporting people to start up their own small enterprises.
- Jobs for disabled people tend to be lower skilled, e.g. cleaning and catering.
- There is a need for more ongoing support for people with learning disabilities once they get work.

Worcestershire County Council - Equalities

- The range of conditions which can be considered as a disability is much broader than many people realise.
- For consideration:
 - Agreed procedure regarding disability
 - Information / statistics for staff to include disability
 - Proactively publicising support for staff who have a disability
 - staff review and development include specific consideration of sufficiency of reasonable adjustments and other possible disability-related matters
 - accessibility of software applications
 - disability awareness training
- Potential barriers to recruitment could include:
 - Accessibility/usability of sites on which posts are advertised
 - Inclusion of requirements which are not always essential (and can be difficult for some disability groups to meet)
 - Difficulty in completing online applications (especially where no spell-check option to support dyslexic applicants)
 - Lack of experience (because harder to gain experience where unemployed over a period of time – this becomes self-perpetuating)
 - Failure to apply Two Ticks scheme correctly in shortlisting disabled applicants for interview
 - Interview process which may (or may not) bring out the best in applicants, particularly those who are on the Autistic Spectrum or have anxiety-related conditions.