

Embracing Diversity

EMPLOYER FORUM ON DIVERSITY

Minutes of the Employer Forum Meeting Held on 12 January 2005 at the Bolholt Hotel, Walshaw, Bury

Present

Nigel	Barlow	Edric Audio Visual	Steve	Mason	Bury Metropolitan Police
Fred	Bowen	Bury EST	Nicola	Moss	Manchester Enterprises
Terry	Crosby	Youth Offending Team	Fran	Naylor-Oakes	Bury EST
Gerrard	Curran	Chamber Link	Marie	Nicholson	Jobcentre Plus
Sheila	Deighton	Mcr. Coalition for Employment	Emma	Ostridge	NHS Pennine Care
Boyd	Farrar	Heathlands	Pauline	Parrett	PACE
Barbara	Forber	Inland Revenue	Graham	Parry	Cormar Carpets
Paul	Foster	Gtr. Mcr. Chamber of Commerce	Sue	Pearson	Bury EST
Ingrid	Hitchon	Molygran Ltd	Tim	Quirk	Co-operative Financial Services
Karen	Holness	Royal Air Force	Peter	Rabbits	ACAS
Wendy	Holt	Ambers Attic	Lynda	Smethurst	Bury EST
Janice	Howarth	Bury College	Graham	Smyth	Youth Offending Team
Sandra	Hughes	Chamber Link	Phil	Sutton	Bury EST
Clive	Hughes	Forest Bank Prison	Chris	Trees	Philips High School
Preston	Hulse	Probation service	Beverley	Unsworth	Cameron House
Elizabeth	Irwanina	Mcr. Ent. Equal	Andy	Walkden	Bury MBC
Susan	James	Forest Bank	Catherine	Wall	Bury EST
Michelle	Lomax	PACE	Carol	Watts	Inland Revenue

Apologies

Zerqa	Ahmed	Bury EST	Victoria	Proudlock	Manchester United
Joanne	Alcock	Village Hotels	Stuart	Reich	BCR Chemicals
Diane	Atkins	Asda Stores	Bill	Robinson	Armed Forces Careers
Julie	Bramley	Mayflower Hospitals	Lee	Salad	Bury EST
Jonathan	Butterworth	Bolholt Hotel	Caroline	Schofield	Bury MBC
Kerry	Cameron	McDonalds	Cath	Slater	NCH Extra Mile
Sue	Chambers	Jobcentre Plus	Joan	Smith	Unsworth Medical Centre
Patrick	Connellon	Cormar Carpets	Alison	Todd	Bury College
Huw	Davies	Bury EST	Holly	Wallace	Ambers Attic
Phil	Emott	Bury PC Trust	Steven	Walters	Metrolink
Cath	Hignett	NHS Trust	Peter	Weidenbaum	Trumeter Ltd
Alicja	Kinsey	Senior Hargreaves	Anthony	Wharton	Archlight Bending
Mike	Mooney	First Buses	Carol	Woodhams	Mcr. Met. University
Edwin	Partridge	Holts Brewery			

Embracing Diversity

MINUTES

1. WELCOME TO MEMBERS

Fred Bowen welcomed members, new members and invited guests to the meeting. Several apologies had been received some at the last minute and Fred apologised for the brief delay to today's meeting he had been expecting some late arrivals. Apologies had been received from Bury EST staff Huw Davies, Lee Salad and Zerqa Ahmed.

2. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING

Fred asked for approval for the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 13 October 2004. These minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

The Bury EST 'Employers Pack' was now nearing completion. Fred explained that due to the detail of the inclusions it had taken much more time to prepare than was originally envisaged and apologised for this unfortunate delay. A draft of the pack would be sent to forum members along with a feedback sheet for comments and suggestions for additions etc. There were no further matters arising from the minutes.

4. PROJECT PROGRESS TO DATE

Funding Update

There had been no change to the funding position at Bury EST and the situation remained the same that a number of jobs were at risk when the current Equal funding comes to an end in May 2005. Huw was still actively seeking funding from all possible options and was currently working on a bid in partnership with Bury Council and Jobcentre Plus. The situation had been notified to the North West Development Agency but up to date there had been no response. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce had also recently been informed and the subject was awaiting further discussion.

5. Recruitment and selection workshop meeting 24 November 2004

A workshop had been held at the Bolholt for clients from Bury EST and the employer forum members. This workshop attracted a large number of employers who were invited to work with a representative number of clients to listen to the findings of the client focus groups facilitated by Bury EST teams. This was followed by a number of sessions to consider and make recommendations on how the identified barriers to gaining employment could be resolved. A full report on the findings and outcomes of the workshop has been mailed to all delegates and forum members. This had been the first time that the clients and employers had been given the opportunity to work together and the feedback had been very positive with the employers requesting further opportunities to meet with the clients. This would be considered for future meetings and arrangements for a further workshop could be discussed and arranged.

Embracing Diversity

6. Reflection

To recap on the subjects covered by the business of the forum in 2003/4, discussions had covered Age, Race, Gender, Disability, Youth, Retention and Work-life balance, Drug and Alcohol. Representatives from the Government Commissions had attended and presented at the meetings. Add to this the recent workshop on recruitment and retention and it was clear that a wide range of subjects had been covered, not particularly restricting the business of the forum to a Bury EST agenda.

It had become obvious that the model of supported employment could be transferred to many other disadvantaged groups that are not currently covered by Bury EST. Today's meeting subject, Ex-Offenders, was a prime example of one area that could be considered if the funding was available to offer this service.

Employing ex-offenders is a concern for many employers, as is understanding and meeting the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, and knowing the support that is available to employers and ex-offenders. There was evidence that proved that where offenders had been able to gain employment, especially immediately following institution release that they were less likely to offend. To address some concerns and explain the services available several representatives had been invited to attend this meeting. Speakers today included the probation service, the youth offending team and ACAS.

7. Youth Offending Team – Graham Smyth (Manager) and Terry Crosby (Mentor worker)

Graham Smyth: The Youth Offending team are working with the age group 10-17 years in partnership with the Education, Police, and Probation services to name but a few. The work starts with youngsters at risk and includes people who have been in custody for offending. There are of course certain factors which put people at risk for example, family issues, substance misuse, lack of employment and their attitude to employment. Graham stated that there are lots of opportunity for employment in Bury for young people of employment age but if you add to this the number of ex-offenders trying to find a job it becomes obvious that this places the ex-offender at a disadvantage giving them less chances to find work.

Graham went on to explain that there are some schemes that have supported ex-offenders to access employment. Bury Metro have the Community Safety Warden project that recruits wardens to work throughout the Borough Towns. This project was being managed by Ged McGee and two ex-offenders had gained employment for fixed terms of 12 months. These employees were now into their fourth month of employment. One of the main factors of success here had been keeping the individuals in employment and out of trouble.

- ① **Graham Smyth, Youth Offending Team manager, Seedfield Resource Centre, Parkinson Street, Bury BL9 6NY. Tel: 0161 253 6862**

Embracing Diversity

Terry Crosby: Graham Smyth felt that there would be some added value for members in hearing from one of his mentor colleagues who works with the individuals on a one to one basis and he invited Terry Crosby to talk at this meeting.

Terry spoke of his experience in dealing with young people and expressed a need for dedicated support and help coupled with equal treatment. One mistake should not mean that young offenders are punished for life; in many cases they just need a chance. Terry reminded members of the mistakes that we have all been guilty of in our lives many of which we had not been found out for. He went on to reflect on the example used by Graham in reference to the Safety Wardens project and noted that while employers may be cautious this project has certainly set a standard for other employers.

Terry highlighted that the main problem for young offenders was time off work. This is where the role of the learning mentor can prove to be most effective in getting them back on track, keeping them on track and support for the employer. To support some of this work there was the ISSP (Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme). Employers are more sceptical about employing young people with a criminal history but we must provide adequate support to the employer as well as the offender.

① 'The Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) is the most rigorous noncustodial intervention available for young offenders. It combines intensive community-based surveillance with a comprehensive and sustained focus on tackling the factors that contribute to the young person's offending behaviour. Where an ISSP is used, it must meet the following standards and be delivered in line with the Youth Justice Board's Key Elements of Effective Practice. Most offenders will spend six months on ISSP. The most intensive supervision (a minimum of 25 hours per week) will last for the first three months of the programme. Following this, the supervision will continue at a reduced intensity (a minimum of five hours per week) for a further three months. On completion of ISSP the offender will continue to be supervised for the remaining period of their order.'

(Source: National Standards for Youth Justice Services 2004 (B16))

www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk

① Terry Crosby, (Mentor) Youth Offending Team, Seedfield Resource Centre, Parkinson Street, Bury BL9 6NY. Tel: 0161 253 6862

8. Bury Probation Service – Preston Hulse (Senior Probation Officer)

Preston went on to describe the role of the Probation Service. They deal with a wide age group with the majority being 21 years and over and that whilst this service is still referred to as the probation service there were plans to change the name of the service to the 'National Offender Management System'

The aims and objectives of the service are to protect the public and reduce re-offending by supervising effectively.

Embracing Diversity

Employment, drugs and alcohol are all contributing factors and as was stated earlier employment does provide stability. Community Service is geared to providing work in which an offender can gain specific job skills to help them in their search for employment. Basic skills assessment is automatically provided for all prison leavers by the probation service.

Preston drew attention to the fact that the probation service links with employers had become weaker and it is essential to strengthen and develop an effective dialogue and working arrangement with employers. Historically there had been a problem with getting clients to move into employment and there is a need for a supported environment for them. There is a will to work and due to the problems associated with getting into the labour market many clients tend to take casual work.

‘Work builds peoples confidence, providing a focus and everybody benefits’.

① **Preston Hulse, Senior Probation Officer, Bury Probation Office, Argyle House, Castlecroft Court, Castlecroft Road, Bury BL9 0LN. Tel: 0161 764 9514**

Sheila Deighton (Manchester Coalition for Employment)

Commented – she is working with Hindley prison, they hold employer open days where employers are given the opportunity to meet with prisoners who are due to be released and will be looking for jobs. These open days help to break down the barriers. Employers also have the chance to see the training that prisoners receive – many are qualified people.

Susan James (HMP Forest Bank- Employment Advocacy Worker)

Commented that she could also arrange visits for employers to the prison. Susan also reminded employers that they could already be employing ex-offenders: not everyone has to declare.

Steve Mason (Greater Manchester Police, HR Divisional manager)

Commented that these are excellent opportunities that should be built on.

9. ACAS (Assoc. for Conciliation and Arbitration) – Peter Rabbitts

Peter had been invited to speak about the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. Although it was not a subject he was familiar with he had taken the time to research the act and prepare a presentation for this meeting. This act was currently under review and its main focus was on good practice.

Peter went on to state that we live in a litigious society where the employer can be held responsible for the activities of his employees. There must also be an opportunity in the workplace for people to re-build their lives.

Peter advised members that it would be best practice to look at their recruitment process and focus on the central aims. In particular, it is important when employing ex-offenders to beware of the working environment they will be expected to work in. Identify the potential risks and ensure that these are managed effectively. Unfortunately stereotyping of offenders gets in the way of employers taking them on.

Embracing Diversity

Every sentence imposed has a rehabilitation period attached after which a conviction is 'spent'. Sentences of over 2.5 yrs are never spent and have to be disclosed.

There were exceptions to the act and it did not apply to certain groups for instance, national security, vulnerable groups, lawyers, police, doctors, nurses and dentists.

The 1997 Police Act had introduced a system to verify disclosed convictions. As an employer you can now verify a person's admission of an offence.

The 'Basic' disclosure shows all unspent convictions and is open to individuals as well as employers and organisations, however this is not operating yet.

The 'Standard' disclosure will show all spent and unspent as well as cautions.

The 'Enhanced Disclosure will show all spent and unspent convictions, cautions and will include previous and current investigations that have not necessarily led to convictions. This disclosure is important for the care industry, education and those involved in the supervision of vulnerable groups. The enhanced disclosure is applied for by the individual and countersigned by the employer who needs the information to progress to the offer of employment.

Peter highlighted some 'good practice' points that had been published by CIPD

(Please refer to the presentation enclosed with this pack)

① Peter Rabbitts, ACAS, Soho Foundry, Sicely lane, Blackburn, BB1 1HQ. Tel:01254 689 236

email: prabbitts@acas.org.uk

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Fred reminded members that a draft of the employer pack would be sent out soon accompanied by a feedback sheet. He said he would value some feedback regarding the change of venue and suggestions for future forum subjects.

Fred thanked all members and speakers for their attendance and valued input and support.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 10.45 am.

11. THE DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEEING

The next forum meeting will be held on Wednesday, 13 April 2005. This will be a breakfast meeting with an 8.30 am tea, coffee and breakfast snack service and a meeting start of 9.00 am.

The meeting will be held in the Hayloft Suite at the Stables Leisure Centre, Bolholt Hotel, Walshaw Road, Walshaw, Bury.