



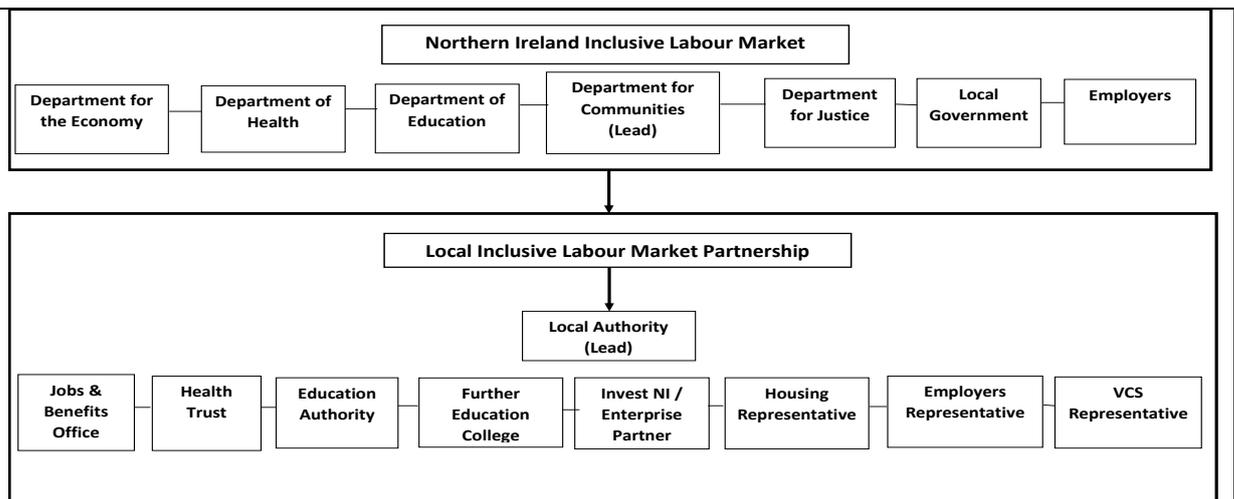
Subject:	Employability NI – update and proposed way forward
Date:	11 November 2020
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update the Committee on DfC’s Employability NI initiative• Detail the specific proposals around Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships (LILMPs) and update on engagement with DfC about how these might work in Belfast• Secure approval to move forward along the lines agreed with DfC in order to bring forward the partnership in Belfast.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the update on Employability NI

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to move forward with DfC as set out within the paper, taking an incremental approach to establishing the Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnership and prioritising key elements of activity.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Employability NI is DfC's new approach to providing support services for unemployed individuals seeking to get back into to work. Rather than a stand-alone programme, it is a series of interventions that will evolve over time, as legacy programmes (such as Steps to Success and Access to Work) come to an end. It is intended to be a cross governmental approach to co-designing and co-commissioning (including with local government potentially) a sustainable future strategic employment offer which provides a tailored level of support proportionate to need. It has been designed in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a reduction in economic inactivity and long-term unemployment to bring NI closer in line with UK rates • Provide increased support for those with health conditions (esp. mental health) and disabilities • Create a mechanism for government to collaborate with Councils and other Departments to offer local solutions.
3.2	<p>Since 2018, council officers have been part of the Employability NI Programme Board. The Board's work has been on hold since early 2020 but, by that point, there had been broad agreement on the substantive programme elements.</p>
3.3	<p>One of the key elements of the programme design was the proposal to create "Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships" in each council area. They were intended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership and lead on the integration of services • Develop local area plans including setting targets for performance • Manage devolved funding and its delivery through a dynamic purchasing framework • Manage arrangements for the evaluation of local interventions.
3.4	<p>The proposed composition of the partnership and its structure is set out below.</p>



3.5 While DfC's original intention was to go live with the new approach from October 2020, COVID-19 has set their programme back to some extent. They are still finalising the work on the Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships, with a view to having these operational in each council area at some point in the coming financial year. However, following a series of engagements with officers in Belfast City Council's Economic Development team, DfC has agreed in principle to move forward with establishing a labour market partnership in Belfast as a precursor to the roll-out across the region. At present, officers are finalising details but it is likely to involve an incremental approach, progressing from oversight of existing and new interventions (including their new "Work Ready Citizens" programme which has just been put out to tender with a closing date of mid-November and which has been divided into 11 sub-contracts, along district council lines) towards a more active role, with the council taking on the task of local convenor of a partnership approach to employability interventions in Belfast.

3.6 The advantages to working with DfC on Employability NI include:

- Ability to target employability interventions in line with need, ensuring a more inclusive approach to economic growth
- Enhanced level of insights on the localised nature of employability and inactivity challenges – and ability to tailor resources in line with need
- A more responsive series of employability interventions – with enhanced progression and employment outcomes for those engaging in the activity
- The potential to move towards a more formal strategic leadership role for councils in this area of work – as is the case in most other EU countries.

3.7

There are a number of key differences between DfC's current way of working and the proposed approach under Employability NI. With specific regard to the Belfast Agenda and the Inclusive Growth commitments, the following are important to note:

- The programme will involve voluntary participation rather than mandatory engagement. This builds on the learning from many of the community-based providers and European Social Fund (ESF) projects. It will be reliant on building a trusted network of referral points and creating a seamless approach to engaging with individuals who often present with very complex needs
- The Department has been very clear in its commitment to focus on the long-term unemployed and economically inactive. This is a huge challenge in Belfast and the scale of the problem here is more significant than in most other council areas. The Inclusive Growth strategy currently identifies four target groups – one of whom is the economically inactive. This challenge is going to be even more significant in a post-COVID economy – where jobs numbers are significantly reduced
- The preferred delivery model is based on local management of programme delivery, with local defined as each of the local authority boundaries. The rationale for this approach is to ensure that programme delivery is reflective of local area needs from a participant and employer perspective. This should provide us with a much more granular data set on who the LTU/economically inactive are, where they live, what the associated social issues are and what the implications for service delivery (for us and other partners) might be. There may also be an opportunity to re-focus this data and agree our indicators for economic inactivity as part of the work on our stretch goals for the next four year period of the Belfast Agenda
- Given the reasons behind our economic inactivity problem in Belfast, it is likely that there will be a significant focus on health-related economic inactivity. This will require a much better way of working with the Health Trust and other health partners
- There is currently a significant volume of local delivery through community and voluntary organisations, many of whom are delivering European Social Fund (ESF) activity. There is still some lack of clarity regarding the future focus of the Shared Prosperity Fund but it will be important to consider the implications of any reduction in local delivery
- The Department's proposal is that the delivery model will involve a mix of statutory and community/voluntary based provision. However the critical element will be to consider how it can be outcomes-based (i.e. progressing in training/towards or into employment) while focusing on what is right for the individual. Given the range of organisations that

are likely to be involved in delivery of this service, there are likely to be some challenges in getting this right.

Proposed approach

3.8 Based on our recent engagement with DfC – and taking account of the pressing nature of the unemployment challenge – officers consider that the best way forward on this is to:

- Mobilise the partnership quickly with a focus on the new Work Ready Citizens contract (currently out to market)
- Engage with DfC and QUB on the underpinning labour market intelligence (LMI) that will drive the work of the partners, particularly the linkages between employment/unemployment and deprivation as well as barriers to accessing a job (e.g. childcare, skills). Develop rich sources of intelligence that will drive delivery and focus resources
- Engage the key anchor institutions to understand likely demand (particularly Belfast Trust and Belfast Harbour) and to develop targeted interventions, focusing particularly on LTU/economically inactive
- Explore how council interventions can add value to the DfC offer – particularly the Employment Academies model which is extending into new areas (including transport and logistics) and exploring emerging areas of work (including sustainable construction and technology)
- Co-design interventions that can help move people back into work as quickly as possible – this will be particularly important for the “new unemployed”
- Review the progress of specific interventions regularly to understand what is working and to share insights with partners.

3.9 In addition to the Local Labour Market Partnerships, the Department for the Economy (DfE) is currently exploring the potential of establishing “local skills forums”, as part of their new skills strategy. This is set to go to consultation in early 2021, with implementation planned from Autumn 2021. There are clearly synergies between employability and skills. However we are aware that DfE is further behind DfC on progressing their local governance approaches and, for that reason, officers are proposing to move forward with the employability approaches for now and consider how these can be brought together down the line – once we have had a chance to demonstrate the value of local approaches.

3.10 In our engagement with DfC, we have underlined how this work is wholly consistent with the Community Planning approach and is a good example of developing a partnership approach

	<p>to address an entrenched challenge that requires input across a range of organisations. As part of the work to look at the existing Community Planning structures, we have been working closely with the Strategic Hub to consider how Employability NI can align to any proposed revision of the Community Planning Partnership and the respective Boards. The Deputy Secretary from DfC presented an update on Employability NI at the 27 October meeting of the Community Planning Partnership.</p> <p><u>Financial and resource implications</u></p>
3.11	<p>No specific additional financial contribution required from council at this point. It is expected that we will make available our initiatives such as Employment Academies as part of the solution to create employment opportunities in key sectors.</p>
3.12	<p>DfC have indicated that they will be willing to consider resource support for the management and administration of the partnerships. Details of support available are currently being finalised. In the interim, we are working to refocus existing staff resources to support this important programme of delivery, pending a wider review of resources.</p> <p><u>Equality implications/rural needs assessment</u></p>
3.13	<p>One of the key advantages of this approach is that it will enable us to target resources on specific groups, including those with particular access issues and barriers that currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities.</p>
3.14	<p>DfC proposes to establish Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships in all council areas in the course of the coming financial year.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None.