

BUSINESS CASE

Learning disability supported employment re-procurement – PART I



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supported employment is a vital intervention for people with learning disabilities. Supported employment refers to the intervention offered to people with disabilities, including learning disabilities, mental health, and traumatic brain injury, to help with obtaining and maintaining paid employment. Supported employment is not a statutory duty, but all local authorities are monitored on their progress in enabling people with learning disabilities into employment.

National policies, such as Valuing People, have underscored the significance of supported employment in effecting positive change. It has been a successful model for securing and maintaining paid employment, extending its benefits to various disadvantaged groups.

The current supported employment service, provided by Seetec Pluss has been in place for approximately 20 years and, employs the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE) pathway. Key functions include an employment bureau, work experience placements, prioritization of jobs, and employer liaison. Pluss operates on 50 places per week, mainly for individuals with learning disabilities but also for those with mental health conditions and autism.

Feedback from service users has been positive, emphasising the value of receiving assistance in job seeking and skill development. However, challenges in securing paid employment for people with learning disabilities are evident. The focus is primarily on securing jobs exceeding 16 hours, with work experience placements also monitored.

This business case recommends the use of a competitive dialogue approach for the re-commissioning of the learning disability supported employment service. The approach involves planning, advertising, dialogue, final tenders, and contract award stages. It is based on an options appraisal that considers statutory duties, system drivers, council drivers, revenue cost, user benefit, ability to deliver, risk, timescale, and future needs.

The process is designed to allow for discussions and negotiations to shape the new service effectively:

- Risks, such as the quality-of-service providers, financial budget constraints, user knowledge, system/partner improvements, reputation, and time, have been identified.
- Mitigations include building BASE accreditation requirements, introducing a competitive dialogue process, and revising service specifications.
- Anticipated outcomes and benefits include cost avoidance, improved paid employment outcomes, increased user satisfaction, system/partner efficiency benefits, and enhanced partnership working.

In summary, the proposal advocates for the re-commissioning of the learning disability supported employment service through a competitive dialogue process, considering various factors and anticipating positive outcomes and benefits.

Recommendations

This business case contains the following recommendations:

- The contract with the incumbent provider is extended to cover the agreement of the business case through the full democratic process and subsequent procurement exercise.
- The service is procured using a competitive dialogue - option 2.
- The proposed budget for the supported employment contract is £195,974 per annum. It is proposed that the new service is for a contract length of 9 years (with all agreed extensions being agreed).
- The total spend for a 9-year contract (3 + 2 + 2 + 2) is £ 1,763,766.

I. INTRODUCTION

The value of supported employment as a positive tool to achieve positive change in the lives of people with learning disabilities has been underpinned by National Policy (Valuing People, Valuing People Now, Valuing Employment) which influenced changes to how supported employment, day centres and preparing for adulthood were commissioned.

Supported Employment has been successfully used for decades as a model to secure and retain paid employment. The model uses a partnership strategy to enable people with disabilities to achieve sustainable long-term employment and businesses to employ valuable workers. Increasingly, supported employment techniques are being used to support other disadvantaged groups such as young people leaving care, ex-offenders and people recovering from drug and alcohol misuse.

The numbers of people with learning disabilities in employment remain very low as a percentage of the population – an average of 5.1% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work (NHS Digital, 2021). The level of learning disability employment has been affected by the impact of the global pandemic in 2020.

The proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment varies by region. the Southeast (6.6%) have the highest proportion of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in paid employment, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber (6.3%; NHS Digital 2020). The Southwest is at 5.3%.

In England, a higher proportion of men with a learning disability known to their local authority (6.2%) are in paid employment than women with a learning disability known to their local authority (4.8%; NHS Digital 2020). Mencap.

Research has shown us that the commissioning of high quality, outcome-focused supported employment for people with learning disabilities can bring significant financial savings to local authorities and directly improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities.

Research studies in Kent and Gloucestershire

Research studies have evidenced the value for money of supported employment schemes, with opportunities for further development and savings generated by :

- * Obtaining more full-time jobs for those not in receipt of day services and/or are unknown to social services.
- * Developing a greater focus on those who are dependent on local day services prior to obtaining a job.

In Gloucestershire savings were evidenced returning £1.17 to the LA for every £1 it spent on the supported employment service.

https://www.base-uk.org/sites/default/files/knowledge/Gloucestershire%20Cost-Benefit%20analysis/cba_final_draft_ap_2015-2.pdf

The study from Kent identified even greater savings than originally identified. Indications pointed to average annual savings of £1290 to the council and over £3500 to the taxpayer for every person in work. The study considered changes to welfare benefit entitlements, the cost of services received and tax and national insurance payments before and after employment.

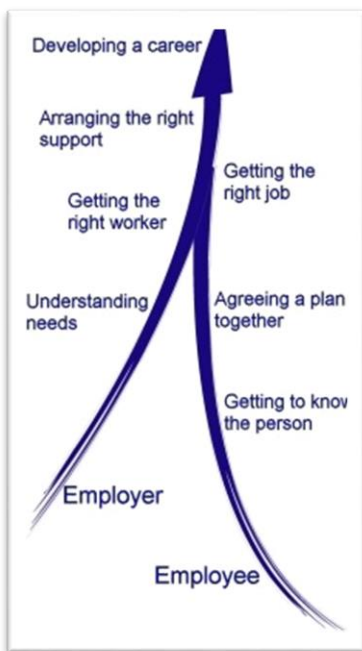
https://www.base-uk.org/sites/default/files/%5Buser-raw%5D/11-06/kentcba_-_final_sept2011.pdf

2. CURRENT SERVICE OFFER

The current supported employment service is provided by Seetec Pluss, a specialist social enterprise who supply work and wellbeing services across the country.

Support for people with learning disabilities to obtain paid employment is based on the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE) pathway , using the “Place & Train” model please see below. This is widely recognised as the most effective model for the delivery of supported employment.

Figure 1: BASE Supported employment pathway



The key functions of the Seetec Pluss (Pluss) supported employment service are as follows below:

- Employment bureau –completing work and employment-based assessment for each person referred to the service. This service will also map out training and support needs, Referrals can come from many routes including schools, colleges, direct from the individual and or their family, social care and the Department of Work and Pensions
- Delivery for people aged 18+,
- Programme of time limited work experience placements,
- Prioritisation of 16 hour+ jobs for people with learning disabilities, autism, and mental health conditions in the city,
- Supported & supported permitted work (paid employment), at or above the minimum wage, to include less than 16 hours per week,
- Employer liaison, engagement & promotion of paid work for people with learning disabilities.

All of the above services can be delivered within community hub locations across the city, as and when required.

Plus currently operates on 50 places per week within the service and delivers this predominately to people with learning disabilities, but also includes with the scope of their service when required people with mental health conditions and or autism.

3. CASE FOR CHANGE

Within the forthcoming procurement options, we would like to review and consider up to date best practice, changes and reviews proposed by industry leaders. This includes retaining the accepted best practice in the model for supported employment that works, but also build in and reflect on any change requested or evidenced during the period before and after the pandemic.

1. The “Place and train” model that was designed by BASE has long been held up as a model of best practice for supported employment and was endorsed by Valuing People Now. Any new service design going forward will still be based on the Place and Train model.

<https://www.base-uk.org/about-supported-employment>

BASE is using a short version of the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) to audit the model fidelity of Supported Employment services. There is growing pressure from employers and commissioners for employment services to demonstrate their quality in an independent and transparent way. This quality accreditation aims to provide that assurance.

It is proposed that any new supplier for supported employment should have or be working towards the SEQF.

2. The “Employers Guide to Supported Employment” (NDTi 2019) concentrated on NHS as an employer around employing people with a mental health condition, a learning disability and / or autism. This guide gave some very helpful areas to focus on:
 - The importance of recruitment, selection, and retention
 - Implementing reasonable adjustments
 - Ensuring that all staff understand the social model of disability and the concept of disability equality, and this is embedded within an employer’s equality and diversity policy.

- An emphasis on providing disability awareness training and guidance for staff based on the social model disability and the legislation.
 - Appropriate recruitment training and guidance is provided to those involved in recruitment process and in developing HR guidance.
 - Strength-based approach to managing staff to build on skills and meet business needs.
3. Mencap’s “Employ Me” programme and guidance are focussed on low level support for employers, reasonable adjustments, training, and awareness for staff.
4. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) “Inclusive recruitment: Guide for employers” 2022 includes the requirement for employers to lay out their plans for equality in an inclusion policy, proper and consistent use of reasonable adjustments, the positive use of pre-employment medical questionnaires, and support for managers to challenge stereotypical thinking,

Disability confident and CIPD – “Recruiting, managing, and developing people with a disability or health condition” (2020) concentrated on key advice for organisations about the whole process of employing and retaining people with disabilities.

We know from feedback that there are areas of the service that need to be adjusted:

Feedback from service users

- “More training – need more to get a job- on shop floor/till training.
- They need to find a job that would match at least/almost match your idea.
- More work experience.
- Telling me a lot of things about found jobs that they never told me about before. It’s a lot to take in because it makes me feel very uncomfortable.
- Be able to move on to get more people jobs.
- Local jobs, people need wages.”

Feedback from staff, professionals, and employers

- “We need to be using distance travelled tools so we can measure more effectively how far people have come.
- We need to be using up to date technology to make work easier.
- Be more streamlined – everyone can input and access information.
- Use BASE model creatively without putting off employers.”
- Individual marketing - Employers don’t come to Pluss with vacancies?

Conclusion and recommendations

- Continue to commission using the “Place and Train” model for future supported employment services.
- To build into future commissioning the requirement for suppliers to hold the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) and link with key local partnerships such as Skills Launchpad and Caring Plymouth
- To increase the provision of training for job seekers on the job, whenever required.
- Within a future commissioned service, to increase the level of guidance and support available for employers around reasonable adjustments, recruitment, and retention.

- To build into new service specifications the requirement for the provider to offer training courses for employers and organisations to support the learning disability paid employment.
- To set clear expectations around efficient service delivery using digital solutions in all aspects of how the supported employment service is run.
- To review data collection methods with the local authority and partners to find the best method that will improve accuracy around the recording of the number of people with learning disabilities in paid employment.
- Review and share access criteria for learning disability employment, to ensure that eligibility for support is correctly deployed, to also ensure that pathways are mainstream and do not bring people into adult social care if this is not required.

3.1 National Drivers

The following national strategic drivers support the recommissioning of learning disability supported employment services:

- **Valuing People (2001) and Valuing People Now (2008)** – National strategy frameworks for learning disability services.
[Valuing People - A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- **Valuing Employment 2009:** national strategy to raising the expectations of people with disabilities, their families, and professionals about paid employment, improve the transition from education to employment, include people with severe and/or complex disabilities and introduce quality standards for supported employment.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2009/179/pdfs/ukia_20090179_en.pdf
- **ASCOF measure 1E:** Proportion of adults with learning disabilities in paid employment.
- **Public Services (Social Value) Act (2012):** To consider how the services the local authority commissions and procures might improve the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of the Plymouth area.
- **Equality Act (2010) – Public Sector Equality Duty:** To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people, to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- **Improving Lives (2017): Department for Work and Pensions** - plans to transform employment prospects for disabled people and those with long term health conditions over the next 10 years.

3.2 Plymouth System Drivers

The following **partners' strategies and plans** must also support the procurement of supported employment:

- **Devon ICB** - aim is “to improve people’s lives in Devon – wherever they live – to reduce health inequalities and make sure we can deliver these services for the long term. 5-year joint forward plan - Varied education, training and employment opportunities, workforce availability and wellbeing”.

- **Livewell Southwest Community Interest Company** - mission is to support people to lead independent, health lives in the place, and the community in which they live.

3.3 Plymouth City Council Drivers

The following **council strategies and plans** must also support the procurement of supported employment :

- **Skills Launchpad Plymouth** - Skills Launchpad Plymouth – the city’s one-stop-shop for skills, training, education, careers, and jobs
- **Local offer to Care Leavers**
- **Working together to improve employability skills**
- **Plymouth’s SEND employment forum and SEND Innovation programme**
- Plymouth’s **Go Green Campaign** is a key driver for our procurements, with the goal for the city to be net zero carbon by 2030. This includes sustainable procurement and driving innovations to create change across the city.
- **Corporate Plan** – Green investment, jobs, skills, and better education

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is proposed that this contract is let with a budget for the whole service rather than a quote for per person or place. A long contract length (3 initial years with an option to extend for a further 6 years, in increments of 2 years) would be more favourable to the market to offer longer term sustainability for the provider, with the ability to draw down other funding streams which complement the service area.

| Budget – year | Amount |
|--|--|
| The budget for the Pluss supported employment contract 2023/24 | £195,974 |
| 3-year contract figure | £587,922 |
| + 2 + 2 + 2 addition option to extend | £1,175,844 (£391,948 per 2-year extension) |
| Total final figure for 9-year service | £1,763,766 |

6.1 RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

Table 8: risk and mitigation

| Risk | Risk Score | | | Mitigation | Revised Risk Score | | |
|---|------------------|--------------|--------------|---|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Likelihood (1-5) | Impact (1-5) | RAG (1 – 25) | | Likelihood (1-5) | Impact (1-5) | RAG (1 – 25) |
| Quality of Service Providers tendering for services that are untested | 4 | 4 | 16 | Build into specification requirement to hold BASE accreditation | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Financial Budget to deliver service and level of growth built in | 3 | 2 | 6 | Length of contract 3 + 2 + 2 +2 builds in sustainability. Supplier questionnaire to test supplier performance on bringing in new business and other contracts related to supported employment. | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| User Level of knowledge about the service for users and their families – especially in the light of the proposed changes to benefits | 3 | 3 | 9 | Specification revision to include better communication and information being shared . | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| System / Partners Best practice and guidance require changes to how services are operated, with no additional funding | 4 | 3 | 12 | New procurement model being proposed to build in a competitive dialogue process to seek solutions to issues and problems in a sustainable way and links with Skills Launchpad and Caring Plymouth | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Reputation Local authorities are measured around the number of people with learning disabilities who are in paid employment. The number is inaccurate due to reporting and accuracy issues | 5 | 2 | 10 | Specification and new access criteria to build in requirement with PCC data systems to collect and manage access | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Time Suppliers are delivering more complex services where digital recording of cases, outcomes and | 4 | 2 | 8 | Use competitive dialogue process to work out solutions to deliver | 2 | 2 | 4 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|----|--|---|---|---|
| employer engagement need to be held within "live" data systems | | | | technical changes expected in service delivery | | | |
| Procurement – challenging expectations for service delivery against available budgets, need to ensure service is deliverable & look for different approach to deliver this. | 4 | 3 | 12 | Use competitive dialogue process to work out solutions to deliver required changes within the service. | 2 | 2 | 4 |

6.2 OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

Table 9: outcomes and benefits

| Strategic Outcome | Benefit Description | Benefit Category |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Cost Avoidance | By delivering an outcome focused supported employment service, we will increase the number of people with learning disabilities moving into paid employment and not using social care services. | Invest to save, we avoid spending and improve independence and quality of life by making the change. |
| User Improvements | Revised service specification will deliver improved paid employment outcomes / increased user satisfaction | Evidence around improved outcomes for SEND, transitions, CQC assurance & ASCOF data improvements. |
| System / Partner Improvements | New service operation model will deliver efficiency benefits across the system working with the SEND/transitions employment pathway & the DWP to help partners achieve increases in paid improved flow, | Improved partnership working |