

MAYOR AND CABINET		
Title	Creation of an Over 50s Employment Support Fund - Response to Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel	
Wards	All	Item
Contributors	Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration (Head of Strategy)	
Class	Part 1	Date: 13/11/2013

1. **Summary & Purpose**

In July 2013, Mayor and Cabinet approved the Work and Skills Strategy, including the allocation of up to £150,000 for the creation of an Over 50s Employment Support Fund. The report was considered by Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel in July 2013, where a number of queries were raised. The responses to these queries are set out in this report.

2. **Recommendation**

That the Mayor approves the responses set out in this report for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel.

3. **Policy context**

3.1. The Mayor announced in his AGM speech in March 2013 that two of the areas in which the Council and its partners must take decisive action are:

- creating opportunities for those seeking employment to enhance their skills and experience and
- using the power of the Council as a service provider to create growth in the local economy.

3.2. This vision ties in with *Shaping Our Future: Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy*, and in particular with two priorities:

- **dynamic and prosperous** - where people are part of vibrant communities and town centres, well connected to London and beyond and
- **ambitious and achieving** - where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential.

4. Background and update

- 4.1. The collective impact of welfare reform and the aftereffects of the 2008 recession impact upon all demographics in Lewisham and beyond. Nonetheless, the scale of the impact upon those aged 50 or over is notably profound. The number of people aged 50-64 in Lewisham who were claiming Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) for over 2 years stood at 80 in May 2008; as of September 2013, it stands at 485 – an increase in excess of six times. This trend is replicated regionally and nationally.
- 4.2. During that period, the overall number of 50-64 year olds in Great Britain claiming JSA has also risen sharply. The figure in May 2008 was 122,890; as of September 2013, this had climbed to 219,110. And whilst the national claimant count for this demographic has almost doubled, the rise in Lewisham is higher – from 750 in May 2008 to 1,725 five years later; an increase of 130%. See Figure 1 below for an illustration of these trends – the vertical dotted line represents the implementation of the Work and Skills Strategy in July 2013.

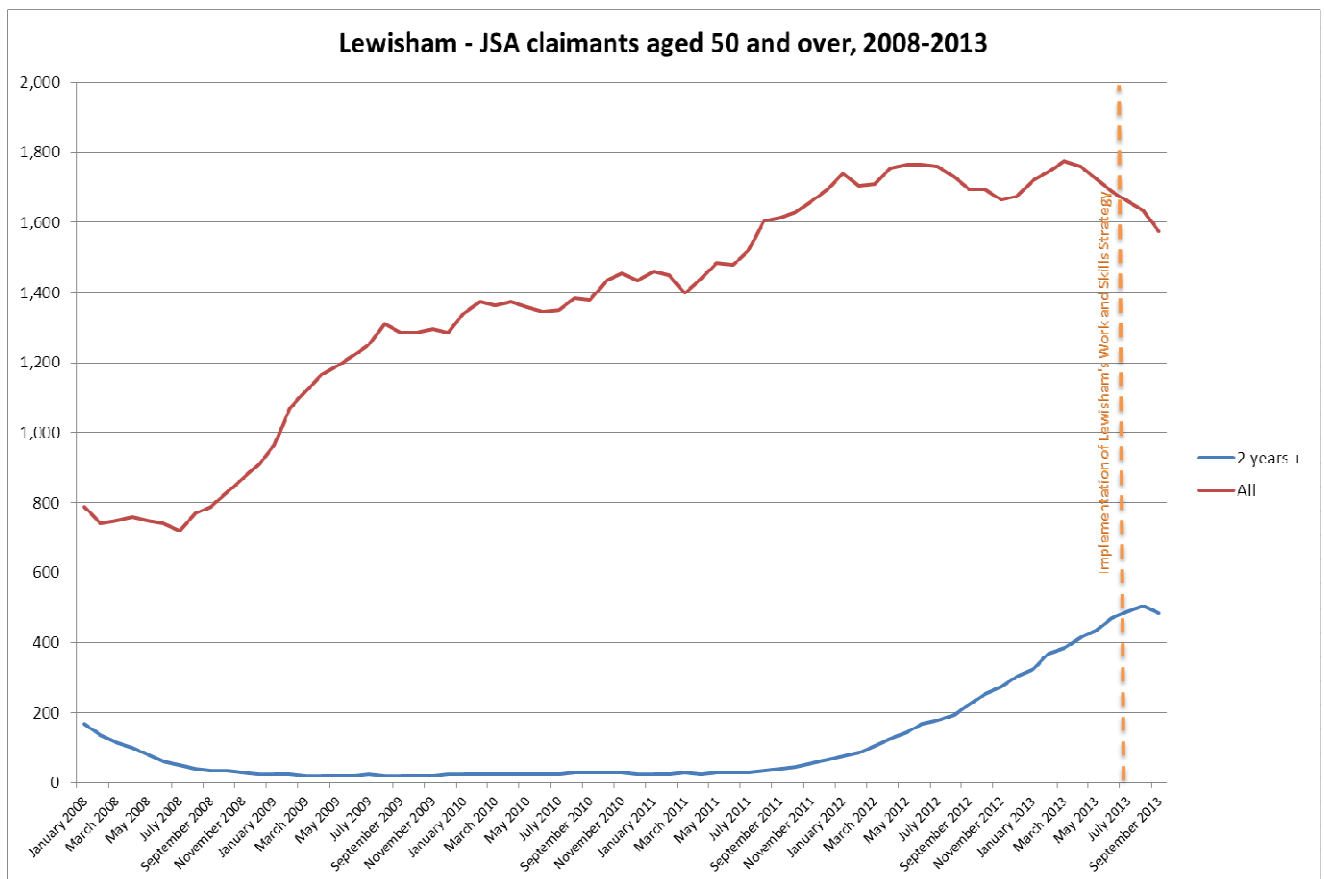


Figure 1: 50+ JSA claimants in Lewisham

- 4.3. Of Lewisham's 50-64 JSA cohort, 47% have been claiming for 12 months or longer. Over a quarter have been claiming for over 2 years. To prevent entrenchment and help improve outcomes for this client group, targeted support to encourage employers to recruit from this cohort will strengthen their prospects of securing employment.
- 4.4. The Over 50s Employment Support Fund is available to an employer who

commits to taking on anyone aged 50 or over receiving JSA for 30 hours or more per week, for a period of at least 26 weeks.

- 4.5. The Fund provides grants of up to £2,000 per individual. Employers are able to claim the grant after a period of 26 weeks has elapsed. Small businesses with 50 or fewer employees are able to claim partial payment 8 weeks after the employee commences work.
- 4.6. The Fund will be used to contribute to the costs for employing the individual, and can include training and salary costs. The Fund is primarily available to social enterprise employers, as well as private, voluntary and community sector organisations.
- 4.7. Jobcentre Plus coordinates the Fund and provides further information and advice on the eligibility conditions and support organisations to identify the right person, and specialist over 50s advisors have been introduced to champion the scheme and provide targeted support to claimants in that age group.
- 4.8. The Fund launched in September 2013, and there have been six job starts to date. Jobcentre Plus staff are enthusiastic about the programme, and have fed back that it complements ongoing work to support Work Programme returners. Employers with vacancies are being approached directly to engage with the scheme.

5. **Response to Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel queries**

At the Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel meeting in September 2013, a number of queries were raised. Officers are aware of the concerns, and will ensure that they continue to be taken into account. More specific concerns are listed below, along with responses from Officers:

- i. If possible, additional help for the over 50s Employment Fund should be provided.*

Officers have responded to this recommendation and sought additional help from a number of partners. Work is underway with Twin Training, who provide IT skills courses, to get the over 50s referred in to that support via the Jobcentre. LeSoCo is running specific courses around Digital Inclusion, and the Jobcentre is also referring over 50s clients in to that support.

Jobcentre Plus have arranged for the National Careers Service to hold confidence building workshops specifically for the over 50s. Jobcentre Plus is also liaising with Twin to design specific courses for the over 50s, which are set to begin in November. Dedicated over 50s advisers have been appointed in Lewisham and Forest Hill JCPs.

Jobcentre Plus have set up a monthly profile for the scheme, meaning that they are working to recruit and place a minimum of 4 candidates per month until April 2015.

The over 50s Employment Fund is a pilot, and lessons learnt from its implementation and rollout will need to be considered and evaluated before decisions are made on whether to direct additional funding to it.

- ii. *The Mayor asks officers to request participating Managers to offer at least the London Living Wage to participants.*

Scoping work for the implementation of the project involved a survey of Lewisham JSA claimants aged 50 and over (with 290 respondents) between May and July 2013, and an exercise undertaken by Jobcentre Plus in July 2013 to analyse live vacancies on Universal Jobmatch.

The survey found that the vast majority of respondents were willing to consider entry level jobs in any sector. The analysis looked at vacancies pinned to the Lewisham area, in addition to those within a 15 mile radius of Lewisham town centre (thereby encompassing jobs within a commutable distance in neighbouring boroughs).

The range of wages on offer varied greatly, from National Minimum Wage through to London Living Wage (LLW) and higher. However, the majority of roles were paid under the LLW, and restricting the scheme to only employers who offer the LLW would considerably reduce the number of opportunities for residents. We are trying our best to work with employers who offer LLW, but our key priority is to get our residents back into work. We will continue to champion and promote the London Living Wage, and strongly encouraging any employer who works with us to adopt it.

- iii. *The Mayor asks officers to provide participants with a confidential feedback mechanism to the Council, and that the feedback is reported to the Mayor, and Sustainable Development Select Committee.*

Officers have responded to this recommendation, and the publicity material accompanying the scheme has been revised to include a feedback mechanism through which potential participants and employers can direct any comments they may have to the Council (see Appendix 1). This feedback will be monitored by the Partnerships Team and reported back to the Mayor and Sustainable Development Select Committee.

Additionally, any individual who participates in the scheme will be given the option of completing an anonymous feedback form. The feedback form is optional, and will ask participants to rate and comment on the process and the services provided to them by all involved parties (including the Jobcentre and the employer), as well as to make any suggestions to improve the scheme. These forms will be sent directly to the Council.

6. **Financial implications**

The cost of the employment support fund is estimated at up to £150,000 over two years and funding for this project has been set aside from corporate reserves for this purpose.

7. **Legal implications**

7.1. Under S1 of the Localism Act 2011 the Council has a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do unless it is expressly prohibited.

7.2. The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

7.3. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

7.4. The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

7.5. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equalityact-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

7.6. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

1. The essential guide to the public sector equality duty

2. Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
 3. Engagement and the equality duty
 4. Equality objectives and the equality duty
 5. Equality information and the equality duty
- 7.7. The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sectorequality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

8. **Crime and disorder implications**

There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

9. **Equalities implications**

- 9.1. Our vision and ambition for our borough is that:

“Together we will make Lewisham the best place in London to live work and learn.”

This is underpinned by hard-edged principles for:

- **reducing inequality** – narrowing the gap in outcomes for citizens
- **delivering together efficiently, effectively and equitably** – ensuring that all citizens have appropriate access to and choice of high quality local services

- 9.2. The Council’s Comprehensive Equality Scheme (CES) for 2012-16 provides an overarching framework and focus for the Council’s work on equalities and helps ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

- 9.3. The Council equality objectives through the CES include:

- **improve access to services;**

Take reasonable steps to ensure that services are inclusive; responsive to risk; physically accessible and provided through the most efficient and effective channels available.

- **close the gap in outcomes for citizens;**

Take reasonable steps to improve life chances for citizens by reducing outcome gaps that may exist within the borough as well as those that may exist between the borough and elsewhere.

- **increase participation and engagement.**

Take reasonable steps to remove barriers that may exist to engagement and help residents (especially those who are under-represented) to participate in local decision making and influence local decisions.

- 9.4. The strategy addresses the Council's equality objectives as it includes measures to improve access to services for our most vulnerable residents particularly through the implementation of the Local Services Support Framework. The core aim of the strategy is to provide a framework for DWP/the Council and other partners to work to reduce the number of residents on the JSA register, this supports our equality objectives as increased number of residents will participating in work related activity.

10. **Environmental implications**

There are no immediate environmental implications arising from this report.

Background documents and originator

- Work and Skills Strategy for Lewisham, Mayor and Cabinet: 10th July 2013
- Report Back on Matters Raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel: 11th September 2013

If there are any queries on this report please contact **Robyn Fairman, Head of Strategy** (0208 314 6635) or **Rahul Rana, Principal Policy and Projects Officer** (0208 314 8246).

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Have your say: confidential feedback about this project can be sent to lsp@lewisham.gov.uk