

## **EAST BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOLIHULL REGENERATION ZONE**

### **“WAY FORWARD” WORKSHOP**

#### **JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM**

**19 JULY 2006**

## **REPORT**

### **1. Introduction**

East Birmingham North Solihull Regeneration Zone (**ebns**) sponsored the event on 19 July 2006 and invited key stakeholders<sup>1</sup> involved in a range of projects to provide an opportunity for them to contribute ideas on how we (**ebns**) might best meet the worklessness challenges of the wards of Nechells, Small Heath, Sparkbrook, Sparkhill and Washwood Heath. The workshop was promoted as a “key event” for decision makers, i.e. those responsible for project planning and delivery and those interested in influencing the Zone’s Implementation Strategy”.

In anticipation of the event, participants were invited to complete a pre-questionnaire. The responses were useful in providing background information for the preparation of the workshop and have been incorporated in the findings section.

The workshop was facilitated by Jane Lewes of the Learning Consultancy, an independent consultant.

### **2. Objectives, Outcomes and Methodology of the workshop**

The workshop **objectives** were:

1. To review what’s gone well and why
2. To gain agreement on priorities to meet identified needs
3. To define essential ingredients for success
4. To identify actions to support regeneration through employment

<sup>1</sup> See appendix a for list

The anticipated *outcomes* for the event were:

1. **ebns** will be confident about commissioning work targeted on genuine needs
2. service providers will “raise the bar” to deliver what’s needed at the right:
  - Time
  - Quality
  - Cost
  - Place

The *methodology* selected included:

Six groups were pre-selected for the workshop with as wide a cross-representation as possible and were encouraged to:

- Participate in cross-representational groups to ensure greater participation and to encourage networking
- Discuss a series of key questions
- Participate and make decisions consensually
- Participate and take joint responsibility for achieving results

### **3. Findings**

#### **Introduction - workshop**

The workshop commenced with a presentation from Programme and Finance Manager for **ebns**. The presentation emphasised the role of ebns to be one of coordination and facilitation as much as funding. **ebns** has a role in “encouraging innovative developments that will really make a difference.

Objectives and the intended outcomes were restated as well as defining the “ground rules” for the workshop emphasising the need to respect the constraints imposed due to time. A brief analysis of the principal barriers to employment based on the pre-workshop questionnaires was presented. Key findings, in order of frequency, included:

- Language barriers
- Lack of basic literacy and numeracy
- Lack of work related skills
- Lack of childcare provision
- Ignorance about what is available
- Lack of access to/contact with employers
- Employers’ attitudes and prejudice

- Fear of the unknown
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of confidence
- Low motivation
- Lack of “soft skills”
- Perceived cultural incompatibility
- Ageism
- Addictions
- Inadequate transport

An Action Learning approach was adopted to stimulate discussion within each of the six groups. Based on the initial findings, the six groups were then given three tasks. The following section covers the key points arising from the feedback from each of the three tasks, together with a brief summary analysis.

### **3a Task 1: What’s working well and why; one thing I want to get out of this morning**

The first part of this question yielded a list of “successes” that individuals were able to identify in relation to their own sphere of interest. Little attention was paid to the “**why?**” aspect of the question, and there was virtually no analysis of the underlying factors critical for success. Nevertheless, taken together the list is impressively eclectic.

- Employer engagement
- Volunteering opportunities
- Good staff to help long term unemployed back to work
- Workwise provision of 1:1 support
- Short courses and tasters
- Linking courses to job search activities
- Sensitivity to culture and gender
- Childcare
- Links to communities
- Strong partnerships (several references to this factor)
- Opportunities for people to build their confidence levels
- Capital investment
- Women returners’ programme
- Holistic approach
- Passion!

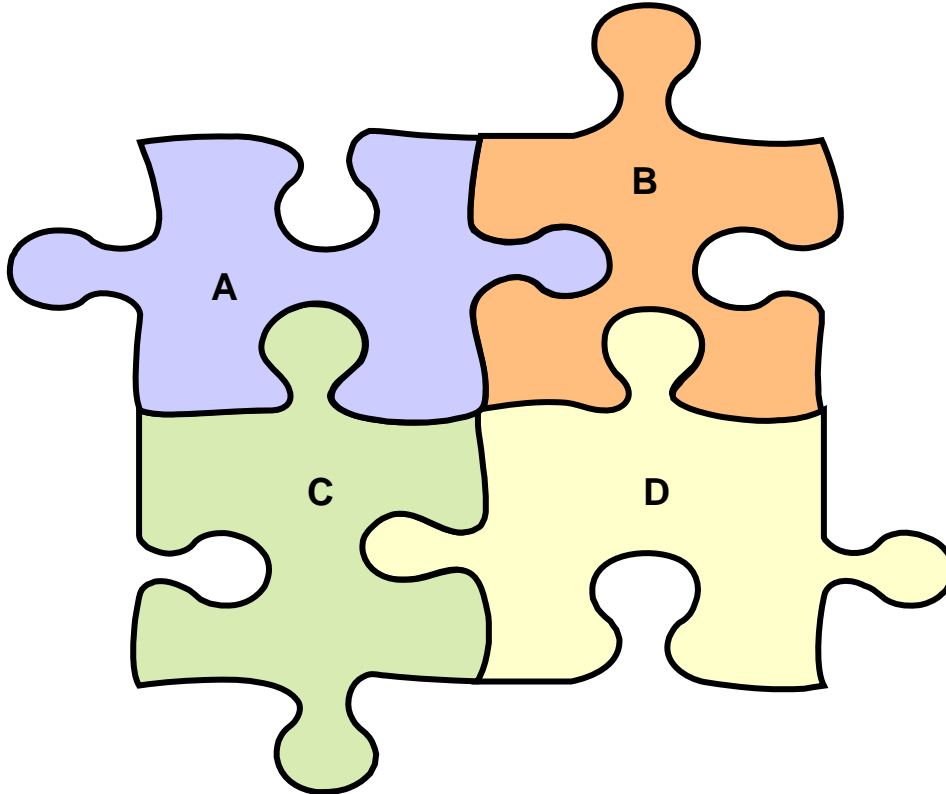
In terms of what people wanted to get for themselves from the workshop, from the analysis of responses three key themes emerge:

1. To gain information in general and, in some cases, on specific issues:
  - “To learn from others”
  - “Gain information – funding, potential partners, what is happening in **ebns**”
  - Find out what others are doing”
  - Learn about innovative ideas that work”
  - “To gain greater understanding (e.g. about funding changes – criteria, restrictions, etc.)
  
2. To develop partnerships and networks
  - “Let people know what we do”
  - “Networking”
  - “Expand network of partnerships”
  - “Build links with organisations servicing the needs of people with disabilities”
  
3. To identify routes for progression
  - “Where can we move people on to?”
  - “How do we fill the gaps and improve the processes?”
  - “Build referrals of clients from partner organisations”
  - “Routes into employment”
  - “How can we anticipate the challenges of the future to meet the needs of the Enterprising Communities Programme area residents?”

In conclusion, Task 1 provides evidence of a range of diverse projects and activities aimed at helping people to enter or re-enter paid employment. However, many of the projects seem to be operating in isolation with little or no knowledge or understanding of one another; even some potentially complementary projects.

**Task 2(a): Which stakeholders are represented in our group?**

Participants were shown the following stakeholder model:



In which A represents Potential Employees; B Jobs/Employers; C Training Providers and D Agencies that connect A with B

Each group was then asked to map their own stakeholder position. The aggregated results (from the four groups that completed the task) are:

Potential Employees:	2
Jobs/Employers:	4
Training Providers	10
Agencies that connect A with B	9

In conclusion; task 2A represents the feedback from only 4 groups, it is unlikely that the stakeholder map would have been significantly different had there been 100% feedback. There is some evidence that not all participants have a sound understanding of who their stakeholders are. Some thought should be given to hosting a seminar to develop awareness of diverse stakeholder influences and how this can be leveraged to benefit organisations. One additional point might stand some critical scrutiny; the number of organisations that describe themselves as

“Training Providers” seems inordinately high in relation to the other stakeholder groups.

### **Task 2b: What are our stakeholders’ expectations?**

The aim of this exercise was to encourage each group to identify the diverse expectations of each stakeholder group and discuss the potential influence of these expectations on **ebns** future priorities.

The principal points from each group are aggregated and summarised under each stakeholder group.

#### **Potential Employees:**

- Extrinsic rewards (money, motivation, respect, security, good working conditions, fun etc.)
- Intrinsic rewards (“not just a job, but the *right* job”, satisfaction, confidence, meaningful employment, fairness in recruitment/selection, etc.)
- Progress in job/career (direction, aspirations, wage increases, recognition of skills/experience, training, completion)

#### **Potential Employers:**

- Confidence about selection (“right person for the right job”; “to be referred right staff from agencies”; “employment ready”)
- Employees’ competence (“appropriate experience and skills”; “positive attitudes and behaviour”; ability to communicate; experience in customer care)
- Employees’ potential (“motivated to learn”; “transferable skills”; “essential skills + ability and motivation to learn”; “flexible and adaptable”; “high levels of achievement”)

#### **Training Providers:**

- Greater flexibility around funding criteria
- More transparency in funding strategy
- More targeted marketing to close information gaps with potential employers
- Higher levels of motivation from students
- Evidence of success (qualifications and jobs)
- Funding to recruit and retain quality staff
- Less emphasis on outputs and more on outcomes
- Training programmes that respond to individuals’ needs and aspirations

### Agencies that connect A to B:

- Recognition of the role (“why we focus on particular groups”; “commitment from clients”; “fairness and flexibility from employers and job seekers”; knowledge of all stakeholder perspectives; “need to reflect local needs”; high quality resources)
- Sustainability of funding and activities (“what can realistically be achieved?”; addressing disjointed approach – client needs should be top priority”; “address implications of target-driven approach”)
- Closer links with employers (“mentors, work placements, liaison; sponsorship, business development; recruitment events)
- Qualifications (“NVQs do not always fit needs – especially “soft skills”)

The key points should be noted are:

- Ensuring that Training Providers have a genuine knowledge and understanding of the needs of Employers before delivering specific training programmes. Thought should be given to innovative ways in which confidence and willingness to work, together with a flexible “can-do” attitude could be imparted to job seekers/learners. To what extent do Training Providers (and Connecting Agencies) have the opportunity to liaise on a regular basis with genuine employers?
- Some groups were keen to distinguish between straightforward skills training and more qualitative “soft skills” training that offer a more holistic approach to developing individuals to be genuinely “work ready”. Some thought might be given to examining the potential of a dynamic Key Skills programme (in which the methodology would be experiential rather than didactic) to deliver such learning.
- There could be value in undertaking empirical research on the current skills needs of potential employers; to establish to what extent present provision is based on training providers’ assumptions about what they think is needed rather than on what is actually required? (**ebns** note: the LSC are currently conducting such research in key sectors of the region).
- Some participants were positive about the value of short, tailored courses, rather than the longer NVQs.
- There is evidence that, in some situations, there is an element of “competition” between training providers and connecting agencies. Some thought could be given to examining ways in which these stakeholder groups

could identify their complementary roles in supporting individuals and groups to enter/re-enter the world of paid work. Many of the connecting agencies are proud (protective?) of their relationship with particular communities. There seems to be an element of, “We know what’s best for our people.”

- Several groups identified the frustrations involved in delivering programmes that are largely “outputs” driven, finding them restrictive and potentially excluding, in the sense that if success is measured by achievement of specific qualifications, there will always be the temptation to recruit only those individuals who are certain of attainment. Other frustrations identified related to narrowness of funding criteria and tight timescales.

### Task 3: Putting it all together

The aim of this task was to enable participants to refocus their thinking to respond to four specific questions to sum up their discussions. The questions were arranged in a simple matrix for ease of work, and to help groups to manage the time available for the task.

The matrix was arranged thus:

<p>What’s working well?</p> <p><i>Disseminate Consolidate Replicate</i></p>	<p>What has potential to work?</p> <p><i>Try it some more Build on it Get some help</i></p>
<p>What is harmful?</p> <p><i>Reduce Eradicate</i></p>	<p>What’s missing?</p> <p><i>Introduce Innovate Locate</i></p>

This part of the workshop concentrated on the following two questions:

- What has potential to work?
- What is missing?

*What has potential to work?*

The key themes from the responses were:

- Information sharing to learn what organisations and partnerships are doing and how they can work together more effectively
- More “joined-up thinking”, for example, a shared joint knowledge base to ensure more cohesion and alignment of individual strategic/business plans
- More direct contact/work with employers
- Linking potential to opportunity, thereby raising aspirations of potential employees

*What is missing?*

The key themes from the responses were:

- Engagement with employers (specially small businesses)
- Full access to all relevant and current information
- Vision that is common (shared) by all beyond individual organisations
- Support to take more risks without fear of failure or withdrawal of funding
- Assurance of sustainability of funding
- Opportunity to reflect and learn from one another’s experiences
- Co-ordination
- Shared Vision / Strategic approach to addressing worklessness / Strategy/policy linkages
- Leadership
- Shared understanding of worklessness issues
- Linkages
- Sharing of information/ good practices
- Appropriate linkages with HE/FE
- Approach to developing CVSO to become self-sustaining
- Creating opportunities for people to grow / develop in their chosen area
- Relationship with / links with growth sectors
- CVSO’s vision translated into the Community Plan

Some of the actions that merit further consideration are:

1. Creation of a regular on-line bulletin along the lines of [www.renewal.net](http://www.renewal.net) to which individual organisations are invited to contribute any issues they wish to disseminate further
2. Establishment of a forum that includes more employers and potential employees
3. Support for organisations to continue to learn from their shared experiences through provision of occasional workshops, etc.
4. Provision of support for organisations to understand and manage risk more effectively
5. Establishment and support for Action Learning Sets to enable organisations to continue to learn from one another using a process that promotes sustainability and “cross-fertilisation” of ideas and experiences

#### **4. Concluding thoughts**

The fast paced and intensive workshop provided an opportunity for stakeholders to engage in discussion about the future of service provided to workless people. The openness of discussions has been especially useful in helping us to understand the barriers faced by contributing organisations.

Too many organisations are competing for the same resources. It is evident that there is a lack of co-ordination and lack of joint-up approach. The discussions also highlighted the vast majority of the service provision is at basic level. This could be due to a number of reasons such as some of these providers do not have the appropriate and adequate resources, organisational capacity, lack of knowledge of need and demand, poor linkages with employers and the competitive nature of funding.

Providing appropriate support to local organisations working in deprived neighbourhoods especially with minority ethnic communities to contribute to the delivery of active labour market policies are essential to bring about long term changes. There is a growing appreciation that local services need to be coordinated or aligned with local, regional or national policies.

## **5. Recommendation(s)**

1. A seminar should be held to enable participants to understand and develop awareness of the diverse stakeholder influences on their organisations and how this can be leveraged to benefit them.
2. A regular on-line bulletin to which individual organisations are invited to contribute any issues they wish to disseminate further Information sharing to learn what organisations and partnerships are doing and how they can work together more effectively should be established
3. Establishment of a forum that includes more employers and potential employees
4. Support for organisations to continue to learn from their shared experiences through provision of occasional workshops, etc.
5. Provision of support for organisations to understand and manage risk more effectively.
6. Establish and support the development of Action Learning Sets to enable organisations to continue to learn from one another using a process that promotes sustainability and “cross-fertilisation” of ideas and experiences.
7. ebns to support and utilise empirical research on the current skills needs of potential employers; to establish to what extent present provision is based on training providers’ assumptions about what they think is needed rather than on what is actually required?
8. Support the development and delivery of short, tailored courses, rather than the longer NVQs.
9. Reduce competition between training providers and connecting agencies and encourage collaboration.

## Appendix A

### Participants List

- Yemeni Day Centre
- JSJS Employment Resource Centre
- ebns
- BIETTEC
- Bangladesh Women's Employment Centre
- Citysave Credit Union
- Building Health Employment & Learning Hub
- Birmingham Employer Coalition
- Eastside City Jobs
- Gordon Franks Training
- Solihull College
- Birmingham City Council
- Basic Training Centre Ltd
- Enterprising Communities/Birmingham City Council
- My Time Ltd
- Birmingham & Solihull Jobcentre Plus
- East Birmingham Communities Forum Ltd
- 3Es City College Birmingham Enterprises / CTC
- City Academy Aston
- Joseph Chamberlain College
- People in Partnership
- ICAP
- Balsall Heath Jungle
- Matthew Boulton College
- Bellis Training Ltd
- Free @ Last
- Josial Mason College
- South Birmingham College
- Pertemps People Development Group
- Chinese Community Centre
- Working Links