



## Board

**24 March 2009**

### **YHN's 'Skills to Work' strategy - working together to improve local employability (2009-2011)**

**Report by:** Director of Tenancy Services

<b>For Decision</b>	<b>Area Implications</b>	<b>ALL</b>
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<p><b>Executive Summary</b></p>	<p>In 2008 the audit commission commended our existing employment initiatives but reported that we had not yet fully maximised employment opportunities for our residents through our partnerships.</p> <p>This prompted us to bring together all the activity we have already undertaken with a clear action plan for what we will do over the medium term. The result of this was the production of our first employability strategy. Based around 4 key priorities the strategy details how we will work with our local partners to improve employability and promote employment and training opportunities for our residents.</p> <p>The action plan is attached as appendix 1 and the full strategy will be available for Board members at the meeting</p>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>	<p>Board is asked to agree the content of this 'Skills to Work' strategy</p>

<b>Business Implications</b>	
<p><b>YHN Mission and Strategic Objectives</b></p>	<p>Implementation of our Skills to Work Strategy will contribute to our organisational mission of being the best housing provider in the North East and particularly to the following strategic objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and Care to Communities</li> <li>• A Quality Workforce</li> </ul>
<p><b>Value for</b></p>	<p>We hope that by working more effectively with</p>

<b>Money/Efficiencies</b>	our employability partners this will enable us to provide a more holistic/value added service to our customers.
<b>Resources</b>	The action plan incorporated in to the strategy may require additional staff resource to deliver it. However any additional staff costs will be recovered from savings elsewhere. The total resources required will be determined by the Chief Executive.
<b>Impact on Services/Performance</b>	We hope that through the implementation of this strategy that our residents, who can work, will receive the necessary information and support they need to enable them <i>to</i> work. Through increased economic activity fewer children living in our properties will grow up in poverty, fewer households will be benefit dependent and fewer areas will be deprived.
<b>Outcomes for tenants/leaseholders</b>	<p>We hope that the implementation of this strategy will have the following outcomes for our residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of residents who are in education, employment or training</li> <li>• Overall increase in basic and key skills levels</li> <li>• Reduced dependency on benefits</li> <li>• Increased confidence and self esteem</li> <li>• Sustainable and successful communities and neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Decrease in problems often associated with worklessness including anti-social behaviour, drug misuse, crime</li> <li>• Increased income for residents through higher levels of employment</li> </ul>
<b>Risk (reputation, relationship)</b>	<p>We recognise that in the current economic climate levels of unemployment are rising whilst the number of job vacancies is reducing.</p> <p>In light of this we know that is not going to be an easy task increasing the levels of employment amongst our residents however we believe we still have a key role to play in ensuring we contribute towards raising skill levels, improving employability and promoting training and work</p>

	<p>experience so that when the current climate improves residents will hopefully be in a better position to move into employment.</p>
<b>Environmental</b>	<p>There are no environmental implications related to this report.</p>
<b>Legal Implications</b>	<p>There are no legal implications related to this report.</p>
<b>Equality and Diversity</b>	<p>It is intended that the strategy will benefit all of our residents particularly those who are currently not in work or training. It is not anticipated that the strategy will have an adverse impact on any particular group or individual.</p> <p>We always try to ensure that our services meet the different needs of our diverse communities by involving communities in identifying their needs and making sure they are met. This commitment equally applies to the implementation of this strategy.</p> <p>We want to ensure that there is maximum take up of new and existing services, aimed at improving employability by all communities and particularly those groups facing disadvantage or discrimination.</p>
<b>Stakeholder Involvement/Consultation (planned or already carried out)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff received a team brief on this subject in autumn 2008. The purpose of the team brief was to introduce them to the topic of worklessness, explain why it matters and encourage feedback about what we could and should be doing as an organisation to improve employability and to support more of our unemployed/ economically inactive residents into work and training</li> <li>• Internal colleagues were sent a copy of the draft strategy and invited to comment</li> <li>• We have worked in partnership with both Newcastle Futures and Newcastle City Council in developing this strategy and both were invited to comment on the draft document. Newcastle Futures work very closely with those who are far removed from the labour market and were able to offer us valuable expertise.</li> <li>• A small scale survey was sent to a number of residents. Questions asked included what we</li> </ul>

	<p>should be doing as an organisation to support those who are out of work and also asked what barriers people might be facing that were preventing them from entering employment/training. A summary of responses is provided in section 4 below</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A tenant skills and training survey is currently underway to ascertain what type of training courses tenants might want and/or need which will help inform the development of a residents training programme</li> <li>• We are currently working with Northumbria University to carry out some research into worklessness. The findings of this research will be used to inform further initiatives</li> </ul>
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<b>Background papers</b>	YHN's 'Skills to Work' Strategy
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<b>Contact officers</b>	Neil Scott-Director of Tenancy Services (Tel: 2788711)
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# YHN's 'Skills to Work' Strategy - working together to improving local employability

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report introduces our first Skills to Work Strategy which sets out how we will work with local partners to bring housing and employment together to reduce worklessness amongst our residents and improve overall employability.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 In 2007 the government published their employment strategy entitled 'Ready For Work- Full employment in our generation' .This set out the government's goal of achieving an 80% employment rate and detailed how social housing providers will need to work more collaboratively with employment agencies to help support more residents who are out of work into work.

The government's strategy has partially been informed by earlier research carried out by Professor John Hills in 2006/07 who was commissioned to examine the role of 21<sup>st</sup> century social housing. Hills found that a growing number of working age social housing tenants were workless (unemployed or economically inactive and not looking for work). This is a trend that is reflected amongst our Newcastle council tenants with only 23% in full or part-time employment. Hills recommended that social housing providers could and should do more to reverse this worrying trend.

In 2008 we were inspected by the audit commission who commended what we were already doing to help our residents into employment and training but felt that we could do more. They also reported that we had not yet fully maximised opportunities through partnering arrangements.

In order to remedy this we have developed our first YHN employability strategy which details how we will build on what we have achieved so far and work with partners to improve employability amongst residents and support more people into work and training.

We have identified 4 key priorities which we will work towards to help us achieve this:

- **Embedding tackling worklessness into our culture**
- **Pre-employment support of unemployed and economically inactive residents**
- **Improving employability**
- **Getting people into work**

### **3. The strategy**

3.1 We have identified 4 key priorities to work towards which we are confident will result in more of our residents becoming economically independent through work and improve overall employability. In developing our priorities, guidance has been sought from Newcastle City Council's employability action plan which sets out what additional activity (outside of mainstream provision) is needed across the city. A brief summary about each priority is provided below. The full action plan together with details on how the actions will impact upon our customers can be found in the appended attached strategy.

#### **3.2 Priority 1: Embedding tackling worklessness into our culture**

Central to the success of our strategy will be embedding tackling worklessness into our organisational culture. If we are to make a real contribution to this agenda our staff will need to be motivated towards doing all that they can to tackle worklessness.

To achieve this tackling worklessness will need to become an integral part of our day-to-day activities and no longer be viewed as something that is solely dealt with by specialist staff or other organisations outside our own.

#### **3.3 Priority 2: Pre-employment support of unemployed and economically inactive residents**

We want to ensure that if residents need information, advice and support which will help them make steps towards employment they will be able to access it through us. We have over 850 employees; many of them have regular direct contact with local people who for varied reasons are far removed from the labour market. This puts us in a unique position to influence worklessness. Unlike other organisations we already engage with a large number of our residents about a wide range of housing and neighbourhood related issues. Whilst we do not have the necessary expertise to provide individual tailored employment support we can play a valuable role in engaging with residents pre-employment and connecting with those who need specialist support with the agencies who can provide it. We are also able to provide some first stage support primarily in the form of information provision and raising awareness about benefits and tax.

#### **3.4 Priority 3: Improving Employability**

An individual who is out of work may face one or more problems and require a range of interventions to improve their employability. We will play a direct role in the delivery of the some of the interventions that might be required including the provision of training, work experience, volunteering opportunities and mentoring.

#### **3.5 Priority 4: Getting people into work**

When someone is ready to begin looking for work they can encounter

further difficulty finding out about job opportunities and then getting through recruitment and selection processes. Repeated failure can result in a loss of confidence and de-motivation. We will provide a range of support to help ensure that this doesn't happen.

## **4 Implications**

### **4.1 Human Resources**

We recognise that we need to have designated resources responsible for overseeing the strategy launch and subsequent implementation ensuring that all actions within the strategy are delivered. They will also have direct responsibility for the implementation of a number of the actions and be expected to routinely monitor and report progress.

There will also be a necessity to maintain and strengthen existing partnerships with our employability partners Newcastle Futures and Newcastle City Council who are fundamental to the success of our strategy. We will also need to build new partnerships and foster agreements for example with Workfirst.

Any additional staffing costs required to deliver the strategy will be met from efficiencies elsewhere.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 To inform the development of this strategy we have consulted with a number of stakeholders including our residents and our staff. A summary of responses is provided below. Additionally we have worked closely with both Newcastle City Council and Newcastle Futures who support our strategy.

### **5.2 What our residents have told us**

In preparing this strategy we asked our residents, through a survey, what they thought we should be doing as an organisation to tackle worklessness. Some of the suggestions we received are summarised below:

- Refer people to the job centre
- Help people fill in application forms
- Offer job fairs
- Display details of YHN advice and support team (name, phone number)
- Display job vacancies
- Send out leaflets advertising vacancies and services
- Post available part time jobs that need to be covered, to the tenants, so they can apply for it, or for an apprenticeship
- Arrange a visit at home, know your tenant and know their needs

We also asked what barriers people might face when looking for work,

responses include:

- Lack of childcare.
- Criminal record.
- Lack of experience.
- Health problems.
- Non flexible working hours/not being able to work full time.
- Earnings related benefit trap.

We are committed to carrying out further research to strengthen our understanding of what particular barriers our residents face. This will enable us to develop further appropriate interventions to help overcome them. We are currently working with a local university to help us achieve this.

### **5.3 What staff told us**

We value insight from our staff so in preparation for this strategy we also consulted with them through an organisational team brief in September 2008.

Most of our staff agreed that as an organisation we do have a role to play in supporting residents back into work where appropriate, and welcomed the fact that we are being pro-active in this area. Many also felt that our primary role in this area should be that of an information provider or sign-poster, as there are already several organisations out there whose core business is to get people back into work. By modifying/improving our existing processes and services and information provision to better promote employment and employability we can positively contribute to the national and regional tackling worklessness agenda. Whatever we decide to do will complement and/or enhance existing provision and not replicate what somebody else is already doing.

We also asked all teams to come up with suggestions for what we could do to help support customers into work, many of which have been incorporated into our action plan.

## **5. Recommendations**

### **5.1 Board is recommended to:**

- Agree the draft 'Skills to Work' strategy

## **6. Next Steps**

### **6.1 Should board endorse our 'Skills to Work' strategy the following next steps would be required:**

- MT to confirm and implement the necessary resources required to deliver this strategy.
- Launch the strategy

## Priority 1: Embedding tackling worklessness into organisational culture

Ref	Action to be Delivered:	How we will do this:	Responsibility	Target for completion.
1.1	Raise the profile of tackling worklessness across the organisation.	Include features and articles about worklessness in our internal communications. This will include worklessness related articles in at least 3 policy briefings.	Business Strategy Team	March 2010
		Incorporate tackling worklessness as a key organisational priority within our emerging business strategy.	Business Strategy Team	June 2009
		Allocate resources either internally or externally for a period of at least 6 months, to oversee delivery of all the actions detailed in this strategy.	Head of Support and Care	May 2009
1.2	Motivate staff to tackle worklessness.	Launch the strategy using a series of at least 3 interactive information workshops run in conjunction with Newcastle Futures. Through the information workshops we will enable staff to hear first-hand from people who have progressed from being out of work into work to help them understand the positive impact employment can have on people's lives.	Employability Co-ordinator	September 2009
		Facilitate staff visits to partner organisations. Organisations to include Crisis Skylight centre, Cyrenians, Building Futures East.	Employability Co-ordinator	March 2010

		Facilitate work shadowing of Newcastle Futures Customer Co-ordinators for a minimum of 10 YHN employees	Employability Co-ordinator	March 2010
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## Priority 2: Working in partnership we will improve access to pre-employment information and support

Ref	Action to be Delivered:	How we will do this.	Responsibility	Target for completion.
2.1	Engaging residents through outreach work.	We will consider the possibility of co-locating partner organisations, including Newcastle Futures, in our offices.	Employability Co-ordinator	September 2009
		In collaboration with organisations from the Newcastle Futures partnership, we will hold at least two community based employment information days. This will enable residents to find out about the wide range of support in Newcastle available to help people make steps towards employment. In doing so we will mobilise the YHN 'Talk to Us' bus enabling us to get right to the heart of the community.	Employability Co-ordinator	March 2010
2.2	Increase the provision of information available for people who want to get back into work or training.	We will develop an employment page on our website at <a href="http://www.yhn.org.uk">www.yhn.org.uk</a> . This will enable residents to access a range of information to help them enter work or training. The website will contain details of where and how to access local support, details of available training provision and details of where to look for job vacancies.	Communications Manager	August 2009

		<p>We will make available a comprehensive resource booklet containing information and guidance for those wanting to get into employment or training.</p> <p>We will facilitate staff access to the Newcastle Futures practitioner's on-line resource and contribute to its development. This will enable our staff to effectively provide information and signpost residents. It will also minimise the risk of duplication of activity across the partnership.</p>	<p>Employability Co-ordinator</p> <p>Employability Co-ordinator</p>	<p>August 2009</p> <p>December 2009</p>
<b>2.3</b>	Connecting residents to personalised tailored support.	<p>We will develop and pilot a formal referral process between YHN and Newcastle Futures. YHN staff will be able to directly refer residents using a mutually agreed referral process, to the Newcastle Futures service for support. Newcastle Futures will monitor the number of referrals and monitor customer's progression towards and into employment through their Hanlon management system.</p> <p>Our Young Persons service will strengthen existing links with Connexions. This will include staff within the YPS service, referring young people to connexions for employment/training support.</p>	<p>Head of Support and Care</p> <p>Head of Support and Care</p>	<p>June 2009</p> <p>June 2009</p>

## Priority Three- Improving the employability of residents and local people.

Ref	Action to be Delivered:	How we will do this.	Responsibility	Target for completion.
3.1	Provide an increased range of training opportunities for residents.	Working collaboratively with a selected partner we will develop and implement a construction skills or DIY training scheme. The scheme will offer a minimum of 12 residents training in D.I.Y/basic construction in addition to other skills, including literacy and numeracy where needed. The aim of the scheme will be to improve the employability of participants. We will seek to encourage participation from members of disadvantaged groups including those who are long term sick or disabled.	Business Strategy Manager	December 2009
		In collaboration with local partners we will introduce a customer training programme for individual tenants and leaseholders.	Tenant Involvement Manager	September 2009
3.2	Provide work experience and work tasters for people from disadvantaged groups.	We will develop a partnership with Workfirst and commit to offering at least 5 work experience/work trials to their clients through their Workstep programme.	Employability Co-ordinator	March 2010

<b>3.3</b>	Provide volunteering opportunities for residents within YHN.	We will expand the existing range and number of volunteer opportunities available within YHN. This will include recruiting an estimated 50 volunteers from the local community to offer a range of support to young people.	Employability Co-coordinator / YPS Manager	March 2010
		We will make contact with Newcastle based volunteering projects and promote their volunteering opportunities to our residents	Employability Co-ordinator	September 2009

#### Priority 4: Getting people into work.

Ref	Action to be Delivered:	How we will do this:	Responsibility	Target for completion.
4.1	Increase availability of information about available job opportunities and support with accessing commonly used recruitment processes.	Enable customers to use p.c's in housing offices to access employment opportunities/partner websites including Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, and Newcastle Futures.	Head of Housing Management	June 2009
		Where feasible we will advertise YHN and local job opportunities in local housing offices and other community buildings.	Employability Co-ordinator	June 2009
		We will establish a network of 6-10 YHN employment champions who can provide on the spot practical assistance to residents to help with job search, application form filling and C.V production.	Employability Co-ordinator / Employment Initiatives Team	September 2009
4.2	Increase access to job opportunities at YHN.	Review our recruitment and selection processes in collaboration with partners to ensure that people from disadvantaged groups can access the employment opportunities that we have available.	Human Resources Manager.	December 2009

		<p>Establish a Local Employment Partnership with Jobcentre Plus to support more potential recruits from benefits into sustained employment and continue to develop their skills to encourage progression in work. In doing so we will commit to a number of specific measures which might include guaranteed interviews and work trials to help support more potential recruits from benefits into sustained employment and continue to develop their skills to encourage progression in work.</p>	<p>Employability Co-ordinator</p>	<p>December 2009</p>
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