

HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

Health and employment is one five key areas within the Tackling Health Inequalities theme nested within the Health and Wellbeing Partnership. It is part of a programme designed to deal with one of the wider determinants of health – that of the relationship between employment, worklessness and health. This report relates to the activity of the Improving Health, Increasing Employment Project Board.

Improving Health, Increasing Employment is a partnership initiative involving a wide range of agencies in Birmingham and Solihull. It aims to tackle the barriers that stop people with health problems being in a job – and to secure the improvements to health that employment can bring.

Organisations currently involved include:

- Birmingham City Council – Economic development
- Birmingham City Council – Adults and Communities
- Birmingham City Council – Constituencies
- Birmingham Chamber of Commerce
- NHS Birmingham East and North
- Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership
- Birmingham Race Action Partnership
- Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust
- Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
- Heart of Birmingham tPCT
- Jobcentre Plus
- Learning and Skills Council
- Solihull Care Trust
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- NHS South Birmingham
- University Hospital Birmingham Foundation Trust

The purpose of this paper is to update the PCT Board on the progress made over the last year and to summarise the findings and implications of the Government's response to Dame Carol Black's Review of the health of Britain's working-age population (see Annex 1).

It is worth noting that this particular set of policies was conceived during a time of "full employment". As a result of the recent and ongoing economic downturn now affecting the local real economy we have been told by "providers" that (not unexpectedly) the job market is becoming increasingly competitive. However there are no signs that the Government is backtracking in policy terms and recent discussions within IHIE have confirmed the commitment of the Partners to tackling health and work issues.

Indeed, following a discussion of the possible implications of an economic downturn at its November 08 and March 09 meetings, the Project Board has recognised that new issues in health and work may arise as a result of forecast increases in unemployment – for example, unemployment is particularly associated with mental health problems, but the effects may be greater for those claiming Jobseekers Allowance than for those claiming incapacity benefit or Employment and Support Allowance. The Project Board plans to keep these issues under review, so that it can consider whether new initiatives may be needed to deal with new problems.

Background

The Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership (BHWP) and the Birmingham and Solihull Employment Strategy Group (ESG) approved a joint strategic approach to tackling the inter-related issues of ill-health and worklessness in autumn 2007. The strategy aimed to tackle the barriers that stop people with health problems from working – and to secure the improvements to health that employment can bring. The proposed approach was to

- enhance the role of GPs and other primary care staff in facilitating return to work
- increase the availability of support for people with health and employment problems, enhancing their ability to gain and remain in employment
- improve employers' management of health in the workplace, including the recruitment and retention of people with health problems.

A joint sub-committee of the two partnerships – the Improving Health, Increasing Employment Project Board - was established early in 2008 to develop an implementation plan for this strategy, when the BHWP Executive and ESG approved the terms of reference for the Project Board.

Developments in the national context

During 2008 there have been a number of important national initiatives on health, work and wellbeing. As a result of these national developments, this area of policy has a much higher profile than a year ago, when the Project Board was first established. Further, the Government is now beginning to take forward a number of new initiatives which will require action by one or more partners in the Increasing Health, Improving Employment initiative.

- In March 08, Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population, *Working for a healthier tomorrow*, was published. This proposed that the Government should consider piloting a new service for people whose ill-health was affecting their employment – a Fit for Work service. It also recommended that the Government should enhance the capacity of healthcare professionals to deal with health and work problems and that more should be done to raise awareness of health in the workplace among employers, especially smaller businesses.
- In June, the Government published its welfare reform Green Paper, *No one written off*. This proposed that a new sick note system should be introduced with greater emphasis on return to work. It also proposed that the Government should build on the development of the Pathways to Work programme by extending personalised back-to-work support to existing incapacity benefit claimants.

- In August, the Government published the report of a major review of international research about health and work: *Vocational rehabilitation: what works, for whom and when*. This provided further evidence for an approach based on enhancing the capacity of healthcare professionals to deal with the common health problems affecting work; on the development of additional help for a minority who do not return to work promptly; and on the development of programmes like Pathways to Work for those who are out of work because of ill-health.
- In November 08, the Government published its response to Dame Carol Black's report. This confirmed its intention to introduce a new "fit note", replacing the current sick note system, and to pilot a Fit for Work service. The response also set out a range of other initiatives, including the provision of a national training programme for GPs through the Royal College of General Practitioners.
- In December, the welfare reform White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support*, confirmed that personalised back-to-work support will be extended to existing incapacity benefit claimants, starting in pilot areas in 2010.

In September, the IHIE Project Board carried out a formal review of the strategic approach adopted by the BHWP and ESG to ensure that it reflected national developments. The Board concluded that the basic approach, with its focus on employers, primary care, and support programmes, was a good reflection of the evidence base for policy and provided a sound basis for response to initiatives proposed by Government.

Implementing the strategy

The long-term aim of the strategy approved by ESG and BHWP is system change in mainstream services. However, the Project Board recognised that specific activities would need to be undertaken to bring about such changes, and during February-April 2008, the Board developed and approved an implementation plan setting out a number of development programmes. Progress on these is set out below.

Fit for Work project

In May 08, the Project Board set up a working group, chaired by Dr Richard Mendelsohn of Birmingham East and North PCT, to review local options for piloting a Fit for Work service. The group prepared an outline approach, which was approved by the Project Board in November for further development, alongside local consultation on the outline proposal. A local consultation on our model was initiated at the beginning of January 2009. Following a DH launch, a call for expressions of interest has been made and we intend to submit a proposal to pilot a Fit for Work service in Birmingham and Solihull on April 20th 2009.

Developing the role of primary care

Health care professionals, especially GPs, can play a vital role in identifying and supporting those whose health is affecting their ability to work. The September 08 meeting of the Project Board approved an outline work programme, which is currently being revised in the light of the Government's announcement of new initiatives in its response to Dame Carol Black's report. A member of staff from South Birmingham PCT started a part-time secondment in from December 08 to March 09 to take this work forward.

In addition, awareness raising and training for community-based healthcare staff has been piloted in a workshop in September 08 when nearly 20 health trainers were briefed about local programmes by staff from Jobcentre Plus, Work Directions and Working Links. Following this pilot, further such sessions are planned.

Back-to-work support for those out of work because of ill-health

The Project Board agreed at its first meeting that Pathways to Work, which offers back-to-work support to all new incapacity benefit claimants (since October 2008, Employment and Support Allowance claimants), should be an explicit part of its approach. There has been continuing liaison with Work Directions, which provides the Pathways to Work programme in Birmingham and Solihull.

The Project Board also recognised that there are gaps in support for existing claimants, and it commissioned research on ways to help people who have been out of work for some time because of ill-health from the Institute of Employment Studies at the University of Sussex. The final report on this work was received by the Project Board at its September 08 meeting and discussed further at a special meeting of the Board in early October 08.

The Government has subsequently announced that back-to-work support will be extended to all existing claimants, starting in selected pilot areas in 2010. The Project Board agreed that, in the light of the Government's decision, its role should be to consider options for pilot ***back-to-work support*** programme, with a strong emphasis on fit with existing programmes, such as Pathways to Work, and planned developments through the Integrated Employment and Skills system. In addition to providing extra help to long-term incapacity benefit claimants, the aim is to establish local arrangements which will encourage the Government to select Birmingham as an early site for the roll-out of its proposed back-to-work support programmes.

The Board has also decided to support the expansion of ***volunteering opportunities*** for people who have been out of work because of ill-health. Following discussions with BVSC, an outline scheme was approved by the Project Board at its meeting in November 08, and commissioning proposals are being prepared. Longer-term funding will depend on evaluation of the proposed scheme and the need to dovetail into other proposals for volunteering opportunities.

Work with employers

Helping employers to adopt good practice in managing health in the workplace is currently the least developed area of the Project Board's work. The Board has agreed that work with employers to encourage good practice should be undertaken with existing agencies that work with employers, rather than by setting up a separate programme. A workshop with these intermediary agencies took place in early December, [following which it is proposed to establish a Healthy Workplaces Forum to co-ordinate and promote activity. The workshop also proposed the development of a programme of work on exemplary practice in the workplace with public sector employers in Birmingham and Solihull.]

Communications

A key role for the Improving Health, Increasing Employment initiative is increasing awareness of and knowledge about health and work issues. The Project Board adopted an initial communications strategy in March, with a focus on fostering awareness among partner organisations. A series of Briefings have been produced, with a circulation list approaching 100 by the end of the year. In addition to providing information about the work of the Project Board itself, these briefings have also kept partners up-to-date about developments in national policy.

A review of communications has recently been completed, as a result of which it is proposed to set up pages about the Improving Health, Increasing Employment initiative on the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership's website. In addition, work is beginning to develop channels of communication with particular groups, such as GPs, as part of the specific programmes of work.

Staffing

When it approved its outline implementation plan in May 08, the Project Board recognised that staff would be needed to take forward the detailed work envisaged in the main work programmes. Of the staff team of five that was proposed a Programme Manager has now been appointed and is working 2 days per week until the formal start date, the role is explained below.

The Programme Manager will take on overall management of the programme, including liaison with partners and stakeholders locally and with Government nationally; the maintenance of governance arrangements, including support for the Project Board; the managing any staff who take responsibility for specific aspects of the work; and the managing of the budget of the initiative, including oversight of commissioning.

Development of the Project Board

The Project Board now meets once every two months. As the Project Board's work has moved from preparing plans to overseeing the development of programmes of work, it has established sub-groups to take on these tasks – for example, the working group to develop proposals for a Fit for Work service. The Board has also recognised that its work will require increased oversight of commissioning and of budgets; it therefore decided at its November meeting to establish a formal Finance and Commissioning Sub-Committee to undertake detailed scrutiny on its behalf.

Improving Health, Increasing Employment: priorities for 2009/10

The Project Board envisages the following as priorities for the Improving Health, Increasing Employment initiative in 2009/10.

- Recruitment of a staff team to take forward detailed work on key programmes
- A proposal to host a Fit for Work service pilot locally
- Development of a communication and training programme for staff in primary care, focused on helping local healthcare professionals to manage effectively the introduction of national initiatives, such as the new fit note

- Establishment of a healthy workplaces forum for employer intermediaries and supporting a agreed programme for promoting good practice in the workplace
- Development of a programme on healthy workplaces with local public sector employers
- Commissioning of a pilot back-to-work support programme for people who are out of work because of ill-health
- Further exploring a volunteering placement scheme for people who are out of work because of ill-health.

Annex 1

Improving Health and Work: changing lives

Working for a healthier tomorrow, the report of Dame Carol Black's Review of the health of Britain's working age population was published in March 2008. The Government's response to the report – *Improving health and work: changing lives* – was published on 25th November 2008. This section summarises its main proposals and comments on their implications for the Improving Health, Increasing Employment initiative in Birmingham and Solihull.

Overview

The Government's response to Dame Carol Black's review is organised under three main headings:

- creating new perspectives on health and work – this mainly focuses on promoting new approaches to health and work within primary care, though it also emphasises the need to communicate better with employers and the general public
- improving work and workplaces – which focuses on how employers can be supported
- supporting people to work – which sets out plans for piloting new services, including a 'Fit for Work' service.

Supporting health professionals

Chapter 2 of *Improving health and work: changing lives* sets out plans to work with healthcare and other professionals to help them provide the best advice on health and work to individuals and their employers.

A new 'fit note'

In order to improve communications between GPs, individuals and employers, the Government proposes to make changes to the current system of medical certification. A new 'fit note' will be introduced to provide better information about when and how to return to work after illness. The revised medical certificate is intended to be simpler to complete and to help GPs provide advice on fitness for work; it is also intended to help employers consider when and how a return to work can be arranged.

The new format has been tested in draft with over 500 GPs, and the Government will consult formally on the proposed changes early in 2009. The revised medical certificate will then be introduced later in 2009.

Improving health and work: changing lives also accepts Dame Carol Black's recommendation to replace the current paper medical certificate with an electronic one. Electronic certification is currently being tested in Wales, and the Government will subsequently decide whether to introduce the new 'fit note' and electronic certification at the same time.

Education and training programmes

Improving health and work: changing lives recognises that many GPs and other working in primary care have received little or no training on health and work. It proposes that the National Education Programme on health and work for GPs, which has been piloted by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) should be made available to all GPs from April 2009. In addition, the RCGP and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) are developing a competency framework and syllabus on health and work for GPs who wish to increase their expertise in occupational health. The aim is to make training available, through academic centres and online, from 2009.

Dame Carol Black recommended the development of a register of GPs with an interest in health and work. The Society of Occupational Medicine, together with the RCGP and the FOM, is to develop web-based resources for GPs with such interests.

The Government has also been working with the Royal College of Nursing to provide all nurses with an understanding of the relationship between health and work and of the role of nurses in supporting patients of working age to return to work.

Guidelines and standards

The Government has supported a number of initiatives to improve the availability of guidance on health and work outcomes. For example, the Royal College of Surgeons in England is producing a series of leaflets for patients on progress and recovery after an operation for a number of common surgical procedures.

The Government has also supported the recent establishment of the UK Vocational Rehabilitation Council. In October 2008, the Council circulated for consultation a draft set of standards to define the principles and practices expected of service providers and practitioners. In addition, the Faculty of Occupational Medicine has started discussions on the development of a system for accrediting occupational health services, such as those provided to employers. The Government is committed to supporting the development of such an accreditation system.

Improving health and work: changing lives also notes the intention, set out in the NHS Next Stage Review report prepared by Lord Darzi, to include vocational rehabilitation as part of community care services.

Positive messages on health and work

Improving health and work: changing lives argues that it is important to promote positive messages about health and work as widely as possible. The Government has commissioned market research to help it understand how best to communicate to different audiences, so that tailored communications can be prepared for employers, health care and other professionals, and the general public. The report on this research is due in spring 2009.

A number of public health campaigns aimed at employers and workplaces are already planned for 2009. These include

- Alcohol awareness at work
- Workplace action to prevent chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder
- Smoking cessation campaigns
- Tackling obesity through workplace action
- Healthier Food Mark for public sector organisations

Improving work and workplaces

Chapter 3 of *Improving health and work: changing lives* sets out a number of proposals to support employers in creating healthy workplaces.

Self-assessment tools

A Business HealthCheck tool was launched in July 2008. This helps organisations to estimate the costs of sickness absence, turnover, and worker ill-health and injury, and to identify the benefits that might be gained by investing in health and wellbeing programmes. Business in the Community has been asked to offer practical advice to businesses on the use of the tool.

Investors in People (IiP) has also developed a self-assessment tool to provide employers with an overview of health and wellbeing in their organisations. Existing IiP standards are being developed to provide more focus on health and wellbeing.

Advice and support to businesses

NHS Plus – a network of NHS-based occupational health services – has been seeking ways to offer NHS occupational health services to private businesses. The Government proposes to continue to support this work.

In addition, *Improving health and work: changing lives* proposes the piloting of a national occupational health telephone helpline for smaller businesses. Its aim would be to provide occupational health advice on individual cases. The Government proposes to invite local partnerships and business networks to bid for funding to design, market and deliver local gateways. These will signpost employers to other local services and support, as well as acting as the entry point to the national helpline. The service will be piloted from summer 2009. It will last two years and test both free and fee-based approaches.

Dame Carol Black recommended piloting a business-led health and wellbeing consultancy service. *Improving health and work: changing lives* says the Government is waiting for the evaluation of the Workplace Health Connect service, expected early in 2009, before considering the case for a consultancy service.

However, to improve access to guidance and advice on best practice, the Government proposes to pool existing resources into a central hub – probably supported by Businesslink and Directgov – to make these accessible to both employers and the wide range of intermediary organisations, such as chambers of commerce, who work with and support businesses. *Improving health and work: changing lives* also proposes that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) should work with ACAS and others to promote the use of the HSE's management standards

for work-related stress. Guidance will be offered from spring 2009 through a new work-related stress website.

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health will be piloting a new training programme to help safety and health practitioners to further their understanding of health and wellbeing at work. The aim is to equip such professionals to play a more active role in the management and promotion of health in the workplace.

Finally, *Improving health and work: changing lives* proposes the establishment of a regionally-based 'Challenge Fund', which would be used to support workplace projects to improve health and wellbeing. The fund will be launched in summer 2009, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing in smaller businesses.

Supporting people to work

Many of the proposals described in Chapter 4 of *Improving health and work: changing lives* have already been announced in *No one written off*, the welfare reform Green Paper, published in July 2008.

'Fit for Work' service

The Government has already confirmed that it will be piloting 'Fit for Work' services. It has set aside central government funds to pump-prime pilot activity in local areas. *Improving health and work: changing lives* says that the Government's approach will be based on the following principles:

- innovation in order to test a number of different models
- meeting community needs – and reducing health inequalities
- working in partnership: employees, employers and healthcare professionals.

Improving health and work: changing lives says that many of the components for a 'Fit for Work' service pilot are already funded and delivered across the country: the challenge for local partners is to bring these together in a service focused on the needed of the working population. The Government wishes to see pilots taking account of services and skills available in private, public and voluntary sectors.

Other initiatives

The welfare reform Green Paper suggested the Government was proposing to test the impact of employment support advisers working within the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme. *Improving health and work: changing lives* confirms that employment advisers will be piloted from 2009 in a small number of PCTs as a core component of the IAPT programme.

The welfare reform Green Paper also proposed the expansion of the pilot Pathways Advisory Service, where Jobcentre Plus advisers are located in GP surgeries. *Improving health and work: changing lives* confirms the Government's intention to extend this pilot.

Improving health and work: changing lives also states that decisions about a number of other initiatives floated in the welfare reform Green Paper in July will be announced in a forthcoming welfare reform White Paper. These include expansion of

the Access to Work programme and development of back-to-work support for existing incapacity benefit claimants. The White Paper will also discuss how health and work can be linked to the wider skills agenda.

Implications for Improving Health, Increasing Employment

Most of the proposals in *Improving health and work: changing lives* are broadly in line with the Improving Health, Increasing Employment programme.

Primary care

The proposals for raising awareness and for providing education, training and support for healthcare professionals fit well with the Improving Health, Increasing Employment proposed programme of work with primary care. National initiatives on education, training and resources should support planned activity in Birmingham and Solihull. The proposal to introduce a new 'fit note' provides an opportunity for focused work with GPs to raise awareness of health and work issues.

Wider communications

The Improving Health, Increasing Employment Project Board decided at its November meeting to review its current approach to communications. It may be useful to link this with the Government's plans to research and develop communication strategies.

Work with employers

The Project Board has decided to support those organisations which are already working with employers, such as the HSE and Chambers of Commerce, rather than establishing its own separate programme. Proposals in *Improving health and work: changing lives* to co-ordinate the existing activities and resources of intermediary organisations are close to the approach adopted by the Board. The Board's approach was discussed by local agencies at a workshop in early December, and this event also provided an opportunity to reflect on how new initiatives, such as the Business HealthCheck and the challenge fund, might be supported locally.

But the Project Board will need to consider how to respond to the Government's proposal to set up a national occupational health telephone helpline. *Improving health and work: changing lives* says that the Government will invite local partnerships and business networks to bid for funding to design, market and deliver local gateways, which will signpost employers to other local services and support, as well as acting as the entry point to the national helpline. This may provide an opportunity to extend the availability of support to local businesses, especially smaller enterprises.

Supporting people to work

Improving health and work: changing lives confirms that the Government will be seeking bids to pilot a 'Fit for Work' service early in 2009. The Improving Health, Increasing Employment Project Board has already approved an outline framework for a 'Fit for Work' scheme, but further work will be needed to develop a bid for pilot status.

The Project Board has also agreed to take account of Government initiatives in designing its programme of back-to-work support for existing incapacity benefit claimants. The proposals put forward in *Improving health and work: changing lives* were sketched out in the welfare reform Green Paper, and so are already part of the

general planning for back-to-work support. However, where Government initiatives are piloted locally, it will be important to discuss the implications with the relevant partners.