

4.3 Employment for people with learning disabilities

The percentage of people in Barking and Dagenham with a learning disability and in paid employment in 2015-16 has been identified as estimated to be 3.5% (a minor improvement from the 2014-15 estimated rate of 3.2%), significantly lower than the London average of 6%. This figure puts Barking and Dagenham in the bottom quartile of our comparator group for other local authorities (which has an average figure of 6.9%¹).

The demand for supporting people with a moderate learning disability into paid employment is likely to rise as changes to the benefit system continue to be embedded; however, the local and national economic situation and constrained job market will make it challenging to satisfy this increased demand.

4.3.1 Action to address employment needs

The Council decommissioned the block contract arrangement with the Osborne Partnership, and continue to support people with learning disability to use their personal budget to buy work based learning and supported employment opportunities from the Osborne Trust or any other provider. The Osborne Trust has provided retail traineeships to service users. The Relish Café in Barking Town Centre is now in its third year and provides a range of supported employment opportunities for people with learning disability². The Clinical Commissioning Group has also commissioned the Richmond Fellowship to provide support to residents with learning disabilities in accessing vocational and employment opportunities.

In addition, the Council started a project in 2012 to support the development of local micro providers (those with five employees or less) who wish to work with adults with social care needs, and to support adults with social care needs who wish to set up micro enterprises themselves. Since the start of this project in December 2012, there are approximately 20 micro providers developing offers for people with learning disabilities including community gardening, sewing courses, social activities, computer training, developing CVs, and massage.

As well as the specialist services outlined above, several different mainstream and universal services exist within Barking and Dagenham to support people with learning disabilities achieve their employment aspirations. However, these services often exist in isolation rather than as key components within a pathway leading to employment. There has been some dissatisfaction reported from the community regarding referral between specialist commissioned providers and Job Centre Plus.

The Learning Disabilities Partnership Board (LDPB) is a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The LDPB has recognised the need for more effective support pathways into paid employment for people with learning disabilities and the LDPB will be focusing on employment in their work programme for 2016/17.

¹ HSCIC (2015), Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, England - 2014-15, Final release, Aggregated measures, Oct 6 2015, available at: <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/searchcatalogue?productid=16655&q=Combined+Activity+Returns+for+Adult+Social+Care&sort=Relevance&size=10&page=1#top> - last accessed: 26 April 2016

² <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/residents/leisure-libraries-and-museums/barking-learning-centre/relishblc/>

The Health and Wellbeing Board have requested for the Learning Disability Partnership Board to put a plan together by September 2016 setting out how 50 service users can be identified and assisted towards finding paid employment, with an outcome of 40% of these service users (20) being successfully supported into employment in 2016/17. The LDPB held a workshop in July 2016 to explore the issues in more detail and the outputs of the workshop will be used to shape the employment action plan by September 2016.

Employment can be as little as 4 hours per week and can be short term (i.e. Temporary work over the Christmas period).

4.3.3 Inequalities

A previous emphasis on “work preparation”, voluntary work and training, often with limited structured follow-up into paid employment, needs to be re-balanced. A greater focus should be on the ultimate goal of paid employment. Many services have been largely geared to provide employment support to people with a mild or moderate learning disability, largely excluding people with more complex needs who nevertheless, with the right support, could be assisted to undertake at least some paid employment.

Gaps in current provision have identified the need for the development of specialist social enterprises, as an alternative route for people into paid employment. Such development enables closer working between specialist learning disability, mental health and mainstream employment support services. During 2015 the Council commissioned Community Catalysts³ to facilitate this, as well as the development of micro enterprises in the borough. The development of micro enterprises remains an important element in delivering personalisation and increased choice

For disabled young people approaching school-leaving, the “default” route for many remains accessing specialist services, rather than preparation for employment. This will need to be a key focus for partners in the local authority and the CCG as Education, Health and Care Plans are developed and all partners work together to continue to build a more seamless transitions pathway for disabled people in the Borough.

³ Community Catalysts (2014) *Community Catalysts*. Available: <http://www.communitycatalysts.co.uk/>. Last accessed 8th October 2014.

Recommendations for Commissioners

Continue to build on the offer of local mainstream and universal services to enhance the capacity, accessibility and knowledge of those through co-location, training and collaborative approaches.

Services should be reviewed and refocused to enable collaborative delivery of key outcomes including supporting clear progression routes for people with learning disabilities to access paid and unpaid employment.

Through the Learning Disability Partnership Board, commissioners should develop an action plan to improve the numbers of people with learning disabilities who are in paid employment and develop a supported employment pathway within the borough for people with a learning disability.

Public sector agencies as both employers and procurers of services should support the employment of disabled people through tender and contractual process and give guidance on good practice, and reasonable adjustments such as job carving for disabled people.

Commissioners should stimulate a mix of employment opportunities including paid work, self employment, social enterprises and Community Interest Companies.

Young people, particularly those in transition should continue to be offered routes into paid employment as a real option.

Volunteer placements should have clear objectives, ensuring relevance to the individual's career path or overall development, be time limited, with appropriate level of support, and encourage greater independence

Commissioners should also seek to increase the number of people with learning disabilities in paid employment working more than 16 hours.