4.2 People with disabilities or mental illness in employment

4.2.1 Employment and support for people with disabilities

Data from the latest Annual Population Survey (see Figure 4.2.1) show that 40.1% of people aged 16-64 years with disabilities in Barking and Dagenham are in employment, compared to 49% in London and 48.9% in England\(^1\). In each case this is well below (over 20% lower in each case) the employment rate for working age people.

Figure 4.2.1 Employment rates people aged 16-64, Barking and Dagenham, London and England, January to December 2014

Source: ONS-NOMIS, Annual Population Survey

Annually, mental ill-health is estimated to cost employers £28.3 billion in sickness absence, decreased productivity and increased staff turnover \(^2\).

According to data from the population survey (NOMIS, 2015), reviewing employment rates by impairment type shows that nationally people with ‘depression, bad nerves’ have very low employment rates, estimated at 38% for the period of time Jan to Dec 2014. In Barking and Dagenham this is significantly lower at 17%. However, people with learning disabilities, particularly those with complex needs and additional impairments, have significantly lower employment rates. The Valuing People Now Office for National Statistics - NOMIS (2015). Annual population survey. Available at https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/select/getdatasetbytheme.asp?opt=3&theme=&subgrp= (accessed1 April 2015).

Summary Report 2010\(^3\) indicates an average employment rate of 6% nationally for all people with a learning disability.

To quote the Department of Health report, Valuing Employment Now\(^4\): "If real disability equality is to be achieved, work needs no longer to be seen as optional for most people with moderate and severe learning difficulties. The default must be that everyone will have the chance to get a job."

There were a total of 9,040 people resident in the borough claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Incapacity Benefits in November 2014, with the 7.4% rate being the third highest in London\(^5\). Around 40% of these claimants were claiming sickness benefits for mental and behavioural disorders, and form the largest subgroup among people claiming these benefits. The second largest subgroup is those with ‘diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue’, at around 17%.

Despite more stringent eligibility criteria, the number of local people claiming benefits for mental health reasons is rising. There were 3,230 claimants in November 2010, 3,360 in November 2011, 3,500 in November 2012 and 3,600 in November 2013. The 2014 figure (3,790) is therefore 17% higher than in 2010.

According to the 2013/14 Combined Activity Returns for Adult Social Care, only 6.7% of adults with learning disabilities assessed or reviewed by adult social services were in paid employment. This ranked the borough 13 out of 31 London boroughs. The highest reported figure was 23.1%.

The 2013/14 Mental Health Minimum Dataset shows that 3% of adults receiving secondary mental health services in the borough were in employment during the previous twelve months. This ranked the borough 31 out of 32 London boroughs. The highest reported figure was 9.7%\(^6\).


\(^5\) https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157260/report.aspx

4.2.2 Current delivery

The performance of the Work Programme for people claiming sickness benefits falls far below target minimum performance levels set by government. As section 4.1.2 above set out, only 50 residents out of 1,040 referred on to the programme to date have secured a job lasting for 13 weeks or more\(^7\). The proportion improves slightly to 6.3% when looking only at new claimants of Employment & Support Allowance. Nevertheless that figure is at the mid-point of performance when looking at London boroughs, albeit below the 7.0% figure for London as a whole.

Work Programme providers and Jobcentre Plus are keen to improve their links, particularly with providers of mental health services. The proposed 2014/15 Partnership Agreement with these partners and the Council will have a key focus on building linkages between frontline advisors and exploring options to fund projects that help people with mental health problems into work.

Active health agency input into this agenda is critical if employment outcomes are to be improved. Given the scale of the problem, there is merit in considering enhancing the resource allocated to facilitating this work, as well as to co-funding employment programmes. The opportunity to refer directly from employment programmes to health-related provision (such as Improving Access to Psychological Therapy) and co-location of services should also be considered.

Disabled people with complex needs who cannot be helped by other programmes can receive support under Work Choice. This is a relatively small scale programme locally delivered by two prime contractors.

Specialist employment support services are commissioned separately by NHS Barking and Dagenham CCG and Barking and Dagenham Council. These are described in more detail in the following sub-sections 4.3 and 4.4.

4.2.3 Implications for commissioning

The future commissioning of specialist employment services for people with mental health needs and learning disabilities should continue to build on the offer of the mainstream employment services, currently Work Programme, Work Choice, Access to Work and other provision designed to help disabled people into employment. Public sector agencies as both employers and procurers of services should support the employment of disabled people through the tender and contractual process, and give guidance on good practice and reasonable adjustments such as working interviews and job carving for all disabled people.

There should be explicit targets for work experience opportunities for all people with disabilities. These should be available to all agencies supporting local people into work.

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There is a particular need to ensure effective linkages between Work Programme contractors, mental health provision and specialist employment support. Co-location of provision should be explored with local employment services.

At a time of increasing competition for employment, public agencies should take the lead in supporting people with disabilities into employment. The aim should be to actively promote the business case to employers in the private sector in employing disabled people.

**Recommendations for Commissioners**

Commissioners need to consider the opportunities for paid employment, job carving (customising job duties to enable a disabled person to undertake the role), volunteering, job coaches etc within commissioning strategies. In particular there needs to be a focus on tackling employment opportunities for young people and people claiming benefits due to sickness or disability.

There should be clearly defined outcomes regarding employment opportunities for disabled people included in the partners commissioned contracts.

Services should be aligned with mainstream employment provision, especially that of the Work Programme. Where specialist employment support is commissioned, the objectives should be clearly aligned with mainstream provision.

Resources should be identified to support the facilitation of effective linkages between mental health services and employment provision, particularly with Work Programme providers.

The Health and Wellbeing Board should receive updates at least twice yearly on the progress of employment and skills initiatives.