

Committee(s): Education Board	Dated: 06/02/2023
Subject: Connecting Communities Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3,5, 7, 8, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£0
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Gwen Rhys, Business Manager, Connecting Communities, Department for Community & Children's Services	

Summary

This report updates Members on the progress of the Connecting Communities programme.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

Main Report

Background

1. The Report to the Education Board dated 3 December 2021 gave a detailed overview of Connecting Communities, an £18 million programme funded by the Greater London Council (GLA) and the European Social Fund (ESF) of which the Education Strategic Unit (ESU) will receive £669,000 to deliver the programme's outcomes and impacts over the next 18 months.

Current Position

2. The Connecting Communities Team consists of: 1 x Business Manager, 1 x Employment Engagement Officer, 3 x Caseworkers (1 x Administrator in process of being offered the position and 1 x Caseworker in process of being recruited)

3. Communication and outreach activities

Since the last Education Board meeting, the Christmas/New Year break has resulted in something of an interregnum in service. Team members took leave and referral agencies were closed for some of the period.

3.1. In the last two weeks since returning to work on 6 January we

3.1.1 have invited those Participants who enrolled before our new style Introduction Sessions and appear to be “stuck” with their job searching activities to attend a “Boost Your Opportunities” workshop on 17 January. Going forward, the content of this workshop will be used in the first meeting between Participant and Caseworker. Designed to actively engage Participants in their own job search and training needs activities it is hoped that this workshop will lessen the time from joining the programme to achieving either a training and/or a job outcome.

3.1.2. are experiencing better engagement from Participants following our new style weekly Introduction Sessions during which we enrol Participants on the programme and deliver the “Boost Your Opportunities” This also means every Participant achieves a “Training Outcome” at the outset of joining the programme.

3.1.3 have had one Participant refer two unemployed friends to the programme and several Participants have sent us “thank you” emails having attended our Part 1 Development workshop.

3.1.4 are inviting all Participants to attend Parts 1, 2, 3, 4 of the Personal Development Programme. This programme is running continuously over a four week period (week 1, Part 1, week 2 Part 2 and so forth) until at least May.

3.1.5 are continuing outreach and promotion with the support of our colleagues in the media team.

3.1.6 continue to take every opportunity to meet with influencers, partners, and stakeholders from within and beyond the Corporation

4. Unemployment and the current Economic Climate in the UK

4.1 The ONS released its Labour Market data on 17 January 2023 which showed:

4.1.1 the employment rate September – November was largely unchanged compared with the previous three-month period. The number of employees and part-time self-employed workers increased. Recruitment consultants, Reed, are reporting more part-time and contractual work and this is reflected in the job opportunities being offered to our Participants. Overall, vacancies decreased on the quarter but are above pre-pandemic levels.

4.1.2 in the latest three-month period (October to December), the number of people unemployed for up to six months increased, driven by those aged 16 to 24 years. Those unemployed for over six and up to 12 months increased, while those unemployed for over 12 months decreased.

4.2 Economic inactivity continues to be a concern.

4.2.1 Economic inactivity due to long-term ill health, early retirement and educational studies appear to be falling slightly, although economic inactivity due to long-term ill health remains well above its pre-pandemic levels.

4.2.2 Economic inactivity due to early retirement is now back to where it was before the pandemic, illustrating that the challenges we are now facing are primarily around fewer people *entering* work rather than more people *leaving* it.

4.2.3. Around a fifth of all of those who are economically inactive state that they would like a job at the moment, including 560 thousand of those with long-term health conditions. Among those out of work due to caring responsibilities, 390 thousand want a job now while a further three quarters of a million expect to work again in future.

5. Outcomes

The Team's focus is on contractual outcomes and we are moving at pace to ensure that we have a contractual outcome (training, education, job) for every Participant.

5.1 One barrier to our achieving monthly targets is the requirement to provide detailed "compliant evidence" of outcomes to the contract holder, Central London Forward. The evidence is not in itself complicated, but whilst it is imperative, for example, that we receive confirmation from a training provider that a Participant has started a course, giving this information is not top of the training provider's priorities.

5.2 Since November, we have secured one more evidenced Sustainment (Participant in work for 6 months) with a further two due in January. We also have five Participants who have been offered employment and for whom we are waiting evidence (contract of employment signed by both employer and employee or a copy of their first pay slip).

6. Contractual Reviews

6.1 Central London Forward, the main contract holders, review each borough's progress against targets on a monthly basis. Connecting Communities, like all ESF-funded contracts, requires accurate data entry supported by the provision of specific evidence which shows proof of Participants reaching certain targets. In recent compliance audits the City of London's programme has been 100% compliant. The

City of London's Connecting Communities programme produces monthly financial claims which are prepared on time and are consistently accepted without need for revision.

Options

Not applicable.

Proposals

Not applicable.

Key Data

Not applicable.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

7. This initiative has the potential to make a significant contribution to a flourishing society by giving people an equal opportunity to enrich their lives and reach their full potential. Moreover, it supports a thriving economy by enabling industries to access the skills and talent they need and ensuring that more individuals can reach their potential and secure decent work. It shows that collaborative working can make the core city institutions even better connected and responsive to changed needs. It builds individual and systemic resilience by enabling structures which can be mobilised in the shorter-term but are able to continue in a sustainable manner for the longer term.

Financial and resource implications

8. A total budget of £18 million has been secured for Connecting Communities of which the ESU will receive £669,000 to deliver the programmes outcomes and impacts over the next 18 months. The proposal does not seek additional funds or resources from the City Corporation at this stage. Connecting Communities also aims to support the Livery Companies to make better, more joined-up use of the existing £7.9 million currently dedicated on an annual basis to skills development work. There is also the potential to work more closely with business partners and the Liveries to gain access to wider funding opportunities possible through the recently released government white paper "Skills for Jobs"¹ which focusses on post-16 education reform.

9. There are some officer resource implications in terms of management and implementation time.

Legal implications

10. Connecting Communities is being managed through Central London Forward. Central London Forward (CLF) is a partnership of the 12 central London local authorities. They collaborate with their member authorities and with other stakeholders to support inclusive and sustainable growth in central London; so that our economy thrives, and our residents benefit from the opportunities this creates. CLF deliver large scale employment and skills programmes across central London.

11. The governance of the Livery Skills Initiative is with the Livery Committee. The collaboration partners, including the Livery, are separate legal entities with their own decision-making processes.

Risk implications

12. There are risk implications of not completing the important and urgent recommended actions, and people failing to secure the skills they need to secure good jobs.

13. There are contractual risk implications associated with not meeting the targets outlined by the European Social Fund contract with Central London Forward regarding Connecting Communities.

Equalities implications

14. Not every young person has access to a breadth of developmental relationships and life experiences, which facilitate and broker routes into employment. The least advantaged tend to not have access to networks, mentors, advocates, work experience opportunities, careers advice, and family support in the same way as their more advantaged peers. For example, only 6 per cent of young people from low-income families take part in extracurricular activities, compared with 6 per cent from higher income families and young people who attend private schools are twice as likely to get internships in London compared to state educated children. They are not supported to access potential pathways or understand how to reach their goals. There is a disconnect between what they learn in school and their aspirations and opportunities later in life. For example, in 1997, 42 per cent of 16-17 year old students were studying and working. By 2014 this figure had declined to 18 per cent.

15. A more equitable society is based on realising the potential of all people. This requires strong networks of support and trust. The Liveries could leverage that trusted network. They could use their connections to boost opportunities for structured work experience, internships, and employment. Young adults who have 'four or more employer contacts' are five times more likely to be in employment or training than those who have little or no contact with employers.

16. An equitable society is one where all people have access to meaningful and valued pathways, and opportunities to flourish and achieve success. There should be multiple pathways and routes in and out of learning throughout life, which is of benefit to us all.

17. This initiative has the potential to make a significant contribution to a flourishing society giving people an equal opportunity to enrich their lives and reach their full potential. Moreover, it supports a thriving economy by enabling industries to access to the skills and talent they need and ensuring the more individuals can reach their potential and secure decent work. It shows that collaborative working can make the core city institutions even better connected and responsive to changed needs. It builds individual and systemic resilience by enabling structures which can be mobilised in the shorter-term but are able to continue in a sustainable manner for the longer term.

Climate implications

18. There are no immediate Climate implications.

Security implications

19. There are no immediate Security implications.

Conclusion

20. The City of London's Connecting Communities team continues to impact the lives of those it supports into training, education and work. We are now supporting a number of Ukrainian refugees, most of whom have left successful jobs in their country of origin to start a new life in the UK. As well as supporting young graduates whose lives have been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic to gain confidence, acquire work-related skills and secure employment, we are also helping a number of individuals aged 50+ to make career changes which fit with their current needs.

Appendices

- (1) Overview of the 4-Part Personal Development Programme
- (2) Overview of the Boost Your Opportunities Workshop

Background Papers

None.

Gwen Rhys

Business Manager, Connecting Communities, Department for Community & Children's Services

T: 07599 102169

E: gwen.rhys@cityoflondon.gov.uk