

## **Fife Employability Forum**

### ***Improving employment outcomes for the people of Fife***

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014, Rothes Halls

46 people took part in the Fife Employability Forum held on 29<sup>th</sup> January, of which 8 were Fife Council staff, 1 from Fife College and 2 from SDS.

The event was facilitated by Carolyn Stenhouse of Avanté Consulting. Presentations were given by:

- Pegs Bailey on the Draft Fife Employability Pathway Commissioning Framework and
- Bruce Penman on the creation of an Integrated Employability Service in Edinburgh

This was followed by a morning of discussions on the Draft Commissioning Framework. The Forum undertook a SWOT analysis which is summarised below. Fife Voluntary Action (FVA) have developed a number of key recommendations built from the discussions on the day.

1. There is a lot to like in the more strategic approach to commissioning services, and a number of concerns.
2. The gap in funding provision from April to June (or beyond) is very concerning and some small specialist projects which serve niche client groups may get lost along with their capacity, expertise and relationships. Small amounts of money could make all the difference.

**Recommendation:** Fife Council work with those small niche projects under threat to ensure their survival until the full commissioning framework are developed.

**FVA to send details of those projects under threat to FC.**

3. There seems to be a disconnect with the framework and the priority outcomes contained in the ESIF 2014-20 documents.  
**Recommendation:** Fife Council's Enterprise Planning and Protective Services (EPPS) work closely with Sharon Douglas's team to ensure that the two documents reflect each other appropriately.
4. The assessment criteria and weightings will be crucial to selecting the best services for the people of Fife.

**Recommendation:** The assessment criteria include Best Value (or relevant equivalent) criteria so that the quality of service provision can also be assessed and not just cost/job outcome. The final criteria and weightings should be shared with the Opp Fife Delivery Groups for comment and feedback, and possibly more widely.

5. There is a lack of detail in the document on the approach to what is being commissioned and how. It was felt there had been a lack of consultation with the many services who will be affected by this.

**Recommendation:** OFP (in partnership with FVA) host another consultation event when the document is in its near-final state. Possibly in early May prior to the next OFP meeting.

6. The timeframes are very tight. The third sector does not feel well positioned to develop a consortium approach to ensure a good range of service delivery. (For example in Edinburgh the sector had 12 months to establish relationships and explore options, 3 months to develop the bid once the tender document was out and a further 3 months to establish the service once it had been commissioned).

**Recommendation:** As a matter of priority FVA to host a meeting of interested third sector organisations to explore options and realities of consortium working. Organisations to consider who best placed to lead such activity.

**Recommendation:** If there are to be delays in ESF funding going 'live' then we recommend that OFP use FSF funding to either: a) extend existing provision to allow for further consortium development work or b) pilot some initial consortium structures with a view to testing this mode of delivery in advance of ESF coming live later in the year.

7. Partnership working is seen as the biggest opportunity. Conversely competition is seen as the biggest threat, particularly for small and niche projects which serve some of the most vulnerable clients

**Recommendation:** Projects interested in continuing service delivery in the employability arena should take part in consortium discussions to see how best they can fit in and work with others.

8. Focus on job outcomes only will shift focus of delivery from stage 1 and 2 engagement with the hardest to reach.

**Recommendation:** Assessment Criteria should ensure sufficient weight is placed on 'progression' along the pathway and the attainment of measurable 'soft outcomes' for services for these clients.

## Detailed summary of comments from the workshops:

### Strengths:

- The opportunity to encourage and invest in developing partnership working, particularly in the third sector was seen as very valuable. The existing work in developing the Forum was seen as helpful in making this happen.
- Recognition of the existing skills and specialisms within the third sector, (balanced by concern in threats that this might get lost if we aren't careful)
- The strategic approach to identifying gaps will hopefully prevent duplication.
- The focus on the areas of highest need (e.g. the 20%SIMD areas) was also positive.
- This will lead to a better structure of services in Fife and smoother referral pathways for clients.
- The longer approach to funding (FSF issues not withstanding). A three year in principle commitment was seen as very helpful to allowing services to develop more strategic responses.
- Recognition of need to focus on people with health problems and also the approach to working with families.
- We have already undertaken a mapping of existing third sector provision which shows client, stages and geographical gaps

### Weaknesses

- There is a lack of necessary detail in the commissioning framework to allow services to develop appropriate bids.
- The timeframes are unrealistically tight and may cause rushed and ill thought through projects.
- There has been a lack of engagement and consultation with all parties affected by the commissioning framework.
- The outcomes based approach to funding will create significant cash flow issues for smaller organisations. This will be exacerbated if ESIF is run at a 'Supra CPP' level.
- The short timescales *and* the outcomes based approach to funding will inhibit the development of innovative (and therefore riskier) delivery models.
- There are gaps in relation to homeless and young people leaving the care system, and young people who are NEET but live outwith the SIMD areas.

### Opportunities

- A lot of people saw this as a great opportunity to develop real and strategic partnerships to better serve the needs of clients.
- There will be greater accountability for all service providers.
- It addresses the current gap in provision for ex-offenders.

- The clarity on target areas will allow new and different providers to become part of the conversation.
- The guidelines have created a useful framework for discussion and an opportunity to feedback to OFP and inform their development.
- Tight timeframes will galvanise providers into action!

#### Threats

- Competition was identified as the biggest threat. This could come from the private sector or national voluntary organisations that have a scale that could remove funding from more local 'homegrown' charities which have established local ownership of their services, community benefit, relationships, trust and capacity. Not to mention keeping Fife's resources in Fife.
- Niche service provision could get lost as these projects cannot 'compete'.
- Individual projects only want what is best for them and do not collaborate for bigger picture.
- File sharing with JC+ and/or Work Programme providers would be a concern.
- Focus on job outcome rather than progressions could mean more cherry-picking of clients and a shift of focus from providing stage 1 & 2 provision for the hardest to reach.
- Outcomes payments and cashflow issues could cripple small partners within a consortium.
- The gap in funding will lead to loss of experience and unnecessary staff turnover, not to mention loss of momentum with key client groups.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the event for the frank and constructive contributions. We look forward to engaging again at future Forum events.