



INSIGHT - Customer Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny Review Summary Report

Employment & Skills Support

Thursday 6 February 2025

Introduction

This report summarises our scrutiny which aimed to give assurance from a customer perspective of the Employment & Skills Support offer and effectiveness to deliver a quality support experience. Our three key takeaways from this scrutiny were that:

- evidence showed this is a successful offer that continually seeks to adapt to offer impactful support.
- the team is small, but experienced and driven to support customers achieve their goals, encouraging individuals to recognise their potential.
- customers spoke with genuine gratitude and were proud to share their experiences of the difference support had made to them.

Detailed Findings – Scrutiny Approach

Our scope considered the quality of support and attempted to understand the difference support has made to customers. We gathered information as follows:

- Met with the Head of Community Investment and Employment & Skills Manager.
- Spoke with Employability Coaches (ECs) / Community Investment Officer (CIO) and observed a home visit.
- Gathered a range of customer consultation feedback about their experiences.

Service Background

The Employment & Skills (E&S) support offer is an added-value service. It aims to support customers' preparation to find employment, training, work or volunteer placements, whilst building personal development like motivation and increased confidence. The offer includes some opportunity for residents living in communities with Great Places homes. The approach works to empower people to positively progress into work or training, which is achieved with an offer of coaching, delivery of innovative projects, and training, utilising strong community partnerships with local colleges, and agencies such as the Lancs Training Group, Princes Trust 'Get Into' Programmes, amongst others.

Service links to the Neighbourhood & Community Consumer Standard, which states registered providers must co-operate with relevant partners to promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where they provide social housing. The number of customers accessing support is a key driver to measure success as outlined in the Corporate Plan and reported on the Balance Scorecard.



Four experienced Employability Coaches, ECs work in regions with General Need, GN and Independence & Wellbeing, I&W customers. Maximum caseloads range from 20 to 30 generated through comms campaigns to customers advertising opportunities, links to community centres via the funded programme delivery and from colleague referrals.

We observed that the team works conscientiously to provide impactful support for customers. When we met ECs they shared ideas to improve effectively by offering local place-based support for a set period assisting to create local presence, and establishing area knowledge and partnerships. Supplementary light-touch support could be offered to customers who require advisory support, utilising self-serve tools and other features on the website. Plans for 2025/26 aim to carry out more targeted work with specific customers, for example those with gas capped, customers at risk of benefit changes and young people living in our households, and continue to barrier bust with customers to attempt to remove perceptions that may prevent people feeling empowered to seek work.

Conclusion

We feel from evidence gathered in our scrutiny that this service provides customers with added-value and impactful support that makes a genuine difference to their lives. We saw evidence the teams' approach is to listen to customers, agreeing relevant support tailored for customers' needs and capacity. ECs agree manageable step-by-step plans with customers reinforcing a 'with not for' model.

We noted good practice areas during the course of our scrutiny as follows:

- The service offers a diverse range of opportunity to support customers into employment, training or gain volunteering experience.
- Requests for support can be accessed via referrals, comms campaigns and information is available on Great Places website. Following initial customer contact ECs will arrange an in-person visit with customers. ECs spoke positively about face-to-face working and the benefits achieved to provide support that is meaningful for customers.
- Support is not time constrained enabling a flexible and tailored approach to be taken, whilst providing time for development of safe trusting relationships.
- We noted service offers a person-centred approach that empowers people to recognise their aspirations and strengths.
- We observed mutual support and respect for colleagues within the team and learnt about opportunities for development and training. The team catch-up each month which allow colleagues to share updates, opportunities, ideas and experiences.

We noted from information collected ~~shows~~ evidence of effective quality support, this was clearly evident in customers' feedback. Our scrutiny work did identify findings, where additional improvements may be made to strengthen the offer. We discussed these with service, which would deliver fair and equal access for all customers, use of resource to maximise impact, and collection of satisfaction data to evaluate and inform service. Using this evidence we proposed five recommendations and agreed an action plan with a focus on these areas, see action plan for detail.



Learning which informed our scrutiny

- Service baseline target of 900 people has been achieved, YTD the team has supported 1,102 people into employment, training and volunteer placements - 43% are Great Places customers. Externally funded projects do attract non-customers, which in-turn offers greater opportunity for customers.
- Performance figures 2023-24 were 1295 households into employment, training and volunteering of which 33% were Great Places customers.
- ECs arrange home visits and hold surgeries in I&W schemes and community spaces, creating a regular presence to help build confidence and remove barriers. ECs also manage a budget using their specialist experience and skills to allocate funds to support customers.
- ECs also said that geographical spread of patches does create inefficiencies relating to time because of travelling between appointments. They added working across a region also presents challenge because it can be difficult to gain local knowledge and establish partnerships.
- Five live externally funded projects generate a combined value of more than £600K this financial year and more than £3 million in the last 3 years in Sheffield, Lancashire and Greater Manchester. Performance data of externally funded projects is reported to funders for evaluation to meet targets. All these contracts are on track to deliver agreed outcomes, recent site visits in Sheffield resulted in positive feedback from the DWP.
- Customer satisfaction is not currently captured to gauge data to inform about the quality of service. Plus data is not always recorded effectively when E&S support is provided by other customer facing colleagues, if data were captured ECs could follow-up with these customers.
- ECs create Support Improvement Plans and use QL to capture and manage caseloads, and record case outcomes.

What customers said about service:

We chose to collect feedback using telephone surveys believing customers may engage more readily with this approach rather than by email. Given this more time-intensive approach and our focused 6-week scrutiny window, we agreed to contact a manageable sample of twelve customers. In total, we spoke with thirteen customers, whilst this is a small sample the feedback captured positive insightful comments about support from a customer perspective to inform our scrutiny.

In addition to feedback, we reviewed five case studies that brought the impact of support to life and not only in relation to employment prospects, we observed a boost in customers' confidence, changes of mindset, self-belief and aspirations, for example.

- *I am figuring stuff out slowly and doing tons of research... I'm just glad I have found my passion in something again. I do appreciate the support so much, I will be seeing in a new year with 2 new qualifications - I can't thank you enough, honestly*
- *I got professional help plus gained confidence to return to work after so many years.*



Average satisfaction scores given for the following ranged from 9 to 10:

Employment & Skills support is offered	Customer clear what to expect from the support	Customer contacted in a reasonable timescale
Felt comfortable to speak openly	EC was understanding and customer felt listened to	The support advice offered was useful

- We used Our Voice to gauge appetite for self serve facilities, but didn't receive responses to report on.
- We shadowed an employability coach on a home visit to observe a customer interested to learn about the in-house enterprise programme Boss It, which supports people into self-employment.
- A smaller feedback sample meant there wasn't sufficient detail to identify specific trends relating to customer profiles. However, we can confirm we did observe feedback from people with a range of lived experiences and reasons for support, which was reflected in the approach taken by the ECs.

Website Research

Our review included review of service related information customers can access on the website – we found it easy to locate using the search facility. The E&S web page contained basic service information including an enquiry form, which was simple to follow. We noted the main web page did not provide information about the in-house training programmes like Boss It or the Working Wardrobe. We also found two website articles relating to Wybourn Works and Employment Hints & Tips that weren't linked to the main web page.

Our comparison with other landlord websites found similar content, although, several landlords had given greater prominence to the service information on the website. We found it was easier to navigate to relevant web pages as a result of less clicks, use of more intuitive header titles and placement of detail on web pages compared with Great Places website. One landlord's site made use of videos, one example showed how customers can design a CV.

Overall Summary

Following our scrutiny we feel this is a meaningful support service with potential for further development making best use of team resource, we have summarised evidence that informed our recommendations.

Evidence showed the service offers comprehensive person-centred support via Employability Coaches, who are clearly invested to assist a range of customers to identify and achieve goals. We would like to ensure service is promoted fairly and equally, so customers who require support have opportunity to prepare to find employment, training, work or volunteer placements.

We would like to see the collection of customer feedback to inform service of the benefits of support and capture data to monitor the difference the support has made to customers - this will allow measurement of more holistic improvement enabling better reporting.

The teams' suggestion to undertake more place-based work where opportunity arises will allow greater knowledge to be established in areas building local partnerships and presence of support for customers.