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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – DEVELOPING THE WORKFORCE**

### **Report by Director of Resilient Communities**

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## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**6 December 2022**

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### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on Scottish Borders Council’s (SBC) commitment to deliver Employability Support in the Scottish Borders. It provides a brief breakdown of the diverse employability interventions SBC and our partners are utilising to tackle unemployment in the region and in particular supporting priority groups. The report also outlines the coordinating role of the Local Employability Partnership (LEP).**
- 1.2 The unemployment rate in the Scottish Borders has risen since February 2020 from 1,860 to 2,015 as of August 2022, measured by the Universal Credit claimant count (Source: NOMIS 07/11/2022). It is anticipated that Covid-19 has impacted significantly on the number of people seeking employment, as well as claimants moving onto Universal Credit and those affected by the crisis in the Ukraine. This has created a high demand on support services especially for young people and those with additional barriers.
- 1.3 The report highlights the Council’s and its partner’s significant commitment to support those most in need to reach their employment goals. It highlights the work of SBC’s Employment Support Service and other departments and the various projects and interventions funded through external funding from Scottish and UK Government.

### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **2.1 It is recommended that the Executive Committee:-**

- (a) Note the Council’s ongoing commitment to employability support services in the Scottish Borders;**
- (b) Endorse the establishment of the Local Employability Partnership (LEP) and its objective to align and integrate support; and**

**(c) Note the challenges and impact on employability delivery relating to short term in-year funding.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The unemployment rate in the Scottish Borders has risen since February 2020 from 1,860 to 2,015 as of August 2022, which is measured by the Universal Credit claimant count (Source: NOMIS 07/11/2022). This rise of 8% compares with an increase over the same period of 22.5% in the UK, and a decrease of 0.8% in Scotland (Source: Capital City Partnership Claimant Count Update, September 2022).
- 3.2 The employment rate is a measurement of the number of economically active people aged 16-64 who are in employment. The employment rate for the Scottish Borders was 74.4% in the year to June 2022. The number of those employed in the Scottish Borders (aged 16 and over) rose by 1,200 during the same period to 52,800. The employment rate was the same as that for Scotland, but lower than that for Great Britain (75.5%). In March 2020, the employment rate was 74.8%, with 53,500 people in employment.
- 3.3 It is anticipated that Covid-19 has impacted significantly on the number of people seeking employment, as well as claimants moving onto universal credit and those affected by the crisis in the Ukraine. There has been a high demand on support services especially for young people and those with additional barriers.
- 3.4 Many people who are unemployed face greater barriers than others when it comes to entering into and moving forward in the world of work. The reasons for this are often quite complex, but there are a number of barriers that typically have to be overcome before people enter or re-enter the workplace. These include low educational attainment, low self-confidence and esteem, gaps in their CV, negative experiences of work, lack of references, high anxiety, absence of recent work experience, out of date or limited employability skills, lack of awareness of employers expectations, and stigma around mental health problems. As a result, some people may need extra help and support to gain the benefits of work that many of us take for granted.
- 3.5 In September 2021 the Scottish Borders Local Employability Partnership (LEP) was established to focus on the local employability needs of the Scottish Borders, and to improve alignment and integration of services as well as leading the Scottish Government's 'No One Left Behind' (NOLB) policy and other employability funding streams. The LEP's role is to identify employability priorities and ensure NOLB funding is targeted at priority groups. This is laid out in the Scottish Borders Employability Delivery Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25, which was agreed by LEP partners in March 2022.
- 3.6 The LEP is chaired by SBC, however this is very much a multi-agency partnership approach. All Members of the LEP have an equal voice ensuring supported interventions and projects are meeting the employability needs of the Scottish Borders. The LEP membership consists of senior officers from Scottish Borders Council (SBC), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Borders College (BC), Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce, Scottish Borders Social Enterprise Chamber, and a representative from Scottish Borders Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and the Third Sector Interface (TSI).

3.7 The objectives of the LEP are to:

- Drive forward the shared ambitions and actions of the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind policy agenda, and to ensure the right support is available in the right way at the right time;
- Align as appropriate with regional and national approaches and ensure effective employability links to employers and business sectors;
- Oversee the allocation of the funding from the Scottish Government and the delivery of No One Left Behind and the Youth Guarantee Fund, and to monitor these projects to ensure they met their required outputs and outcomes;
- Develop a Scottish Borders employability model and strategy and to ensure its effective implementation;
- Utilise the evidence to co-produce an all age employability support service that is person centred, more joined up, flexible and responsive to individual needs;
- Use labour market statistics and available data to inform decisions identify priorities and support an effective partnership response;
- Co-ordinate information sharing and action between strategic partners;
- Co-ordinate resources to improve opportunities and outcomes, and
- Involve service users throughout the process.

3.8 There have been a number of changes to funding relating to employability over the last few years with the introduction of Developing the Young Workforce (2014), No One Left Behind (2019), Young Persons Guarantee (2020), Kickstart (2020), Long Term Unemployed (2022), and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (2022).

3.9 Some people may fulfil the criteria to be considered as part of priority groups for receiving assistance through employability programmes, including lone parents, those with disabilities, people with mental health problems, the long-term unemployed, young people leaving care and ex-offenders. It is important that everyone facing barriers to entering employment are effectively directed to the appropriate services at the right time, and that the staff providing support are able to refer people to these services in a joined up and coordinated way.

3.10 Over the years, many employability projects and services have changed or ceased due to short-term funding and geographical challenges. This can add to the complex and often confusing employability landscape which people in the Scottish Borders are required to navigate to access employability support. The establishment of the LEP in 2021 and the agreement of a joint delivery plan aims to simplify the support landscape and take a significant step forward to ensure employability services better meet local needs and are more joint up and aligned.

3.11 The launch of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for the South of Scotland in 2021 has provided an increased focus on the region's economic performance. The ten-year strategy seeks to maximise economic opportunities in the South of Scotland, whilst taking account of its key challenges. This strategy has six themes, including 'Skilled and Ambitious People', with the following priorities:

- Enabling access to skills, training and employment;
- Attracting and retaining people with a diversity of skills, ambition and knowledge;
- Preparing for the future of work, and
- Building lifelong learning opportunities.

## 4 SCOTTISH BORDERS EMPLOYABILITY INTERVENTIONS

4.1 The following interventions are supported in 2022/23 by core SBC funding of £338,678; No One Left Behind (NOLB) funding of £1,369,151; ESF (European Social Fund) funding of £57,468, and Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Deal funding of £76,320. This year to date the below interventions have supported 98 individuals into paid employment many requiring in work and ongoing support.

4.2 **NOLB STAGE 1** (Community Learning and Development): aims to give young people, not yet in a positive destination, the opportunity to work with a Key Worker to identify and overcome barriers preventing them from moving into training, employment or education. Young people are offered opportunities to gain qualifications, to build on strengths and interests, to improve independence and life skills, and to participate in volunteering and work experience, all of which improve their own self-worth, and options for future employment. Learning Plans for each individual are agreed between the individual and their Key Worker and are reviewed regularly. These plans are used in support of any applications for Education Maintenance Allowance, and young people are identified as at risk or not in a destination in a variety of ways, with schools and partners working together using a data hub to target additional support. Stage 1 has engaged with 43 people this year to date. (This project is funded by Scottish Government/NOLB)

4.3 **NOLB STAGE 2** (Employment Support Service & Lowland Training): Pre-Employment Training through a blended learning approach of face to face sessions and virtual training. The training runs for approximately 10 weeks for a minimum of 2 days per week. Individuals have the opportunity to obtain accredited qualifications in employability, personal development, core skills and customer care. A short work taster placement may also be offered during the training where appropriate. Stage 2 has engaged with 30 people this year to date. (This project is funded by NOLB)

- 4.4 **NOLB STAGE 3** (Employment Support Service, Lowland Training and Borders College): Work Experience provides individuals the opportunity to gain 8 weeks experience in a real working environment. Placements usually consist of 24-30 hours per week however, this can be adapted to meet the individual's needs and abilities. During this time, individuals have the opportunity to gain employability based qualifications along with valuable work based skills. Stage 3 has engaged with 23 people this year to date. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.5 **NOLB STAGE 4** (Direct Partners, Lowland Training and Borders College): is designed to help individuals obtain the skills they require to secure paid employment. This stage is for those ready for work but lack the qualifications that will allow them to take advantage of job opportunities in a specific sector. Stage 4 offer short courses in key sector areas such as Retail, Construction, Care and Hospitality. The courses usually run for 2- 4 weeks depending on the course content. Stage 4 has engaged with 28 people this year to date. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.6 **SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT** (Employment Support Service): supports people of working age with recognised additional barriers to find and sustain paid employment. This includes Care Experienced young people (16+); those with a learning disability; people with a physical disability; those with a sensory impairment; recovering from a mental health condition; homeless or under threat of being homeless; people who are on the autistic spectrum; disengaged / disadvantaged young people; and people 50+ of age and veterans. Support is provided by following the 'supported employment 5 stage process' which includes supporting individuals to complete CVs, application forms, job searching, interview skills, in work support, job coaching and career progression. Job tasters and short term work experience placements can also be arranged to support individuals reach their employment goals. Guidance on retention of staff and reasonable adjustments in the work place is also available to employers. In 2022/23 to date, the supported employment element of the service has engaged with 99 people on various stages of the 5 stage process, and 19 of those have secured paid employment. (This service is funded by SBC)
- 4.7 **BORDERS FAMILY FIRM** (Employment Support Service): supports Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) aged 16 – 25 years old find and sustain paid employment. Offering a menu of employability interventions including job tasters, work experience, working interviews, job search training and ongoing support and in work support. This project is a partnership approach with NHS Borders and currently working with 9 young people, 5 of which have secured paid employment. (This project is funded by the European Social Fund)
- 4.8 **DFN Project SEARCH** (Employment Support Service): is a partnership between SBC, NHS Borders and Borders College. The project provides a one year internship for 8 people providing real life work experience for young people aged 17 – 29 with additional needs. The Project is based at the Borders General Hospital and follows the academic calendar. Individuals obtain work experience in various hospital departments combined with virtual learning sessions. These sessions will include employability skills, communication, job search skills, interview skills and health and safety in the workplace awareness. The interns currently on the

project are on their second work experience rotation. From the 7 people who participated last year 6 have secured paid employment. (This project is funded by the European Social Fund)

- 4.9 **PATHWAYS FOR EMPLOYMENT** (Learning Disability Service): provides opportunities for individuals with a learning disability, those who experience mental health issues, and autistic people, to engage in voluntary work opportunities with the ultimate aim of broadening the pathways to employment for individuals in these groups. The target group are individuals who have a requirement for a higher and/or a more intensive period of support and those who would be defined as 'not job ready' in the employability pathway. The project provides employment preparation including confidence building and the development of employability skills. Through the provision of this support, the project seeks to reduce the gap in employment outcomes for some of those furthest from the labour market. The project has engaged with 9 clients this year to date. (This project is funded by the European Social Fund)
- 4.10 **UKRAINIAN SUPPORT** (Employment Support Service): supports Ukrainian people living in the Scottish Borders after leaving Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict. The project funds a bilingual Ukrainian and English speaking Employment Development Officer who offers employability support to Ukrainian people who would like to move into paid employment. Support can include CV writing, job searching, interview support to individuals and employers and employability workshops. The project is currently engaging with 35 people. (This project is funded from the SBC Ukrainian budget)
- 4.11 **KICKSTART** (Employment Support Service): SBC acted as a gateway organisation for DWP's Kickstart scheme providing funding to create new jobs for 16 to 24 year olds in receipt of Universal Credit, who were at risk of long-term unemployment. The Kickstart funding covered 100% of the National Minimum wage (or the Living Wage depending on the age of the participant) for 25 hours per week for a total of 6 months, some Kickstart places were then extended for a further 6 months using the Young Persons Guarantee funding. The employer received funding per job to cover any setup costs and support the young person to develop their employability skills, training IT equipment and uniforms. Employers supported the young person to become more employable through developing workplace skills. This intervention supported employers to create 80 Kickstart places leading to 25 permanent job roles. (Kickstart was funded by DWP before the programme ended in September 2022)
- 4.12 **INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMME** (Community Learning and Development): This Borders wide service supports young parent families and families where parents are isolated from existing services, with a focus is on supporting lone parent and low-income households affected by worklessness, helping adults to provide a better environment for their young people and progression opportunities for every member of the family. The project has engaged with 12 families this year. (This project is funded by Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Growth Deal)

- 4.13 **PARENTAL EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE** (Community Learning and Development): supports parents within the Scottish Borders by providing 1:1 Employability support. The support is person-centred and allows parents to address their barriers to work, which might include a lack of skills or work experience, health support, ASN, money advice, confidence building or motivational support. PES provides the opportunity to gain formal training and/or qualifications to move into a new area of work or progress in their current role. Referrals are received from: Health, Education, Social Work, DWP and also self-referrals. This year 31 Parents have started working with PES and 9 have received SQA qualifications moving them towards their chosen goals. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.14 **JOB CREATION SCHEME** (Economic Development): is a Scottish Government fully funded programme to help the long-term unemployed get back into work. The scheme is open to those aged over 25 years old and who have been out of work for a year and aims to find them a workplace opportunity in the public or third sector with each local authority given a target number of third sector placements. The hope is that the posts become permanent roles funded by the employer. Each post had an associated budget of £10,000 and each role could be for up to 30 hours per week at Scottish Living Wage and for a maximum of 6 months. However, there was significant flexibility in this and part-time roles can be created for a longer period if this met the needs of an employee. There have been 24 posts created in the Borders and these are a mixture of full time and part-time and are spread across the public and third sectors. (This project is funded by NOLB).
- 4.15 **PARTNERSHIP ACTION FOR CONTINUING EMPLOYMENT (PACE)**: SBC provides specialist employability support to the PACE partnership for people facing redundancy. The current PACE partnership operation in the Scottish Borders is led by the local Skills Development Scotland area manager (SDS), and provides strong links sharing across the South of Scotland sharing labour market intelligence.
- 4.16 **TARGETED EMPLOYER RECRUITMENT INCENTIVE (ERI) PROGRAMME** (Economic Development): the LEP allocated a budget for targeted employer recruitment incentives. These incentives are designed to support individuals with additional support needs. The ERI's will work specifically with one client and one employer, to support the creation of a unique opportunity that would not otherwise have been possible. Those eligible for support will be currently engaging with a service providing 1:1 support, with an ultimate goal of employment for the individual. The duration and hours worked during the ERI are flexible to cater to the needs of the individuals. To date 12 individuals have received supported and estimate a further 4 to be supported by March 2023. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.17 **BARRIER REMOVAL FUND** (Economic Development): the LEP ring-fenced a budget for a Barrier Removal Fund, designed to support individuals with barriers to employment with no viable alternatives to overcome their barrier in supporting them reach their employment goal. A panel meet regular to review applications, to date 34 applications have been approved. (This project is funded by NOLB)



- 4.18 **CHAMBER OF COMMERCE JOB TASTERS:** is a procured intervention delivered by the Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce. The chamber work with their members to offer job tasters for individuals working with employability projects. This provides individuals an opportunity to gain an insight into what working in a specific sector may look like, and the variety of roles within each organisation. To date no job tasters have been delivered with an expected 30 by the end of March 2023. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.19 **BURNFOOT COMMUNITY CENTRE:** The Community Hub operates a Employability café/hub every Thursday morning where a wide range of employability projects and services such as SBC's Employability Services, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Borders College and third sector groups come together to offer employability support and guidance. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.20 **LET'S GET EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE (TARFF SERVICES):** Let's Get Employed in Agriculture is a procured out intervention delivered by Tarff Valley Services, in partnership with Borders Machinery Ring Ltd. The intervention pilots a 6-week full time 1 to 1 work experience programme for up to 15 young people interested in a career in agriculture in the Scottish Borders. It aims to bridge the gap between education and employment, to establish a more dependable pipeline of appropriately skilled labour, in one of the South's key sectors and improve business partnerships with farmers enabling more opportunities for links with schools including businesses hosting CPD events on farms. The first cohort of placements will take place in January 2023 with the second to start in February or March. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.21 **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS (ASN) YOUTH TRANSITIONAL PROJECT (Branching Out):** the project employs an additional staff member to develop the capacity for employment, training, and qualifications for young people with Additional Support Needs. Branching Out will work in partnership with stakeholders to support learners accessing training courses, life skills as part of their transitional pathway to employment. The projected number of starts is 14 people. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.22 **PEER MENTORING PROGRAMME (Scottish Borders Social Enterprise Chamber):** the peer mentoring programme offers third sector social enterprises support by offering a dedicated mentor with significant experience working in social enterprises and private businesses. The mentoring is designed to support business growth and development. (This project is funded by NOLB)
- 4.23 **GET INTO ENTERPRISE COURSE (Scottish Borders Social Enterprise Chamber):** run a 6 Week Course on Social Enterprise, from taking a business idea to actually starting a social enterprise business covering key areas such as finance, supply chain, customer service etc. The chamber will deliver 2 courses during 2022/23. (This project is funded by NOLB)

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial**

Apart from the Council's core funding of the Employment Support Services all the employability schemes outlined in this report where the Council is involved are fully funded by the Scottish and UK Governments. Funding allocations from No One Left Behind for 2023/24 are not known at this time. European Social Fund will end in March 2023. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has the potential to fund employability related interventions.

### **5.2 Risk and Mitigations**

The key risk is that the Council fails to support people in the Scottish Borders who are unemployed or being made redundant, especially those who sit within the priority groups. By failing to respond, the Council may also suffer significant reputational risk. Specifically;

- (a) The timing of funding allocations from Scottish Government for 2023/24 has the potential to impact on the retention of current employability staff contracted to 31 March 2023.
- (b) Without the ongoing NOLB funding there is a risk that interventions that are currently funded through NOLB will be significantly reduced.
- (c) The European Social Fund (ESF) ends in March 2023, however the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has the potential to fund current ESF and NOLB employability related interventions.

### **5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment**

The appropriate IIA stages have been carried out however a full IIA was not required. Tackling inequalities is key part of the work of an employability service and every effort is made to support disadvantaged individuals within the protected characteristic groups in the implementation of various schemes.

### **5.4 Sustainable Development Goals**

This report provides an overview of many employability projects and interventions and are expected to deliver against many United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The projects and partnerships noted in the report promote fair and equal access to employability support and training ensuring the most vulnerable individuals in our society have access and help to support they need to reach their employment aspirations.

### **5.5 Climate Change**

Working with partner organisations to deliver employability projects and interventions throughout the region reduces the need of excessive travel to receive employability support. It is recognised in the LEP Development Plan that the economy in the Scottish Borders is changing with new sectors emerging such as renewable energy, natural capital and bio-technology.

This provides opportunities of green jobs and supports Scottish Borders on a path to 'net zero' by 2045.

## 5.6 Rural Proofing

Employability Support services cover communities and individuals in all parts of the Scottish Borders including rural areas.

## 5.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications contained in this report and the Data Protection Officer has confirmed that a Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required, however for awareness there is a DPIA in place for NOLB and Employability Services.

## 5.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no proposed changes to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation resulting from this report.

# 6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Acting Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and their comments incorporated into the final report.

## Approved by

**Jenni Craig**  
**Director - Resilient Communities**

### Author(s)

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### Background Papers:

**Previous Minute Reference:** Scottish Borders Council's Response to the Employability Challenge in the Scottish Borders, 9 February 2021

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Alasdair Scott can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at [Alasdair.scott@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:Alasdair.scott@scotborders.gov.uk) tel:01835 824000 ext 2827