

The Black Country Working Together Project

'A Critical Analysis'

A follow up report to the Interim Evaluation of the Working Together Project focusing on key themes, learnings and recommendations for future programme development

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Contents Page

Executive Summary

Section 1 – Introduction

Section 2 – Comparison with Jobs Plus Model

Section 3 – The Community Connectors

Section 4 – Role of Housing

Section 5 – Approach to Procurement

Section 6 - Grant V PBR

Section 7 – Consortia Models

Section 8 – Place-based delivery

Section 9 – Housing Type

Section 10 – Recommendations for future programme development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Critical Analysis is to separately review and analyse in more detail a number of key project themes reported in the interim evaluation report. It is intended to build on and be complementary to this report. There are separate data reports and analysis of the reach and impact of the project. This analysis provides key information, learnings and recommendations for stakeholders and commissioners interested in developing future place based solutions to increase employment and earnings.

In developing the original Working Together Pilot Project, elements from the US Jobs-Plus model were used. A comprehensive comparison is contained within the body of the analysis. Whilst there were practicalities and challenges in how closely the programme could be implemented, a strong community engagement focus combined with place-based employment support have supported economically inactive residents across four wards of the Black Country increase their employment and earning opportunities.

The project themes explored in detail in the body of the analysis include:

- The community engagement strategies used, with a particular focus on the role of the community connectors and the inter-relationships between these roles, delivery partners and job-centre plus.
- The role of housing within the project, with a particular focus on the complexities presented by the social housing picture in each area and their role as lead partner. The analysis also explored some of the original assumptions and subsequent changes to the eligibility relating to residents housing tenure.
- The engagement of local delivery partners, with a particular focus on the projects approach to procurement, as well as an analysis of the comparative benefits of payment by results versus grant and consortia versus individual provider delivery.
- Place-based employment support, with a focus on challenges and successes in implementing this approach.

Based on the learnings and findings from the project, a successful place-based approach needs:

A local partnership for each area targeted with a strong commitment to the project and collaboration at senior level. It should include as a minimum housing, welfare, benefits, employment support and community engagement organisations/representation. The designated lead organisation does not have to be a particular type of organisation provided there is the co-operation and 'buy-in' of all partners and senior leadership. Where organisations work across more than one field i.e. Local Authority partners, it is important that each specialism is individually representation.

To be flexible and not prescriptive in its delivery model i.e. 'one size does not fit all'. The type of structures used for the delivery of the community and employment support elements i.e. through consortia or individual providers are not the primary consideration. Most importantly is whether the provider(s) have the skills, experience and capacity to meet the particular (and often diverse) needs of the community the project is working with. **A targeted mapping and gapping exercise of the area prior to commencement of the project** is an essential requirement to understand the extent of these local needs and the gaps which exist.

The type of payment model used should be considered on an individual basis and on a range of factors. In this project where both approaches have been trialled, there is no strong evidence either way that PBR incentives for providers improve sustainable outcomes. It is generally accepted in supply chain management, that **incentive alone, without strong performance management and support to improve, will not be a driver for change.**

A comprehensive and cohesive community engagement strategy, which includes area based community engagers. Whether this is delivered through dedicated roles i.e. community connectors within the project team or outreach roles within delivery organisations, effective community engagement is a critical success factor. Community roles are key to effective marketing and promotion of the opportunities to local people, and need to build trust quickly in order to engage people onto the project. This works best where individuals are already known to the local community, live in the local area and have some experience of this type of community engagement work.

A community engagement strategy which **recognises and harnesses the role informal community activities** can play as not only a hook to participation but building trust the local people and providing a stepping stone to employment-focused interventions for those furthest away from the labour market. Over 60% of those who have engaged have been non-traditional jobseekers e.g claiming health related benefits, income support.

The provision of local hubs (placed-based support) as a tool for initial engagement and development, within the heart of residential communities is a critical success factor. This is particularly the case where little or no service provision existed prior to the project. As part of the mapping exercise, consideration should be given to whether multiple locations will be needed to reach all communities within a specified geographical area. With space to deliver often at a premium, the types and nature of interventions have to be carefully considered and planned.

A strong employer focus and engagement from the beginning, with aligned **employment routeways and pathways to local transformational and enabling sectors.**

The project is in its third year of operation and will continue into mid-2018. The early findings and the interim report have been disseminated by the evaluation and project team on a national basis at the Into Work conference in both 2016 and 2017. This has already resulted in a number of follow up study visits of interested parties.

If you are a stakeholder or commissioner interested in finding out more, please contact either the Project Director Jacki Lakin jacki.lakin@accordgroup.org.uk or the Lead Evaluator Christine Brown christine.brown@futureexcel.co.uk.

SECTION 1: PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report builds on and is complementary to the evidence and conclusions drawn in the interim report produced in November 2016. It separately reviews and gives critical analysis on a number of key project themes and areas reported in the interim evaluation, as well as makes a series of recommendations to support future programme development.

The report also examines in more detail the similarities and differences between the Black Country project and the US Jobs Plus Model on which some project elements have been based. This has been undertaken through desk-based document review of relevant project documents detailed in the foot notes¹.

This report will be further supplemented with a refreshed analysis of project data and performance information, before the final phase of evaluation commences in Autumn 2017.

⁻¹ Sources of Jobs Plus Information:

Web-Site: <http://www.mdrc.org/project/jobs-plus-community-revitalization-initiative-public-housing-families#overview>

Document Sources:

- *Promoting Work in Public Housing – The Effectiveness of Jobs-Plus: Final Report (March 2005) Howard S Bloom, James A Riccio, Nandita Verma, with Johanna Walter*
- *Helping Public Housing Residents Find and Keep Jobs – A Guide for Practitioners based on the jobs-plus demonstration (December 2008) Susan Blank & Donna Wharton-Fields*
- *Sustained Earnings Gain for Residents in a Public Housing Jobs Program – Seven Year Findings from the Jobs Plus Demonstration (January 2010) James A Riccio*

SECTION 2: THE JOBS PLUS MODEL

Overview of Jobs Plus

Jobs-Plus was conceived in the mid-1990s by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Rockefeller Foundation, and MDRC to address the issue that public housing developments are among the most economically challenged neighborhoods with residents facing obstacles to employment beyond those normally experienced by other low-income people. To address the complex challenges residents faced, the programme took a multipronged approach to help residents increase their employment and earnings. It offered: (1) employment services at on-site job centers in the housing developments, (2) changes in rent rules that provide a greater financial incentive to work, and (3) community support for work, through which important information about work-related opportunities was spread through neighbor-to-neighbor outreach and other social networking efforts. The programme targeted all working-age non-disabled residents, in an attempt to “saturate” the housing developments with information, services, and incentives to support work.

Comparison with the Working Together Pilot Project.

Element	Jobs Plus Model	Working Together Pilot
Selection of Project Sites	<p>A national demonstration model, able to select from housing developments across the US. From 53 local housing authorities (with 442 housing developments), 7 sites were selected for the final demonstration project.</p> <p>A range of strict criteria was implemented for selecting the housing developments, which were run by sole housing providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only large housing developments (at least 250 family occupied units could qualify). - Housing authority must have at least 2 or more similar developments within the City. - There must be no more than 30% of families with an employed member and at least 40% receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children 	<p>A sub-region project, focused within the Black Country. The selection criteria for the ‘sites’, was devolved to individual Local Authorities. The selection was based on geographical areas of need (deprivation) with a prevalence of social housing stock, rather than individual ‘social housing developments’.</p>
<p>There is a sound rationale for choosing an area based approach; in areas of high deprivation including those selected in the Black Country, there is a mixed housing market (different types of housing tenure (social, private and owner-occupied), as well a multiple housing providers. Social housing stock is often dispersed with no ‘discernable’ focal point for the ‘development’. However, an area based selection criteria for a project targeted primarily at social housing residents brought significant challenges to the implementation and delivery of the Black Country project. This also impacted on the delivery of the Saturation Model element, which is explored below.</p>		

The Saturation Model	The programme targeted all working age, non-disabled residents, attempting to 'saturate' the housing developments with information, services and incentives to support work.	In year one, the project targeted unemployed and economically inactive residents, living in social housing within the identified areas. In year two, this was extended to private housing residents who met all other criteria.
<p>By taking an area based approach and applying eligibility criteria based on the type of housing you reside in, prevented the Black Country project from being a true saturation model. Whilst eligibility was extended in year two, after extensive negotiation with the primary funder, it still does not include 'owner-occupiers' or a focus on those already in work. The 'Final Report on the effectiveness of Jobs Plus' found that "although Jobs Plus was effective in boosting earnings both for welfare recipients and non-recipients, it was much more effective for non-recipients".</p> <p>An interview with a senior leader within the lead housing provider revealed that at development and planning stage, the project was always intended to be 'tenure blind' but agreement was not reached with funders and therefore this aspect did not translate to the final project agreement. Using housing type as an eligibility criteria for the project presented further challenge including whether a sufficient pool of eligible participants existed and this is explored in more detail in Section 9.</p> <p>It should be noted, that the issue of saturation was not without challenge in the US model. Not all the people who 'lived' within the development were 'eligible' participants. For example, partners of housing tenants living in the development but not named on housing agreements. In most cases, the lead provider extended the service offer to include them for the benefit of the overall household.</p>		
Local Needs Assessment / Identifying Existing Services	<p>Before delivery starts, understand the people you intend to serve and their employment needs by putting together a local needs assessment.</p> <p>To avoid duplication of services and to connect with programme partners, scan the housing development and its neighbourhood to find out what organisations and programmes that help residents are already in place.</p>	<p>The first year of the project focused on implementing project infrastructure, recruiting the project team and working with key stakeholders to agree operational requirements to deliver the project strands.</p> <p>This included undertaking a mapping and gapping exercise of local services and an assessment of needs in the areas with the highest levels of worklessness across the Black Country.</p>
<p>The findings from the needs assessment and the mapping exercise were reflected in the specification for the first round of procurement for the employment support elements of the Black Country project to ensure targeted and innovative approaches were developed locally. The approach to procurement is explored in more detail in Section 6: Approach to Procurement.</p>		
Place-Based Employment Support	This aspect encompassed activities such as help with job-searches, coaching to help residents adjust to the world of work, (short-term) vocational training, general education and English as a second language courses,	A range of universally 'recognised' employment support interventions is delivered, combined with education and skills based interventions. In all

	<p>subsidised support work positions, help with starting and running a business and a range of support services (i.e. childcare support)</p> <p>Some services were provided on site in a 'job centre' located within the housing development, whilst others were provided in the community.</p> <p>To operate this component of Jobs-Plus programs often have relied to some degree on staff members from one of more agencies who have been out-stationed at the housing development.</p>	<p>cases one to one support and mentoring was a common feature.</p> <p>Mostly, the core employment support has been delivered by partner organisations from within the wards, with for example courses delivered in the wider community.</p> <p>Particularly in the Dudley and Walsall area less traditional interventions, approaches to and methods of delivery have been used e.g. using art, crafts, and drama.</p>
<p>The employment support component translates the most readily from project to project; and the similarities are clear to see. The 'place-based' nature of the employment support has been a positive aspect of the Black Country project, but not without its challenges and this is explored in more detail in Section 8: Place-Based Delivery.</p> <p>A notable difference in the Black Country project has been the delivery of less traditional interventions. It is important to note that these interventions are not considered by the delivery organisations or participants to be purely 'engagement' activities i.e. part of the marketing and promotion of the programme but designed to build confidence and motivation, as a stepping stone for returning to work. The participants value these interventions and acknowledged that they helped to build their confidence to go onto other activities, with many participants moving onto educational and vocational courses i.e. English, Maths, customer service, health and social care, horticulture. <i>"I can't believe how well I have done. I loved the craft work and it gave me the confidence to try the maths class"</i> (St. Thomas's Project Participant)</p>		
<p>Financial Incentives – Changes in rent rules to provide a greater financial incentive to work.</p>	<p>The rationale: public housing residents can be subject to rent increases because rent is calculated as a percentage of income.</p> <p>The Jobs Plus programme offered rent-based incentives; either a flat rent (one that doesn't rise as the house-holds income rises) or an income based rent set lower than the standard 30 percent of income that is stipulated by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency responsible for public housing.</p> <p>The Final Report on the Effectiveness of Jobs Plus found that "the Jobs-Plus rent incentives were a crucial ingredient in the program's effects on earnings."</p>	<p>There have been no changes to rent rules within the Black Country project.</p>

This aspect of the Jobs Plus model has not translated well from the US model to the Black Country project. For example, in the UK, the amount of rent you pay is not linked to your income; what is linked to income is the financial support (housing/council tax benefit) you may be able to receive to support these costs. In the US model, increases in rent were viewed as the primary disincentive for residents to 'work or earn more'; as this is not the case in the UK we can only say that loss of benefits for housing and other costs may be a disincentive (relevant to some extent in the US as well). However, the UK has a provision for continued support for those in-work on lower incomes and with the inclusion within most employment support provision of in-work benefit calculations, we are more likely to talk in terms of residents being stuck in the benefits trap (a fear of change) rather than having a financial disincentive.

The 'Guide for Practitioners based on the Jobs Plus Demonstration' recognises that financial incentive is a complex area; which requires an understanding of how benefits and earnings interact to avoid incentives creating 'penalties' and to maximise opportunities for residents. There were significant challenges faced by housing provider partners during the implementation stages, in translating this element into the Black Country project. A number of ideas were explored including 'rent holidays' or 'reduced rent' for those who moved into work, but with the focus solely on implementing 'rent-incentives' and with no project funding budgeted to pay for this element, agreement was unable to be reached.

Financial Incentives – Work Related	As part of the rent-based incentives, Jobs-Plus included help for residents to learn about and take advantage of other work-related financial incentives available to all but that can help work pay.	As part of the Employment Support element, providers support participants with in-work benefit calculations and raise awareness of in-work support to ensure work pays.
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This component translates more readily; and the similarities are clear to see. Within the Black Country project some 'support components' of the employment support have also acted as financial incentive to support the move into work for participants i.e. paying / sourcing the costs of initial travel to work expenses, interview clothing and work-wear.

Community Support for Work	<p>Community support for work, through which important information about work-related opportunities is spread through neighbor-to-neighbor outreach and other social networking efforts.</p> <p>Typically, this involved recruiting, training and supervising a small group of residents who encourage their neighbours both to use Jobs-Plus services and to generally try to improve their employment situations. Residents who were selected to play this role usually received stipends or expenses as compensation for their contributions.</p>	<p>Initially, delivered by four 'community connectors', one in each of the four Local Authority areas, employed by the Project Lead (Accord) but hosted with a local housing provider; this is currently delivered by two community connectors based with the project lead and supported in some areas with community engagement roles based with the employment support providers.</p> <p>The role of the community connectors is explored in more detail in Section 3.</p>
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Commonality in this element can be found in the purpose of roles i.e. community based outreach and networking element; spreading the work and promoting the programme to residents with the project area. The use of community connectors has been a positive aspect of the Black Country

programme, but not without its challenges and this is explored in more detail in Section 3: The Role of the Community Connector.

A local collaboration / the Collaborative as the governing body

Targeted at public housing residents but envisioned as a locally collaborative undertaking.

Each local collaboration had to include as a minimum – the public housing authority, resident representatives, the welfare department and the workforce development system who could form a strong and efficient governing body for the project.

There is a steering group in place with representation from the Project Lead (Accord Group), Accountable Body for the funding (Walsall MBC), Black Country Consortium, Black Country Local Authorities, Housing Providers, Jobcentre Plus/DWP and Youth Initiative Talent Match.

Its purpose is to oversee, guide and support the delivery of the project. It meets on a regular basis and meetings are documented in writing. There is openness and transparency by the project team with the steering group and the steering group is proactive in their involvement and challenging.

The current chair is the Black Country District Jobcentre Plus representative.

The approaches are broadly similar in respect of the make-up of the collaboration and governance structures. However, not all housing providers are represented or want to be engaged, and those who are Local Authorities are represented by the nominated Local Authority employment leads, rather than housing personnel. There is also no specific resident representative at this level of governance, but some evidence of engagement in the programme at local level.

In the Black Country project (as is often the case), high level staff were involved in the early planning stages of programmes, particularly during project scoping, but then mid-level staff assigned to governance meetings. The ‘Guide for Practitioners based on the Jobs Plus Demonstration’ identifies that “sustained involvement of senior leadership within the Collaborative is essential” to ensure ongoing ‘organisational’ buy-in, commitment and resolution of issues across the partnership. Whilst a clear commitment to the project principles by all senior leaders exists, there has not always been direct action and intervention at points where key decisions and negotiation with funders was required.

A further complexity is the added layers of reporting and governance between the lead partner and funder, through the involvement of an accountable financial body (Walsall Local Authority) operating on behalf of the primary applicant (the Local Enterprise Partnership and its secretariat the Black Country Consortium). This was felt to be time-consuming and in some cases unnecessary by the lead partner, where direct reporting and negotiation with the funder would have been more efficient.

The designation of a housing provider as lead agency, across multi-housing provider areas and the role of housing providers in general within the project has also not been without challenge. This is explored separately and in more detail in Section 5: Role of Housing.

SECTION 3: COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

The introduction of the Community Connector – Year One

The development and introduction of the community connectors role (previously referred to as community champions), as part of the community support strand took place between November 2014 and March 2015. The original scope of the role was to work in the community, developing relationships and trust with local people and organisations and facilitating project referrals and engagement through offering support and signposting to relevant provision. Key elements of the projects community connector model included:

Employing unemployed or economically inactive individuals who lived or had previously lived/worked in the identified area, with good local area knowledge and a commitment to the principles of the project. To support the recruitment and selection process, a two- week customised pre-employment training programme with work experience was delivered in conjunction with JcP and a local provider; with guaranteed interviews for all those who completed the training. Four community connectors were appointed and in place between April – May 2015.

What we learnt: Finding individuals with the right skills and experience to carry out the role of the community connector proved challenging. Despite initially appointing four community connectors, the role proved particularly challenging for the two connectors with no previous experience of delivering similar community engagement work. They required lots of additional support and development to carry out the role but despite this left the roles. However, for the two connectors with previous experience and good local knowledge there were some positive results in year one around the engagement of stakeholders and the wider community.

Being hosted by a housing provider. Whilst employed by the lead project partner (Accord) the initial four community connector roles were ‘hosted’ by one of the larger social housing provider in each identified area. During 2015/16, the hosts were Walsall Housing Group (Darlaston South), Dudley MBC (Kates Hill/St Thomas’s), Wolverhampton Homes (Bilston East) and Sandwell MBC (Princes End). The purpose of the hosting arrangements was to facilitate targeted recruitment of eligible social housing tenants, with an initial expectation of data-sharing to support this. The community connectors would in turn signpost potential participants to the employment support providers and other relevant support in each area.

What we learnt: This element did not work in the way originally anticipated. In most cases, the connector was not fully integrated into the nominated housing team and data-sharing expectations not supported or practical work-arounds implemented – in effect making the purpose of the hosting arrangements redundant. The reasons behind this and the role of housing providers in the project is explored in more detail in Section 5. It is also evident, that the development of working relationships with the housing providers was not helped by those connectors who lacked experience in working with stakeholders and partners. However, it should be noted that there was some evidence of integration and good working arrangements developed between the Bilston East (Wolverhampton) housing provider and community connector in Year 1.

Joint working with the Employment Support Providers - In year one, both providers and community connectors undertook 'direct' recruitment of project participants through a range of activities from 'door-knocking' in the identified area, networking at community events and venues (local schools), promotion within Jobcentre Plus local offices and running specific 'engagement' events.

What we learnt: In the initial stages, feedback from referral partners including Jobcentre Plus indicated that the marketing and promotion of the programme was not 'joined up' and engagement activity was being duplicated, as they were being approached by multiple organisations involved in the same project. Likewise, most providers and connectors felt that the requirement to proactively promote and market the programme in order to engage with residents and meet their engagement targets, invariably led to a perceived sense of competition. However, this was not across the board, with some examples of good collaboration between providers and local community connectors². To address this the project team were proactive in addressing issues around duplication by brokering practical solutions and agreeing new working processes.

The evolution of the Community Connectors – Year Two

With lessons learnt from year one, the decision was taken to reshape and extend the roles of the two remaining community connector roles. The aim was to provide a more focused and co-ordinating function across the project, employment support providers and the wider community. On this basis, each connector was allocated two project areas– dedicating two days a week resource to these area; one with lead providers/in the community and one promoting the project within the local Jobcentre office as the single point of contact for the project. There is still a requirement for delivery providers to promote and market the project in order to engage local residents. One area, St. Thomas's in Dudley have employed a dedicated engagement worker who is a local resident and has extensive knowledge of the area and works in tandem with the community connector to market and promote the project and increase engagements. Engagements generated are then distributed on an equitable basis to consortia members by the lead provider.

What we learnt: The decision to make the community connectors the single point of contact for Jobcentre Plus (JcP) local office engagement and referrals has facilitated a more effective and productive working relationship with JcP; although it is acknowledged by both parties that this could be improved further. In general, this approach has facilitated improved working relationships by bringing clarity to the roles of the community connectors and more collaborative approaches with lead providers. Marketing, promotion and other activities to engage residents in the project is a critical factor in its success. In the Jobs Plus Model, this was carried out by groups of residents receiving a stipend, in this model it is carried out by nominated professionals within the lead agency and some delivery partners. The key factor is those individuals are able to build the trust quickly of the communities they serve. This has proved to be effective where those individuals are already known to the local community, have lived in the local area and have experience of this type of community engagement.

² For example, Black Country Housing Group identified all their eligible tenants within one of the areas and jointly with the Community Connector door-knocked / leafletted all those identified.

SECTION 4: ROLE OF HOUSING

A Housing Led Project

The initial focus of the approved project was social housing tenants and this was the driver for having a social housing provider as the lead and as key members of the Steering Group. As outlined in Section 3, this was also the driver to make the largest social housing provider in each area the hosts for the community connector roles to facilitate targeted marketing and promotion of the project to their tenants.

However, the levels of referrals from housing providers were at only 5% at the time of the interim evaluation (November 2016). Most housing providers have not played the active role originally anticipated in the planning and implementation stages. Despite a focus in the year 2 procurement, for delivery providers to demonstrate a clearer strategy in the engagement and partnership work with housing providers in the geographical area referrals remain low.

What we learnt: Unlike the Jobs Plus model which involved an individual housing provider for the development, the Black Country project areas contain not only mixed housing stock (social, private and owner-occupied) but in most cases more than one social housing provider in each area. This was also compounded by complex 'group' structures and challenges for the housing sector, which in the early phases of the project were a barrier to joining up and co-ordinating involvement.

In the Jobs Plus model, Housing Authorities were considered a key collaborator because they had access to HUD resources and controlled policies affecting housing developments and their tenants. However, in the 'Guide for Practitioners based on the Jobs Plus Demonstration' they state that "the Public Housing Authority need not be the lead agency for Jobs-Plus" although they are quick to point out that a "strong commitment" from them would be required and "co-operation" specifically in relation to acquiring space within the development and restructuring rent policies to fit in with the financial incentives policy. Due to the diversity of social housing providers in identified areas it may have been more appropriate for another strategic lead i.e. a local authority who has oversight and leverage over all areas to manage and lead the project. Future projects should consider these potential complexities carefully when designating a lead organisation.

The success of these relationships is wholly dependent on a strong commitment to the project and collaboration. Direct feedback from some housing providers indicated that whilst it was recognised that the project had important priorities, operationally it had a small geographical focus and reach for them. The project had to compete not only with the core aims of housing providers but during a time when social housing providers were facing significant change and challenges. In effect, they were not able to provide the level of buy-in or commitment being asked.

Some housing providers felt there needed to be a degree of separation between certain aspects of the housing role i.e. in respect of rent, repairs, anti-social behaviour and work-focused interventions. Therefore, engagement and support services needed to be delivered through community based organisations or housing providers with separate employment and skills functions.

Initial relationships in areas with Local Authority stock was facilitated primarily through established relationships with other parts of the Local Authority e.g. employment team leads rather than directly with housing personnel. As a result, housing teams were not sufficiently 'connected' or 'engaged' with the project. Whilst part of the same organisation but with significantly different roles and responsibilities it is essential both employment and housing need are key stakeholders and represented on the Steering Group.

Where housing providers had been actively engaged are directly involved in the delivery of project interventions, for example Black Country Housing Group, their leverage as a housing provider was minimised as the majority of their stock was outside the project area. Where they did have a stock, they were able to carry out targeted and direct engagement of their residents.

SECTION 5: APPROACH TO PROCUREMENT

Background / Timeline

Following agreement of the Project Steering Group, it was agreed that the employment support element for each project area should be commissioned locally. For year one delivery, a series of provider briefing events were held during November and December 2014 across the 'identified' project areas. The deadline for applications was the 30th January 2015, with a 2-3 month window allocated for assessment, due diligence and contract award (subsequently the majority of contracts commenced May 2015). For year two delivery, a provider procurement and networking event was held during 24th February 2016. The deadline for applications was the 24th March 2016, with a view to contracts commencing May 2016.

Key elements of the commissioning model

Year 1	Year 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was no set specification but support should meet specific area needs as identified by the <i>data analysis</i> and the <i>mapping and gapping exercise</i>³ undertaken by the City Deal project team. For example, the Princes End area data showed significant Health & Well Being indicators and priorities which needed to be addressed. • Proposals should demonstrate innovation approaches to engagement and delivery. • There should not be duplication of services, where funding already exists. • Eligibility was aligned to overall project perimeters (defined geographical areas; social housing tenants) but with an additional emphasis on participants over 25 years old and longer term unemployed/economically inactive. • Participation in the programme would be voluntary & supported by community connectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A customer and job focused delivery model. • Engagement strategy is a key element. • Must demonstrate knowledge of the specific area. • One lead provider per area • Applications must have housing providers as part of their 'offer' • Lead applicants should give consideration to existing delivery providers. • Clear strategy for dealing with existing customers. • Eligibility still aligned to geographical areas and emphasis on 25 years plus and longer term unemployed/economically inactive people but indication of widening to non-social housing tenants. • Prescribed financial budget per area. • Prescribed number of outputs/outcomes per area. • Payment By Result element – 30% of funding retained & payable on sustained job outcomes.

³ Mapping & Gapping Activity available on-line at www.the-blackcountry.com/about-us/making-it-happen/black-country-city-deal

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration should be given in proposals to all strands of the project including employment support, community support and financial incentives. • Funding would be in the form of a one year grant agreement with contractual and financial target monitoring arrangements in place. • Providers able to propose costs and outputs/outcomes. 	
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What we learnt: The ‘open’ nature of the specification in year one commissioning, did not produce the level of tailored responses or innovations to tackle the identified needs for each individual area expected. There were some examples of targeted delivery models and interventions including:

- An integrated health, well-being and employment model utilising horticulture as a mechanism for delivery in Princes End;
- a programme targeted at older people in Darlaston South, with a focus on digital inclusion, ICT literacy and online learning;
- and a self-employment programme across two of the areas.

Additionally, some provision incorporated non-traditional delivery methods to build confidence and motivation, including arts, drama and crafts but mostly delivery models reflected standard employment support elements.

In year two, tailored approaches have become even less discernible, with a model of employment support primarily focused on the role of an individual job coach / mentor co-ordinating a range of interventions (job-search, IT, basic skills, vocational training and other support measures).

The rationale relating to the use of grant in year one commissioning compared to payment by results is explored in more detail in Section 7.

SECTION 6: GRANT V PBR

Background

As outlined in Section 5, a key difference in the approach to procurement of the employment support element was the payment arrangements; in year one a grant and in year two an element payment by results elements.

The rationale for a grant based payments approach in year one, as opposed to payments by results element was to support the piloting and testing of approaches, as well as encourage local voluntary and community based organisations to get involved.

The change in approach in year 2 to an element of payment by results (PBR); 70% grant and 30% sustainable job outcome basis reflected observations and findings from the project team that in some cases providers were not sufficiently focused on the employment outcome, rather the engagement and development activities. With many national employment related contracts⁴ being procured on a PBR basis, the year 2 approach presents opportunities to explore how this approach works in locally procured programmes with the voluntary and community sector and influence future funding.

However, it should be noted that this is the arrangement between the lead agency (Accord Housing Group) and the lead delivery partner in each area. Where consortia exists, it is for them to decide how to pay their delivery partners, for example in Dudley a mechanism to 'share' the outcome payment has been introduced, where multiple providers have supported the participant.

What we learnt: At the time of the interim findings, initial feedback from providers indicated that it was not a driver or motivator in achieving performance. This combined with the view that the level of job outcomes which had been 'prescribed' would be challenging to achieve, resulting in a perception of less money in the project to deliver interventions, as the entire available funding was unlikely to be realised. For most of the local delivery partners, PBR is a relatively new feature of service delivery, if at all. The move to PBR has not had the desired impact on sustainable jobs impact. It is generally accepted in supply chain management, that incentive alone, without strong performance management and support to make improvements will not be a driver for change. This has been recognised by the project team in year 3 of delivery and resources redeployed to focus on and support providers with performance improvement. A further detailed analysis of project performance will be produced during the summer of 2017, which will provide an up to date and more accurate picture of the differences in performance between year one and two.

⁴ For example Work Programme

SECTION 7: CONSORTIA MODELS

Background

Across both delivery years, the majority of lead providers commissioned to deliver the employment support elements of the project have used a supply chain for delivering elements of the projects. This has been on either an end to end service delivery basis or for the provision of specialist and/or clearly defined services. Some developed large and extensive supply chains, while others have relied on far fewer organisations to provide services (and delivered the majority of services themselves). Of the providers, only one (Sandwell MBC) is not delivering any services directly to participants i.e. acting as a managing agent, with the others using a mix of direct delivery and using a network of sub-contractors / supply chain partners. Where there are larger supply chains i.e. St Thomas's (Dudley) and Princes End (Sandwell), individual providers may only be working with an annual cohort of between 30-50 people; as opposed to a single delivery provider i.e. Bilston East (Wolverhampton) who will manage the entire annual cohort of up to 250 participants.

The move to one lead provider per area, aimed to streamline the management and effectiveness of the project operationally, however what it doesn't do is reduce the number of operational delivery partners where consortia models are used. It also does not reduce the requirement to effectively manage the performance and quality of the supply chain, which remains a key resource consideration for both the project and consortia lead. Whilst there has been a reduction in the number of lead providers from year 2 (one per area); broadly the number of organisations delivering across the project has remained the same.

The consortia lead for both Dudley and Sandwell have put mechanisms in place to ensure community connector/JcP engagements are distributed on an equitable basis, and based on need. Despite this, there was still a perception of competition within the supply chains. This is in part to partners being located in the same part of the ward (in some cases sharing premises with another end to end partner); and in part due to the ongoing requirement for all partners to pro-actively promote and market the project to residents to reach engagement targets. Mechanisms have been put in place by the consortia lead to manage the supply chain i.e. regular meetings with supply chain partners, claims procedures, co-ordination of area based activities. However, some arrangements have been considered by the project lead light-touch and not sufficiently pro-active, particularly around the management of performance.

Whilst there are some variations in the way the consortias operate on a day to day basis there were common elements across the board e.g. service level agreements, monthly collation of project data (to reflect the project requirements), co-ordinated dissemination of project documentation and regular meetings and progress reviews. Feedback from year one indicated that whilst the majority of supply chain organisations were satisfied with the arrangements and had good working relationships with their contracted provider, some indicated that they would like more opportunities to engage directly with the other providers and the project lead. There

has been an opportunity in year 2 for lead providers to bring representative supply chain members to operational delivery meetings with the lead partner Accord.

What we've learnt: Where a consortia model has multiple providers delivering similar roles or interventions within a relatively small geographical area, strong mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure organisations are not competing or duplicating activities. This might include defining a target group that they will focus on i.e. lone parents, or individuals with health issues or a specific geographical area i.e. focusing on a specific neighbourhood or housing development.

The involvement of multiple end to end partners in effects creates a number of much small projects and caseloads. There is a danger that for some providers a very small project becomes unviable or risks the level of buy-in required; and the implications of the resources required and outcomes expectations needs to robustly reviewed prior to project commencement by all parties.

Good supply chain management is critical to achieving quality and performance within consortia projects. Regular review and relevant support needs to be provided by the project lead to ensure consortia have the capacity and skills to deliver this.

Currently, there is no substantive differential in outcomes or other evidence at this point in time to indicate that one model performs better than the other. A further detailed analysis of project performance will be produced during the summer of 2017, which will provide an up to date and more accurate picture of whether there is any substantial differential in outcomes.

SECTION 8: PLACE BASED DELIVERY

Background

A key feature of the US Jobs Plus model was the provision of employment support services within the social housing developments, creating in effect on-site 'jobcentres'. Each of the four areas has identified main venues which act as the focal 'hub' for the project. However, establishing 'hubs' have not been without its challenges. For example, at the beginning of the project in the Dudley area, one partner's community venue was nominated as the hub for the whole consortia. When the venue and provider closed in mid-2015, it left the lead provider and remaining supply chain without a dedicated project base. Delivery continued on a peripatetic basis using available community space on the estate, until an alternative location was secured at the end of 2015. Similar to the Jobs Plus model, the primary hub maximised an empty and void space within the social housing development managed by the Local Authority. Once established, the based was used by multiple providers and agencies; with multiple and simultaneous interventions being delivered and allowing participants to access different types and level of support at one time and in the same place.

In the Princes End (Sandwell) area, one providers original intention was to engage on an outreach basis (meeting residents at community facilities), and then provide transport to their main facility. Their main facility was a purpose built market garden and horticultural facility in a neighbouring ward, where therapeutic and work based interventions would be delivered. Participants were reluctant to engage and resistant to travel, and the decision was taken to find a dedicated base within the area. This would provide a platform to build trust, offer initial services and act as a stepping stone to further work-based interventions. Working with a local housing provider (Trident Housing), a room was secured within the small 'social housing development at Burberry Court, which provided supported housing, The room had previously been used as an housing office but was not currently in use. This provided a catalyst to engaging participants living in the development and from the immediate surrounding streets. The layout of the development; around 50 maisonette style flats arranged around a courtyard and communal garden area, enabled the team to deliver on a smaller scale therapeutic horticultural activities through using the spaces and facilities available in the development. As the development provided supported housing, the nature of the residents included individuals with significant and multiple support needs including learning disabilities, mental ill health and alcohol and drug dependencies. As a result, many interventions by the provider focused on meeting these support needs or supporting individuals with a crisis. The space was not always conducive to this due to its condition, size and layout.

Even where established community locations were in place from the beginning of the project, challenges have arisen around the location of the venue in relation to other social housing developments. This has particularly been the case for the project in Bilston East (Wolverhampton) and Darlaston South (Walsall) where initial and primary locations/hubs have not had sufficient reach to communities within the Lunt and Rough Hay areas. This is a similar picture in the other areas. For example, in Sandwell all the providers premises are clustered in one area, leaving areas like Tibbington without a focal point. The geographical reach of the hub's is relatively small, this is particularly the case St Thomas's' (Dudley) and Princes End (Sandwell)

area, where the majority of those interviewed lived within a couple of streets and less than 5 minutes' walk of the venue.

The project lead has been working closely with providers to understand how best to reach and work with communities not currently being reach and even exploring in some areas how redundant community buildings can be brought back into use and provide employment support services.

What we learnt: The provision of local hub's within the heart of residential communities (particularly where little or no service provision existed prior to the project), has been one of the positive impacts of the project to date. The residents welcomed and valued the services and support offered; they liked the physical proximity to their homes, and the friendly and welcoming environment the venues offered.

However, where social housing is dispersed across the area, one focal hub may not be sufficient to reach residents and encourage take up of on-site services; it may require multiple locations alongside strong outreach strategies. It is also important to consider that within what are predominantly housing communities, space to deliver community development activities is at a premium, and therefore the types and nature of interventions have to be carefully considered and planned.

SECTION 9: HOUSING TYPE

Background

As outlined in Section 2, the original project agreement and activity during delivery year one focused only on those unemployed and economically inactive residents living in social housing within the identified area. Social housing is that which is owned and managed by registered providers (social landlords) and tends to be non-commercial organisations such as Local Authorities or Housing Associations. On this basis, the eligibility criteria applied to the project did not include unemployed and economically inactive residents living in private rented accommodation. Immediate challenges arose out of the use of housing type as an eligibility criteria for project participants:

Sufficient Pool of Social Housing Residents

Concerns were raised early in the project by the project team and delivery providers as to whether there was a sufficient eligible pool of residents within each area to engage and work with. There was a lack of clear data on which to base a decision. The original data and information used to set targets at scoping stage related to area based numbers of unemployed and economically inactive individuals regardless of housing status. It was also not possible to get data from each housing provider on how many unemployed and economically inactive participants were residing within the social housing stock in each area. On this basis, a methodology⁵ was developed by the Research and Evaluation Team to establish whether a pool of eligible participants existed.

What we learnt

The 'pool' of eligible social housing residents across all areas was circa 5,000; this varied across each of the four areas in direct correlation to actual numbers of social housing properties. The area variations ranged from circa 900 residents in St. Thomas' ward to 1700 residents in the Princes End ward. Considering this pool, against an overall engagement target of 2800, nearly 60% of all eligible beneficiaries would need to be engaged with; and in some areas i.e. St. Thomas' ward up to 80% of eligible residents. Without some flexibility in and extension to the eligibility in 'housing type', the engagement targets were deemed unrealistic and unachievable. From delivery year two, following negotiation with the funder, eligibility was extended to include private rental residents who met the remaining criteria. These challenges could have been avoided if relevant and specific social housing data had been used at the time of scoping the project.

The research found that social housing residents are more likely than other tenures to have certain characteristics. Understanding these characteristics can support projects in providing targeted approaches to engagement and delivery. For example, social renting householders were more likely than other tenures to contain a householder who was economically inactive; with the economic status of partners following a similar pattern and a higher proportion claiming ESA (long term illness) or

⁵ A full methodology can be found in Annex 4 of the Interim Evaluation November 2016

ISLP (Lone Parent households). From this we know, that many residents will not currently be engaged with or receiving any structured employment support as they are not currently 'required' or expected to look for work. We also know that social housing tenants are more likely to be women and have lone parent households.

Unintended engagement of 'ineligible' participants in year one

The nature of some recruitment and engagement activities for example, the delivery of community and family events from which the project could be promoted, often attracted ineligible (non-social housing) residents. This led to frustration from providers who felt the 'housing type' was an arbitrary eligibility criteria against the significant deprivation factors all residents in the designated area faced. Whilst these residents could not be directly supported through the project in the first year of delivery, the providers did signpost residents to other available support.

What we learnt

Unlike the Jobs Plus model which focused on specific housing developments, this project focuses on a geographical area with a mixed housing market, making effective targeting of eligible participants extremely challenging. Even with the subsequent extension of eligibility to private rented tenants 'unintended' engagement of ineligible participants still exists. This is in part due to some residents still not being a focus for the project (those in private rented accommodation and those in work) but mainly due to the porous nature of local boundaries. For example, Princes End ward residents, primarily identify as Tipton residents, but not all of Tipton is in Princes End ward. In these circumstances, a level of project autonomy, flexibility and discretion should be asserted to facilitate effective project delivery across an area and for the benefit of residents; as was the case in the original Jobs Plus model. The ability to make changes responsively through the project has often been hindered by fear of non-compliance/claw-back within the project/governance team, combined with a lack of continuity of decision makers within the funder to provide that required change 'sign-off'.

SECTION 10: LEARNING & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE PROGRAMMES

The learnings and findings from the project interim evaluation and critical analysis report provides invaluable information, resources and critical success factors for commissioners and stakeholders who are looking for place-based solutions to increase employment and earnings in their localities.

In order, to roll out the current project to further wards or to develop and implement similar place-based projects, it is recommended:

1. For each area where a place-based solution is being developed, a dedicated and bespoke local partnership is created. As a minimum, this should comprise of as a minimum housing, welfare, benefits, employment support and community engagement partner organisations and representation. Where organisations work across more than one field i.e. Local Authority partners, it is important that each specialism is individually representation within the partners.
2. The level of representation of your partnership should be a significantly senior to ensure efficient decision making and appropriate 'buy-in' across the partnership.
3. The designated lead organisation does not have to be a particular type of organisation provided there is the co-operation and 'buy-in' of all partners and senior leadership. The project manager should have a range of skills and experience relating to employment, community and housing sector.
4. There is not a 'one-size fits all' delivery model. To support the development of your place-based delivery model, undertake a comprehensive and up-to-date mapping and gapping exercise to understand the type/extent of the local needs and the gaps which exist.
5. The type of structure used for the delivery of the community and employment support elements i.e. through consortia or individual providers is not a primary consideration. Most importantly is whether the provider(s) have the skills, experience and capacity to meet your identified need (mapping and gapping).
6. The type of payment model used should be considered on an individual basis and on a range of factors. In this project, where both approaches have been trialled, there is no strong evidence either way that PBR incentives for providers improve sustainable outcomes. It is generally accepted in supply chain management, that incentive alone, without strong performance management and support to improve, will not be a driver for change.
7. A cohesive and bespoke community engagement strategy for your area is developed. Whether this is delivered through dedicated roles e.g. community connectors who are based within the project team or outreach roles within delivery organisations - community support is a critical success factor. These roles are key to effectively marketing and promoting the opportunities to local

people, and building trust quickly in order to engage people onto the project. This has worked particularly well where individuals carrying out these roles are already known to the local community, live in the local area and have some experience of this type of community engagement.

8. The provision of informal community events and informal learning is a part of your wider engagement strategy. It does not only provide a hook to participation but builds trust and a stepping stone to employment-related interventions for those who would not otherwise engage.
9. The identification and provision of local employment support hubs and focal points (placed-based support) in the heart of the communities. This is particularly important where there is little or no service provision already in place, in a neighbour or housing development. However, as part of the mapping of resources, consideration should be given to whether multiple locations will be needed to reach all communities within a specified geographical area. With space to deliver often at a premium, the types and nature of interventions also have to be carefully considered and planned.
10. Employer engagement and the development of employment pathways (linked to local transformational and enabling sectors) should form part of the employment support offer from the beginning. Clear strategies for the delivery of post-employment support and job sustainability also need to be in place.

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