

SUSE E-bulletin 14—March 08

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TIME
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**SUSE AGM
23rd April 08**

The SUSE Annual General Meeting will be held at the MacDonald Holyrood Hotel, Edinburgh, situated next to the Scottish Parliament. The Agenda is detailed on the following page and Minutes from the 07 AGM are attached. Directions to the Hotel can be found on their website:

www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/holyrood/business/location/index.htm

To book your place at the AGM email:
shona.davidson@fife.gov.uk.

Tea and coffee will be served half an hour before the start of the AGM and a finger buffet will be served afterwards at 5.30pm. An invitation to a 6pm Evening Event hosted by Sarah Boyack MSP is attached. **To book your place at the Evening Event, complete the attached Booking Form and email to:**
fiona.drape@intowork.org.uk

This event is entitled 'Disability and Employment: The Future for Services in Scotland' - an awareness raising event exploring the current resourcing issues faced by many public and voluntary sector organisation which could impact on the potential success of current national employment strategies.

**Networks to nominate
Board Members**

If your Network has not already done so, it needs to nominate a Board Member for the coming year. This needs to be done before the AGM if possible.

SUSE Annual General Meeting Agenda

SCOTTISH UNION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT
A Company Limited by Guarantee
SC213687

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
To be held at the Holyrood Suite
McDonald Holyrood Hotel, Edinburgh
23rd April at 2.30pm (Coffee served at 2pm)

Notice is hereby given that the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of THE SCOTTISH UNION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT will be held to deal with the following ORDINARY business:

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introduction Alan Weaver
 2. Apologies Alan Weaver
 3. Presentation on new Employment and Support Allowance
 4. Minutes of the AGM held on 15th March 2007 Alan Weaver
 5. Matters arising from the Minutes Alan Weaver
 6. Board of Directors' Report Alan Weaver
 7. Receive the Annual Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2007, the Director's Report and the Auditor's Report, and approve the Annual Accounts
 8. Appoint the Auditors of the Company for the year ending 31st December 2008
 9. Appointment of Directors to the Board Alan Weaver
 10. 3.30pm Presentation on new Employment & Support Allowance—CPAG to be followed by the opportunity to ask questions
 11. 4pm Presentation on Working Tax Credits including Disability Premium—CPAG To be followed by the opportunity to ask questions.
 12. Any Other Competent Business
- Round up, Thanks and Finish—4.30-5pm.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD
Alan Weaver Director and Chair of SUSE

Pathways Providers in administration

News
in brief

The use of prime providers doesn't seem such a surefire winner after all. DWP staff are busy reviewing contracts after a Pathways to Work prime provider, Carter and Carter, called in the administrators. It issued two profit warnings last year and has been unable to restructure its debts. It is thought that some of its provision such as Train 2 Gain had not been performing as well as hoped. Last month, Instant Muscle also went into administration leaving staff unpaid and contracted provision without a provider.

Budget Update

This month's budget sees several reforms that impact on welfare to work policies. Probably the most significant is the introduction of work capability assessments for existing incapacity benefit claimants. The key points are:

- From October 2009, rules for housing and council tax benefit will mean families on benefit are better off in work
- From April, 2009, child benefit will be increased to £20 a week
- From April 2010, all long-term recipients of incapacity benefit will attend work capacity programmes
- £60m over three years for equipping people to return to the workplace.

Government strategy to offer more control for disabled people

The government has announced plans to transform the lives of disabled people, which includes funding of up to £3m. The Office for Disability Issues has published The Independent Living Strategy, which aims to give disabled people more choice and control over the support they require and greater access to employment, transport, health and housing opportunities. The strategy brings together initiatives on employment, housing and social care to remove barriers and improve access to services. This includes a national strategy to enable people to remain in employment when they acquire an impairment or their condition worsens.

Localism & Welfare

The New Local Government Network has published a report entitled 'The Local Journey To Work: Localism, welfare and worklessness' which makes recommendations to reduce unemployment figures throughout the country. One recommendation is to exempt local branches of national public services, such as Jobcentre Plus, from national performance targets that might contradict their work towards local targets. It recommends local authorities be allowed to keep 50% of the benefit savings made as a result of local initiatives, and suggests that the government supports a pilot scheme of Multi Area Agreements, whereby a group of councils would receive a devolved funding stream, in order to tackle worklessness in the area.

SUSE Response to DWP Consultation Document 'Improving Specialist Disability Services'

1. Are there any points in the evidence-base that you either strongly agree with or strongly disagree with?

The evidence base appears sound although little research seems to have been done into the significant differences in the needs of people in rural rather than urban areas. The Highlands being a prime example of small communities, large distances between communities and employment with mainly small to medium employers.

2. Do you agree that disabled people should only be directed to our specialist disability employment provision where it is unlikely that our other programmes, such as the New Deals, would be effective?

Directing people to specialist disability employment provision could be advantageous to the individual however the individual should still have the choice. Some individuals may feel that by taking up specialist services they may be stigmatised and this may be detrimental to their ability to gain employment.

3. Are there points of our overall proposal to replace the Job Introduction Scheme (JIS), Work Preparation and WORKSTEP with a single programme that you either strongly agree with or strongly disagree with?

The general agreement amongst members is that the proposal to merge the three programmes into one would be beneficial to customers and will offer continuity and clarity about services available.

4. For the Work Entry element of the proposed new programme – how could we best ensure that our providers focus their efforts on all their customers and not just those most likely to get a job?

This question highlights the intrinsic problem that can arise from main contractors and sub contracting with the main contractor cherry picking or parking all the clients that are hard to support with the sub-contractors. This provides an easy option for the main contractor to then blame and evidence all performance issues on to the sub contractor.

5 *For the Transitional Supported Employment element of the proposed new programme – is it right that we should introduce a greater focus on helping people progress off the provision and what safeguards and flexibility's would you like to see included?*

Often people are willing to progress off supported employment however they and their employer often want to have the security of knowing that someone can be contacted if issues arise. This sense of security maybe all that is required to enable someone to maintain open employment therefore some kind of maintenance contract maybe all that is needed with the option of getting the individual back onto full support if the issues demand it. This could work in a similar way as the current ability to preserve an individual's benefits entitlement for 2 years and would reassure a lot of people with fluctuating conditions.

6 *For the Longer-Term Supported Employment element of the proposed new programme – how can we best ensure that providers work closely with employers and individual disabled people to help them develop in their job whilst on the provision?*

A new development plan should be created at the start of employment based on development within the job. The career development plan should then be reviewed after 6 weeks once the initial induction period and new smart goals set, then after 3 months and then 6 months. At the 6 month period a wide-ranging discussion about the future of the individual should take place to plan towards progression of the Workstep programme with milestones and goals being set.

7 *What should we do to ensure that consistently high quality standards are delivered?*

In terms of any service provision quantitative assessment can be fairly straightforward however there is a need to gain first hand information from disabled people as to the quality of the service they are receiving. Live person audits should also involve full consultation as to the quality of service based on a structure interview process.

8. *What else can we do to improve the way in which DWP's supported employment services for disabled people are delivered?*

All Staff at Jobcentres should be fully aware of all the services for disabled people in their area. This could be in the form of a guide that the Jobcentre could commission a local voluntary organisation to produce.

9. What role do you think supported businesses/factories should have in providing employment for disabled people?

The supported Businesses/factories have a role to play in supporting people with disabilities back into employment. For some it may be the idea first short step that will help them make the transition to main stream employment. For others it may be that they will require longer support to enable them to be fully ready to move on to mainstream employment.

However, there will always be a small percentage of people who are very difficult to place in mainstream employment without a large package of support and a very understanding employer. For this small percentage Supported Businesses/factories will always be essential to enable to person make a valuable contribution and to promote social inclusion for all.

10. If we go ahead with these reforms, do you believe we should offer some protection to supported businesses when we tender for the new programme? If so, what form should this protection take and how long should it last for?

It is essential that DWP carryout a full equality impact assessment of all the proposed reforms. Otherwise the effects could have a long-term detrimental impact to those people with high degree disabilities. Initiating reforms based on the model of low level disability based on the negative assumptions being made of all people on incapacity benefit will have a very negative impact on people with enduring or fluctuating disabilities. There will always be a percentage of people on Workstep for whom progression is not a longer viable option. For whatever reason, be the nature of their disability or the fluctuating nature of their condition some people and their employers will always need support to enable the employee and the employer to maintain that employment.

11. We are proposing to initially transform the WORKSTEP Factory Support Grant (FSG) to focus on modernising services to deliver better progressions within and outside the programme. This would be instead of, for example, buying new factory equipment. Eventually we would like to spend this money directly on helping more individuals onto the proposed new programme. What are your views on this

Progression for all should always be at the forefront of people's minds, however an employer cannot force someone to move on. It has to be a negotiated process between factory (workstep provider) and the employee (Workstep participant). Informed choice must always be at the heart of progression. Yes perhaps the system needs to be improved to ensure that everyone has the full opportunity to progress, but it cannot become a issue that is forced on to disabled people who are not ready. The transition between supported factory and mainstream employment will be a vital key in the success of any progression.

12. We are considering holding an open competitive tender for contracts. For some of our current WORKSTEP customers this could mean their employment support transferring to another provider. What would we need to consider and what actions do you think we would need to take to help make any such transfers a success?

Open competitive tendering will only be fair on a level playing field. Small may be the better option to provide a personalised local and effective service for disabled people, however in terms of economics of scale it may appear to the DWP that larger organisations are a more efficient means of delivering a service. Yet this consultation is about making services better for disabled people it is not about making the service easier for the DWP to manage. Therefore the tendering process should be slanted towards better on the ground services. A service that guarantees high quantitative outcomes may in the rush for outcomes and cost management be providing low qualitative service to the people this document is meant to be helping.

Also what choice will a participant on Workstep have, if as a participant I am very happy with my providers service and tomorrow I am told I am being transferred to a new provider who I know nothing about and may not even have a local representative. If this consultation is about improving services for disabled people then choice must be high on the agenda and perhaps having a range of providers to choose from will not only provide that choice but it may also help to drive up the quality of those services. Therefore it would seem that increasing the number of providers and providing a range of choices for disabled people would be a better option than reducing the number of providers to make the service more manageable for the DWP.

13. How do you think we could best ensure that we retain the skills of smaller and specialist providers in the proposed open competitive tender of this programme?

The one-size fits all is a very out dated concept and the idea that one provider can meet all its service user needs is misplaced. A range of providers offers choice, but that choice must be given to the disabled person and taken away from the DEA. Also if the service is not meeting the needs of the disabled person they should have the option to change to another provider easily. In the same way that if I get fed up with my bank I can easily change to another bank with out a major problem. If the aim is to drive up quality then providing choice is important, but real choice that every participant can exercise. A monopoly of one provider even if they are subcontracting to other providers is still a monopoly. If we believe in competitive tendering to allow DWP to get the best provider what option does that leave the disabled person?

DWP could be falling into the trap of the medical model of we know best and you disabled people will be given what we think is best for you. Surely we should be basing services on the social model and providing real informed choices and not services dictated by the DWP or the DEA. The answer to this is to have a wide range of providers able to compete to provide a service to the individual. The choice of provider should be down to the disabled person himself or herself and if the provider does not meet their needs they should be able to change at any time.

Are there other specific issues that we would need to consider in moving to a competitive tender for this provision?

Competitive tendering can only provide the DWP with the service they feel best meets their needs it does not provide choices for disabled people. It can be seen to be based on the medical model of we know what is best for you and not on the social model of choices that can be made by the disabled person requiring the service.

15. We are proposing that only Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) would be able to refer individuals to the proposed new programme (see Chapter Three). What are your views on this proposal?

Again this is based around the medical model with the DEA having the choice to make the referral and to which organisation the referral is made. The DEA becomes the gatekeeper the choice and decision-making process is taken away from the disabled person. The social model of disability must be key part of the service otherwise we could be looking at institutionalised discrimination. The choice of the referral and the provider must be down to the individual disabled person with advice from the DEA.

16. Do you believe that DEAs should have a higher profile role for people to feedback on the support they receive from our externally delivered provision?

The DEA could take the role of advocate providing impartial advice and acting as advocate for the disabled person in order to ensure that the individual is getting the best service. The DEA could also assist the disabled person to move from one provider to another smoothly if a provider is not meeting the real needs of the individual. The person at the centre is what this document advocates.

17. If you have used the Jobcentre Plus DEA service to help you find or retain suitable employment, what aspects of the service do you like and are there aspects that you think could be improved?

The DEA should be offering a range of options and not being led by targets that meet Jobcentre plus needs and not the needs of the individual. The DEAs could provide a good service if it was more focused on providing choices and information to allow the individual to make informed choices.

18. As an employer or provider of our services, in what ways, if any, do you currently use the Jobcentre Plus DEA service to help you employ or retain disabled people in employment? What aspects of the service do you like and are there aspects that you think could be improved?

The DEA should have access to information on a full range of service providers. Each service provider should be providing marketing materials to the DEA so that the DEA can give the disabled person a choice. The DEA should also be able to contact a provider to allow a person to visit their service provider in order to make an informed choice as to whether that provider can meet their needs. The DEA should be allowed to be impartial so that the disabled person can make his or her own choice. It will then be up to the provider to sell their service, this could help to push up the quality of services. The DEA could also feed back to workstep on any concerns expressed by service users about a provider. The quality assurance department could then investigate this.

19. If you have recent experience of our Access to Work provision what aspects did you like the most and do you have any suggestions for improving the service?

Access to work is to many Disabled people an unknown service that provides things for their employer. Yes Access to work provides a very good service to many disabled people but few know about it until a crisis or a new job triggers a referral. Often employers rather than the disabled people make these referrals.

20. What can we do to ensure Access to Work is used more effectively to meet the needs of individuals?

The service should be promoted to the disabled person rather than to the employer, the service provided should then be owned by the disabled person. This would allow the disabled person to feel more able to change jobs if they really felt that they had ownership of the things provided by Access to Work. Often that ownership is given to the employer.

21. How would you try to better balance the need for consistency of decision-making in Access to Work across the country with benefits of local flexibility?

Clear criteria need to be laid down that provide the Disabled person with a range of options and clear criteria within which those options can be met.

22. How can we more effectively focus Access to Work on adjustments/support beyond that which an employer should make as a reasonable adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act?

Full information should be given to the disabled person including costs, what is reasonable, and how much the employer is contributing. The disabled person should also be given the option of making a contribution or discount if they wish to purchase items themselves.

23. Do you believe that we should increase employer contributions to Access to Work adjustments as long as the savings are reinvested in the programme?

The option of increasing the employer's contribution could have detrimental implications for disabled people trying to gain employment. If any increase in contributions was to be made Access to work would need to be able to convince employers that what is being provided is of long term real value to them. If this is not done then many employers will find ways not to employ people who require large packages of Access to Work funding.

24. Are there more innovative ways in which we could make better use of the private and third sectors in delivering Access to Work?

Access to Work should as implied by question 21 'provide consistency of decision-making in Access to Work across the country with benefits of local flexibility'. Using private and third sector providers to deliver Access to Work could increase the inconsistencies and increase the limitations on the availability of the service.

25. Ministerial Government Departments are now directly funding Access to Work adjustments for their disabled staff. What are your views on other public sector organisations paying for such adjustments if any savings were reinvested in the programme?

If the public sector is to meet the demands of the Equality Duty requirements then funding such adjustments that would normally be funded by Access to work should be a part of the requirements. However it should be ensured that this does not reduce the numbers of disabled people able to gain employment in the Public sector. In other words use the Equality Duty to ensure that funding is provided and monitor this through the Act.

26. How do you feel we can improve the way these services work with other locally delivered services and/or local partnership arrangements?

All DEAs should be provided with a comprehensive guide to local services. These guides should be commissioned from the local voluntary sector that is part of the Community planning Partnerships. All Jobcentres should make it a priority to be an active member of the Community Planning Partnerships.

27. We are committed to producing a full Equality Impact Assessment on the final proposals and would value your input in this area. Do you have any specific comments on the impact of the proposals put forward in this consultation on particular individuals or groups?

Any Equality Impact Assessment must take into account the views of the current disabled people who are on the workstep programme. Do they wish to have a change of provider, and are they being made fully aware of the implications of a change to their support provider will have on them and their employer?

28. Please let us know your views about any other aspect of this consultation.

Please ensure that the person is at the centre of any changes and that the people who are currently participants of the Workstep Programme are made fully aware of the proposed changes to the services they are receiving, including any change in service provider. The Choice should be given to the disabled person. Do not fall into the trap of the medical model.

Open Letter from DWP

The following letter was sent out to Workstep providers recently by Fiona Hamilton, DWP Disability Programmes Monitoring Team Manager. This caused great concern for many members and at the last Board Meeting on 29th February 08 it was agreed that Alan Weaver, SUSE Chairman would write to Fiona, expressing Members' concerns. The reply letter is on the following page.

Dear Provider

WORKSTEP

Throughout the current operational year my colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions, Operational Procurement Unit, have been in regular communication with you over the delivery of Workstep. In particular, they have highlighted concerns regarding under occupancy and the impact that this may have on future contracts.

The contract extension exercise has now been completed and in some cases the contract capacities have been reduced. This is a direct result of the number of places that were unfilled at October 2007. To ensure that we can continue to provide an appropriate level of support to our customers, through the Workstep programme, we need to utilise all existing provision including that provided by Remploy.

As the Remploy contract currently has the capacity to accommodate a large number of customers within Scotland, our DEAs and IBPAs have been advised where appropriate to make use of Remploy for Workstep. This will enable us to achieve an effective solution whilst continuing to meet the needs of our customers.

I am confident that this strategy will enable us to maintain a good and appropriate level of service for this disadvantaged customer group.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Hamilton

Disability Programmes Monitoring Team Manager

SUSE Response from Alan Weaver to Fiona Hamilton—DWP

I have been asked by members of the Scottish Union of Supported Employment and providers of Workstep in Scotland to express our concerns over the implications of your letter of the 27 February 2008. I would like to highlight the paragraph below:

'The contract extension exercise has now been completed and in some cases the contract capacities have been reduced. This is a direct result of the number of places that were unfilled at October 2007. To ensure that we can continue to provide an appropriate level of support to our customers, through the Workstep programme, we need to utilise all existing provision including that provided by Remploy.'

The reduction in contract capacities with members was done with little consultation, giving people no opportunity to justify their position or support to help organisations to fill their capacities. Now we seem to have a situation where Remploy is being supported to fill its unfilled places. Further to this you state: *'As the Remploy contract currently has the capacity to accommodate a large number of customers within Scotland, our DEAs and IBPAs have been advised where appropriate to make use of Remploy for Workstep.'*

This begs the question as to why Remploy did not lose unfilled places as was the case with all other Workstep providers in Scotland who had unfilled places. It also infers that Remploy is to be given support to help them to fill their places by asking the DEAs and IBPAs to favour Remploy over all other Workstep providers in Scotland.

This appears to go contrary to the best interests of all other Workstep providers and the best interests of people who require Workstep. Primarily a local provider of Workstep may be far better placed to meet the real needs of the client and the employer and may now struggle to fill vacant places because the lack of referrals from their local DEAs and IBPAs.

On a personal note I would like to report that in a conversation with the local DEA in Elgin, who had recently indicated that she was going to refer a client to our Workstep programme, she stated that she has now been directed to refer to Remploy for all workstep clients. Therefore, even if your letter did not intend to show favour to Remploy it appears that DEAs are being directed to refer all Workstep clients to Remploy. As we are a workstep provider based in Elgin and the nearest Remploy worker is based in Dundee this would appear to be a strange decision that is not in the best interests of the client.

I would be grateful if you could clarify this situation with all Workstep providers in Scotland and with the DEAs and IBPAs.

Response from Fiona Hamilton—DWP 20th March 08

Dear Provider

Following concerns raised by providers, this note seeks to reiterate a couple of the points raised in my recent note regarding Workstep delivery.

I want to reassure you that DEAs have been informed that they should continue to refer customers to the most suitable provision, and this of course includes non Remploy local and national Workstep provision. DEAs will continue to ensure that customers are referred to the most suitable available provision, to meet their needs. This will ensure that identified places are filled as soon as possible with appropriate Workstep customers throughout 2008-09.

As you know, the latest contracting round has sought to bring the number of contracted places closer into line with the Workstep budget allocation. The overall budget allocated for Scotland is higher in 08-09 than in 07-08, this is to cover existing commitments to the number of filled WORKSTEP places and pay providers an additional amount for the sustained progressions they achieve.

I hope that this provides clarification and reassurance on these points, but if you have any further concerns regarding your contract, please contact Robert Jack DWP senior contract manager in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Hamilton

Manager

Disability Programmes Monitoring Team

Regional Business Diversity Awards



Attached to this E-Bulletin is a 'word' version of the Business Diversity Awards Form which should be used for all Regions. All Regions should use the same form, and this will ensure consistency for judging the Scottish Business Diversity Awards.

All items highlighted in red are sections which should be adapted for each region.

E-Bulletin attachments

Attached to this E-Bulletin are:

- the SUSE leaflet which can be printed and distributed to SUSE Members (in .pdf and word formats)
- DWP Commissioning Strategy (which SUSE gave response to)
- 07 SUSE AGM Minutes
- Regional Diversity Awards Nomination Form
- Booking Form for 'Disability and Employment—the future for services in Scotland' Event—23rd April

*Send your articles for the next SUSE e-bulletin to:
shona.davidson@fife.gov.uk*