

ISLINGTON'S COOPERATIVE COMMITMENT: WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

Summary

Islington Council's cooperative commitment includes deals with job seekers, employers and central government to significantly increase the employment rate of local people, help more people claiming sickness and disability benefits into work, reduce the number of people claiming Job Seekers' Allowance for more than a year, and improve client satisfaction with employment support. For job seekers the offer will include more coordinated and higher quality employment support, including personalised support programmes. For employers it will include a single point of contact to provide the support they need to recruit locally and pay a living wage. For government there is a request for greater flexibilities.

Islington Council has a proud history of cooperative innovation. In recent years this has included, for example, our work to tackle problem debt by supporting London Capital Credit Union to take on payday lenders; to generate communal energy through our pioneering Bunhill heat and power station; and to secure tenant involvement through Tenant Management Cooperatives on our estates.

However, we want to do more, and believe that through better cooperative working we can start to tackle the single biggest driver of poverty in our borough: unemployment.

At the beginning of last year we started this process by setting in train an Employment Commission to help us better understand the nature of unemployment in Islington and to explore what could be done to reduce it.

Over the past nine months we have brought together local employers, public services, the voluntary sector and residents to shine a light on employment and understand how we can work better together to bring about significant and long-lasting change.

As a result, our cooperative commitment to Islington is as follows:

- **FOR JOBSEEKERS:** We need to expand and improve the support available to Islington people to get, keep and enjoy their job. We are forging a **stronger partnership** between the council, JobcentrePlus, the health service and the voluntary sector to expand and improve the quality of **employment support** available to local people. We will be focusing in particular on those with health conditions or disabilities who have been poorly served by mainstream, national programmes. Our own iWork service is leading the way – providing intensive, **personalised coaching** and mentoring to local people who want to find work.
- **FOR EMPLOYERS:** We need to enable employers to recruit better locally by engaging with and supporting their local community. We are establishing a **single point of contact** for local employers to provide them with help and support to recruit locally and to encourage them to improve the quality of local jobs, such as offering **flexible hours** and paying the **living wage**.

- **TO GOVERNMENT:** Our message is that local councils have the appetite and expertise to drive better employment outcomes for our residents facing long term unemployment and complex barriers to work. We are therefore calling on the next government to **devolve greater responsibility and resource** to local government for getting local people into employment.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

1. Significantly increasing the employment rate in Islington from 70.5% of working age people (as of June 2014).
2. Reducing the 12,600 people claiming sickness and disability benefits – which is currently the highest rate in London – by getting them into jobs that work for them.
3. Reducing the 1,365 people who have been claiming Job Seekers' Allowance for more than a year, which is 30% of all claimants (as of September 2014).
4. Increasing client satisfaction with each service that provides employment support – so that it is at a similar levels of customer satisfaction to other organisations.

We are confident that through mobilising the energy and commitment of local people, local organisations and local employers – with a co-operative spirit – we can make a significant impact on long term unemployment in our borough. This requires us to maximise the impact of resources and talents held locally and ensure they are focused on our residents who need them most.

However, even greater progress could be made by devolving greater responsibility and resource for boosting employment. This would enable Islington to drive real collaboration across local public services and take advantage of our networks and relationships with local people and local employers.

We would also be able to involve residents who are looking for work in the design and delivery of back to work support in Islington, which is hard to meaningfully achieve in centrally driven, national employment programmes.