

Report on the Wokingham Job Support Centre (WJSC) virtual AGM 23rd June 2021

By Andrew Mickleburgh, ETC representative.

ETC awarded WJSC a grant of £300 for 2021/22. The Treasurer's Financial Report indicated that the organisation's finances are healthy and being managed well.

A representative from Wokingham Town Council was also present. The Chair noted that WJSC receives grants from many of the Town and Parish Councils and is very grateful for this.

Believed that the impacts of covid-19 on unemployment in the borough are much greater than generally recognised, with certain sectors and age groups much more affected and less resilient than others.

WJSC:

- Has assisted approximately 11,000 job seekers in the last 29 years. It will try to assist anyone seeking help, though clients have tended to be in the 45 year plus age group, not IT literate, and with minimal formal qualifications.
- Offers free 1 to 1 support and advice and assistance with matters such as CVs, searching for jobs, and interview coaching (including 'zoom interviews').
- Offers residents looking for work access to computers, the internet and telephone lines.
- Open 10am to 2pm Monday to Friday. Based at The Cornerstone, Norreys Avenue, close to Wokingham Town centre and good public transport links.
- The offices were closed earlier in the pandemic, but have re-opened and are covid-secure.
- WJSC has an excellent website with lots of useful information, including case studies and testimonials. www.wjsc.org.uk

Stuart Munro, WBC Executive Member for Business and Economic Development, spoke about WBC plans to create an Employment Hub in the borough to assist job seekers – possibly with some Department of Employment support. This is at an early stage of development and would complement work done by groups such as WJSC and Citizens Advice.

My questions about the profile characteristics of WJSC clients led to the information provided above and discussion about ways that Town and Parish Councils could help to publicise WJSC. These include: posts on Council websites and notice boards; making available WJSC leaflets in Council-owned facilities. This is something that I hope ETC will support.

There was also useful discussion about possibilities for helping to improve contact with hard to reach / under-represented groups; and a willingness to explore if WJSC might be able to assist some of the borough's current and former care leavers.

In summary: A very positive and informative AGM of an organisation that has a clear sense of purpose and proven capability to deliver valuable services to Wokingham Borough (including Earley) residents.

Cllr. Andrew Mickleburgh, 27th June 2021.