

# Households Into Work – Interim Evaluation of Pilot Programme

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## Summary

Launched in February 2018 and developed through the Liverpool City Region Devolution Agreement, the £4.5m Households into Work (HiW) pilot is a significant labour activation programme for the Liverpool City Region. HiW is a collaboration between the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, six Local Authorities and Department for Work and Pensions.

The programme was designed to address the systemic issues associated with long term and entrenched worklessness that has resulted in generations of the same household being unable to enter the labour market or sustain work. Its focus is on households where more than one adult is unemployed and in receipt of benefits, rather than more traditional employment programmes that target individuals for support. HiW draws together learning from the household focus used by the Troubled Families programme, the case worker utilised by Working Well in Greater Manchester and the personal budget used by Liverpool City Region's Youth Employment Gateway initiative.

In September 2018 the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) commissioned the University of Liverpool's Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place to undertake an interim evaluation of its HiW programme.

This second report reflects upon our findings from phase 1 which were reported to the Combined Authority in May 2019 and includes additional learning gained from second stage interviews. Although we started this second phase of research before the COVID-19 pandemic reached the UK we have expanded our scope to capture insights on how the coronavirus has impacted on the client group.

To provide a range of insights into the circumstances of those experiencing worklessness, including their complex barriers to employment but also their experience of participating in the HiW programme, we have focused on individual case studies rather than statistical analysis in this report. To achieve this we conducted a series of semi structured interviews with 16 Householders during 2019/20 who agreed to be part of our research project.

By sharing participants' varied circumstances and stories of transformational change with policy makers and practitioners, we hope that knowledge the HiW Households gained through their lived experience of multiple barriers to work and service provision can help shape Liverpool City Region's approach towards Building Back Better, creating a fair and inclusive economy.

Our research suggests three key areas of learning and insight from the HiW programme for policy makers and practitioners to consider in a post-COVID world. These relate to service design, partnerships and supporting people back into work.

### *Service Design*

The post pandemic recovery provides an opportunity for services to be reshaped in ways that they can be fully cognisant of the needs of their users. The HiW programme demonstrates the value of placing the user at the centre of service design and delivery.

Clients of the programme co-produced their actions plans with Employment Advocates, which alongside promoting their ownership of the process provided a better understanding of their support needs and circumstances, flagging any potential barriers to engagement. This approach enabled Employment Advocates to deploy the “right” type of interventions and helped to increase Household resilience.

The adaptable and responsive nature of the programme epitomised by the nimble role of the Employment Advocates allowed for quick changes to be made to action plans enabling clients to make continued to progress towards employment objectives. The non-sanction based approach of the programme removed “fear of trying” from within a client group who had become risk adverse from their experience of previous sanction led interventions.

The programme’s approach of operating across multiple services and interlinked but perhaps previously siloed policy domains provides learning for wider service reform.

Being a devolved programme, accountable to the LCRCA rather than national policy and commissioning processes, meant HiW was able to act fast, be flexible and take immediate action to help Households deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The speedy response over a two-week period led to the introduction of a new service “offer” for Households that would not have been possible with a more traditional contracting model.

### ***Partnerships***

Tackling the long term health, social and economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic will require holistic solutions. HiW brought together the collective skills and knowledge assets that existed within organisations from across the city region, translating them into a single source of service delivery. It demonstrated an effective approach to partnership working, one which maximised the value of the collective services by overcoming barriers to joint working to fill gaps in provision, ultimately improving outcomes for clients. Social and economic recovery from the pandemic will require the adoption of a similar approach to tackling complex needs.

### ***Supporting People Back into Work***

The economic impacts of COVID-19 risk widening inequalities across the UK and in particular places like Liverpool City Region where there are high numbers of socially and economically vulnerable people.

Those residents already seeking work prior to the pandemic now face increased competition for limited jobs and risk being pushed further away from the prospect of employment. Though there is an urgency in returning the newly unemployed to work and ensuring young people can access the labour market there is still the need via HiW to address long term worklessness, including the associated health and economic inequalities.

Investing in locally tailored solutions that reflect the HiW’s transformative approach will be important for economic recovery and in meeting the Government’s intentions to ‘level up’ underperforming and left behind parts of the UK.



# 1. Introduction

In September 2018 the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority commissioned the University of Liverpool's Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place to undertake an interim evaluation of its Households into Work Programme. This report has been produced to share the learning and experiences of the programme participants with policy makers and practitioners. The evaluation findings from phase 1 were reported in May 2019 and are reflected upon in this report. As a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic our approach to evaluating phase 2 was expanded to capture insights on how coronavirus has impacted on the client group. In this report we have focused on individual case studies rather than statistics to reflect the varied circumstances of the client group.

## *1.1 Background to the Households into Work Programme*

Launched in February 2018 and developed through the Liverpool City Region Devolution Agreement, the £4.5m Households into Work (HiW) pilot is a significant labour activation programme for the Liverpool City Region. Developed as an alternative approach to supporting people into work, HiW is focused on people living in households where more than one adult is unemployed and in receipt of benefit, rather than more traditional employment programmes that target individuals for support.

The Treasury Business Case underpinning the programme highlighted how national and local interventions have proved insufficient in addressing the complex and interlinked issues often associated with poor health and worklessness. With 130,000 Liverpool City Region residents accessing out of work benefits, and around 100,000 of these in receipt of sickness benefits: this represents the highest rate of any economic area nationally (NOMIS Out of Work Benefit Area Comparison). Though the city region is well served by other labour interventions their focus is upon building human capital by, developing an individual's skills to move them into employment.

The HiW approach took learning from three programmes: the household focus used by Troubled Families, the case worker utilised by Working Well in Greater Manchester and the personal budget used by Liverpool City Region's Youth Employment Gateway initiative. Across the two years, the pilot has tested new ways of working where each eligible household is provided with tailored support and assigned an Employment Advocate for up to 12 months to support the individual and household into work.

The client group for HiW was intended to be harder to reach and have circumstances much more complex than other job seekers, for this group addressing barriers to employment meant taking action to remedy the root causes of worklessness. To do this the programme took a radically different approach than other labour activation programmes, it worked with the Households (clients) on a full spectrum of issues covering health, debt, housing, training identifying suitable interventions aimed at stabilising the Household to move them closer to the labour market. HiW was very much the foundation that enabled people to build their capabilities progressing on to more specific employability programmes or accessing employment during the 12 months of the programme.

The aims and objective of HiW were to:

1. Determine the extent to which a Household based approach to employment will improve employment prospects and job outcomes
2. Identify lessons from better local integration of services to deliver outcomes for customers
3. Identify the impact of improved resilience to get and keep a job and the extent to which this supports sustained job outcomes
4. Identify systemic improvements which will improve the processes to support customers into work
5. Capture learning from the innovation to inform wider public service reform

## **1.2 Evaluation Methodology**

The evaluation was not *aiming* to measure 'success' statistically – but rather to provide a narrative explanation of the reasons for programme outcomes. The methods used included:

- Qualitative study capturing voices of Service Leads, Employment Advocates and Householders
- Analysis of participant profiles
- Analysis of Pathway Star system data, which is used to track participant's progress on the programme

To enable an element of longitudinal tracking we proposed two sets of interviews with each of the groupings described above at intervals of roughly 12 months.

Our initial round of field work took place between January and April 2019 and comprised of three interviews conducted with Service Leaders, 24 interviews with Employment Advocates and 44 interviews with participating Householders. Alongside the interview data we drew upon secondary data including Operations Reports compiled by the Combined Authority which brought together data from each areas customer relationship software and the pathway star system.

The outcomes of the interviews and analysis of secondary data were used to draft report one of this interim evaluation which was submitted to the Combined Authority in May 2019. This second report picks up the outcomes of the second stage interviews with Employment Advocates and Households, we also reflect upon the themes which arose from the first report.

Interviews with the Employment Advocates took place across the Winter of 19/20 and though our intention was to pick interviews with the Households at exactly one year after the initial interviews UK Government Guidance related to COVID-19 meant that we had to revise the methodology for the Household interviews switching from face to face interviews to telephone interviews.

These interviews took place during the UK lockdown so do contain some unique and wide ranging reflections on what it was like for the client group to live through that experience. We reengaged with the group of 44 Households and those who felt able to participate, a total of 16 households were scheduled in for telephone interviews.

### **1.3 Scope**

When the coronavirus crisis has subsided, the city region will need to take stock of what has happened and what is needed for a sustainable economic and social recovery. That may be some time away. But it is possible at this point in time for this evaluation to provide some early reflections on the COVID-19 crisis to inform the plans to build back better and deliver a people-focused recovery. Liverpool City Region entered the pandemic with 70,000 people unable to seek work because of ill health, one third of communities in the most deprived decile and an employment rate of 57% for ethnic minorities compared to 74% for white residents. Both nationally and locally there have been calls to place well-being at the heart of the recovery and to re-invigorate the role of public services to ensure people and places are not left behind.

The Combined Authority are committed to the principles of equality and HiW provision was made available on an equitable basis. Put simply if you met the requirements to be accepted on the programme you were able to get support, and therefore there is no “control group” against which to analyse the programme outcomes. However it may be possible to achieve comparison using a wider set of DWP data for clients within the city region who share similar characteristics to those of the HiW group. This data was not available to us at the time of writing so we have not included comparisons between HiW participants and those not on the programme.

Each Household participating in the programme had their own action plan which provided them with a bespoke framework of activity. Although Households may have accessed the same or similar service at points on their journey other links in the chain of activity may have been different, nor is it the case that each Household would require the same interventions. Though we can describe the interventions which took place we cannot directly compare the effectiveness of specific interventions as the programme always intended to take a holistic approach to each individual in order to move them towards the labour market.

As a pilot programme it was reasonable to expect that the framework for data collection may evolve as the programme develops and more becomes known about the client group. Colleagues at the Combined Authority and the Employment Advocates have worked to create a consistent data set at programme level. Two elements of data which would have been useful for this study were details of previous programmes Households had engaged with prior to HiW and at the other end of the spectrum details of services they were referred to after completing the programme were not captured. Our understanding is that this has now been addressed and this data is collected for Households joining and completing the programme.

## **2. The Delivery Context**

### **2.1 Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

When HiW was designed and even when we completed our phase 2 interviews with the Employment Advocates we could not have anticipated the societal challenges created by

the COVID-19 Pandemic. A virus which first caused a global public health crisis moved at such speed it has caused the greatest economic challenge in living memory.

As society and the economy recalibrates it can be difficult to imagine what the future will look like, what will jobs in the future look like, how and who will be able to access employment, what support will be available for individuals seeking to access the labour market? The questions can seem almost endless but sadly it seems certain that many more of us will have to make claims for financial support from the state, some of these claims will be made by people who have never had to seek this type of support before.

Back in the 1930s when the economist Keynes was thinking about how the economic future for that generation's grandchildren might look he used the phrase "painfulness of readjustment between one economic period and another". This perhaps resonates with what we are experiencing now and poses questions as to what the future of the labour market and welfare state may look like.

Although measures recently announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, including the 'Kickstart Scheme' for young people, are urgent and necessary, the development of a post-COVID labour market in areas like the Liverpool City Region which have already been experiencing above the national average levels of long term worklessness will still require a balanced approach to intervention.

If we don't make the commitment to engage with a wider group of individuals in the 25 plus group some of whom may have complex circumstances which have complex barriers to employment we will risk consigning multi generations to economic inactivity, widening those inequalities of opportunity particularly around health which have come into sharp focus via the lens of COVID-19 and setting back the Government's ambitions to level up Britain.

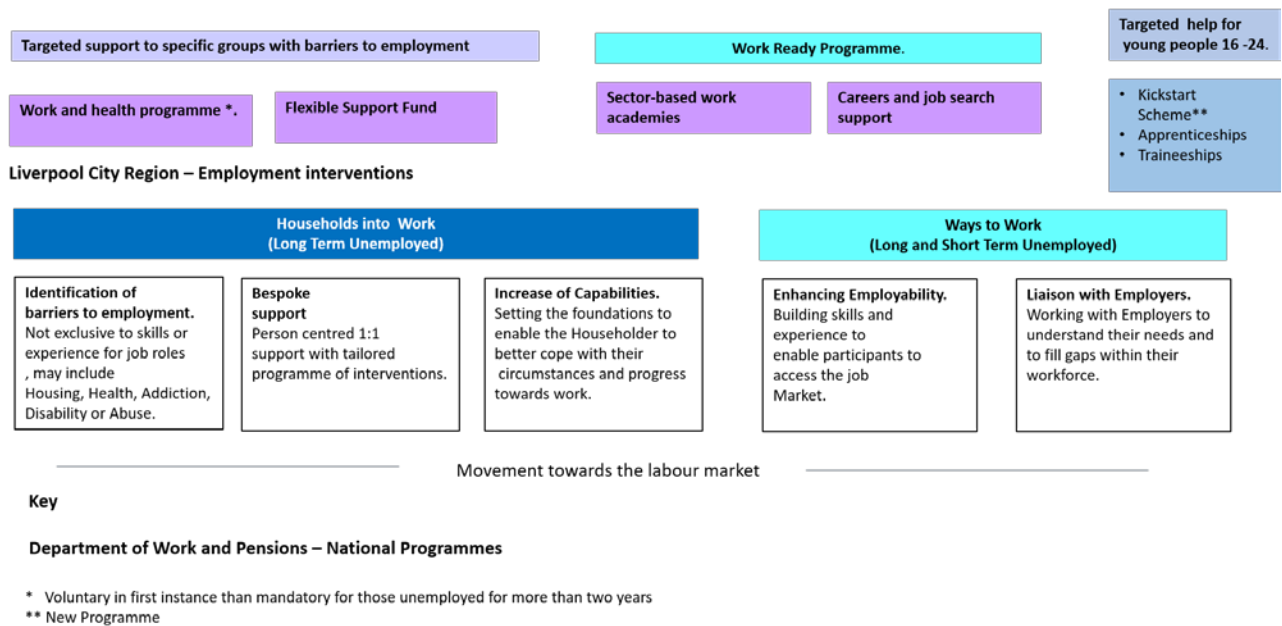
## **2.2 Labour Activation Programmes**

Later in this report we discuss the place the HiW programme takes in the wider city region ecosystem of services, but to provide additional context to the design and operational delivery of HiW we wanted to briefly discuss the relationship between the programme and other labour activation programmes within the city region in particular the Ways to Work Programme which is delivered by the 6 local authorities.

The current delivery offer involves a combination of nationally delivered and local labour activation programmes, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Labour Activation Programmes in Liverpool City Region (August 2020)**



At the local level, the Ways to Work employment support programme which has been in operation since 2016 is a notable success story for the city region. Funded by the European Social Investment Fund and working with 25,000 people it has supported over 15,000 back into work. It has achieved this outcome by aligning the training and development needs of the individual with the vacancies and skills shortages of employers.

The agile way in which the programme responds to the needs of the labour market is a key part of its success. It caters to a client group who though are experiencing unemployment may not have the underlying complex barriers to employment experienced by the HiW client group and therefore don't require intensive support outside the realm of skills development required to fill the gaps in the workforce.

HiW was designed to help move households who were experiencing long term worklessness address the root causes of unemployment, often associated with deeply entrenched issues spanning a spectrum of their lives including health, careering responsibilities, housing, addiction and debts. It is because of these issues that Households on programme may be less "work ready" than their counterparts on Ways to Work.

The rationale behind HiW is that if Households are given the "right type of support" they can build on their capabilities to overcome longstanding barriers to employment become "work ready" over their twelve months on the programme. Progressing to targeted employment support offered by Ways to Work or national programmes or perhaps securing employment during their time on HiW.

Our research particularly in terms of the qualitative interviews pointed to there being strong levels of inter play between these two local programmes, with a flow of referrals being made to and from each other. If we imagined Ways to Work as the Springboard propelling people into employment HiW provided the ladder upon which to reach it.

As the labour market recalibrates itself the collaboration between programmes like Ways to Work and HiW could potentially play a key role in building a more inclusive economy.

### 3. The Client Group

HiW offers a person centred approach to addressing worklessness. Rather than being prescriptive about the structure and approach to the programme, it was felt that given the complex nature of the client group it was to be crucial to tailor the types of support, locations, activities and ways of working to each Household's needs.

In this report using the programme data and information gathered from the interviews with Households we examine the characteristics of the client group and the how the programme worked with them.

Though the data tells the story of the programme we felt it was difficult to understand the breadth and depth of the complex and often interlinked issues experienced by the Households on the programme without hearing about the impacts of these circumstances from the Households themselves. It is because of this we have incorporated some small Household case studies to supplement the data.

#### 3.1 Support Needs

As the programme was designed to tackle the root causes of worklessness to receive support clients had to identify with one of the support needs shown in table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Self-reported support needs of 1,606 individuals at conclusion of the pilot stage of the programme, March 2020

Support Need	%	Support Need	%
Mental health issues	65%	Drug misuse	10%
Parent (with children under 18)	32%	Problem drinking	6%
Has care responsibilities	26%	Sensory impairment	4%
Lone parent	23%	English is not first language	4%
Chronic health condition	23%	Care leaver	4%
Victim of domestic abuse	16%	On community sentence	4%
Homeless/temporarily housed	16%	Teenage parent	1%
Learning disability	15%	Refugee	1%
Physical disability	13%	Ex-armed forces	1%
Ex-offender	12%	Asylum seeker	1%
Not in education, training or work (NEET)	12%		

Figures provided from whole programme CRM. N=1,606

45% of the Households identified with having between 3 to 4 support needs which was the largest percentage grouping, at the other end of the scale 6 % identified as having between 7 to 8 needs and 1% felt the 9 or more needs which were forming a barrier to employment.

Throughout the two years of the pilot Mental Health was significant issue across the programme, with 65% of the participants identifying as having a mental health issue. Such was the prevalence of barriers associated with poor mental health each of the seven Households I met with on my first day of interviews in January 2019 had identified their mental health being a barrier to securing work.

The data available does not provide finer detail on the type of mental health condition which participants have, however discussions with the Employment Advocates and Households themselves points to the programme participants identifying with conditions across the mental health spectrum including anxiety, depression and schizophrenia. One of the Householders I interviewed who was married with small children had been sectioned under the mental health act, another who had a criminal record told me that when things had gotten too much for him to cope with he would reoffend with the aim of returning to prison to “sort his head out”.

His condition was described as being complicated, he was prone to volatility which has been a barrier to him receiving and engaging with the support he needed. But there was something about the Employment Advocate that made him let them into his life, they developed a “bucket list” of actions to be taken. This gave him structure to better manage his medication and allowed him to fully engage with the specialised support available.

***“I’d had support workers, psychiatrists, CPMs, mental health workers, bipolar workers, all of them and they never took the time to kind of get to know me and like see what my issues are.”***

*Primary Householder, Male 34 years old*

The results of the interventions were there before me as he told me if he had been asked to speak to someone like me the year before he would have come in and gone “Do you know what, nah, and just walked out.”

Without the support from the programme it’s doubtful that he would have been in a position to think about looking for work the impacts of his condition upon others would have made securing and maintaining work difficult. But at that stage where he was gaining control over his life and not being led by circumstances.

The intention of HiW was been to focus on those people who are the furthest away from the labour market. Table 2 shown overleaf, demonstrates that the programme was activity engaging with those individuals who were experiencing long term unemployment.

**Table 2:** Time Spent out of Employment

Time band	Proportion
0-6 months	17%
6-12 months	8%
12-18 months	6%
18-24 months	5%
24-36 months	10%
More than 36 months	38%
Never employed	15%
Unknown	1%

Figures provided from whole programme CRM. N=1,606

### 3.2 Ethnicity Data

Individuals participating in the programme predominately identify themselves as White – British (91.2%), with 8.8% identifying themselves as coming from different ethnic backgrounds. This is broadly in line with the overall Population for Economically Inactive individuals (90.8% White – British and 9.2% Ethnic Minority background). This demonstrates that the Households in to Work programme is operating in line with the ethnic make-up of the Liverpool City Region.

### 3.3 Gender Data

The gender breakdown of the programme has 58% of individuals identifying as Female and 42% as Male, is lacks alignment with the overall Liverpool City Region unemployment gender split 56% Male and 44% Female.

Our initial thoughts as to a reason for this was that referrals within the Liverpool Team have come from Children’s Centres and whilst this has definitely had an impact on our overall gender split, the trend was experienced by the other local teams throughout the lifetime of the pilot. This perhaps points to the holistic approach of the programme, one which via the support of the Employment Advocate helps balance personal responsibilities including providing care with opportunities for personal development as having a particular appeal for women who are experiencing long term unemployment.

## 4. HiW Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Though in terms of timescale this report covers a period before the COVID-19 pandemic, given the social and economic implications of the crisis it would be remiss of us not to reflect on the both potential impacts upon the target clients and how the programme has shaped its delivery to respond during the period of lockdown and reopening.

#### **4.1 Implications for the Client Group**

The Liverpool City Region has historically suffered from poor health outcomes, a high prevalence of long-term conditions including diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and heart disease have formed a persistent barrier to economic engagement by sections of the region's population including HiW Clients.

These health conditions place individuals at additional risk of serious and long-term complications from COVID-19. Data from the ONS points to those living with a lack of financial resource being particularly vulnerable to the disease, in England the age-standardised mortality rate of deaths involving COVID-19 in the most deprived areas was 128.3 deaths per 100,000 population; this was more than double the mortality rate in the least deprived areas (58.8 deaths per 100,000).

When we submitted our draft report about the programme to the Combined Authority in May 2019, we wrote the following about the Household Budget which was a resource to be used by the Employment Advocates to help stabilise the Households while they progressed towards the labour market. "Though all costs which have been incurred to date are eligible under the programme terms and conditions, there may be some legitimate concern that items purchased to support core living costs including fuel vouchers, food, basic hygiene and clothing should be provided from elsewhere within the benefits system."

We wrote this not because we thought the expenditure was in any way frivolous but to raise the issue that budget transactions and the interviews with the Households told us that without this resource many of those on the programme would have gone without the necessities required to maintain the most basic standard of living. Examples of costs incurred included a second-hand cooker for a family whose cooker had been condemned, beds and bedding for a family, mobile phone top up to enable clients to remain compliant with Universal Credit and fuel vouchers as a member of a household had not received any hours from the agency they were registered with.

This knowledge of how and why the pandemic has effected those who are living with poor health and limited resources should be further incentive to policy makers to redouble their commitment to reducing these inequalities – building an inclusive economy for the future.

#### **4.2 Reshaping Service Delivery**

The COVID-19 pandemic reached the UK at a time when HiW was transferring from its two year pilot phase (which is the subject of this report) to a nine month extension of the programme and the recruitment cycle for new Households to join the programme had opened.

The imposing of UK Government social distancing guidance in March 2020 resulted in services including Job Centres pausing face to face contact, and meant that the programme had to adapt its plans. Being within the control of the Combined Authority allowed the programme to respond dynamically and flexibly to an unprecedented challenge, meeting urgent and local demands in a way which may not have been possible had the service been contracted out to an external supplier.



The agile, flexible and creative approach taken by the programme towards the resolution of issues associated with long term worklessness, underpinned by the extensive skills and knowledge of the Employment Advocates, in particular their understanding of the wider ecosystem of statutory and voluntary services, enabled a responsive approach to addressing needs to be taken throughout the crisis. The programme adapted to the constantly evolving circumstances by utilising multiple modes of service delivery including telephone calls, face time, zoom and when safe to do so face to face contact resumed.

The highly adaptable, speedy and creative approach taken by the programme in response to the pandemic is best illustrated by providing details of the “COVID Response phase”. This was a new element introduced to the programme which offered up to 12 weeks of support to any LCR resident who though may not have had a second eligible householder may still need help to stabilise their situation.

The amount of time an Employment Advocate spends helping the client could range from as little as half an hour. For example, giving them information about a food bank or referring them onto Ways to Work or it could be for the full 12 weeks sorting out a problem with benefits or housing. If during this time, it was found the individual did not have a second eligible householder who is willing to join the programme, they will be registered in full.

If at the end of the 12 weeks, the person still doesn't meet the programme eligibility criteria but is still in need of support such as help with debt, the Employment Advocate will make sure they are referred onto an appropriate service such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. This approach was explained to potential participants at the outset.

#### **4.3 Reconnection with Clients: Welfare Checks**

Across the early stage of the pandemic Employment Advocates connected with phase one Households by a series of welfare calls. Of the 1,606 people who had been on phase one, 795 were contactable. Reasons for noncontacts included phone numbers no longer current and calls going unanswered (this was reflected within our interview group).

Of those contactable, 304 participants asked to be contacted again with the frequency ranging from daily contact to monthly. Themes of the calls included:

- **Housing.** Examples included individuals under threat of eviction due to rent arrears, a pregnant former programme participant trying to secure new housing and other seeking advice on the use of property pool.
- **Benefits.** Advice on Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments including appeals, referrals for food/fuel vouchers and very sadly some requests for advice on accessing support for funeral costs.
- **Mental Health and Addiction.** Referrals made to counselling services including for one client who had relapsed into alcohol addiction.
- **Employment.** Individuals were asking for advice with CVs, accessing employment agencies and work ready programmes including Ways to Work. It's perhaps a testament to resilience of this group that they were still actively seeking work at a time when society and the economy was retracting within into its self.

Although this connection with previous participants was taking place, the programme was still working on recruitment plans for the future. This involved promotion to potential participants taking place across social media and web platforms, alongside constant contact with partners.

We have not as yet provided a deeper analysis of this process as it is out of the scope of this report and the process is still on-going but should the LCRCA wish we will reflect upon this at a later stage.

## 5. Programme Performance (March 2018 – March 2020)

The quantitative data shown in tables two and three covers the two years of the pilot programme which covered the period of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. In parallel to the conclusion of the pilot the programme entered into a further one year phase of service delivery. The recruitment period coincided with the enforcement of UK Government lock down restrictions in response to the COVID -19 pandemic.

The changes to modes of service delivery for statutory services including job centres and scaling back of services operated by partner organisations including the community and voluntary sector have understandably impacted upon the referrals to the programme. However the Combined Authority have begun to market the programme via partner networks and social media channels including Facebook.

### 5.1 Performance against Targets

Referrals to Households into Work started in March 2018, with Advocates in place across the city region following a common induction process. Referrals were accepted through a range of avenues including self-referral, agencies, Council services and Jobcentre Plus. The summary of performance to the end of March 2020 against high level targets was:

**Table 3:** Performance Summary: March 2020

	Year 2 Target (March 2020)	Actual (March 2020)
Number of Households who have started on the programme	800	1,062
Number of Households where individuals have completed at least one agreed activity	600	851
Number making significant improvements / moving close to work	500	722
Moved into employment (16 hours per week for 4 weeks)	20%	28%

The programme had achieved and surpassed each of its four high level targets, with a positive 8% variance between the target and actual for those moved into employment (16 hours per week for 4 weeks).

At an individual level HiW programme’s key measures are set against the following criteria:

- Progress Measures
- Job Outcomes
- Work related activity (such as work experience or volunteering)
- Courses (could be NVQ or training, must be over five hours)

**Table 4:** Number of Progress Improvements Secured

	Progress Measures	Steps	Job Outcomes	*Work related activity	*Course (5+ hours)
Liverpool City Region	5,374	8,184	220	345	566

## 5.2 Pathway Star

Alongside each local area CRMs the Pathway Star system is used to monitor progress against individual action plans aimed at the achievement of the above criteria. Developed by Triangle, Pathway Star is a tool used to measure and support change when working with people. It does this by demonstrating the impact of interventions being delivered and capturing evidence of respective change. Tailored to specific sectors, the system is used by Local Authorities, NHS, Police and support services both in the UK and internationally.

Upon or soon after registering on the programme each Household completed an assessment on the Pathway Star System. Using a scoring system of 1 – 5 (1 = Not Managing 5= Managing Well) the Household position against Skills, Stability, Money, Physical Health, Emotional Health, Family, Social Networks and Aspiration & Motivation

Over the course of their time on the programme an individual’s progress is tracked using these measurement to record progress and on some occasion’s regression against an indicator. In our previous report we note that as the scales available to record change are open to individual interpretation there was some variance as to how progress is recorded across the programme.

However the scores and notes recorded on the Pathway Star system provide a useful story of the journey of change from the initial assessing of needs, connecting with service to achieving outcomes.

## 6. Client Experience

The data points to the programme achieving results with a complex client group with deeply entrenched (perhaps multi-generational) needs and barriers to employment. What was driving the achievement of positive outcomes with a clients who maybe had engaged with other services had not achieved the same level of success?

In our first report we noted that HiW offered a disruptive approach to labour activation, its novel innovations included:

- **Household Approach to addressing Worklessness:** Clients within a Household could support each other with making and embedding change.
- **Household Budget:** An allowance allocated to each Household which enabled quick action to be taken to move an issue on, allowing change to happen.
- **Employment Advocate:** Supporting each Household to develop a framework for change and guiding them to its achievement.

Households who had struggled with work trials prior to HIW talked about “messaging up”, “not meeting targets” or “not lasting” and having to start again. HIW wasn’t like this, Households told us that this programme felt different to other services.

*“I wasn’t meeting my targets. And I got to that stage where the manager spoke to me because people have met the targets. That was the last job but obviously that wasn’t for me”*  
Male 33

Though the Employment Advocate was a professional they weren’t removed from the Households they worked with they got alongside them.

Perhaps for the first time they were recognised as the experts of their own experience and as such they were able with support of their Employment Advocate to take action and connect with services to craft what they felt would be a good future for themselves.

### 6.1 Client Perspectives of the Programme

Within our previous report we highlighted the following attributes of the programme which were fed back to us by Households in the first round of interviews.

- **A flexible, service user-led.** This was one of the most common factors identified which supported delivery of positive outcomes. Rather than being prescriptive about the structure and approach it was felt to be crucial to tailor the types of support, locations, activities and ways of working to each Households’ needs.
- **Practical and solution-focused support.** Households valued the fact that the meetings with the Employment Advocates went beyond listening. Instead they came away with strategies and referrals to appropriate services which helped them manage and make positive changes in their lives. Employment Advocates also noted that the emphasis on building resilience helped Households to sustain positive outcomes and move towards independence, which both Advocates and Households felt was a positive outcome of the programme.
- **Consistent and trusted source of support.** Households felt that having a consistent source of support that was both separate and distinct from other employment services was a factor in moving towards the achievement of positive outcomes. Households felt that the qualities of the Employment Advocates such as being non-judgemental, caring, respectful, accepting, patient and motivating were important for achieving positive outcomes.

As these comments were reaffirmed within our second stage interviews with the Households we want to briefly focus on why flexibility and adaptability were such an important feature of the programme.

This was a client group which traditional modes of service delivery had little impact upon improving their deeply entrenched circumstances, it was necessary to try a new approach.

A key part of this approach was the role of the Employment Advocate, an overarching theme of the interviews with the Households was how important this role had been to them in making change.

***“When you’re coming to an office, you’ll instantly put defences up, so both times or not, you’re panicking and what you want to say when you walk up the door, you’re like, “Oh.” You have forgotten what to say and you can’t go aback as you are imposing on them. It’s frustrating as what could take twenty mins takes three weeks to resolve.”***

*Household*

The role transcended the traditional structure of centralised service delivery associated with welfare, moving from a mode of service delivery which is desk based and perhaps prescriptive to one which is agile and responsive.

In comparison to other roles within the sector where colleagues are mainly office based, there is some mobility with the Employment Advocate role which allows them to build a knowledge base of the different types of service provision within the area. This allowed them to identify a spectrum of thoughtful and creative interventions which could be used to progress change in the individual Household circumstances.

Though rigorous feedback loops and governance structures were in place across the programme, Employment Advocates had high levels of autonomy in their daily operational decision making process both in terms of the interventions selected for clients and how (provided costs where eligible) the Household Support Budget for their Households could be used.

***“We can deal with it quickly, and we can solve that problem. Having that kind of ability can make a hell of a difference”***

*Employment Advocate*

The autonomy in built within the role allowed Employment Advocates to adapt to changing demands, to quickly take the necessary steps to improve the Household circumstances.

***“I was just under 16 stone. If it weren’t for Advocate getting into with the PT trainer. Now, I’m below 13 stone. My health wasn’t in the best place. My mental state wasn’t in the best place”***

*Household*

One story of transformational change came from a client who had as a result of interventions relating to health and fitness lost a significant amount of weight. This had improved both her physical and mental health, giving her the opportunity to get back to work for the first time in seven years. Something she felt she wouldn’t have achieved without her Employment Advocate.



There were other similar examples provided which demonstrated how the programme's asset based approach to building capabilities moved beyond the more traditional training and skills interventions.

Households and Employment Advocates told us about the coproduction of action plans which were adaptable and flexible, responding quickly to changing circumstances. The ownership of plans, the relationship with the Employment Advocate and the non-sanction based nature of the programme enabled Households to have an honest dialogue about their progress with their Employment Advocates.

***"She fully- ask me questions, so she probably understood what I was thinking and what I was looking for, and then from then onwards, I sort of evolved"***  
Household

One participant who had worked most of his adult life until he began to suffer from depression told us about how he had been so keen to get back to work and the routine he knew he put himself on a course before he was quite ready.

When he tried to start the course the circumstances overwhelmed him and he felt able to reach out to his Employment Advocate. He described the process of how they "picked" him up from the disappointment, helping him change course so he could channel his energy into an activity which would improve his circumstances and move him towards the labour market.

***"It was stupid, I sat down and I spoke to her, she just put everything right for me, she said, "Right, put that on a back burner but it's still there, right, what you want to do?" and then like giving me time to calm down, give me time to relax and pick me back up again"***  
Household

Without that trust in the Employment Advocate and flexibility in the process that Household may well have retreated back into himself. Losing the progress he had made while on the programme and missing the opportunity to reach the potential of his capabilities. Additionally Employment Advocates reported that the feedback loops and the Household Support Budget provides the Employment Advocates (providing costs are eligible) with the mandate to take responsive decision required to progress the programme participants.

## **6.2 Emerging Themes**

When we started our project we had always intended to reconnect with the households we had interviewed during stage one to reflect on their journey. However, our interview schedule coincided with the period of coronavirus lockdown restrictions in the UK. Undoubtedly this period has tested the resilience of many of us, upending our routines, limiting our social options and causing concern about what our future may look like.

Though the conversations I had with the households touched on these themes, there was also a sense that they were looking ahead applying for jobs, voluntary opportunities and where possible were taking steps to improve their circumstances.

Before looking at some of the updated case studies from our second stage interviews with Households, we wanted to reflect on the themes which emerged from the first and second stages interviews with both Employment Advocates and Households which are relevant to the discussion.

- **Housing.** During the cycles of interviews with both Employment Advocates and Households, the importance of the relationship between housing and worklessness emerged as a theme. Resolving issues including rent arrears, repairs, securing and furnishing homes often seemed to be the first step to moving clients towards work.

During the course of our interviews we met with people who due to benefit payments being out of sync had built up a cycle of rent arrears which in some cases left them trapped in accommodation which was no longer suitable. A household who was renting privately being at risk of eviction due their landlord not paying the mortgage on the property and two people who had experience of “sofa surfing” constantly moving between the homes of friends and family making it almost impossible to take steps to improve your circumstances and return to work.

Resolution of housing issues seemed so integral to the achievement of progress measures against Pathway Star indicators including: Stability, Money, Physical health, Emotional well-being and Family, that the Stability indicator was amended to Stability and Home. Anecdotal data provided by the LCRCA indicated that concerns about evictions, rent arrears and trying to find accommodation were pressing issues for some of the clients who had received welfare calls during lockdown.

We just want to reflect upon one of the examples of private tenants at risk of eviction, this was two brothers who were living together in the former family home. One was out of work as he had been the main career for the father who had died, the other had diabetes which had seen him hospitalised and he had recently taken custody of his two daughters who had been in care due to abuse while in their mothers’ home.

Ultimately the house was reposed and the family was separated, we could only reconnect with one of the brothers who due to being a single person had been housed in a multi occupancy home. Though he had his own room he shared some facilities with another person, he was housed in a different part of the city from where he had lived previously and had little contact with his family meaning but for welfare calls from his Employment Advocate and housing he had spent lockdown alone.

With the help of his Employment Advocate he was restoring his application to Property Pool Plus. Which is the main point of access to the social housing waiting list. The system is used by Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, and Wirral councils

and over 20 housing associations to advertise and let their vacant properties. The registration and bidding system is online, unfortunately he had no digital access his only means of communication was a mobile phone which could not connect to the internet.

Like some of the other Households on the programme his complex circumstances meant that he was somewhat disadvantaged by the banding system used to allocate properties. Though he was without a permanent tenancy his place in the multi occupancy home meant that he was allocated a medium priority for a property,

It's difficult to imagine how people without access to a secure home, which allows their basic needs to be met could progress to work. Case study one featured later in this report perhaps best illustrates how security at home can catalyse other positive outcomes which repay the time invested to resolve the issue by the programme.

- **Digital Inclusion.** I am writing this report at a time when those who are able to have spent the majority of the past five months working from home. We have had the skills, equipment and access to Wifi to be able to stay connected to colleagues, family, friends and access services.

The resource implications of this can be significant for those on limited income, without a device, credit or access to Wifi access to services becomes increasingly difficult. The trend for digital by default services for example Universal Credit, Property Pool has grown significantly in recent years and maybe accelerated by the implications of social distancing.

The Household I spoke to in the example above didn't have the device to be able to engage, others didn't have the credit available on their phone and lockdown had seen free access points to Wifi including libraries and cafes close. It may be cheaper to purchase a 99p drink in a fast food chain restaurant and make that last a couple of hours so you can access your online journal, do job searchers than to top up your phone credit.

As society reconfigures post pandemic a key question not just for this programme but for wider policy makers will be how do we ensure that the benefits of digital access are spread evenly and those with limited digital resources are not placed at a disadvantaged when trying to access key statutory services.

- **Partnerships and Relationships.** HiW sought to determine the extent to which a Household based approach to employment would improve employment prospects and job outcomes.

*"She was telling me that I was good at it. So it was like both of them (Primary Householder) together that pushed me to do it"*  
Secondary Householder

Our first report suggested that the programme perhaps challenged a traditional view of what constituted a household as familial relations included cousins who lived in

different addresses, friends and neighbours were registered as Primary and Secondary Householders on the programme.

Our interviews with the Households Indicated that sharing a journey of change with someone who respected your knowledge of your own circumstances, was supportive of you making change and encouraged you to be open to trying new things was important.

Some of those we interviewed formed this partnership within their own home, for example one Householder whose Secondary Household was their son told us that it was better to take a household approach as if something happens with one of them it effected the whole house not just that person. For some the partnership was formed with an individual from outside of their home but a common thread throughout the interviews was the importance of the relationship between the Household and Employment Advocate.

During the interviews with the Households a recurring comment was that they felt that they were respected and listened to. Quality listening enabled trust to be built between the Household and Advocate, the attentiveness of this approach allows the Advocate to assemble an accurate picture of Household circumstances. Critically reflecting upon the information provided allowed the Advocate to assess and evaluate options available to coproduce plans with the Households, which are grounded in the reality of their needs and not practitioner assumptions, enabling new possibilities to emerge. Employment Advocates indicated that during the process of building a relationship with Households new things which had perhaps been “hidden” or not fully discussed with other provision were revealed and support to resolve this issues could often be the key to unlocking change.

Interviews with both Households and Employment Advocates pointed to Advocates brokering access to a wide network service provision offering activities which perhaps had not experienced before and which in some cases formed the basis of a new network outside the norms of their previous social or professional interactions. It was within these networks Householders capabilities flourished freeing them from the ties which had bound them to their former circumstances.

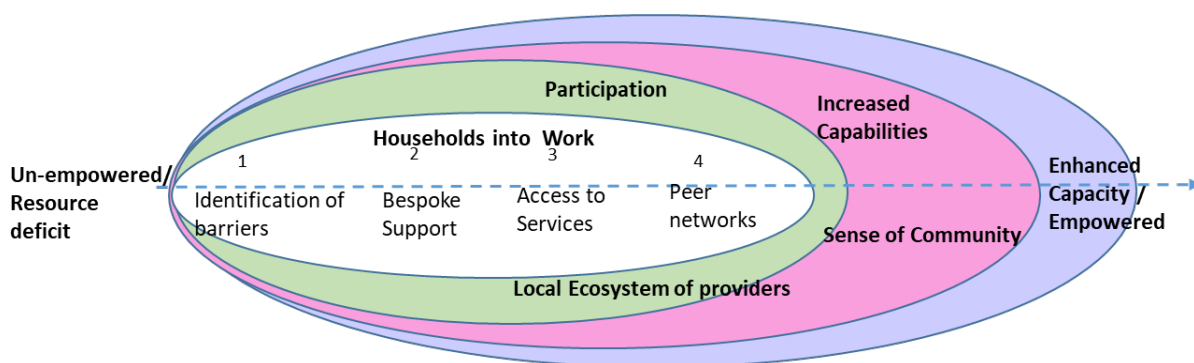
After reflecting upon the clients’ perspective upon their journey towards change we will pick up on the relevance of the above themes and discuss some emerging findings from our second stage of interviews.

### **6.3 Reflections on the Client Journey**

The HiW programme has led to a number of positive outcomes for the individuals who participated on the scheme. A running theme throughout client case studies has shown that individuals who may have felt ‘disenfranchised’ from interaction with support services, employment or members of the public, tend to credit the positive experience they have with HiW in giving them greater autonomy and agency within the lives.

Whether recovering from periods of social isolation or time in prison, individuals on HiW can benefit from enhanced individual power, be it further autonomy within their home (as a result of the Household budget) to instances where individuals regain the confidence to look for employment after initial rejections. It is this *agency*, which allows people to act in ways that shape their own experiences and life trajectories, helping provide the cornerstone for rebuilding someone’s outlook on life.

**Figure 2** (adapted from patient participation the Holy Grail) is an attempt to map out the Households Journey on the programme. Reflecting the themes we have referred to throughout this chapter, we see the programme from the perspective of the Householder.



One of my interviews was with a Householder who when I first met them in 2019 had been quite shy. Speaking to someone new didn’t come easily to her. Twelve months on, this time it was different, the conversation flowed, she seemed confident and determined.

***“She was pointing in the right direction and to places I didn’t even know existed, so it was really like, a sort of the foundation that helped me start my life back up again really”***  
Householder

Focusing on the future, she was pushing herself out of her comfort zone, actively pursuing opportunities to build her skills. She was engaged with a local community organisation and even though we would have to wait for lockdown restrictions to be lifted before she could start volunteering she felt that this could be “her time”.

During her time on HiW she had been encouraged to try new things by her Employment Advocate, they put a plan together to develop both practical and “softer” interpersonal skills. Her plan weaved together services from the network of providers within the city region. Though some of these services were well established she had either not been aware of the provision available or would not have been sure of how to access them. This was a common reflection made by Households over the course of the interviews. Many of them commented that their Employment Advocate had opened up a wider spectrum of services than they had been aware of or felt able to access.



At an operational level Employment Advocates spoke about how when they were tailoring action plans for the Households, they scoped out what was available within the area.

***“We always have a little look around what’s around in the area first and use what resource is out there”***  
*Employment Advocate*

The person centred and agile approach of the programme enabled Employment Advocates to connect and integrate a spectrum of services to support the Households on their journey of change.

Our telephone interviews with Households indicated that during period of lockdown Employment Advocates were still able to identify and access support to continue to progress Households towards employment.

One of our interviewees explained that prior to the lockdown restrictions she had a work placement opportunity and course booked to start in March both of which were unable to go ahead. She was disappointed, lacking access to a computer her options to pursue training at this time were limited.

When her Employment Advocate called her, she explained what had happened and wasn’t expecting a resolution. But they got back to her to say they had been able to connect with a training provider who could provide computer equipment to enable her to access their online provision. When we spoke she was excited as the equipment was going to be installed the next week, she told me that she felt determined to “keep going on”.

## Case Study One

When I met Amelia (35) for the first time in March 2019, she had brought her little girl (the youngest of three) with her. As her daughter played in the corner she told me about the experience which had led to her and her husband Michael (40) joining the programme.

They had moved up the Liverpool City Region from the South of England in 2018, they had no personal or professional connections to the area but were motivated to move as they could barely afford to keep up with the cost of renting where they lived and had ran up debts.

When they arrived they were renting a home without a fridge to store food and they were sleeping on blow up beds. Though her husband a skilled builder was actively looking for work he was finding it difficult to secure a role without local connections so the family of five were surviving on his Job Seekers allowance.

To try to build a life in the area she started to take her youngest daughter to a Children’s Centre. The staff had been worried about the family and they asked if all was okay, she told them that they were struggling and had to feed the children by accessing a food bank. The Children’s Centre put her in touch with Households into Work.

***“When we moved we were already in debt so we’re struggling with feeding the children.”***

When I first spoke with her and husband had been with the programme for nine months, in that time a lot had been happened.

The Employment Advocate who she describes as an “anchor” was able to connect her husband to a job in which he was doing well, using the Household Budget they had been able to furnish the home and the children were doing well.

We had previously written about the strange contradiction of how though we accept the only way out of poverty is through work, we expect people to achieve that without some of the basic needs for example having a bed being met.

Having a liveable home provide a foundation for the family, enabled Amelia began to think about what a she might be able to do for herself and how this could contribute a better future for the family.

As the children’s primary career Amelia had not worked for a long time, her limited experience and qualifications meant she lacked confidence when think about training or work. However she felt able to talk with her Advocate about what her wish to do some further training, as her youngest would have a part time nursery place in the autumn of 2018 they started to look for part time college courses which Amelia could complete around her care commitments.

***“I was like always a mum, having no diploma or whatever, and she encouraged now I’m a student, fulltime student, and that’s only because of the Advocate”***

In September 2018 she started two part time college courses, to further develop her skills she volunteered in the office of a local charity and after hearing about it from a friend she became involved with a charity who collect unsold food from businesses and redistribute it to those in need in the community. She provided to have a talent for liaising with the partners involved with the project and was made captain of the squad of volunteers.

When we finished our first conversation she was very much looking forward to a future where her children were doing well at school and she can go to work.

***“When my (youngest) child starts reception, I will go for work, I can’t wait.”***

### ***June 2020 Update***

Though we had intended to leave a year space between both rounds of interviews our plans were delayed by the UK Government COVID-19 Restrictions. When I contacted Amelia in early June 2020 she was still happy to speak with me but she very politely informed me that she had limited times available as she was working part time and supporting her husband with home schooling their children.

My first question to all of those interviewed was if there was any changes to their lives since we last spoke which they wanted to tell me about? There was a lot that she wanted to share with me. Having paid of the debts the had been burdened as result of high living costs in London they were able to save up a deposit and get a mortgage based on her husband's wages.

Two years ago their children were sleeping on a blow up mattresses, now each had their own room which was something that made Amelia and her husband feel happy. For eight months she had been working part time in a warehouse packing goods for distribution, as a key worker she went into work throughout the pandemic. As we spoke I could sense that she was proud of the work she was doing "as people would have nothing", her husband was laid off due to the pandemic but he was in a receipt of a "grant from the government" so they were managing quite well.

They had the resources required for home schooling and were really pleased with the support that they were receiving from their children's school. She commented that now charity shops and low priced non-essential stores were closed she was finding it expensive to get clothes for her children but she wasn't complaining she was grateful for what she had.

Though she was still volunteering the food distribution organisation the closure of restaurants meant that their work was paused, however she was still hopeful of engaging with them in the future and she also had set her mind to looking for a job where she could use her business diploma.

She and her family have come a long way in two years, for her it was important that her and husband worked together to create stability for their children, they had encouraged each other to try new things.

***"Well, my gosh, we're doing things together. I've started my college. My husband is working. Kids are fine. I can go even to work soon"***

Though she had achieved so much there was one comment she made during the interview which perhaps showed how much her experiences had shaped her. She wasn't so much worried about herself but rather for others as "one thing can topple you over", she hoped others would be able to receive a similar quality of help that they did when they needed it.

## Case Study Two

Melissa (not her real name) agreed to be part of our research project and when we meet with her in March 2019 she had been on the programme for nearly a year, her teenage son was her Secondary Householder.

She worked as a chef in her early twenties, when talking about her previous employment she recalls this time fondly. There is a sense of pride about her holding such a demanding and skilled role, now in her mid-forties she has not worked since. In her twenties she began to experience some personal issues including depression and to cope with these

she began to experiment with drugs. Although she has received treatment these conditions have been an on-going issue for her, affecting her confidence and forming a barrier to her being able to engage with the labour market.

When we met she told me the when she first began to work with her Employment Advocate they told her “ the drugs they don’t define you” I sensed that this simple statement meant a lot to her this was reaffirmed when we spoke again in June 2020 as it was one of the first things she said to me.

She had come on to the programme as the Work Coach that Job Centre felt that she would benefit from the one to one bespoke support offered by HiW. She wasn’t sure what to expect and admits to feeling apprehensive, however when talking about meeting her Advocate there is a sense of contentment, referring back to how the Advocate put her at ease, giving her the opportunity to guide the process asking her **“Where do you want to be in the future?”**.

At that time, she had issues with debt had leading to her housing provider threatening eviction. She was understandably greatly concerned about this and it was effecting both her emotional and physical welling, the combination of this and other factors meant that she was underweight.

She was making a conscious effort to remove herself from negative patterns of behaviour she had a small social network but this was something in time that she wanted to develop.

***“You can’t even think about voluntary or anything like that ‘till you sorted your home life out and your debts and your personal problems.”***

She shared that she had good days and bad days, she was concerned that her skills were out of date but she firmly believed that a focus towards work would lead to improvement in her well-being.

To help her achieve this, she and her Advocate began to work out a “step by step” plan to overcome hurdles which were in front of her. She was very motivated to moved forward which meant sometimes her Advocate had to be honest and help her set realistic goals, not being able to meet a target would dent Melissa’s confidence and this process was about **laying the foundations for her to move on with her life.**

As Melissa was getting support relating to addiction, the first goals they set were to progress resolutions to her debts and then identify some opportunities to undertake voluntary work, though Melissa didn’t have specific skills for this she was passionate about animals particularly dogs and would like the opportunity to work in animal welfare.

Though Melissa was already working with the CAB on her debts, due to rent arrears her housing provider was considering evicting her from the property which was also in need of repair due to damage caused by damp.

The issues around debts and her home were becoming such a barrier that it was difficult for her to think about how to move forward with other goals. However she was able to work with her Advocate to get a manageable alternative payment plan in place with the housing provider and they also carried out repairs.

***“Because when you’re an addict and you have been for years, it’s hard, and you’ll end up in a mess which is what happened to me”***

To further help resolve her debt issues Melissa’s Advocate identified some legal support delivered as part of the provision of community organisation who were based outside of her local area. Connecting to this organisation proved to be a catalyst for Melissa to try other things.

After her first appointment at centre she had a coffee with her Advocate and while they were there Melissa was introduced to the CEO of the organisation, who told them about the wider offer of the organisation. Melissa decided to register for a class at the centre, she made her own way there using travel tickets provided by the programmes Household Budget.

On her second visit the class was cancelled but she decided to stay at the centre ***“So instead of going home and running off home like I would do on any other time, because that support with the Advocate I felt like I’m confident”***. While she was there the CEO came over and started to speak with her. They talked about what she was doing and what she might like to do, from there she started to volunteer in the gardens at the centre.

The slightness of her build meant that Melissa found it difficult to work outdoors in the cold weather, this led to her taking a break from volunteering in the garden over the winter months. This dented her confidence as she had felt that she had let herself and others down, previously this may have meant that she retreated into herself but on this occasion she had the resilience to push herself out of where she felt comfortable and contacted the people at the community organisation.

Since reengaging she volunteered in a kitchen connected to a community café, the number of hours she volunteers for have steadily increased and now she is there up to four days a week. She thrived in this environment, learning new skills and brushing up on the skills she already had from her time as a chef. She was meeting new people from outside the network she associated with addiction and her confidence was growing as she achieved professional accreditations, increasing her employability.

### ***June 2020 Update***

When we spoke again in June 2020 Melissa had a lot to tell me about the preceding year. When I first met her in March 2019 there was some fragility about her but over the phone there was a confidence about the way she talked about herself.



Though she had been happy volunteering in the kitchens over time she wanted something more, a role with a wage and perhaps routes to progression.

***“They were all, like, made up with me; and it gave me lots of self-esteem”***

She was confident enough to raise this with the people at the centre and though there no immediate opportunities for her there, her attitude and abilities impressed them so much they reached out to their network and she got a part time job in a new café (as her wages were below the threshold she still received a housing benefit component of Universal Credit).

When she talks about this there is a rightful sense of pride in her voice, telling me ***“We did lovely food, and I was the most qualified person in the kitchen when I started”***.

When the café had to move locations she worked on their Pie stall at the Christmas Market, they were just settling into their new location when the UK Government COVID-19 restrictions came into place and the café had to shut. Unfortunately the staff contracts were terminated but their manager promised that they would do all they could to bring them back, they gave them some additional wages to cover their notice and some help with food, she was pleased that she didn't have to seek support from a food bank while she waited for her new calm to be processed.

It's difficult to imagine how it must have felt to be achieving a goal you had dreamed off and for the first time in a long time to feel in charge of your circumstances and then to have it halted in way which was unimaginable just months before.

***“I've got the skills and I can get references now ... good references. So, you know, there's no reason why I can't find my own job somewhere else, then, isn't it?”***

Though she told me that she had down times she hadn't lost hope, her manager had said he would do all he could to bring them back to work but she said ***“I won't bank on it”***.

She recognised that amongst all the uncertainty she had skills that people valued and a network of professional contacts which she could call upon. Even if paid employment was in the distance she wanted to be active again, while she looked for work she could volunteer.

***“They'll be back in the offices soon; if they need voluntary staff, I'll do that.”***

Those first words from her Employment Advocate had stuck with her. At a time where many of us are struggling to comprehend what the future will look like, she wasn't going to be defined by these circumstances she was looking ahead.

Without perhaps realising it herself, Melissa and other Households we spoke to had moved from a position of having little control of their circumstances to one where regardless of what was happening around them they felt able to not just maintain but also progress the positive changes that they had made.

### Case Study Three – Pathway to Resilience

Perhaps when we think of resilience we focus on the personal soft skills/resources required to cope with crisis or difficult circumstances. Employment Advocates and Households themselves told us that as they progressed on the programme they were gaining greater control over their complex circumstances, Pathway Star measurements tracked the change from “not coping” to “managing well”. But beyond this the resilience gives individuals the confidence and positivity to try something new, moving from surviving to thriving.

Each of the Households we spoke with demonstrated in their own way their increased resilience, for some it meant being able to share their stories of abuse or mental illness with others, accessing a service to address a specific issue, doing something they may have been fearful of before. For example engaging in new activity, training or tackling a concern with an organisation who they may see as being in authority such as talking to the DWP about benefits.

The positive outcomes from adopting the programme approach to building resilience is perhaps best evidenced by the following example of one of the Households I met during our interviews.

Racheal was a young mother who though unemployed when she came on the programme had previous employment experience mostly gained while working on zero hour contracts. This situation had been challenging for her, as she could never be sure when she would be needed for work and how many hours she would be paid for. She wanted to have financial security for her son and felt that the way to achieve this was to gain more practical skills associated with a specific role.

Working through her action plan with her Employment Advocate gave her a broader understanding of what the local labour market opportunities were and how best she could focus her energy to allow her to access a skilled role. This led to her registering for Construction Training. Gaining a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card meant that she was able to apply for roles in an industry which had been unavailable to her before. By November 2018 Racheal was working on a construction site, for the first time in a while she was earning a decent wage and wasn't in receipt of benefits.

She was happy in this role but she was aware that there might be a period after the site was completed when she would no longer be required, so she made sure to save enough money to support herself and her son should she come back out of work.

When that project was completed securing another construction role proved to be difficult, she was worried that the nature of building work would mean that she was tied into a cycle of short term contracts and may have to make future claims for benefits. However she had

built up a level of resilience, taking pride in what she been able to achieve since joining the programme and she didn't want to allow her worries to take over and halt her progress. In the past her lack of self-assurance may have meant that she was passive about her circumstance but now she felt able to take control.

While recognising the value of the construction skills and experience gained, Racheal started to pursue other routes towards stable employment and she reasoned that she could use her construction skills as a back-up, this led her to registering in March 2019 on a barbering course.

Until that stage she had been using her savings to live off but as this source of income was now depleted, she had reached the stage where she had to claim benefits. Unfortunately miscommunication regarding her course led to her receiving a sanction from the Job Centre, however she was able to address this set-back and had some of the withheld money transferred back to her. Though this was a difficult experience, she was motivated by the respect she felt her family and friends were giving her due to pursuing a career choice and she carried on with the course. By June 2019 she was making such good progress on the course that pending her successful completion of the programme she was offered a job.

Racheal's story illustrates the process of developing the confidence that meant she was open to try new things. Importantly, having the resilience to keep going by looking beyond disappointments led to a positive future where she was in stable employment.

#### **6.4 Implications for Service Reform**

When we conducted our second stage of interviews the themes of Housing, Digital Inclusion, Partnerships and Relationships featured in our first report were still relevant to the participants of the programme. Alongside these, wider benefits of the HiW approach emerged that relate to the breadth of literature on service reform:

- **From Inactive to Purposeful.** A theme from our interviews was that HiW had provided people who were economically and socially inactive with the opportunity and confidence to engage in new activity. Enabling them to seek work, contribute to their wider community by sharing experiences or undertaking voluntary work restoring them back to their rightful place in society.

It did this by combining the guidance and encouragement of the Employment Advocate with a regular pattern of interventions establishing routine and building confidence. Case study two perhaps best demonstrates the power of this approach.

Clients we spoke with during lock down told us that they were very much looking forward to getting back to their activities. For one of them it meant being able to return to the Life Rooms Service for support with mental health. For another volunteering in a charity shop had been a life line which was helping him better manage his addiction, without this purpose he had been struggling to keep himself active and continue the progress he had made.

During our second stage interviews we were starting to see peer to peer support and the formation of community knowledge exchange mechanisms or communities of practise where Households were sharing their experiences building and enhancing each others capabilities.

The unprecedented nature of the pandemic which meant that society had to retreat into its self poses questions about how HiW and other programmes can maintain momentum for its client group at times when services including opportunities for voluntary activity are withdrawn or scaled back.

- **Progress and Transition (including overcoming anxiety about the labour market).** HiW guided by the Employment Advocate is a programme about the journey of change. There is acceptance that within a complex client group who have multiple responsibilities and barriers to change progress won't happen straight away.

Signing up to a programme doesn't mean that there is pause on other factors going on within someone's life. These deeply entrenched needs will be carried with them, further details on barriers may emerge as the relationship between the Employment Advocate and Households develop and new thing may happen which will impact on their lives as their time on the programme progress.

Our interviews and programme data point to the Employment Advocates supporting the Households successfully navigate the dynamic process of making sustainable change and transition to further stages of progress.

The theme of transition came out strongly in the second stage of our interviews as Households were leaving the programme either progressing to further work ready training or employment. This transistion period particularly into work seemed to be one of the most sensitive and delicate parts of the process as it requires both practical and social readjustment. Part of this transition process was about supporting invididuals who had been unemployed for a significant period of time and perhaps felt their skills weren't of value to overcome their anxiety about the nature of the labour market. If you haven't applied for work for a long time or experienced multiple rejections for roles it may be easy to imagine that the labour market is a hostile environment where there is no place for you. As we readjust post pandemic this is perhaps a feeling which is shared by many more of us.

By offering tailored person centred support HiW as demonstrated by the case studies included within this report gave individuals an opportunity to reflect upon and enhance their capabilities. Recognising their own value and understanding how best they could make a contribution to the work force alongside the knowledge inparted by the Employment Advocates about how navigate the processes involved in looking for work enabled programme participants to overcome their anxiety about trying to access a highly competitive labour market.

Employment Advocates talked about how they supported households to manage their finances while moving from benefits to salary, for example giving advice on changing direct debits to align with new payment cycle.

Alongside this practical transition there is the social transition which comes from starting a new role and finding your place in a different environment. This has its challenges for all of us but for people who haven't been in work for a long time and/or had limited social interactions or experiences it can be especially difficult.

Imagine starting a role and being unsure of how to ask for support, not being able to join in conversations as your previous lack of financial resource has limited your experiences or you feel unable to share your experiences for worry about judgement.

At these times advice from someone in your life who has your trust in these circumstances can make the difference in sustaining outcomes.

- **Whole System Approach.** Echoing the comments made on partnerships the programme takes a whole system approach to service delivery, working across multiple agencies overcoming gaps in service provision to achieve outcomes.

Complex needs which can't be addressed in isolation require a whole system approach towards resolution. Though Employment Advocates applied their knowledge of the local ecosystem of provision to meet Household needs, during our interviews some comments pointed to there being a lack of coordination between elements of statutory services (beyond the scope of HiW) which may be counterproductive to the achievement of leveling up ambitions.

In addition to the examples provided earlier about housing, Employment Advocates reported that although people were willing to apply for temporary roles advertised by the job centre but when these roles ended they would have to start the process of claiming benefits again. The risk of loss of income which could put you at risk of incurring debts e.g. rent arrears were forming a barrier to individuals who wanted to build their employability.

- **Community Capabilities.** During our second stage interviews we were starting to see peer to peer support and the formation of community knowledge exchange mechanisms or communities of practice where Households were sharing their experiences building and enhancing each others capabilities.

This process had the potential to enhance the assets within the community and reduce the requirement for lower level professional intervention by filling gaps within individual capabilities with peer support and shared learning.

Though the current circumstances of social distancing places limitations on our ability to bring people together, the emerging shoots of peer to peer support we began to see has if nurtured the potential to stabilise and enhance programme

outcomes. It may also be an approach other programmes would benefit from adopting.

Please note details of the community capability process is included as Annex 1.

## 7. Conclusions

HiW provides a successful model of joint working across the six local authorities in the Liverpool City Region. Adopting a Household based approach to the design and delivery of the programme is a key strength. Moreover, this interim evaluation recognises a number of characteristics and ways of working which could have beneficial effects on the future design and commissioning of local and national employment support programmes.

- **Person Centred.** The programme was led by the needs of the client group, Households were fully engaged in the decision making process. Treated as the “experts” on their experience Households coproduced their own action plans with their Employment Advocates.

This person centred model of service provision recognised that discrete or siloed services fail to adequately address problems that stem from people’s complex needs. The responsive and supportive nature of this processes opened up a client group, who had been made risk adverse by sanctions imposed for non-attainment to trying new approaches to improving their circumstances.

If things didn’t work within in the plan or activities were not what they thought would be/weren’t having the desired effect there was no fear in talking about it with their Employment Advocate. Feeling that something wasn’t working and making changes would not adversely affect them with the implementation of benefit sanctions, they could carry on progressing towards the labour market.

When working towards improvements in complex circumstances, the policy of sanctions maybe be counterproductive to the achievement of the wider policy aims of returning people to the labour market.

Interviews with Households indicated that reflecting back on their achievements against their plans motivated them to continue to make and sustain change in their circumstances, increasing personal resilience and reducing the need for external interventions. The interviews suggested this increased resilience gave individuals the confidence and positivity to try something new, moving from surviving to thriving.

- **Inclusivity.** Both historic and some current interventions have had a clearly defined target client groups often bound by age or other protected characteristics. Though necessary to achieve policy outcomes this approach risks excluding others who could benefit from this support and the state losing potential value of the outcomes which could be achieved by this investment.



Though its aim was to move clients towards the labour market, HiW influenced by the local socio economic conditions, worked with a broad client group who faced multiple barriers to the labour market. This inclusive approach enabled the programme to engage and achieve outcomes with a client group who although had complex needs may not have quite “fitted” within the criteria for other programmes or support.

One of the Employment Advocates spoke about her own experience trying to access support as single parent with poor mental health and a child with complex behavioural needs. She described her experience of hoping to secure some support but being told that she was one point off meeting the criteria. It’s difficult to imagine how it must feel to try to make change, build up hope for the future only to be told that your circumstances didn’t quite meet the needs threshold.

HiW offered a different experience to this, it engaged those with complex and interlinked needs which required a holistic approach to resolve and which perhaps when viewed in isolation were not acute enough to qualify for another service. In doing so the programme overcame gaps within existing provision to progress clients with significant and deeply entrenched barriers to employment towards the labour market.

Though the need for a “means tested” or “targeted approach” is understood especially at a time when there are significant budgetary constraints on public services. There are perhaps lessons to be drawn from HiW which embraced/assessed the totality of a clients need.

- **Adaptability.** The Households involved were a complex client group who had multiple, interlinked and long standing issues. Previous short term and narrow/singular short term interventions had little success in addressing the deeply entrenched needs of the group.

The programme’s holistic approach enabled the group to work through the interlinked issues which were forming a barrier to the labour market. Though this approach was successful in achieving change, progress wasn’t always linear as closing a door on one issue often revealed others, one Employment Advocate told us they often uncovered “hidden” issues.

They gave us an example of a thirty year old householder only being diagnosed with dyslexia after their Employment Advocate observed them completing some paper work, this issue had been effecting the householder throughout their live but action to resolve it only began after they came on the programme.

Additionally the interlinked nature of needs meant that disruption in relationships, health or finances could have a wider ranging impact across all areas of the householders’ lives. The programme had the agility to respond quickly to the changing circumstances of the households, adapting plans and source solutions to emerging needs, enabling the household to make continued progression towards work.

Being a devolved programme that was accountable to the LCRCA rather than national policy and commissioning processes meant the HiW management team could quickly take action to introduce a new flexible delivery “offer” for Households to help them deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The HiW programme is not bound by the constraints of centralised delivery structures and was able to initiate a swift response to maximise innovation in its delivery approach. This proved to be a crucial and timely intervention for some of the Households during the pandemic. Acting at pace to reshape service provision would have been more difficult to achieve if the programme had been part of a centralised and more restrictive contracting model.

- **Asset Based.** HiW taps into the formidable resources which already exist within the local community. Translating these assets into a source of person centred service provision built around relationships and bound by reciprocity.

A key feature of the programme involved empowering clients to change their circumstances by building upon their areas of strength and vitality to create lifelong and sustainable change.

- **Emphasis on Partnerships.** HiW is a programme built around relationships, its approach towards building participants capabilities requires the formation of partnerships of different forms and scale across the 12 months of the programme. (This process of partnership building is described in annex 1).

The role of the Employment Advocate is critical to the success of the programme and this innovative approach has the potential to transform service delivery models, with gradual and steady adoption of good practice over time. The Advocate has been inducted, trained, knowledgeable and experienced to deal practically with a ‘whole household approach’ to a wide range of (multi-disciplinary) issues and barriers the customer/household may present including, health and wellbeing, debt/household budgeting, household relationships and domestic abuse.

The tailored support plans blended together services provided by multiple organisations across the city region. Effectively overcoming gaps within single source service provision to improve outcomes for the client group.

- **Focus on Wellbeing.** Within the city region issues associated with poor mental and physical health have long been intertwined with worklessness. The holistic approach of HiW gave Households on the programme opportunities to improve their physical and mental health. Deploying a variety of interventions including counselling, personal training (delivered within local authority provision) and healthy eating courses.

Better managing existing conditions enabled the household to move beyond these barriers and focus on moving to employment. One Householder we interviewed told use that losing weight and improving her fitness gave her the opportunity to get back to work, previously she wouldn’t have been fit enough to the job she secured.

- **Equity and Levelling Up.** The economic impacts of COVID-19 risk widening inequalities in places like the Liverpool City Region where there are high numbers of socially and economically vulnerable people. Those residents already seeking work prior to the pandemic now face increased competition for limited jobs and risk being pushed further from the prospect of employment. Investing in locally tailored solutions that reflect the HiW's transformative approach will be important for economic recovery and in meeting the Government's intentions to 'level up' underperforming and left behind parts of the UK.

Though the client group as a whole could be described as complex, within the group there were varying levels of complexity with some Households potentially residing further away from the labour market than others on the programme.

One of the Households we spoke to felt that his multiple and interlinked issues made him a risky proposition for employers. He accomplished more than what he would have thought possible while his was on the programme but in the year since we last met he had struggled to secure a job. The day we spoke he had been turned down for a job as a cleaner and was clearly disappointed by experiencing another rejection.

As we rebuild the labour market, wrap around support which provides clients with an equitable opportunity to access work must be a piece of the wider skills and employability provision. Failure to address the issue will risk consigning individuals to long term economic inactivity and reduce the potential return on public sector investment in worklessness interventions.

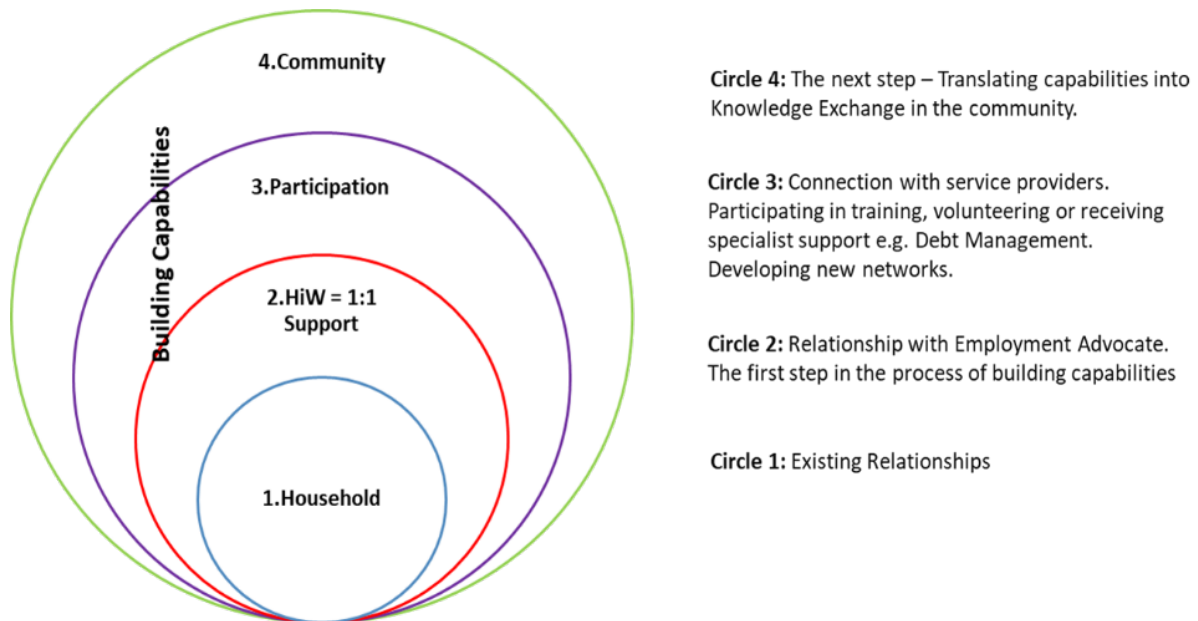
The issues raised in this report and its conclusions are timely, for both policy makers and practitioners. They are relevant to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's ambition of building back better after the pandemic, and present an opportunity to build on what works to improve the resilience and outcomes for vulnerable households. Also, the benefits of devolution meant the programme was able to respond quickly to flex provision during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are relevant to the Government's ambition of levelling up and providing more equal life chances across places and communities, with implications for DWP strategy and other agencies engaged in labour activation programmes and public services. They also have implications for local delivery partnerships and practitioner collaborations to drive improved outcomes through a whole system approach that puts outcomes at the centre instead of a focus on specific organisations.

# Annex 1

## HiW Relationships/Partnerships

HiW is a programme built around relationships, its approach towards building participants capabilities requires the formation of partnerships of different forms and scale across the 12 months of the programme.

**Figure A:** illustrates the flow of relationships.



### Circle One – Household

Circle one is the relationship between the Household Level. HiW sought to determine the extent to which a Household based approach to employment would improve employment prospects and job outcomes. When we wrote on first report we suggested that the programme perhaps challenged a traditional view of what constituted a household as familial relations included cousins who lived in different addresses, friends and neighbours were registered as Primary and Secondary Householders on the programme.

Our interviews with the Households Indicated that sharing a journey of change with someone close to you who was perhaps experiencing the same or similar deeply entrenched issues was supportive encouraging each other to be open to trying new things which may help make a positive change in your circumstances.

***“She was telling me that I was good at it. So it was like both of them (Primary Householder) together that pushed me to do it”***

*Secondary Householder, Female age 25*

A Householder whose Secondary Household was their son told us that it was better to take a household approach as if something happens with one of them it effected the whole house not just that person.

This sentiment was echoed by another Householder who was on the programme with his partner and his father, felt that the same person working with the family was beneficial.

***“It’s finding a balance isn’t it? Once you find that balance, I think things will run a lot more smoothly really.”***

*Secondary Householder, Male age 33*

Though his partner was moving at a different pace, securing a part time job he was working to build his confidence and was taking steps to better manage his mental health which had been both a significant and deeply rooted barrier to employment. He felt that working together in this way was increasing stability within the home, which they could enjoy with their children.

### ***Circle Two – Household and the Employment Advocate***

One of the primary aims of the Employment Advocate role is to enable clients to progress into employment or positive progressions outcomes. A hallmark of the HIW programme is that it seeks to build an individual’s capabilities by establishing a partnership with the Primary and Secondary Householders which recognises that that the Individual is the expert on their own experiences to co-create plans which meet their needs, setting realistic and measurable outcomes.

Our research points to the role transcends the traditional structure of centralised service delivery associated with welfare, moving from a mode of service delivery one which is desk based to one which is agile, responsive (as opposed to prescriptive) and which weaves together services available within the area to deliver a seamless programme of interventions for Households.

During the interviews with the Households a recurring comment was that they felt that they were respected and listened to. Quality listening enabled trust to be built between the Household and Advocate, the attentiveness of this approach allows the Advocate to assemble an accurate picture of Household circumstances. Critically reflecting upon the information provided allowed the Advocate to assess and evaluate options available to coproduce plans with the Households, which are grounded in the reality of their needs and not practitioner assumptions, enabling new possibilities to emerge.

Employment Advocates indicated that during the process of building a relationship with Households new things which had perhaps been “hidden” or not fully discussed with other provision were revealed and support to resolve this issues could often be the key to unlocking change.

Interviews with both Households and Employment Advocates pointed to Advocates brokering access to a wide network service provision offering activities which perhaps had

not experienced before and which in some cases formed the basis of a new network outside the norms of their previous social or professional interactions.

### **Circle Three – Participation and the wider Partnership**

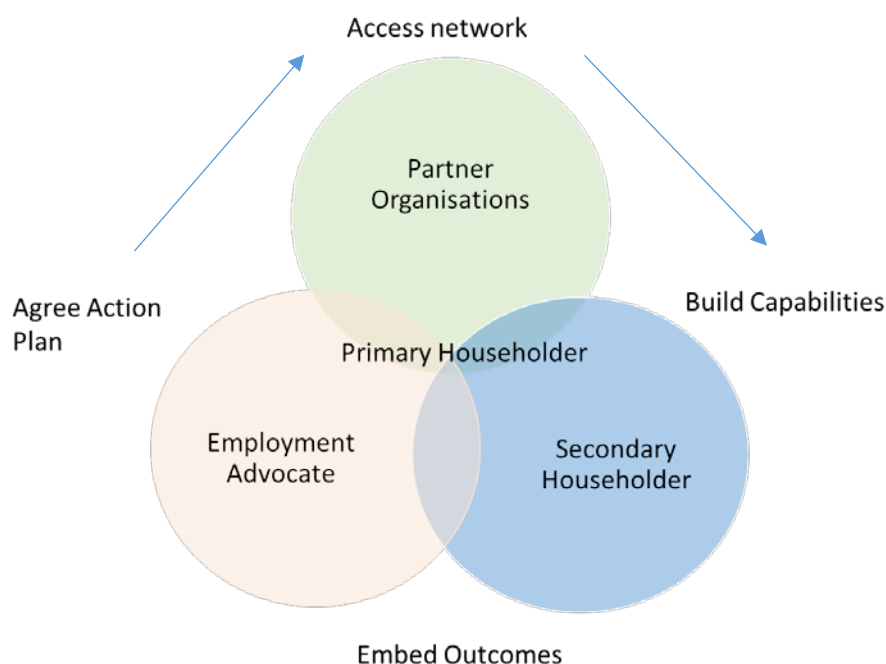
When we think of what it might be like to experience long term worklessness our thoughts may go to the impacts on our lives of a chronic lack of financial resource but just as profoundly worklessness can be a barrier to establishing, engaging and sustaining robust and supportive social networks. Factor in additional burdens of poor physical or mental health, care responsibilities or effects of addiction it can become even more difficult to access strong networks.

Collaboration with partners in terms of both referrals and delivering the services was emphasised by Employment Advocates as being a key feature of their work.

Operationally HiW is connected to a range of agencies and services including Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), NHS, Food Banks, Community Groups, and Programmes delivered by the host Local Authorities and Job Centre Plus.

The partner organisation whether providing training, specialist support e.g. Debt Management or voluntary opportunities are an important part of the developing capabilities process, shown as figure B.

**Figure B: HiW Process**



Collaboration between HiW and these organisations have provided the right conditions for the Householders to develop both “hard” quantifiable skills that can be easily defined/evaluated and “soft” skills those personal attributes including adaptability, critical thinking/option analysis, communication and understanding social cues which are necessary for employment.



# Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place

The Heseltine Institute is an interdisciplinary public policy research institute which brings together academic expertise from across the University of Liverpool with policy-makers and practitioners to support the development of sustainable and inclusive cities and city regions.

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## About the author

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Belinda is an Industrial Strategy Fellow at Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place. Belinda joined the Heseltine Institute on a two year secondment from the University of Liverpool's Research Partnerships and Innovation Department. During her secondment she has been working on an interim evaluation of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Household into Work Programme (HiW).

Prior to joining the University of Liverpool in 2010, Belinda worked for Liverpool City Council Regeneration Portfolio. During her time in the city council Belinda worked on a number of regeneration programmes including the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Housing Market Renewal Fund. Belinda is a graduate of the Liverpool John Moores University, where she studied Urban Renewal.