

Encouraging local employers to offer fair pay and good work opportunities

Learning note from the Action Learning Set with South London boroughs

Introduction and context

From July to November 2023, Shared Intelligence delivered an action learning set (ALS) for a small number of South London boroughs to contribute to the implementation of the Building a Fairer City plan. Specifically, this ALS brought council officers from areas of business engagement, economic development, employment and skills, together for three two-hour virtual sessions to identify and share learning about ways councils can encourage local organisations to offer fair pay and good employment opportunities.

The purpose of this note is to share learning about some of the issues councils are facing when trying to encourage businesses to pay fair wages (such as the London Living Wage as a minimum) and offer good work opportunities, as well as the approaches councils have taken to make progress in this area.

What is an Action Learning Set?

An ALS provides an opportunity for close collaboration in-real time between groups of individuals with similar challenges about real-life issues or tasks. ALSs bring peers together to share learning to identify what works well or less well. As stated in the name, this method is focused on action and provides the opportunity for participants to put ideas into action between sessions and reflect on the effect of their actions over a period of time.

Key issues and learning

In each session, council officers presented specific challenges they were facing in their work to engage and encourage positive action among local organisations. There were four key themes that ran through the specific challenges officers were trying to address. This section presents each theme and the learning and top tips peers on the calls shared to help councils overcome their challenges.

1. Reaching and engaging with businesses when the capacity of these businesses (particularly SMEs who accounted for significant proportions of the boroughs' business bases) is limited.

Key learning:

- Collaboration:
 - Work more closely with the subregional partnerships and chambers of commerce who can help streamline communications and share them more widely.
 - Work with local councillors and supply them with existing materials they can share when they are out in the community.
 - Embed information, advice, guidance and support into existing initiatives that businesses may already be engaging with, for example events and programmes led by local chambers of commerce and sub-regional partnerships.
- When promoting and communicating resources, utilise a range of channels – physical materials, web content, social media channels, QR codes on flyers –

there is no silver bullet and businesses will access information in different ways.

- Make education and learning more manageable by promoting resources from existing initiatives (e.g. [Employer Resources - South London Partnership](#)) and making information more bitesize.

2. Educating and helping businesses understand that there is a business case for offering employee benefits packages, including paying the London Living Wage.

Key learning:

- The business benefits:
 - Committing to paying the London Living Wage, as a part of a broader benefits package for employees, demonstrates the company's investment in staff which can set the business apart from others. It can ultimately build loyalty and therefore retention of staff.
 - A broader benefits package could include a variety of initiatives from signposting to information about how employees can manage their finances, flexible working, and discounts on services for staff, to opportunities to shadow senior management as a commitment to developing employee's careers pathways.
- It is important to educate businesses on the impacts of wages and bonuses. Many employees are in receipt of statutory benefits where income is closely monitored. A pay structure with an emphasis on unpredictable bonuses can introduce irregular impact on entitlement to important statutory benefits. It is important that employers understand the potential impact.

3. Incentivising and encouraging businesses to participate in the conversation when the capacity and resources of the council to do this are limited.

Key learning:

- Schemes such as the [Living Wage Accreditation](#), the [Good Business Charter](#), and the [Mayor's Good Work Standard](#) offer benefits for those who sign-up or get accredited including promotion of the business, access to exclusive resources, branding to use when applying for contracts, and networking opportunities.
- Engagement in annual borough awards ceremonies that recognise good practices can offer promotion and networking opportunities to businesses. Winners and nominees can also use the status of the award to promote their values to potential applicants when recruiting and buyers when tendering for contracts, making them more competitive in the market.
- Badge/recognition schemes such as the [inclusive employer badge](#) encourage healthy competition within and between boroughs.

4. Ensuring resettled communities are aware of and are able to access good work.

Key learning:

- Specific jobs fairs for those on resettlement schemes (e.g. Ukrainian refugees) have been successful. It is important to ensure translators and interpreters are also present on the day so those who struggle with English can still make the most of the fairs.
- Education and skills pathways

- Ensure there are opportunities for communities to study ESOL courses that are quick and intense. Feedback from communities has often been that courses are too slow for getting into employment.
- Improve awareness of information and training schemes that prepare people for work in different sectors. For example, there are some schemes for those interested in a career in the civil service, including: [Civil Service Success](#) and the [Civil Service Employability course](#).
- Create 'Language to work' pathways to support those looking for work in specific sectors that have specific technical vocabulary e.g. some health professions.
- One council mentioned an initiative they had in partnership with a facilities management organisation which focused on helping a small number of employees learn English in preparation for employment in the organisations.
- Joint working with internal teams and community organisations
 - Closer working between the council, job brokerage services and adult training providers to better link up communities who complete their training with employment opportunities.
 - Closer working with other council departments may lead to identification of opportunities that communities may be suited to. For example, one council worked with their local cultural services as a local museum required multilingual residents to create an exhibition. In other cases, multilingual residents with specific qualifications from foreign countries have been linked up to opportunities to translate in areas of their expertise.

Summary of resources for councils and employers:

- Resources for employers offered by the South London Partnership: [Employer Resources - South London Partnership](#)
- Accreditation schemes, charters and standards:
 - [Living Wage Employers | Living Wage Foundation](#)
 - [Good Business Charter](#)
 - [The Good Work Standard \(GWS\) | London City Hall](#)
 - [Inclusive Employers badge](#)
- Civil service employability courses:
 - [Civil Service Success](#)
 - [Civil Service Employability course](#).

Visit the GLA's Building a Fairer City Hub for more helpful resources and toolkits:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-mayor-does/priorities-london/londons-recovery-coronavirus-crisis/london-partnership-board/building-fairer-city-hub>