

# Skills Audit Report On Regeneration Areas in Aberdeen City



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## **Executive Summary**

This Report provides an overview of the findings of a series of five Neighbourhood Audit Reports commissioned by Aberdeen City Council through the Progress Through Positive Partnerships project.

The audits were carried out in mid to late-2017 across regeneration areas of Aberdeen by a team of independent canvassers to maintain impartiality throughout the process. Separate reports are available for each area.

Five areas – Middlefield, Seaton, Tillydrone, Torry and Woodside – were audited. The survey covered topics such as length of unemployment, barriers to returning to employment and qualifications held, as well as willingness to re-train and the support people would benefit from to improve employability and find work.

Half of all respondents were not working. Of those not in employment, almost seven tenths had been unemployed for over six months, although less than half had been affected by longer term unemployment of over 2 years. This potentially reflects that the areas have been harder hit by the recent downturn in the local economy than other areas.

Further reflecting the length of unemployment faced, there was no single outstanding barrier to returning to employment noted by respondents, although the cost of working and the cost of childcare were the most common answers across all areas.

It was also noted that across all areas benefit uptake was lower than expected, with well below a tenth in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and less than one fifth in receipt of Tax Credits, despite wages being received being well below average and the numbers stating they were unemployed.

Almost two thirds of respondents were willing to re-train to improve their skills, with realistic expectations of the funding or wage they could expect to receive while doing so.

Just over two fifths of respondents went on to further or higher education after school, although it was noted that respondents often did not gain employment relating to their qualifications, with half not doing so.

Almost two thirds of respondents also reported that they are available for work or training. Respondents felt that more locally available help, locally available training, increased availability of training in the city and an increase in childcare were required.

It is therefore recommended that awareness of current provision available, including childcare, is raised, so that the support and different routes back into employment which are available are highlighted, ensuring that people are connected to the training and jobs they are seeking and receive appropriate financial support where available.

# Introduction

## Background

In 2017 Pathways was funded by Aberdeen City Council, as part of the European Structural Fund-supported Progress Through Positive Partnerships project, to carry out a Neighbourhood Audit of the Regeneration areas of the city. Separate reports were produced, covering each area, are individually available.

An important aspect of the Audits was to identify what services local people were aware of locally and how new and existing services could be better targeted.

The Audits were carried out during 2017, with further results obtained through use of Survey Monkey and the results then entered into a database for compilation.

This report looks at the information gathered from the area audits to provide a brief overview of findings. Detailed analysis of the findings of each area can be found in the report on that area, which can be obtained from Angela Taylor, Senior Project Officer, City Growth ([AngTaylor@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:AngTaylor@aberdeencity.gov.uk)).

## Citywide Comparison

Each individual report also contains comparisons between the areas audited and Aberdeen city as a whole. As expected for regeneration areas, looking at a range of indicators such as employment, income, health and housing, the comparisons show the audited areas to be at a disadvantage against the city as a whole.

In 2016 Aberdeen City Council produced a paper analysing the most recent Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation figures (Briefing Paper 2016/05). The SIMD looks at small areas of Scotland, called datazones, to look at indicators in small local areas. There are 6976 datazones in Scotland, of which 283 are in Aberdeen.

The figures show that Aberdeen has 9 of the overall 15% most deprived data zones in Scotland, with a further 13 in the overall 20% most deprived data zones.

When looking at individual indicators, the SIMD shows that just 4 datazones (Employment) and 5 datazones (Income) are in the worst 15% ranked across Scotland.

More concerning is that 46 datazones are in the worst 15% for Education, Skills and Training and that this figures, in contrast to those above, has actually risen since 2012.

However, it should be noted that when analysing these figures the full impact of the downturn in the oil industry across all economic sectors had not been fully felt in 2016 and that the position is likely to have worsened since then.

It should also be noted that these figures are based on datazone information from 2016 and that with the current economic downturn these figures may have declined further.

## Methodology

A questionnaire was developed in partnership with Aberdeen City Council's Progress Through Positive Partnerships project team, covering a range of topics such as length of unemployment, job goals, re-training etc.

It was initially planned to deliver the questionnaire solely through door-knocking. However, due to a lower than expected response rate from the door-knocking exercise the survey was also made available through Survey Monkey.

A team of canvassers was recruited from a broad range of backgrounds, which enabled canvassing to be delivered throughout the day when the majority of those currently disengaged would be at home. This had the benefit of ensuring neutrality during completion of the questionnaires.

All doors in each area were knocked on during the course of the canvassing, which was delivered over a minimum of a 3 week period for each area, with the exception of Seaton where the canvassers worked for 7 weeks. Where no replies were received repeat visits were made, so that all doors at which a reply was not received were knocked on at least 3 times.

Those residents in employment were asked questions relating to their employment including hours per week, wages and whether any benefits were received in the household.

Those residents who confirmed they were unemployed were asked the length of time since they had last worked, hours and wages they would consider, the benefits they receive and their likes or dislikes about their last job.

All clients then answered a series of questions on the following topics:

- Willingness to Re-train
- Training & Qualifications
- Goals & Aims
- Support Requested

A total of 692 questionnaires were completed through door-knocking across the regeneration areas, by 284 males and 396 females, with 12 people declining to answer which gender.

### *Survey Monkey*

As the response to the door-knocking element was lower than expected the Survey was also made available online through Survey Monkey. This was heavily promoted through the City Council's online media, Pathways' Facebook page and through SHMU Radio.

This met with limited success with a further 300 people from across the city completing the survey. Of these over two thirds (206) were from outwith regeneration areas, of whom 89 were male and 117 female.

The main difficulty faced in correlating these responses with those received through door-knocking was that in the vast majority of cases respondents did not complete all the questions, This makes it difficult to include these responses in the overall report, although wherever possible this has been done.

## ***Findings***

### ***i. Employment Status***

Across the regeneration areas a total of 351 people who completed the questionnaire worked full time.

The percentage of respondents working full time in each area ranged from 54% in Middlefield to 65% in Tillydrone, with the majority of people in each also having been in their job for at least 6 months and at least 27% having been in their job for more than 5 years.

Very encouragingly, the vast majority of respondents who were in employment stated that they were happy with the hours they worked – this ranged from 85% in Torry to more than 92% in Woodside. This suggests that whether people are working full or part time they are comfortable with their working hours.

However, the percentages working full time were not reflected in the earnings received, with a range of 18% (Middlefield) to 30% (Torry) earning over £300 per week, which is well below the median earnings in Aberdeen City of £483 when looking at full and part time workers combined.

It could be concluded from these figures that respondents were working in lower paid and consequently lower skilled jobs and this was reflected when people were asked what their job was, with the vast majority working in low or semi-skilled professions.

Worryingly, despite this low income the numbers of people in receipt of in-work benefits across all the areas was very low, with never more than 17% in any area receiving these benefits. This would suggest that awareness of these benefits needs to be raised to prevent people slipping into in-work poverty.

Unfortunately, in the Survey Monkey element of the Audit, although 177 people stated they worked full time less than a quarter gave their weekly wage, although it was notable that earnings were much higher in this response, perhaps reflective of the fact that the majority lived outwith regeneration areas.

### ***ii. Unemployment***

Those who stated they were not working were asked a number of questions relating to their last job and their future goals and expectations.

A total of 349 people from across the regeneration areas who completed the survey stated they were unemployed. Across all areas around 90% stated they had previously worked, mostly full time.

Across all the areas audited the main reasons given for leaving the last job held were Had Children, Stress and Illness. Other common reasons given for leaving a job included Being Made Redundant and the Hours or Shifts required.



In common with those currently working, the wages which had been earned by those now unemployed when they worked were low. The highest percentage earning over this amount was in Torry, with just 43% earning over £300 per week, which dropped as low as 24% in Middlefield.

Of concern across all the areas was the high number of people who had been unemployed for over 6 months, which at 240 represented 69% of those answering the question. Of further concern within this figure is that 77 people stated that they had been unemployed for over 5 years and of these 48 had not worked for over 10 years.

Respondents were also asked what they most liked about their former employment, with the most common answers being:

1. Money/ Wage;
2. Social Aspect; and
3. Being part of a team.

These answers are in line with previous surveys carried out elsewhere which consistently show that one of the main benefits of working is the social benefit (and consequent mental health benefits) which can be gained from employment.

However, respondents were also asked what they did not like about their last job. The most common answers given were Stress, Pressure and Hours or Shifts.

Noticeably, as would further be expected from the below average wages noted, respondents across all areas tended to have been in lower or semi-skilled jobs, although there are individual exceptions to this across all areas, such as engineers, a plumber, an accountant and a teacher.

A similar finding was noted when asked what job people were seeking, with lower and semi-skilled jobs being the most commonly given answer.

Respondents were asked what steps they would need to get back to work. Across all areas the most common responses were:

- Build self-confidence;
- Work experience; and
- Update their CV

Following this respondents were asked what concerned them about returning to work, and highlighted the following:

- Childcare cost and availability;
- Stress;
- Time away from family; and
- Wage available for the work.

When asked why these were barriers there were four almost universal replies:

- Didn't think help was available for them;
- Didn't know where to find help;
- Loss of benefits; and
- Loss of benefits security.

Unsurprisingly, following on from these responses, when respondents were asked what help was needed the most common replies were:

- Locally available training;
- Locally available help;
- Increase in childcare provision; and
- Financial help when starting work.

Other common replies included Work Placements, Money and Career progression.

Taken as a group of questions these highlight an ongoing need to both make provision as accessible and affordable as possible and to raise awareness of existing provision.

When asked at this stage what wage would be required to work, less than half stated they would require over £300 per week, closely mirroring both the earlier answer to their previous wage and the tendency noted towards seeking lower or semi-skilled jobs.

### ***iii. Benefits***

All respondents, whether employed or not working, were asked what benefits were received in the household.

Across all areas the most commonly received benefits were Child Benefit, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits.

However, many respondents were potentially either unaware of the full range of benefits they were in receipt of, or not claiming all they were entitled to as the percentages claiming Jobseekers Allowance were never higher than 10% across any area and those claiming Universal Credit no higher than 2. These figures combined do not correspond with the percentage classing themselves as unemployed, which was normally around half of the respondents in any one area.

### ***iv. Willingness to Re-train***

This section asked all respondents about the length and type of re-training they were willing to undergo to secure employment. In each area at least two thirds of respondents stated that they would be willing to re-train to get back to work.

In each area half of those willing to re-train also said they would be willing to train for over 6 months, whilst almost a fifth were willing to re-train for up to 6 weeks.

When asked what rate of benefit they would require while re-training almost a fifth stated they would be willing to do so for their current benefit rate. Of those people who were working and responded over half in each area would be willing to re-train for their current salary.

To complete this section respondents were asked where they would find out about re-training, for which the main answers, discounting those who would re-train through their employer, were as follows:

1. Social Media;
2. Jobcentre Plus;
3. Friends & Family; or
4. Newspaper.

#### **v. *Training & Qualifications***

This section focused on time spent in education, both in school and beyond, including the qualifications gained. The section was completed by all respondents.

Respondents were asked what the highest level of qualification they had attained at school was. There was a noticeable difference between areas, with at the lowest just 26% of people in Middlefield having achieved Highers or equivalent, rising to the highest of 50% in Woodside. However, in each area between 10% and 20% did not achieve any qualification.

Respondents were also asked about further and higher education, with around half in each area having attended college. Across all areas between 67% (Middlefield) and 82% (Woodside) completed their course and achieved qualifications.

Of those respondents who had attended further education between 40% (Middlefield) and 51% (Woodside) gained employment directly related to their course and qualifications.

The last part of this section asked what other training had been attended. Between two fifths and half stated that they had attended further training beyond school or further education. By far the majority of this was on-the-job training, covering a wide spectrum of courses from CSCS and security courses through to nursing, teaching and accounting.

## **vi. Goals & Aims**

This section asked for people's aspirations and was completed by all respondents.

Of those who answered, between 51% (Seaton) and 65% (Torry) stated that they were available for work, with the majority in all areas looking for full time employment. Less than 10% of people put restrictions on the area of the city they would work in, with around a fifth willing to travel outwith the city to secure employment.

The numbers willing to consider self-employment varied greatly from area to area, although encouragingly this was never lower than 26% in Tillydrone and rose as high as 45% in Torry.

In common with the answers given earlier in the audits, the weekly wage stated as required to return to work was lower than expected. Between 46% in Woodside and 62% in Middlefield stated that they would require at least £300 per week, which as highlighted earlier in the report is well below the citywide median earnings of £483 per week per week.

When asked at this stage of the questionnaire what help they thought should be in place to help people back to work the most common responses were:

1. Locally available help;
2. Locally available training;
3. More training available in the city;
4. More affordable childcare;
5. Financial help to start work; and
6. Wider availability of work placements.

Meanwhile, between 64% (Middlefield) and 80% (Woodside) would consider voluntary work as a way of developing skills.

## **vii. Support Requested**

*To conclude the questionnaire unemployed respondents were asked what support they felt would be beneficial to help them return to work, with the following most common responses:*

1. Financial support to return to work;
2. Work experience placements;
3. Help with CVs;
4. Training for a specific job;
5. Free IT Training; and
6. Confidence Building classes.

The figures above suggest that people are seeking support which does currently exist, highlighting the need for increased publicity and awareness of existing support, and ensuring support is available in the localities.

## ***Recommendations***

The findings in each area showed only small variations and this has led to the same recommendations being made for each of the areas and subsequently to the same overall recommendations.

### *1. Ensure people are aware of the support available.*

The type of support looked for broadly matched the support which currently exists within the city.

However, although people stated that they were seeking existing support, the numbers of people from the regeneration areas accessing that support are lower than would be suggested by these answers.

It is also noticeable that, whilst being broadly aware of existing support, when queried about the type of support which should be made available a number of respondents stated that there should be locally available support and training, much of which does currently exist.

It is therefore important that the existing support and any new support, such as through the Progress Through Positive Partnerships (PTPP) programme, is heavily publicised across the areas.

The pipeline of employment support which has been put in place by PTPP is an important step in providing access to training and employment opportunities and this should be heavily and consistently marketed through all forms of media, with social media prominent in any future promotion of services.

By consistently “blanket” advertising the available services across a variety of social media feeds and through a range of other promotional means, access to city-wide support training awareness of support and training can therefore be raised across the regeneration areas.

### *2. Ensure people are connected to the jobs they want.*

It was noted throughout the audits that although a huge range of jobs had been held and were aspired to by those not working that there was a tendency towards seeking lower and semi-skilled jobs.

Whilst it is important not to dumb down the career aspirations of people living in regeneration areas who may wish to enter more skilled professions, it is equally important that those seeking lower skilled professions are supported to achieve their goals.

However, it should also be considered that this may be because a lower skilled job is all that the person believes they can achieve at that time. It is

therefore also important that alongside support to gain the job a person wants that they are also offered the opportunity, either immediately or at a later stage, to access training to secure more skilled employment.

The jobs which were stated as being sought in the audits continue to be available within the city, despite the economic downturn, with a number of sectors, such as care and hospitality continuing to experience shortages.

The most popular employment sectors in the audits were care, retail and hospitality; all of which have current vacancies in the city. It is therefore important that initiatives which can connect people from regeneration areas to the jobs they want to do, such as Jobcentre Plus' Local Employment Partnership, are accessed.

### *3. Ensure Work Trials/ On-the-job training is widely accessed.*

Following on from Recommendation 2, it was further noted that the majority of people are seeking to enter the same types of employment as they have previously held. In addition, large numbers of people said that they would like to access work experience placements.

Work Trials are available directly through Jobcentre Plus, as well as through the Progress Through Positive Partnerships project. These provide the opportunity for local people to demonstrate their skills on the job without affecting their benefits.

These and other similar opportunities are currently available and could be more widely accessed by residents and should therefore be promoted as part of the programme of advertising recommended above to increase uptake.

### *4. Ensure the availability of Back-To-Work benefits and In-Work benefit calculations are promoted*

The Audits have highlighted that the wages which people are looking for are well below the average for the city. As a result there is likely to be a need for in-work benefits for residents returning to work.

Alongside this, the number of people reporting receipt of benefits such as Working Tax Credits is lower than may be expected in regeneration areas.

As a result, the entitlement and availability of in-work benefits should be highlighted within the communities, including alongside the advertising which is undertaken to highlight support services.

In addition, the importance of in-work benefit calculations should be emphasised. By carrying out checks prior to entering employment it would be possible to not only reduce the numbers who may leave work due to

ongoing employment struggles, but also would increase the uptake of in-work benefits by those entitled to them.

Residents have also highlighted that childcare and assistance in buying equipment or clothing would be of benefit to them in their efforts to return to work.

Through programmes such as the Low Value Procurement (Jobcentre Plus) and the Support Fund (Fairer Aberdeen Fund) such support is available, but it is apparent from answers provided that this is not commonly known of by residents.

It is once again therefore important that the availability of such support services are advertised throughout the area.

### ***Next Steps***

The audits were carried out over a 6 month period across all the regeneration areas of the city and found that a large number of people were seeking assistance to get back to work.

Following the audits all the people in each community who stated they required help were re-contacted via the Progress Through Positive Partnerships project and offered the assistance they sought. To date only a small percentage of those offered assistance have taken up this offer. However, as part of this follow-up respondents were also provided with project information should they wish to participate in future.



## ***Conclusion***

The questionnaire ran to over 90 questions and it may have been expected that its length may have discouraged people from completion of it. However, this was not the case, with the majority of those who turned down the opportunity doing so without knowing the length of questionnaire. Those who did complete it were happy to do so with the assistance of the canvassers.

The number of people who are would like additional support to return to work was also a very positive outcome.

The Audit also demonstrated that the help which people seek is available, but that residents are often unaware of it.

Aberdeen City Council's Progress Through Positive Partnerships (PTPP) project is bringing together much of the support available across the city to make it as accessible as possible for the unemployed people to access the support they wish and require.

The key to ensuring that as many people as possible can be supported through PTPP and other projects is therefore to ensure that awareness of the available support is raised through extensive publicity.