

Middlefield Neighbourhood Audit



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Executive Summary

This Report is the first in a series of five Neighbourhood Audit Reports commissioned by Aberdeen City Council through the Progress Through Positive Partnerships project, which will also be followed by an overall report on the combined findings.

The audits were carried out in mid-to-late 2017 across regeneration areas of Aberdeen by a team of independent canvassers who maintained impartiality throughout the process.

This report, covering the Middlefield area, was carried out in 2017 over a three week period and 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.

A little under half of all respondents were not working. Of these not in employment, just over three quarters had been unemployed for over six months and over half for over 2 years.

Perhaps as a result of the length of unemployment faced, a tenth of respondents stated that a loss of benefit security was barrier to returning to employment for them. Alongside this, benefit uptake for both employed and unemployed, was worryingly low with less than a fifth in receipt of Tax Credits and much less than a tenth in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, despite wages being received being well below average and the numbers stating they were unemployed.

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

Just over half 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 less than half not doing so.

Two fifths of respondents also reported that they are available for work or training, with around a tenth reporting that they felt that people in the area require more locally available help and training.

It is therefore recommended that awareness of existing and/or new local support and training is raised so that the different routes back into employment which are available are highlighted, ensuring that people are connected to the jobs they are seeking and receive appropriate financial support where available, whether towards the cost of training or in-work benefits.

Introduction

Background

Aberdeen City Council successfully bid for European Structural Fund funding for the Progress Through Positive Partnerships employability project. As part of this successful bid a series of Neighbourhood Audits was to be carried out, designed to identify the current needs of local people in five areas of the city – Middlefield, Woodside, Tillydrone, Torry and Seaton.

Pathways was commissioned through competitive tendering by Aberdeen City Council through the European Structural Fund (ESF) to carry out a series of 5 Neighbourhood Audits of the area identifying what services local people wanted, key barriers to an improved lifestyle, individual aspirations, and future service provision requirements, with the aim of thereby identifying what services were required.

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

The Audit was carried out in May 2017, with the results then entered into a database for compilation.

Citywide Comparison

In identifying the need to direct services towards regeneration areas such as Middlefield it is important to set the challenges faced by the area into context. The latest published NOMIS figures show the following key benefit claim figures in the Auchmill ward which covers Middlefield and across the city as a whole:

	Middlefield	Aberdeen City
Jobseekers Allowance	120	2 480
Employment & Support Allowance	295	8 455
Incapacity Benefit/ Severe Disability All.	20	270
Disability Living Allowance	280	7 800

Source: NOMIS June 2017

The figures above show that there are significant numbers of residents in the Middlefield area in receipt of benefit, highlighting the importance of addressing the needs of the area through the provision of services which support people to enter or return to work.

Middlefield

Demographic

The Middlefield area itself has a total estimated population of 3 064. Of these, it is estimated that 2 030 (66.2%) are of working age.

The working age population of the area represents approximately 1.25% of the working age population of Aberdeen City.

Significantly, the percentage of the area which is over working age in Middlefield is just 10.8%, against 14.9% in Aberdeen.

Middlefield has a young population, with 24.2% of residents aged under 16. This further highlights the importance of having systems in place to support people of all ages, from school leaver upwards, into employment.

Aberdeen City Council Population Estimates 2015

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Middlefield is covered by 4 datazones in the SIMD, one of which incorporates part of Cummings Park. Unfortunately the datazones across the country have recently been revised, with the latest figures the first available under these revisions and it is therefore not possible to carry out comparisons with previous SIMD figures to identify any trends.

However, analysis of the latest 2016 figures shows the datazones had the following rankings out of the 6505 datazones in Scotland:

Datazone	Employment	Income	Health	Housing	Education
SO1006727	1531	1659	510	559	214
SO1006726	2181	1211	1178	393	263
SO1006729	1662	1131	714	708	178
SO1006718	3498	2981	2885	1516	297

These figures show that Middlefield consistently ranks below the median level for deprivation across the country, with one SIMD datazone for Employment and three Income ranking in the worst 25%.

Also of particular concern is that all four datazones rank within the worst 5% for Education.

Health

As shown by the figures claiming illness-related benefits, across all age ranges there is a significant number of people with limiting long term illnesses. This is further reflected in the SIMD outcomes, which show 3 of the Middlefield datazones to be in the worst 15% ranking for Health in the country.

These figures are important when considering the efforts being made nationally to reduce the numbers of people on illness related benefits and encourage them back into work, such as through the Welfare Reform programme.

Neighbourhood Audit

The information above highlights the importance of correctly targeting services and funding at regeneration areas of the city to ensure that residents of areas such as Middlefield are offered the maximum opportunity to enter or return to work.

A summary of the findings of each section of the questionnaire are presented below, so that the City Council and partners can best decide how to target their own services or introduce new services to the area.

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed in partnership with Heather Farquhar and Angela Taylor, Aberdeen City Council, covering a range of topics such as length of unemployment, job goals, re-training etc.

It was planned to deliver the questionnaire through a combination of door-knocking and approaching people using local community centres and projects.

A team of canvassers from a range of backgrounds was recruited which enabled canvassing to be delivered throughout the day. This has the benefit of ensuring neutrality during completion of the questionnaires.

All doors in the area were knocked on during the course of the canvassing, which was carried-out over a 3-week period. 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 three times.

The preparatory work for the new Haudagain Roundabout affected the Audit as a large number of Council properties had already been vacated by the time the canvassing was conducted. Perhaps as a result of this the number/ percentage of people completing the questionnaire who are in employment was significantly above the percentage completing it who were out of work.

As a result of the lower response rate both in Middlefield and across other regeneration areas an online version of the questionnaire was also developed and published on Survey Monkey. This was widely advertised across social media platforms such as Facebook and the City Council's Twitter feed, as well as directly through agencies and projects across the city.

In Middlefield this resulted in a further 7 responses, although these responses were further limited in that none of the 7 respondents fully completed the questionnaire. However, where questions were completed they have been incorporated into this report.

Those residents in employment, which made up 52.9% of those completing the Audit, were asked questions relating to their employment including hours per week, wages and whether any benefits were received in the household, as well as their opinion on what services should be provided to help those out of work re-enter the workforce.

Those residents who confirmed they were not working 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, before being asked about the support they felt should be in place to help them find work.

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

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

A total of 185 questionnaires were completed, by 72 males and 113 females. Of those completing the questionnaire 86 were unemployed. The questionnaire was therefore completed by 9.1% of the working age population of the area.

Findings

i. Employment Status

Just over half (99) of those completing the questionnaire stated they were currently in employment.

Of those in employment, 54% were working full-time, with 44% (24) also stating that they were happy with the hours they worked (whether full or part-time).

For those stating they were unhappy with their hours the main barriers to changing working hours were caring responsibilities and family commitments.

The majority of people had been in their current job for over 6 months, with just over 18% having been in their current job under 1 year. At the other end of the spectrum, almost 40% of people had been in their current job for over 5 years. Significantly, just over two thirds (68%) work in the Service sector.

A small percentage of people said that they were unhappy in their current job (13%); with the main barriers faced to securing the type of work they wanted being care responsibilities, lack of qualifications and lack of experience.

The weekly wage stated as being received was well below the city median of £483 per week. Of the 94 people in employment, only 18 stated that their income exceeded £350 per week, in itself well below the city average.

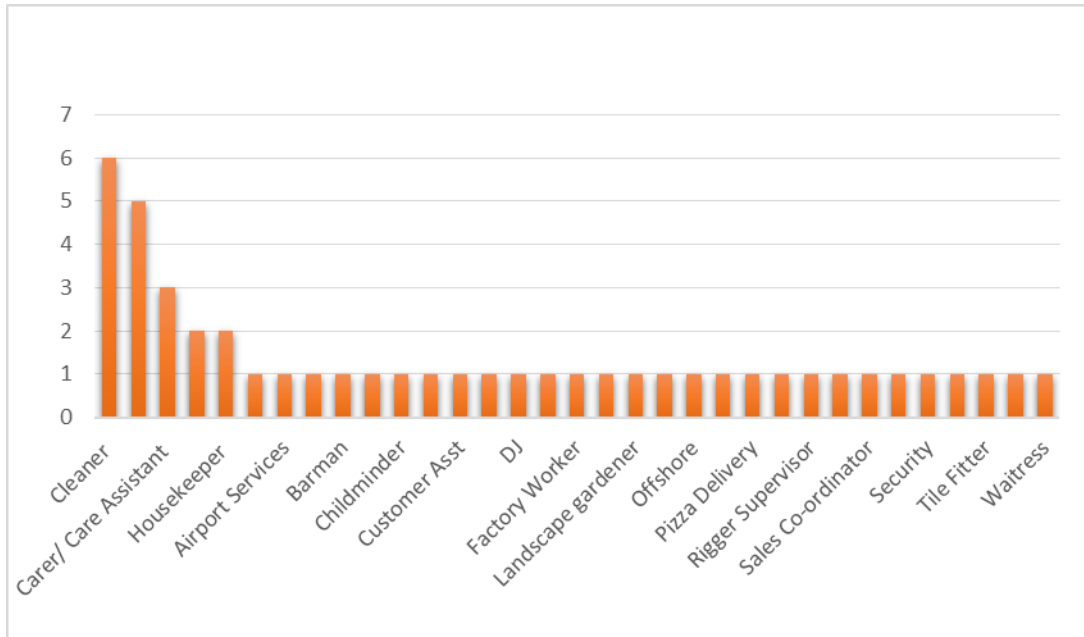
However, only 17 people stated that they were in receipt of in-work benefits. Combined with the low wages, this suggests that there may be a lack of understanding and knowledge of in-work benefits and there may therefore be a need to advertise and encourage uptake of these benefits within the area, perhaps through organisations such as Cash In Your Pocket.

Perhaps the most positive aspect of the survey in relation to employed respondents was that 87% of people stated that they are happy in their current job. This highlights the importance of finding people the kind of work they want, no matter what the skill level of that job may be.

ii. Unemployment

A total of 84 unemployed residents completed the questionnaire, approximately 47% of the total completed. Of these, 87% had previously worked, with almost two thirds of those (63%) having worked full time.

A wide range of jobs had previously been held, ranging from lower skilled jobs such as cleaners and factory workers to highly skilled jobs such as a safety officer and an engineer. However, the vast majority of jobs previously held were lower skilled.



The main reasons given by respondents when asked what they did not like about their previous job were stress, pressure, money, spending time away from their family and the hours/shifts they worked.

This is further emphasised by the wages they had previously earned which, in common with those currently in employment are well below the average for the city, with less than one quarter (24%) earning over £300 per week.

Just under half of those questioned previously worked full time (49%), with the main reasons given for the last job ending being illness and Had Children. This suggests that there are potentially large numbers of Women Returners and Employment Support Allowance clients living in the area, both of which are priority groups for national initiatives.

Significantly, given the recent downturn in the oil industry and subsequent effect on the local economy, a further 12.5% reported that their most recent job ended because they were made redundant.

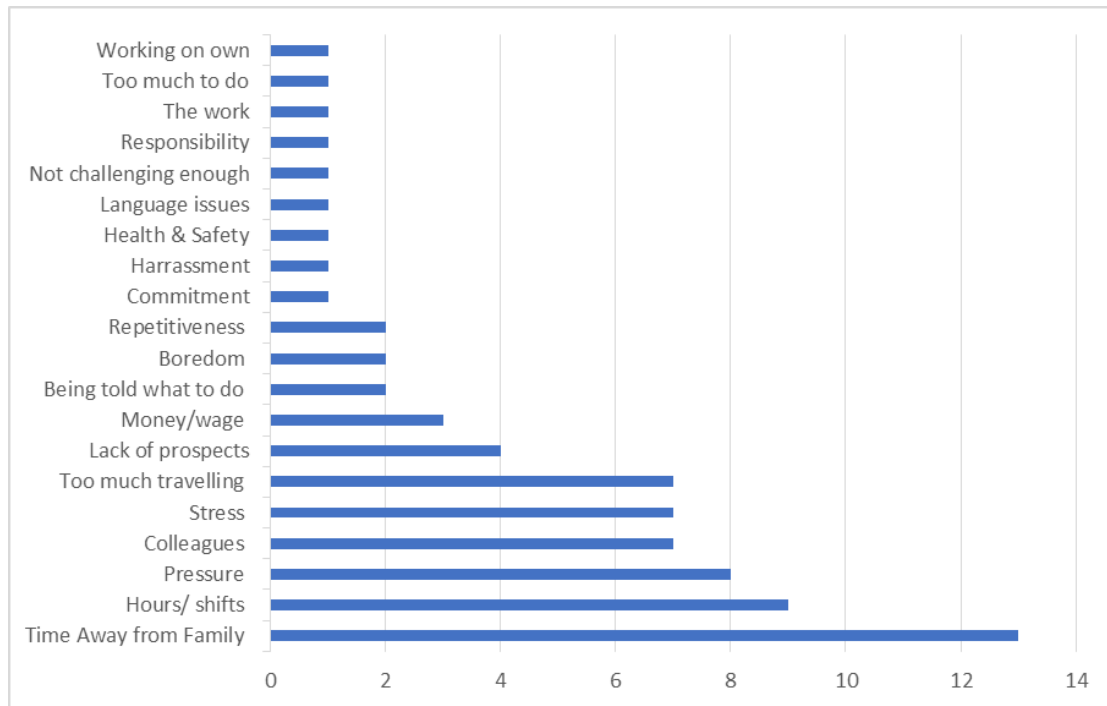
Of particular concern was the length of time which respondents had been unemployed for:

	Number	%age
Over 6 months	64	76
Over 2 years	49	58
Over 5 years	28	33.3
Over 10 years	19	23

These figures are significant as the length of unemployment faced by these groups is likely to mean that individuals not only face a number of barriers to employment themselves, but that when they are applying for jobs they are competing with people who have been unemployed for much shorter times.

A range of activities which address this, such as work trials, are therefore needed to support this client group back into work, alongside services to address the barriers faced in their day-to-day lives which may include such issues as debt etc.

When asked about what they liked about their last job the most common answers were: being part of a team; money; the social aspect; and responsibility. These should also be emphasised when supporting this client group.



Conversely, people did not like spending time away from their family, hours/shifts, stress, pressure and colleagues in their last jobs.

The jobs which people in the area were looking for ranged from lower skilled work, such as cleaner and security work, to skilled work such as plumber, mechanic, and joiner, and included one person looking for work as an architect.

In considering the work they would like to do, the most common steps residents felt they needed to take were to build self-confidence, update their CV, update their qualifications, improve their interview skills, re-train and access funded training.

However, only 2.7% identified literacy or numeracy needs as a barrier to securing the work they wanted.

Participants were also asked what they would enjoy most about working and what concerns they had. The most commonly identified reasons to enjoy working were being part of a team, money, and responsibility.

Meanwhile, the biggest concerns about returning to work were the cost and availability of childcare provision, time away from their family and the money/wage they would earn. These were highlighted as concerns as a significant proportion of respondents (18.8%) stated they did not know where to get help, with 10.9% concerned about a loss of benefits if the job did not work out.

When asked if they had previous experience of the type of work they wanted, less than one fifth (16.8%) stated that they had previous experience. This suggests that training could form an important route back into employment for significant numbers within the Middlefield area.

Respondents were asked a number of times throughout the survey, in different ways, to identify the help needed for them to be able to return to employment. Most commonly respondents wanted locally available help, more financial help starting work, locally available training, more training across the city and an increase in affordable childcare.

Significantly, once again respondents stated that they were looking for wages well below the Aberdeen city average, with just under two-fifths (37%) looking for a wage of over £300 per week. This suggests that a large proportion of the group are looking for part time or lower skilled work and it is therefore important to ensure that the availability of such posts is highlighted where possible.

Finally, all clients were asked if they had worked full or part time in the past, with the following results:

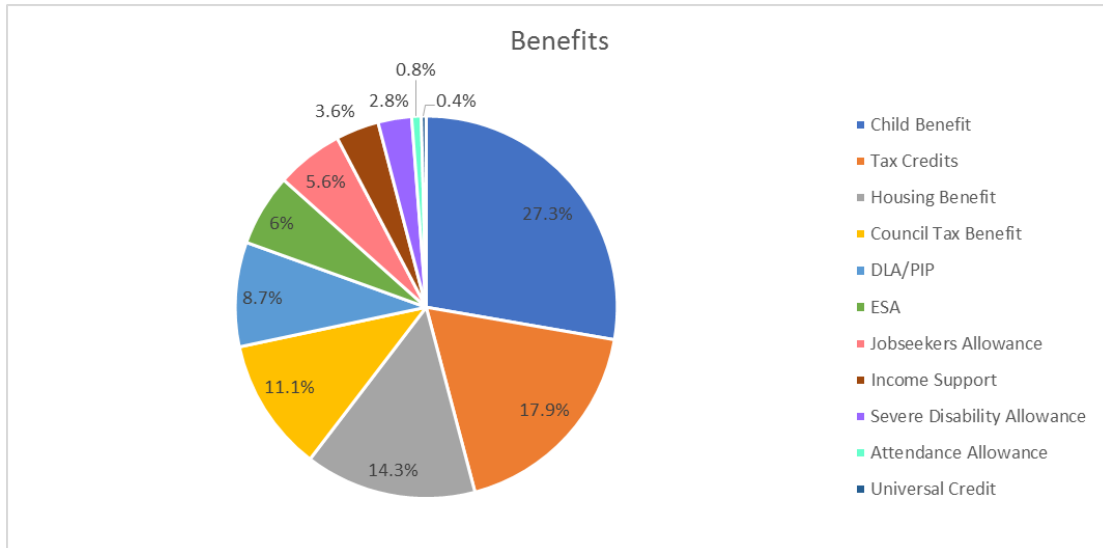
- 52 (62%) of respondents have worked full time;
- 32 (38%) have worked part-time.

iii. Benefits

All respondents were asked about the benefits people in their household were in receipt of.

As expected, the most common responses were Child Benefit (27.3%), Tax Credits (17.9%) and Housing Benefit (14.3%).

However, less than 10% of respondents stated they were in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (5.6%), Employment Support Allowance (6%) or Income Support (3.6%).



Given that almost half of the people completing the questionnaire stated they were unemployed this demonstrates that a significant percentage of people do not know what benefits they receive.

In the longer term, this may become a significant issue as currently only 0.4% are in receipt of Universal Credit. As this percentage increases over time there will clearly be work required to ensure that people know what benefits they are entitled to.

Finally in this section, people were also asked how many people in their household were in receipt of benefit, with over half (55%) stating that one person received benefits, with the most in one household being three.

iv. Willingness to Re-train

All respondents had the option of completing this section, with 98% responding to at least one question. Of those, almost two thirds (115) stated they were willing to re-train for the type of job they are looking for.

The majority of people (114/176) also said that they would be willing to re-train for the type of job they would like to do, with 18.8% willing to re-train for up to 6 weeks and 22.7% for 6–12 weeks and just over half (51.4%) willing to re-train for 6 months or more.

It is therefore extremely important that not only are there training opportunities available for local people, but that these training opportunities are accessible and are delivered over varying lengths of time to suit the needs of local people.

When asked how much they would expect to be paid while training a quarter (24.8%) said they would expect to receive their current income, whilst a fifth

(19.8%) would train without receiving a wage, dropping slightly to 18.2% who expect to receive the National Minimum Wage and 17.4% who would expect to receive a minimum of their benefits.

Finally, people were asked where they would expect to find out about training opportunities. The 5 most popular answers were:

- Employer 12.6%
- Social Media 11.9%
- Jobcentre Plus 10.6%
- Newspaper: 7.6%
- Friends & Family: 5.9%

Taken as a whole this section highlights the willingness of local people to re-train and that their expectations during retraining are realistic in comparison to what training is available.

It is important that a range of training opportunities is in place to meet the needs of local people. These need to be available over a variety of timescales from short courses lasting up to 6 weeks to longer training offering the opportunity to enter jobs with skills. Ideally, as much on-the-job training should be available to people as possible.

v. Training & Qualifications

This section focussed on the qualifications of people living in the Middlefield area, whether they went on to College or University and if they gained employment relevant to their qualifications.

Of those achieving qualifications, almost one fifth (19%) left school with no qualifications. Slightly over two-fifths (43.6%) achieved Standard or O Grades, whilst just over a quarter (26.2%) achieved Highers.

Just over two-fifths (41.9%) attended college, although one third of them did not complete their course. A further 11.4% went to university.

People who went to college and university accessed a wide range of courses, from access courses, through SVQs to degree level courses.

It is also noticeable from the earlier question relating to the job people were currently in that there appears to be a discrepancy between the course attended and whether a job in this sector was secured, with a little over half (55.8%) finding a job relevant to their qualifications.

The survey also asked all respondents to state whether they had attended any training since leaving school or further education.

Two-fifths (40%) of respondents stated that they had attended some form of training. As expected there was a huge range of training accessed, with much of it work-based or led training. However, there was also a range of training accessed which was not on behalf of a workplace. Training accessed included taxi training, child development, army training, CSCS, HR and carpentry, giving a demonstration of the breadth of different training accessed.

vi. Goals & Aims

All respondents were asked the questions in this section, although many opted to answer only questions which they felt were of relevance to them.

Of 161 responses, 60% (96) said that they were available for work, training or volunteering.

In further questioning, 35% (34) of these stated they are willing to work or train over 6 hours per day, with a further 43% (41) willing to attend 2–4 hours per day.

Of 140 people who answered, only 14 (10%) stated that they are only willing to work in the Middlefield area. All other respondents are willing to travel to other parts of Aberdeen or outwith the city to secure work (17%).

Meanwhile, 35 people also said they would consider self-employment, with just under half (49%) saying they would like help developing their ideas and a similar percentage (48%) saying they would need training to become self-employed.

When asked at this stage 90% of people responded to a question asking what kind of help they or others would need to return to employment. The most common answers given were:

- Locally available help 14.2%
- Locally available training 10.6%
- More training available in city 10.3%
- More financial help with starting work 9.5%
- Increase in affordable childcare 7.9%
- Wider availability of work placements 7.4%

Earlier in the Audit, those who stated they were not working were asked about their concerns about working. A wide range of responses were given, of which the most popular were Childcare Provision and Cost (9.4% of responses), Time Away from Family (8.1%) and Lack of Current Skills (7.5%).

As reported earlier, wage expectations were low, with over three fifths (61.7%) looking for a wage of under £300 per week. This ties-in with the range of hours per day for which people were looking for work, with a higher percentage than answering perhaps seeking part-time work.

Over 95% of people thought that the wage they were seeking was realistic, suggesting that people recognise that they may not immediately be able to enter highly skilled employment and linking in with earlier answers relating to the type of work sought, which suggested that many would be comfortable with lower skilled employment.

Positively, almost two thirds (64.2%) of those answering stated they would consider volunteering, which can provide an excellent bridge back into employment.

vii. Support Requested

The final section of the questionnaire looked at what help respondents would like to help them find work. A total of 158 people responded to the initial question in this section, of which almost half - 75 – stated that they would like help to get into work or training.

A wide range of support was listed for respondents to choose from, with the most common choices as follows:

Financial support towards training courses	8.9%
Help with CV's	8.1%
Confidence building	7.6%
Free IT Training	6.7%
Work Experience placement	7.0%
Training for a specific job	6.8%

The figures above (and other answers provided) suggest that people are seeking support which does currently exist. The problem which exists at the moment is therefore perhaps in connecting people to the support which is available.

Recommendations

Findings from the report show that although 80% of the Middlefield residents completing the Skills Audit are long term unemployed, there remains a wish within the population for support which will help them enter or return to employment.

Based on this willingness and the responses to questions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Ensure people are aware of the support available.

A large number of people (75) indicated that they would like additional support to change job or return to work.

Alongside this, residents reported the type of help they are looking for which broadly matched the help they believe is available.

Taken together, these results suggest that although residents are aware of some support they do not necessarily know how readily available it is.

It is therefore important that the availability of existing support within the area and city is highlighted. Extensive marketing programmes, through as many different media as possible, should be carried out across the area so that a steady stream of information is brought to the attention of local people.

Such advertising should not rely on a single source as earlier questions show that clients are not aware or would not use all the support agencies or media available for information on training or jobsearch. Advertising could take place through:

- social media
- community newsletters;
- the community radio station;
- through local projects and centres e.g. The Middlefield Hub; Cummings Park Community Flat etc.;
- job and training fairs connecting local people to available opportunities;
- targeted leafleting of Jobcentre Plus clients during signing on.

By marketing the support available through a variety of media consistently over a period time awareness of support will be raised, with an expectation of increased numbers accessing support.

2. Ensure local help and training, including core skills, is available

Throughout the Audit both employed and unemployed people were asked what type of support should be given to people who want to return to work. Each time this was asked the most popular answers were Locally Available Help and Locally Available Training.

Within the Middlefield area there are locations, such as the Middlefield Hub, where people can access some support, but provision is limited in the area.

Within the city the types of training and support which people are looking for is available through a variety of organisations e.g. Aberdeen Foyer, Tullos Training, NESCOL, Pathways etc. However, when asked about how to address their barriers almost one fifth of people (18.8%) stated that they did not where to get help.

This suggests that people are not necessarily aware of the support which is available, backing up the first recommendation that marketing of services is carried out.

3. Ensure people are connected to the jobs they want.

Further following on from Recommendation 1, there is a clear need to follow up the support provided by ensuring that people are connected to the types of job they are looking for.

There can be a tendency towards highlighting vacancies that are available in specific sectors. For example, in the past, there was a particular push at one stage to get people into retail jobs across agencies. However, if people are not keen on these vacancies there is limited benefit to pushing them towards these vacancies as job retention is likely to be limited at best.

The list of occupations sought given by residents show a mix of lower to higher skilled jobs, from cleaner to architect. It is important that the availability of these jobs is highlighted to residents wherever possible and that they are encouraged to enter into these jobs.

It is noticeable that the jobs listed are broadly available within Aberdeen, if in more limited numbers since the downturn in the oil industry started affecting all sectors, and this, combined with the support available to address barriers should be emphasised.

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

The Audit has highlighted that the jobs and 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 community, 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.

Agencies such as Cash In Your Pocket which can connect people with organisations able to give in-work benefit calculations are available in the city and their services should be highlighted as part of any support to return to employment.

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.

Jobcentre funding for training and travel costs is available, but from answers provided is not commonly known of by residents.

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

5. Ensure different routes into work are available.

The Audit showed that people are looking for a wide variety of support to return to work. Whilst one-to-one support and locally available help featured prominently other avenues, such as work experience and support to improve language skills were also highlighted.

As with many of the recommendations above it is therefore important that residents are connected with the opportunities for to both improve employability through training or work experience and one-to-one support which exist within Aberdeen.

Additionally, almost two thirds of those responding said they would consider voluntary work as a way of developing their skills. Again, it should be highlighted that volunteering opportunities are available in the city, with ACVO's website highlighting over 800 opportunities are currently available.

Work Trials are also available directly through Jobcentre Plus, which can also 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.

Next Steps

The Audit has shown a large number of Middlefield residents are looking for additional support to help them back into work and it is important that this is followed up.

The first step to be taken is therefore to connect all those requesting help in the area with the opportunities which exist with and to follow up through individual contact with all those seeking additional support.

This is being done through the Progress Through Positive Partnerships project.

Further Skills Audits reports are available for the following areas:

- Woodside;
- Tillydrone;
- Torry; and
- Seaton.

Comparisons of the areas will also be carried out to find any variances in the needs between areas, gradually building a picture across the city.

Conclusion

There was an extremely positive response from residents of the Middlefield area to the Audit, both in the reaction to the canvassers when knocking on doors and in the results obtained.

The questionnaire ran to over 90 questions – although a number of these were missed depending on whether the respondent was working or not - 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 asked being extremely willing to complete the form with the assistance of the canvassers.

Whilst there is undoubtedly a significant percentage of people for whom caring responsibilities is a barrier, this is lower than previously thought. However, the number of people who would like additional support to return to work was a very positive outcome.

The Audit also demonstrated that the help which people seek is available, but that this is not often known by residents.

The challenge now will be for organisations to meet the needs of the client group, highlighting the availability of all aspects of jobsearch support, through to training and employment opportunities and the benefits and funding available to support those returning to work.