

High Street “Work Shops Revisited”

The reality

- Unemployment will rise in the current year to perhaps unprecedented levels.
- All business and industrial sectors will be affected to a greater or lesser degree.
- The vast majority of people finding their post redundant would prefer to work rather than depend on benefit.
- Why do we not create a “Benefit plus” grouping, based on the following outline?

The Proposal

- A Temporary initiative would be established with minimum overheads and a project life of 2 year. The option to continue for further years would be influenced by many factors, which are best not considered at this stage. This is a fire fighting initiative for which there is a business case, which must be looked at as urgent and not treated as so many proposals are. We do not have the luxury of time to progress this suggestion through the normal consultative processes. Statutory Agencies must be “encouraged” to “buy in” to the initiative.
- Red tape will only be used to tie up parcels!
- Every community (except perhaps for very small rural locations) has property lying empty with a landlord who is not receiving rent. The first step in establishing the concept of Work Shops is that the landlord would agree to grant a licence lease for a Work Shop to be located in their premises. The rent payable for a 12-month period would be between 25 and 50% of the previous commercial rent. A three month delay in collection of rent would apply. Not only will this secure a level of rental income but will maintain the ability of the landlord to keep the building insured
- The premises would be temporarily assessed on a maximum of 25% of rateable value. A three-month delay in collection of local rates would apply.

Management and Activity

- Each Work Shop would have its own manager. All employees including the manager would be paid on a Benefit Plus Basis. Subject to a calculation (yet to be explored) the Plus factor would be added to any and all benefit entitlement for an unemployed person.

- The Plus Factor would be paid from the Work Shop income and would cease immediately an individual workshop “employee” moved into other employment. This feature would be one of the key objectives of the Work Shop.
- The Manager would have a very wide remit and would have authority to change emphasis to reflect the local area needs.
- The activity and function would be wide ranging and the following is a list of activities, which could operate from the Work Shop.
- From a pool of redundant construction workers, a Repair and Maintenance Team would be formed. To carry out repairs and maintenance to the homes of pensioners and less able members of the local community. Such R&M would be carried out on the basis that the individual paid for the materials and the Work Shop labour would be free.
- The R&M Team would also work with local authorities and social landlords to carry out R&M. which could not be done by existing workforce or contractors or for which there is no current budget provision. This function would not replace in any way, existing services, it would merely function as an added capacity.
- This team could also be contracted out to assist small businesses in need of essential R&M or minor adaptation to their premises.
- Work Shop employees with retail experience would be encouraged to suggest services or sales ideas which would generate income and represent a demand from the local community which is not currently on offer from the existing retail base. Contact would be established with insolvency practitioners to establish links for the re-sale of liquidation stock.
- Local Service provision, such as sale of domestic stationery, postage stamps etc. This function could fill the much-needed gap in Post Office Services throughout the country.
- Equally WS employees who come from an IT background could be organised to visit people with a home PC to assist them with technical, employment preparation and training issues.
- An overarching service delivered from the WS would be assistance with Job Searches and applications. Again this would not replace but add to local provision. Employees with good word processing skills who would directly assist in the preparation of job applications and who would mentor individuals who either registered with the Work Shop or indeed were employed by the Work Shop would provide the service.

- In the event of a successful appointment the client would pay a small but realistic fee to the WS shop to generate some income and recognise the value of the service provided
- It also has to be recognised that many people who have been employed in the professions will find that their post has become redundant. With this in mind it could be that a whole range of services and advice could be delivered from the Work Shop. Such topics as advising clients who have a mortgage or other financial problem, how best to communicate with lenders, but rather than the traditional service offered by CAB, this would involve direct hands on preparation of letters etc. In fact CAB may well welcome the existence of a cost effective service to add value to the level of support which they already provide.
- Many small businesses could benefit from the WS concept. Such topics as mailing or mail merge activity, legal, construction technical and IT advice.

The opportunities for the Work Shop concept are as wide as the reader's imagination and as stated at the outset of this section the management and staff must be encouraged to suggest local initiatives, which would add value to the local delivery.

There is no intention in this proposal to supplant any existing agency conversely the proposal seeks to compliment the work being done by CAB, Local Enterprise Companies, URCs Job Centre Plus, Colleges and Universities, Community Development Trusts, Church Organisations and the whole range of agencies who have a valuable role to play in local, regional and national economic regeneration.