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Wheels to Work (W2W)

A solution for rural access to employment, further education and training?

Summary

Wheels-To-Work (W2W) schemes have been in existence for several years across the country and have proved successful in supporting people into economic activity by overcoming barriers to employment and to training for rural residents, especially the 16-25 age group. At its heart, a W2W project breaks the vicious circle of “no transport – no training - no job – no money – no transport”.

Despite their success in meeting the targets for customers into work, the schemes have suffered from a lack of long term viability arising from varying and often high unit cost, variability in performance, consistency of product, lack of scale and low efficiency of operations. However, through improvements in operating systems, efficiencies in fleet management and administrative support to customers, a W2W project can demonstrate financial success and positive cost-benefit.

The East of England Rural Forum is asked to:

- **Support** the principle of W2W schemes as an effective way to deliver both economic and social outcomes, in support of EE RDF Objectives 4 (Social Inclusion) and 7 (Learning Opportunities)

And

- **Endorse** a proposal for funding to develop a business case to create a regional approach that will secure long term sustainability of W2W projects through improvements in the product that make it attractive to main stream funding.

Overview

In its basic form, W2W is a scheme for individuals to have a free loan of a motorbike/moped for their personal use for a limited period, typically up to 6 - 9 months. It enables the rider to travel to work or training in the absence of public transport. The bike is also available for personal use by the customer. The scheme can also embrace other travel facilities such as push-bikes, electric assisted bikes or taxi vouchers.

W2W projects focus on economic activity (employment and skills development) or training and is personal transport for an individual to travel in response to work patterns. It must not be confused with community transport, which is a public service for access to services and amenities (retail or leisure) in a nearby town.

Various schemes have been managed across the country over the past few years. Until recently, there was a national W2W Forum providing a networking, exchange of good practice and promotion service. The Countryside Agency was a significant funding client through its Vital Village programme. Reports on the schemes invariably report favourably on

the success of the projects in enabling rural residents to gain employment or access to training.

The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) for West and East Midlands and North West are supporting development of a regional approach in order +to achieve a consistent, high quality, cost effective product.

Economic Outcomes

A W2W project delivers a range of benefits to the individual customer:

- Increased employability
- Improved skills
- Increased incentive to find and stay in work
- Enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem (life chances)
- Promotion of participation in community life and wider social circles
- Provides an immediate tangible benefit

In addition, employers benefit through

- Increased availability of suitable recruits
- Retention of staff and reduced turnover
- Improved performance through better trained employees

Finally, the public sector benefits through reduction in payments of

- Job seekers allowances
- Incapacity benefits
- Council tax benefits
- Housing benefits

And increased income to the Exchequer from receipt of

- Income tax
- National Insurance contributions

The national average cost in 2004/05 was £318/customer/month, ranging between £120 and £250.

Project Details

Applicants to the project, must be eligible against criteria which include an offer of a job or training (or commitment to actively seek such), live in the location for the project, have no reasonable access to public or alternative means of transport and hold a valid driving licence.

Applicants learn of the scheme through direct advertising but importantly, also via referrals from partner organizations such as Job Centre Plus, Social Services, colleges and Local Skills Councils.

Depending on the details of the particular project, a customer accepted onto the scheme receives some or all of the following:

- Loan of a taxed, insured and maintained motor bike or scooter, typically 50cc
- Guidance for getting a driving licence

- Compulsory Basic Training (CBT)
- Crash helmet and gloves and depending on particular project, a selection of safety and wet weather clothing
- Security lock and chain
- Guidance on safe riding
- Guidance on basic safety checking and looking after the bike
- Guidance on planning for return of the bike and financial budgeting and saving for its replacement
- Support for job or training applications

Each customer makes a financial contribution to the running costs of the scheme, which is typically £8 to £10 per week. He/she signs an undertaking to take care of the bike and ensure its security and proper use.

East of England

In our region, there are currently four schemes, of which Kickstart in Norfolk is the longest established and biggest.

Norfolk and East Cambs is serviced by **Kickstart**, one of the biggest schemes in the country. It is an independent charity focussed entirely on W2W, with approximately 217 bikes and aims to help 400 customers per year. It operates through a variety of funding from LAs, Lottery, JC+, Leader+ and Children's Trust. This is an exemplar demonstration of the efficiencies and quality of service that can be achieved through economies of scale. Since 2001, over 1,017 people have been helped into work and 388 into training.

Suffolk has a **Kickstart** project managed by Suffolk ACRE, funded by the Defra RSCP and LAA partners with 18 bikes.

Herts has **ScooTS** with 12 bikes managed by CDA for Herts and funded by Herts CC & DCs.

Essex has a local scheme, **Z-Bikes**, managed by Uttlesford DC, with 16 bikes.

In Bedfordshire, a proposal is in preparation and if successful, a scheme will start in the next few months.

An informal W2W Regional Forum has recently been formed to exchange ideas and information and to consider ways for increased collaboration.

Recommendations

W2W is a proven and an effective approach to tackling barriers to employment and training for people living in rural areas with no access to transport. As such, the Rural Forum is asked to:

Support to the W2W approach as contributing to Regional Delivery Framework Objectives 4: Social Inclusion (Promote social inclusion through improved access to services, community cohesion and participation in rural areas) and Object 7: Learning Opportunities (Encourage people of all ages to participate in quality learning opportunities).

Encourage EEDA, EERA and GO-East to consider W2W projects as delivery solutions that contribute to achievement of their regional strategies.

Support and endorse a proposal to EEDA and the EE-Skills & Competitiveness Partnership for funding to prepare a business case for a regional approach to W2W projects. The objects of the business case would be to consider and propose ways in which to improve W2W projects in the region.

In particular, the business case would quantify the potential benefits that would accrue from regional management, exploiting economies of scale through aspects such as purchasing contracts, shared support facilities, common operating systems, common administrative processes and documentation, joint marketing and collaboration on bids for funding. The overall objective would be to achieve long term viability and sustainability of W2W projects in the east of England through increases in efficiencies; a consistent and high quality product through application of best practice; commitment from regional partners/clients through involvement in design of the product and reduced unit cost.

The business case would also consider the appropriateness and feasibility of social enterprise as a way towards commercial sustainability and the optimum legal structure for such an organization.

The business case would confirm the need (and market failure) and quantify the contribution that W2W projects make to economic and social development in rural areas. It would not be necessary to commission new research but would exploit the results of recent studies such as the OCSI investigation on rural deprivation in Norfolk, EDuce Study for Kickstart and various other studies regionally and nationally.

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On behalf of the EERF Learning & Skills Sub-Group