

5.1.5 First Choice Homes Oldham, Managed Exchange Programme

Formation of First Choice Homes Oldham: 2002

Status: Arms Length Management Organisation

Housing stock: 15,100 (now 13,068)

Duration: 5 years

Funding: £120m (ALMO funding)

Start date of Managed Exchange Programme (MEP): April 2003

Duration of MEP: 4 years

Spend on MEP: £0.5m

Spend on training (wider training programme): £0.4m. (FCHO Training budget)

Number of trainees taken to date (on wider training programme): 111

Percentage of BME trainees: 7%

Percentage of female trainees: 9%

Number of trainees intended to be taken in future: 22

Retention rate: 86%

First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) was awarded Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) funding in April 2002. Building upon an existing arrangement with Emanuel Whittaker Ltd, an extended strategic partnership was procured. Successful partners include The Lord Group, Connaughts, Emcor Drake & Scull and training consultancy, Indigo Ltd. Subsequently the heating partnership was procured from April 2005 and Drake and Scull have been replaced by Apollo Heating. A number of sub-contractors have also joined the partnership.

A training programme was an integral part of the partnership, driven both by the aim to contribute to local social and economic regeneration, to develop the future workforce and to increase the representation of members of the local Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community in the construction sector. The three main contracting partners – The Lord Group, Whittakers and Connaught had existing trainees, but the Partnership enabled the planning of a regular annual intake of apprentices based on the certainty of the work programme over a 4 year period. In April of 2003, FCHO and its partners launched the Managed Exchange Programme (MEP), specifically designed to attract and retain people from BME communities. This is seen as a key issue in Oldham and the project is seen as a key component in the Council's and FCHO's community cohesion agenda. Equally BME communities were seen as a significant untapped labour resource.

The MEP has involved a wide range of agencies and organisations in addition to FCHO and its partners. These include the Oldham Race Equality Partnership (OREP), Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, Oldham College, Connexions, CITB-ConstructionSkills, and others.

Partnering and Procurement

Training provision was an integral part of FCHO's original procurement process. All main contractor partners have well established trainee policies and procedures. Partners have all linked their training programmes to their organisations' development plans, indicating the schemes have strategic importance in their company's future growth.



Funding

Funding for FCHO's MEP came partly through the private sector partnership organisations. Additional funding was secured from the CITB-ConstructionSkills STEP into Construction programme (see **Appendices 3 and 4** for more information), the European Social Fund (ESF), Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and Remploy, who are the partnership's upvc window supplier.

Support

The lack of a central co-ordinator for FCHO's MEP, and its wider training programmes, has been an obstacle in the success of these initiatives. This is an area that the partnership sought to address, but to date there has been little progress due to the complexities of the ESF regime that was a potential grant source.

Training

FCHO uses a range of local FE colleges including those at Oldham, Rochdale, Manchester, Wigan, Salford and Bolton. Most trainees complete NVQ Level 3 training in craft and multi-skilling qualifications, although some difficulties in terms of getting suitable assessment have been experienced in moving from NVQ Level 2 to Level 3.

Applicants

Local schools, colleges and Connexions were selected as providing good access to the MEP's target audience. A large open day was held in June 2003 at a local college, from which a total of 105 expressions were received. Through an application process, a total of 12 people from this original group attended a second open day. Following interviews, Connaught, Whittaker and The Lord Group then recruited five BME trainees.

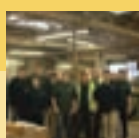
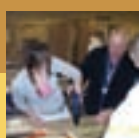
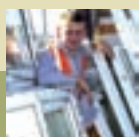
One issue arising from this first annual recruitment process was the need for a central co-ordinator within FCHO to manage the process. Equally, problems with the then central job agency in the Oldham area

– Construction Oldham Rochdale - overcomplicated the recruitment process.

BME recruitment and retention

After the first year of this project, a number of learning points have become apparent that apply particularly to recruitment from BME communities. One relates to the wide range of groups and agencies that became involved in the initiative: while their expertise and enthusiasm was invaluable, it became challenging to retain the original vision, purpose and objectives of the MEP initiative. During the second and third years of the MEP the partnership agreed that the process for recruitment should be simplified and focussed to ensure attraction of candidates from the BME community who have the necessary skills, knowledge and motivation to enter the construction sector. Accordingly the number of referral agencies and the level of their involvement was reduced. A similar process is to be adopted in the 2006/07 training initiative.

Word of mouth proved a particularly important means for recruiting from BME communities accessing this target group and informing them about the MEP initiative. However, the image of the construction industry proved an obstacle in securing applications: construction is often not considered to be a prestigious or attractive career amongst BME communities. The lack of role models in construction is a problem in changing these perceptions. During training, employers and training providers needed to show greater cultural sensitivity, for instance in dealing with religious customs and festivals. Nonetheless a relatively high percentage of BME recruits were retained and remain in post 2 years on. The success is attributable to the sheer amount of hard work and effort of the construction partners in developing networks within the local BME communities as a means of promoting training and employment opportunities within their companies.



Furthermore all three companies became recognised as “employers of choice” and made provisions within their companies to mitigate against discrimination in the workplace.

Outcomes and next steps

FCHO has learnt a great deal from the first two years of its MEP programme. Retention rates amongst the first year’s cohort on the MEP programme will be closely monitored. As the work undertaken by the partnership comes to a close, there is an understandable reluctance to commit to recruiting more apprentices due to uncertainty of volumes of work being available. The partners therefore have reduced their annual intake, although the balance will be redressed by FCHO who have committed to recruiting 20 apprentices over the 5year term of the repairs and maintenance contract that has recently been secured. The MEP will be used as the basis for recruitment.

Emanuel Whittakers recently won the small/medium private sector award in the inaugural event for the Oldham Diversity and Equality Awards. Trevor Phillips (chair of the CRE), and local MPs Phil Woolas and Michael Meacher were present. The award was basically in recognition of work (mainly with FCHO) on race, women in construction, Oldham United, work experience, work with Remploy (i.e.disabled local people) and the Managed Exchange Programme.

For further information on this project please contact:
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Project team

Contractors

Connaught

Emmanuel Whittaker

Emcor Drake & Skull (Apollo Heating from April 2005)

Indigo Ltd

The Lord Group

Sub-contractors

Brierley & Castree

Crowthers Plumbing

GTM Electrical

Sidebottom Roofing

Suppliers

Remploy UK

Rockdoor

Swish

