



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **For immediate release**

## **Health Trainer Programme tackles ill health related unemployment across North West**

Yesterday the Department for Work and Pensions released figures on the UK's benefits bill to Parliament. They identified the total cost was up from figures in 2009/10, with Knowsley and Walton being reported as being constituencies with the highest rates nationally.

One of the biggest contributors to benefit claimants is poor and ill health. Incapacity benefit is the main benefit paid to people who cannot work as a result of a health condition or disability (DWP). Many health conditions are avoidable or can be managed by a change in lifestyle.

HM Partnerships in partnership with PCTs\* across the North West have piloted a programme targeting the long term unemployed and those individuals unable to work due to health factors. The pilots have used Health Trainers\*\*placed in community settings to work with this target demographic with a view to getting people well for work. The Health Trainers do this by working one to one identifying the negative lifestyle factors which are affecting people's health individually, goals are set based on what the individual wishes to change and the health trainer works closely to signpost to other more specialised services if required.

Mike Parker, Managing Director of HM Partnerships said of the programme, *"we have found that the Health Trainer approach to support and empower clients to make small changes to behaviour and lifestyle has been a successful way of working with this target audience of long term unemployed and those on incapacity benefits. As well as the health impacts within local communities, the programme*

*had a secondary outcome of providing routes into health related employment for the health trainers themselves, many of whom were unemployed themselves and benefit claimants.”*

The interim report of the programme which evaluates all three pilots found that by April 2011 approximately 140 people had been supported through the project and the vast majority of these reported some positive impact including regular attendance at health and lifestyle services, participating in employment skills training, taking up voluntary positions within the community, and in some cases employment.

**ENDS**

**6<sup>th</sup> December 2011**

**Notes to Editors**

\*The pilots have taken place in Bootle (NHS Sefton), Workington (NHS Cumbria) and Barrow in Furness (NHS Cumbria) – all three areas were targeted due to high levels of unemployment, incapacity benefit claimants and high levels of lifestyle related poor health. They all have very different populations and illustrate how the programme may be managed in different communities. The learning and evaluation of the programme and the economic impact of the pilots individually is ongoing, with the final review expected in late December 2011.

\*\*The Health Trainers programme is a national scheme which provides opportunities for people from local communities to act as health promoters and advisors within their own communities. Health Trainers provide advice, support and signposting to people about a range of health issues mainly linked to changing individual behaviour for example, advice on smoking cessation, healthy eating or physical exercise.

HM Partnerships is a social enterprise and any profits generated in its work are reinvested into heart disease and stroke prevention programme Heart of Mersey.

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