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North West Employers

SUPPORT. KNOWLEDGE. NETWORK.



It's time to take a fresh look at what we've got to offer

A short guide to who we are and what we do



Spend some time with North West Employers and you'll enjoy being part of a supportive and professional network of people who really understand your challenges.

You feel part of a team of friendly, knowledgeable people, focused on offering help, advice and guidance on best practice that can really make a difference locally.

As a member of our organisation, you become connected to all the authorities across the region. All it takes is a call or a couple of mouse clicks. North West Employers makes your resources go further and takes the strain out of sharing. It connects you to 47 other local authorities and joint boards.



Our world is changing

The challenges faced by local authorities and public service providers are continually and rapidly evolving and so is the world of HR policy and people practice.

Reshaping and rethinking the workforce to meet the current challenges of reduced funding requires brave, innovative leadership and well-informed creative approaches.

Where do North West Employers fit in?

North West Employers exists to help organisations deliver public services *with* and *for* local people that reflect their priorities. We believe that a highly motivated, productive workforce, as well as skilled and supported councillors, are key to making this happen.

North West Employers provides a network of support, advice and consultancy services for all kinds of people matters, from human resources policy and practice, through leadership and management development, to organisational design and performance.

As a people business, characterised by ideas, energy and commitment, we're always looking for ways to improve the services we offer. It is for these reasons that we embarked on a programme to refresh and reshape our own organisation and our services, in line with our customers' evolving needs.

We felt that the best way to connect with our customers' requirements, issues and the pressures they face was simply to ask them.

We've gathered feedback from all of our key stakeholders, inside and outside our organisation. Now we're busy harnessing the insights we've gained to make positive changes for our organisation, our customers and ultimately for the communities they serve.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive about the support that people received and it has given us a real sharpness for our new priorities. But we don't see this as a tick on our 'To Do' list, completed once and allowing us to move on to other things. For us, this is the start of how we do business now, and for the future. We know that the speed of change means we need to stay close to you and continue to make sure that what we offer makes total sense.

Here's what we did to get the first hand perspective that will move our organisation forward:

- Focus groups with key stakeholder groups from our customers
- Focus groups within our organisation
- Up close and personal conversations with our HR colleagues
- Indepth interviews with councillors, chief executives and senior decision makers
- On-line surveys
- Board level consultation
- Ideas and visioning workshops



Our journey

Where we started

North West Employers has been around for a long time, so we are not a quango or new organisation. Our journey began almost 100 years ago when representatives from 22 boroughs in Lancashire and Cheshire joined together to deal with applications for wage increases for their workers. This set a precedent for collaborative working on people matters that laid the foundations for the organisation we are today.

Our role was formalised years later when we officially became an 'Employers' Organisation', certified as part of the 1974 Trade Union and Labour Relations Act. From that point on, we have grown and evolved our services in line with the needs of our member authorities and other public service providers in the region.

Today, we continue to work with the regional trade unions in the public sector to provide conciliation and dispute resolution processes throughout the North West. We also work together as partners to model joint working on developing skills in the workplace.

We pride ourselves on being a membership organisation – owned by the local authorities in the North West, working for the authorities in the North West.

Through North West Employers, our members are able to connect with 47 authorities throughout the North West and over 450 authorities, if you count our contacts in other regions!

Workforce issues have always been at the core of North West Employers' work and the current climate makes it imperative that we reflect the areas of most concern to employers. As part of our refresh and reshape process, we have sharpened our priorities for 2010-12. They are:

- **Workforce and Employment**
- **Learning and Sharing Skills**
- **Networking and Sharing Practice**



"North West Employers has always been a member led organisation and we recognise that we need to work on the issues that are most important for authorities.

I am delighted that we continue to support officers and councillors in a joint effort to support communities and engage citizens"

Councillor Don Lawrenson
Chair - North West Employers

Looking to our future

Here at North West Employers, it's our mission to help organisations deliver public services *with* and *for* local people that reflect their priorities.

We believe that a highly motivated, productive workforce, as well as skilled and supported councillors, are key to making this happen.



"The comprehensive consultation exercise we've just completed marks the beginning of a new era for the way we work. As we refresh and reshape our service offer and our communications, we will strive to deliver the kind of flexibility and creativity that will keep us at the forefront of HR policy and practice. We hope to lead by example and play a key role in setting the people agenda within UK public service provision.

As an organisation in the midst of a transition, we're embracing positive change, because we know that in an evolving social, political and economic climate, our customers are doing the same. We've created this brochure to provide clarity around the service our customers can expect and to celebrate the progress and achievements so far.

As we look ahead, I have absolute confidence that our team will continue in their commitment to deliver to you the very best support and focus on where we add value for the organisations we serve."

Liz McQue – Chief Executive

What does North West Employers stand for?

We want the experience of engaging and working with North West Employers to be a positive one. As part of our consultation we asked our stakeholders how it feels to be part of our network.

We were overwhelmed with the strength of positive feedback we received. Our customers, partners and the people who work for us all shared the view that North West Employers is a special type of organisation, delivering a service that can be summarised by a few key words and themes. They are:

Support

Within whatever capacity you join North West Employers – whether it's employee, customer, councillor or partner – you can expect to feel supported from day one. We exist to connect like-minded people to share experiences, stimulate debate and develop thinking. The result is a close community of colleagues who advise, guide, support, counsel and motivate each other.

Our consultation confirmed that being part of our group is an inspiring and reassuring experience. We aim to make sure it stays that way.

Knowledge

North West Employers has created a peer group of practitioners, each with their own skills, experiences and professional qualifications. Our peer networks and support spans HR leaders, organisational development, chief executive coaches and lead councillor network for adults and children's services.

Together we represent a formidable body of knowledge that would be incredibly hard to match! What that means is that our customers can access ideas, thinking and first hand experience on pretty much any professional topic they care to mention.





Network

North West Employers provides a forum for people to connect. It can be in the real world as part of a meeting, event or workshop. But we also make the most of today's technology, enabling our customers to connect via email, video conference or by joining one of our on-line forums.

The strength of our network comes from the relationships involved and the fact that we work hard to make our services as accessible as possible. We listen carefully to our customers, we aim to be responsive and we encourage dialogue wherever possible.

Underpinning all of the above, our feedback told us that North West Employers is an organisation whose strength comes through people. That's not just the people who work for us, but all of the customers and partners who come together to share ideas, collaborate on initiatives and work together across the public sector in the North West Region.

Together we make a friendly, professional and welcoming team. We're independent and simply united by a commitment to put people first.





Did you know...?

We are a membership organisation and currently represent 41 local authorities and six joint boards throughout the North West, as well as a range of other public sector organisations, including housing and the health economy. In fact our services are relevant to any organisation that is involved in public service provision and more and more organisations are joining us each year.

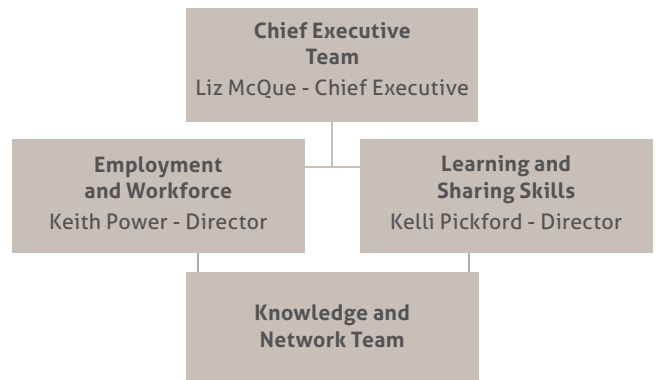
In return for annual fees, each of our member organisations gain access to a core of services across the full breadth of human resources practice. Plus we offer additional specialist support services that can be bought on a consultancy basis, as and when required.

As part of the refresh and reshape, it is our aim to present the services we deliver with improved clarity, so our customers can be absolutely confident in what they can expect and receive as part of their relationship with us.

For that reason, in the next few pages you'll see our services presented under three key areas. We have developed these priorities based on feedback from you on what you wanted us to concentrate on in the future.

- **Workforce and Employment**
- **Learning and Sharing Skills**
- **Networking and Sharing Practice**

As part of our refresh and reshape programme we also looked at our organisational structure. We've slimmed down and taken out duplication to align our resources with these priorities. Our streamlined team now looks like this:



Note: local authorities and joint boards are eligible to join as full voting members, but other public sector organisations are welcomed as associate members. Full details of the costs involved and the full range of available services can be found on our website: www.nwemployers.org.uk

We are aligning our focus with your needs

As part of the refresh and reshape process, we asked you what were your key challenges over the next few years. Our new priorities have been developed to help you respond in these areas.

Your challenges

Redesigning and downsizing organisations

Maintaining and improving front line public services whilst reducing expenditure

Developing a highly skilled, flexible and productive workforce

Being an exemplary employer, retaining the best talent and being a representative of local communities

Developing organisational cultures where people thrive and improve their contribution

Making a leadership commitment to working collaboratively, against the backdrop of reduced funding

Achieving a more productive workforce, recognised as efficient with appropriate employee costs

Supporting councillors in their community leadership roles

Achieving better outcomes and value for money where councillors champion and citizens are engaged

We understand that this approach will need to be on-going and flexible if we are to continue to directly connect with, and respond to, all of our customers' needs as our environment continues to evolve at a rapid pace.

We've used these insights to shape the workplans that will guide our activities over the next couple of years. They will also allow us to achieve clear measurement of our progress.



North West Employers' Core Priorities for 2010-12

Our three core priorities have emerged from our consultation about what's important to you and this has helped us understand how we can offer support.

We never lose sight of the fact that as an Employers' Organisation our focus will always be on people.

We share your belief that a highly motivated, productive workforce, as well as skilled and supported councillors, are key to your success. As a result, our offer of support to you covers three areas:

- **Workforce and Employment**
- **Learning and Sharing Skills**
- **Networking and Sharing Practice**

Workforce and Employment

Our employment service provides a dedicated HR Advice Line, which responds to specialised employment enquiries such as redundancy, discipline and maternity rights. This advisory service combines employment law with detailed knowledge of local government terms and conditions and practices.

In partnership with the regional trade unions, we provide a conciliation service for local authorities and trade union branches to help resolve potential disputes.

North West Employers has a vital role in the consultation process on nationally negotiated issues such as pay, pensions and conditions for local government services staff. We co-ordinate the views of local authorities who are members of North West Employers, and feedback collectively to represent the voice of the North West.

North West Employers provides support to leaders and senior members in their roles as employers, acting as an independent adviser to chief executives' appraisal panels. Access to independent confidential advice is also available to leaders of member organisations.

Our workforce service provides support on the implementation of pay and grading reviews and is supported by a full range of services and job evaluation training to operate nationally recognised schemes, grading appeals and designing pay and total rewards approaches.

North West Employers works directly with councils towards meeting their Skills Pledge objectives and increasing apprentice opportunities. An on-line self-assessment tool is available, only to member authorities, to help plan progress and achieve recognition for this through the North West Skills Award.



Areas of focus for 2010

Re-organisation and flexibility

Working in partnership with the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) we are offering workshops for heads of HR. Workshops will involve sharing IES's research on 'coping with cut backs' and learning from the private sector by focussing on alternatives to redundancy. As part of the NWIEP funded activity, we are also able to offer free, facilitated action learning sets for groups of chief executives and heads of HR to enable them to support and critically challenge each other's restructuring plans.

Support for staff at risk of redundancy

All authorities will be doing their best to avoid redundancies, but where this is unavoidable, they will want to do what they can to support staff that may become at risk. Rather than each authority developing its own support and skills training packages, we will be developing a shared resource so that authorities can get a better deal or use the sector's own resources through combining provision.

Redundancy pay and selection criteria

Many authorities are looking at their redundancy pay and procedures. In response, we are providing workshops on the key issues with some comparative data from across the whole region.

Reducing absence costs and improving health

The potential saving for councils from reducing absence levels is enormous and the savings to the total public sector from improving the health of our workforce is even greater. Our trend data over the last ten years tells us that specific interventions result in reductions in absence for a year or two, but often the reductions don't last. We will be working with health partners this year to undertake pilot projects testing out sustainable approaches to improving health and thus reducing absence costs.

Improving redeployment opportunities

The development of on-line recruitment portals at individual authority, sub-regional and regional levels, provides the potential to target retraining, redeployment and vacancy information across organisations. Through NWIEP investment we will be establishing a North West Jobs Portal to connect existing portals. This new link could increase the sector's capacity to manage the impact of job reductions and assist staff flows to employment, secondment and retraining opportunities.

Support on Chief Officers' pay reviews

Working with colleagues at Local Government Employers (LGE) we are able to provide support to authorities on the new national senior management salary review scheme. The new scheme provides a cost effective option for authorities and North West Employers will be working with authorities to increase their internal capacity through providing training in the use of the scheme.





Learning and Sharing Skills

Councillor development service

We provide comprehensive support to help authorities develop their approach and share practice on councillor development. Our flagship 'North West Member Development Charter' provides a clear approach to providing councillors with the right support. All the authorities in the North West are signed up to the principles in the Charter, with support and assessment provided to members free of charge. The Charter also provides a framework to help authorities show where the development they have offered councillors has had a real impact in communities.

The Modern Councillor Programme

Connecting with the Communities Project and direct support for members using e-learning facilities are further areas of development support available. We recognise the demands on councillors and provide networking opportunities relevant to their leadership, portfolio, scrutiny and neighbourhood roles.

Developing and sharing skills

As part of our commitment, we have invested significant resources in developing a wide range of programmes for chief executives, senior managers and the HR/OD community. Our 'Return on Investment' model has provided real benefits and efficiency savings for authorities. Working with NWIEP we have delivered coaching, mentoring and action learning facilitation, equality and diversity programmes and established regional skills 'pools'.

Supporting Leaders

North West Employers and NWIEP provide a tailored range of development support for leaders and chief executives including access to coaching and mentoring. In addition, we provide support for leadership and development, as well as specific support and development opportunities for HR leaders, including access to free action learning sets, and subsidised places on an MA in Strategic HR.

Note: Access to any of these free services is only available to member authorities.

Working across the public sector

We are committed to working across the public sector and provide opportunities for leaders to work and learn together, offering tailored coaching and mentoring programmes with the health sector to support cross-sector leadership. Through working with health partners, North West Employers' members can offer access to cross-sector mentoring opportunities at no cost to their organisations.



Areas of Focus for 2010

Leading performance improvement

Developing coaching approaches and cultures that encourage individuals to improve their contribution will be key to increasing productivity and releasing the discretionary element of an individual's performance. Our contribution will be to provide high quality development and build the capacity and confidence of authorities to improve and innovate. Members of North West Employers will have access to our coaching matching services and supervision, which will increase the skills in authorities and reduce reliance on external consultants.

As part of our commitment to working across the public sector we are continuing to develop opportunities to work and learn together, which also produces efficiency savings - for example extending access to the joint Mentoring Scheme with health partners.



Regional action learning facilitators

Facilitators are already providing support within their own organisations and across the region. We will be extending this team to be able to offer support to more groups, working on key issues for member authorities.

Organisational culture

Working with a range of leading practitioners, we will be sharing good practice and gathering case studies to share with authorities. Moving forward, our focus will be on: learning to live with ambiguity, developing resilient organisations and engaging staff through shared values. This work will be shared through our website and workshops.





Networking and Sharing Practice

Our Networking and Sharing Practice Service is a key part of our new priorities and organisational structure. This is the core of *how* we do things at North West Employers. We share knowledge and practice, provide benchmarking data and exploit our connector role to provide real networking opportunities in our key areas of activity.

The implementation of revised pay and grading structures at most authorities, and the maintenance of appropriate pay and reward strategies, continues to require extensive data support. The pay benchmarking service has access to data from all local authorities in the region and provides comparative data from local authorities across England and private sector pay.

Note: This is only available to members of North West Employers.

Member authorities also benefit from regular newsletters, updates and guidance notes e.g. North West Employers news, redundancy and total rewards mapping.

Our networking service supports and co-ordinates a range of successful networks to help lead officers in maintaining up to date knowledge, sharing development effort and implementing good practice:

- Learning and Development Network
- Schools' HR Network
- Workforce Lead Officers for Children's Services and Adult Social Care Network
- Job Evaluation User Group Network
- Regional and Sub-Regional Skills Networks

Our networking approach is underpinned by our own experience and deep understanding of how people learn. We use different approaches such as action learning and appreciative inquiry to produce powerful results and build trust.

To complement the networks for officers we have a range of support for councillors in their different roles:

- Lead Councillor for Children's Services Network
- Lead Member for Adult Social Care Network
- Neighborhood Champions' Network
- Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Network
- Councillor Development Network

Areas of Focus for 2010

Pay and rewards benchmarking service

Our focus will be on managing reductions and shaping your future workforce by harnessing the research undertaken. We provide independent data to support authorities in determining pay and rewards.

Note: All member authorities in the region contribute to North West Employers' pay benchmarking service and have free access to the data. We cover a range of jobs including chief executives and chief officers.

Developing knowledge and networking capacity

Funded by NWIEP we will be offering further opportunities to develop action learning facilitators to cascade the methodology and reduce authorities' reliance on external consultants.

Exploiting new technology

We will be exploring innovative approaches and using new technology to enhance our networking and knowledge service. Pilot projects will include developing skills, producing webinars and using Skype and video conferencing to provide greater access to networks.

Summary

North West Employers gives me access to a wealth of knowledge, expertise and ideas that are directly relevant to my working practice.

As a member I feel supported and valued. As well as drawing on the services I need, North West Employers gives me the opportunity to share my own learning to benefit others. It's a network that really works.



These are challenging times for public service providers. Our aim is to ensure that we deliver appropriate, useful and valuable support to our members, now and for the future.

Our promise:

- We will continue to provide a high quality service that puts people at the heart of all we do
- We will demonstrate care for our customers by listening intently to their needs and by responding with appropriate services and support
- We will continue to strive for excellence in delivery and in communication in order that our customers can easily access both knowledge and support from our network
- We will continue to develop and disseminate best practice in all people matters



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