

# SIGOMA

*The Special Interest Group  
of Municipal Authorities (Outside London)  
Within The LGA*

## **‘Slivers of Time Working’ a labour market project being rolled out to urban areas**

### MEMBER BRIEFINGS

- Slivers-of-Time is a Government funded project designed to help anyone with some spare time to offer to local employers like local authorities, healthcare providers and housing associations as well as private companies like caterers and retailers.
- Using the latest Internet-based technology, the project creates a ‘marketplace’ so that individuals can ‘sell’ periods of work as small as 1 hour to employers, who in turn need staff, for example, at short notice or for a short period of time.
- It is aimed at people who have other time commitments and are unable to work regular hours, such as carers or people on benefits, and can provide an opportunity for individuals to gain experience and confidence in the workplace.
- After extensive piloting in the London Borough of Newham, Slivers of Time is now available across the country to any local authority. As such, the Slivers of Time project could complement the work of many SIGOMA local authorities in tackling worklessness and enabling them to create costs savings.
- Slivers of Time has still to be applied in towns and cities outside London, and so SIGOMA is keen to see local authorities in our areas pilot the project in their area to ensure that it meets the needs of labour markets in SIGOMA areas.
- The DCLG is funding Slivers-of-Time until 2008, so local authorities will not face set up costs or charges.

### **BACKGROUND**

The problems of worklessness and benefit reliance are well-established priorities for both the Government and many local authorities in urban areas. At the beginning of 2005, the Office of Deputy Prime Minister funded a project designed to create a new way of working for people having problems entering the labour market. Slivers-of-Time is for anyone with spare hours to sell to local employers, enabling periods of work as small as 1 hour to be filled and making them routine, enticing and uniquely cost effective.

A pilot project was launched in December 2005 in Newham and now has over 300 local individuals actively selling their time and earning wages through the project. A further 400 people are waiting to join after word of mouth spread through local Jobcentres. Employers in the pilot so far include Newham Council (various departments), London Borough of Tower Hamlets, East Thames Group, Pinnacle Housing, Centre for Innovation and Partnerships and British Waterways.

***SIGOMA ..... a voice for urban areas***

## WHAT IS THE SLIVERS-OF-TIME PROJECT?

- Slivers of Time creates a new marketplace to allow people to sell their spare hours around other commitments. Buyers are local employers who would benefit from a pool of sporadic top-up workers. Local authorities particularly, but also caterers, retailers, housing associations, healthcare providers, logistics companies and contact centres have been involved.
- A true Slivers-of-Time marketplace can only work if based on the web. Otherwise the overheads, and risks of transaction failure, are crippling. These marketplaces provide a compelling reason for individuals to make use of public Internet access: “to earn money now”.
- Anyone who wants to sell their spare time: (a) registers themselves online (b) goes along to a recruitment agency offering their version of the system to be vetted (c) tells the marketplace when they are available day to day, hour by hour and when they undertake to be contactable then provides the geography and the terms under which they will work. Additionally, they can view demand for their services in their locality at any time.
- Any employer who has been accepted by a recruitment agency can then: (a) input details of their requirements (b) immediately see a list of eligible, available, contactable workers willing to fulfil those requirements.
- Recruitment agencies (public or private sector) are pivotal in the market. Each has their own marketplace for “spare hours”. Once this is set up, by Slivers-of-Time Ltd, the agency is able to: (a) approve individuals who want to sell their Slivers-of-Time, allowing them into the market once they have proved certain criteria for example a CRB check (b) set up organisations that want to buy with password controlled access to the market (c) “act as” any buyer or seller they have set up, for example making a purchase on behalf of an LA.
- Slivers-of-Time Ltd is funded by a small percentage mark-up built into each transaction. **This charge has been prepaid by the DCLG for Local Authorities until end of June 2008 so it will councils will not face any set up charges and** the service is free to LA’s until that point. After this the charge will be around 2.5% of each hour’s charge.

## WHO CAN BENEFIT?

- Types of work being purchased in the Newham pilot marketplace include: leafleting, market research, environmental clear ups, stewarding at events, data entry, office admin and labouring.
- Many different employers could benefit, particularly if the work they are offering is relatively low skilled or can be taught in a day or so of training. **Local Authorities** with funds to improve their local environment could dramatically benefit by using that spend to spread work throughout their area. For example:
  - a project of £100,000 for environmental improvement could create 4 jobs for a year. Alternately it could allow 144 local people 4 hours work a week for 6 months. Or 285 individuals to be assured of 2 hours work a week at times that suit them. In all cases people can begin building a track record of reliability and work experience that makes them able to apply for other jobs.
- Slivers-of-Time can be set up by a group of Local Authorities or one authority can launch a market for their residents which other LA’s can then start to use, as Tower Hamlets has started buying through Newham’s market.
- Case studies from the pilot shows how the new service can: (a) cuts costs in the delivery of services and (b) support economic regeneration by spreading work and training around in ways not otherwise viable to people, like benefit claimants, who would struggle to access other work.

## WHAT'S THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SLIVERS-OF-TIME WORKING?

- The economic consultancy group Accenture has scoped the potential for the Slivers of Time model. They calculate that 13.7m people in the UK need this way of working at some time each year. Many of these people are on benefits because there is little chance of working this flexibly outside the informal economy at present. 22% of employers have a need for top-up workers in this way.
- Further research by Middlesex University shows that, when target groups have the Slivers-of-Time marketplace explained to them, 68% say they already want to try working this way.
- A report by Oxford Economic Forecasters shows that with only a 5% take up among target groups, the new marketplaces could quickly save government £400m+ a year.
- The project managers are working at ministerial level with DWP, cabinet office and Treasury on a potential national announcement of these markets. In early June the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit organized its second seminar focusing on Slivers-of-Time Working.

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AHEAD?

Following the pilot in Newham, Slivers of Time is now being rolled out across the whole country and the project managers are keen to see how it can be applied in urban areas outside London. However, there are a number of issues they face in taking this work forward, including:

- The entrenched status quo - innovation is never easy. Most people want to be followers into new ways of doing things, not leaders. Assumptions about how contingent labour works and how it is booked are regular barriers that this programme encounters.
- Misconceptions – especially about the ability of benefits claimants to earn on top of their benefits. For example, IB claimants can work 16 hours a week, anyone on Income Support can earn £20 a week and lone parents on JSA can earn the same amount. Yet 78% of claimants are not aware of this.
- Assumptions that “the Internet is not for me” - the ability to work Slivers-of-Time provides a powerful reason to start accessing the web, but it can take time to persuade some of the people who most need of this way of working to log in to a computer for the first time.

## CONCLUSIONS

- The Slivers-of-Time project represents an opportunity for local authorities in urban areas to try out a new approach that could complement and strengthen their existing labour market or regeneration strategies.
- There are no set up costs and the system is free to use for Local Authorities until July 2008. Support and training are provided free of charge.
- The only requirement is to identify enough work to deliver through Slivers-of-Time. This will spread work around to people who need to access their local labour market.
- However, the project needs to be carefully applied in new areas to ensure that it works to strengthen the local labour market and benefit target groups such as benefit claimants.
- SIGOMA members would be in a good position to take advantage of the project and build upon the experience gained in East London marketplace to make sure that this new initiative benefits all urban areas.

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