

ACTION FOR WILTSHIRE



Wiltshire Assembly update bulletin – July 2009

Background to Action for Wiltshire

A report was produced by George Bright for the Wiltshire Assembly to research the affects of the recession in Wiltshire. A number of actions were proposed in the report and the 'Action for Wiltshire' programme is taking this forward.

Progress so far

The Wiltshire Public Service Board (WPSB) and the Wiltshire Coordinating Group (WCG), along with other key partners and organisations, have been consulted on the action plan in the report and have been tasked to consider any extra action that needs to be taken to effectively tackle the recession.



- A **steering group** has been established to ensure effective action is being taken. It includes reps from the voluntary sector, the business sector and the council, as well as John Wraw as Chair of the Assembly. The Group meets on a regular basis to decide the next top priorities and ensure that the actions in the report are being taken forward.

Implementation Executive decisions

The Implementation Executive of Wiltshire Council met on the 13th of May and decided that a sum of £1m from the Performance Reward Grant recently awarded to the Council should be set aside to support some initiatives to combat the recession over the next 18 months.

a. **Business Support Service**

£50,000 has been set aside to fund a free emergency business support service, to advise and support local businesses in times of crisis.

Small businesses in Wiltshire with less than 50 employees who need immediate support through a business crisis can telephone for free professional advice. For more information about the business in crisis helpline project please contact Debby Skellern on 01225 718398 or email Debby.Skellern@wiltshire.gov.uk.

Wiltshire business in crisis helpline - 01225 718222

b. Citizens' Advice Bureau

A total of £288,000 is to be allocated by the programme board to the Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau in order to enable the large increase in demand on the service to be met.

c. Increased capacity to manage apprenticeship opportunities

Research is underway to look at what provision is in place for young people in Wiltshire. A project team is being formed to bring together opportunities to volunteer, work experience, apprenticeship and training opportunities to provide young people with a range of options for their future. This will draw on links with partners in the voluntary sector, the local Chambers of Commerce, bidding for and making best use of funding from the European Social Fund, and it will draw on existing schemes.

Next top priorities

1. To provide advice and support the people and business on energy efficiency and reducing their energy bills

The steering group will consider how it would be best to provide this support at their next meeting.

2. Research effective action to support rural businesses

A survey of Wiltshire's rural economy will be happening over the coming weeks to see what action can be best taken to support rural businesses.

3. Community finance initiatives will be developed, particularly taking forward the development of a Wiltshire wide Credit Union

The steering group will consider how best to support the development of a strong, Wiltshire wide credit union at their next meeting.

4. Taking action to support retail businesses

Research is underway to look at what action could be taken to best support retailers in Wiltshire.

What else has been happening?

Examples of additional actions that are being taken forward by the Council or its partners that are not in the original 'menu of actions,' include:

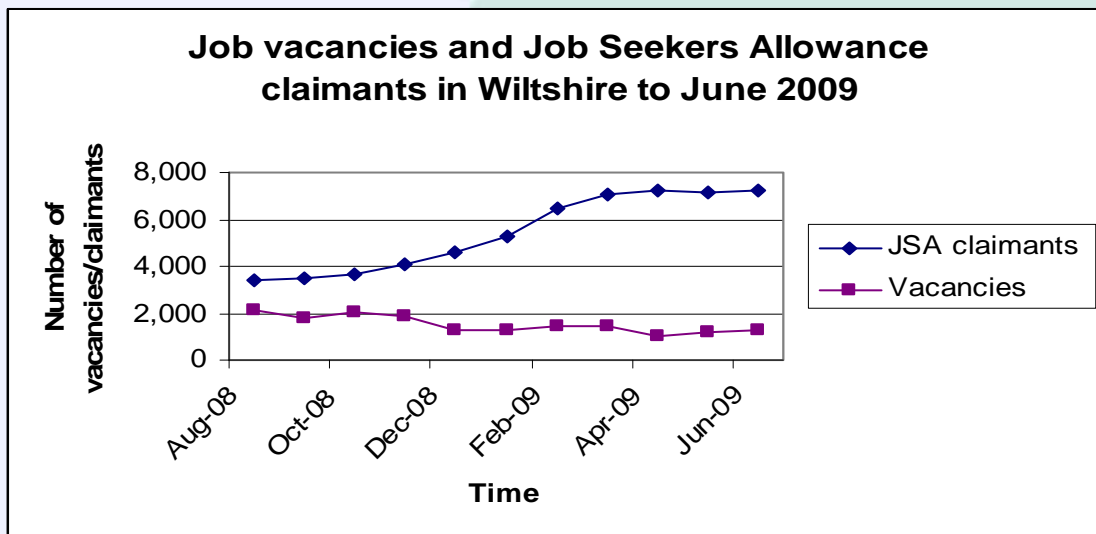
- European Social Fund - £300,000 has been awarded in partnership with Swindon Borough Council, to provide advice and training through the colleges for people who have been made redundant or are at risk of redundancy;
- Mortgage rescue scheme – avoiding homelessness by preventing repossession. The Council is working with a number of partners and the first cases under this scheme have been taken forward;
- Court desk advice – the Council is using funding from Government to support an advice desk at the County Courts to help people who turn up at court to face possession proceedings but have no legal representation.

‘But isn’t the recession over in Wiltshire?’ ‘Why do we still need to take action?’

Over the past few weeks the national media have been hinting at a recovery in the national economy, but at the same time raising concern in case there is a ‘W’ shaped downturn where the economy will fall into recession again.

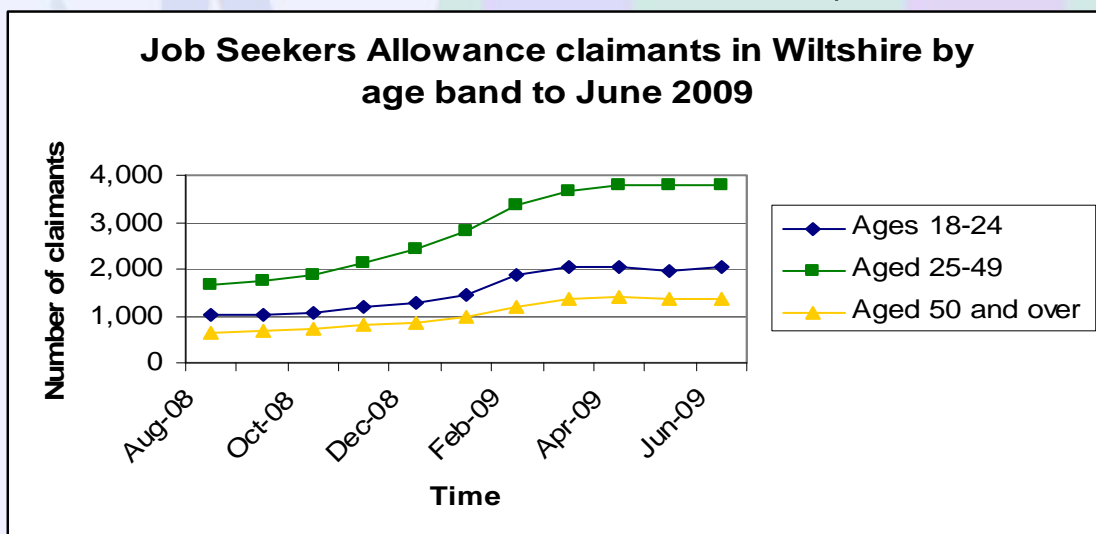
But what is important to look at here is the affects of the recession in Wiltshire and the impact it is having on our people, communities and businesses.

As the graphs below show, Wiltshire is still being heavily affected by the number of people who are out of work.



Source: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> - Official labour market statistics from the Office of National Statistics

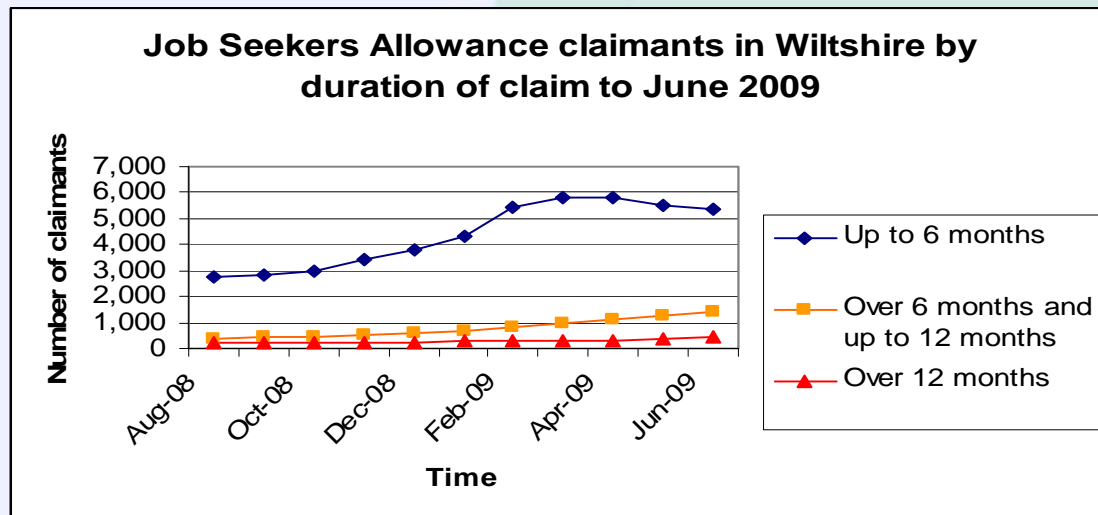
As this graph shows, although the number of job vacancies across Wiltshire has remained relatively stable, the number of people in the county claiming Job Seekers Allowance has doubled over the past 12 months.



Source: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> - Official labour market statistics from the Office of National Statistics

Most people claiming Job Seekers Allowance are aged 25-49 years, but the number of people of all ages claiming JSA has doubled in the past 12 months.

In September, the number of people aged 18-24 who are claiming Job Seekers Allowance are likely to increase – The ‘potential’ programme as outlined above will look to support those young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) in as many ways as possible.



Source: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> - Official labour market statistics from the Office of National Statistics

As shown by the graph above, Wiltshire has yet to see a significant increase in the numbers of people who are unemployed for more than 12 months. However since October 2008 there has been a significant increase in the number of people who have been unemployed for up to 6 months.

So, the effects of the recession in Wiltshire are certainly not over

Even when the upturn begins it will take a number of months for such a large increase in unemployment to be reabsorbed in to the economy. Particular features in Wiltshire include the following:

- Many employers appear to have reacted quickly to the downturn and have taken action to reduce their staffing levels.
- The County has 31% of its working population employed in the public sector, which includes not just local authorities but also the Army, Royal Air Force, health service, education and similar services. This is a reasonably resilient employment sector at present, although it will come under pressure at a later stage in the economic cycle.
- Wiltshire’s smaller dependence on large employers provides less vulnerability to major shutdown decisions with substantial loss of jobs. Many of the larger employers are amongst those who have acted quickly and hopefully have managed the impact on their business already.

It remains very important that all agencies, partnerships and organisations take whatever action they can to mitigate the effects of the recession for the people, businesses and communities across the county. If we work together to support Wiltshire people, communities and business during the downturn and look at how we can be more sustainable in the future, we will be better able to move towards the recovery as it arrives.

What can you do?

- **Can your organisation provide support or resources for any of the actions being taken forward but you are not already involved?**
- **Do you have data or information that can help us track the affects of the recession across the county?**
- **Are there any actions not identified in the ‘menu’ that you think need to be taken forward?**

Please get in touch and let us know!

What next?

The steering group will continue to meet on a regular basis and members of the Wiltshire Assembly will receive regular reports on the progress of the actions to enable all partners to support the people, communities and businesses of Wiltshire wherever possible.

Who to Contact

If you would like further information about the Action for Wiltshire programme or if you have any questions or comments please email ActionforWiltshirePMO@wiltshire.gov.uk or call Rachel Goff on 01225 713931.