



## PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

### INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ESTATES AND LOCAL ECONOMY

### TOPIC – ONE YEAR EXTENSION OF EMPLOYMENT MENTORING CONTRACT

### PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

### Contact Officers:

**Case Officer:** Eloise Appleby, Assistant Director (Economy & Communities), tel 01962 848 181, email: eappleby@winchester.gov.uk

**Democratic Services Officer:** Nancy Graham, Senior Democratic Services Officer, tel 01962 848 235, email: ngraham@winchester.gov.uk

### SUMMARY

- Based on the recommendations of an Informal Scrutiny Group on the theme of Young People and Employment in 2011/12, Members approved the commissioning of a mentoring service to support those looking for work in the Winchester District ([CAB2556](#), 12 February 2014 – Commission for a Jobseeker Mentoring Service, refers).
- A competitive procurement process led to the appointment of experienced national charity Sova to operate the service on behalf of the Council.
- Funding for an initial period of two years was identified from revenue budgets held by Revenues & Benefits, Housing and Economic Prosperity Commissioning.
- A steering group consisting of local organisations working directly with jobseekers was formed at the outset of the contract, bringing together Job Centre Plus, Trinity Winchester, Citizens Advice Winchester District, the Council's Housing Service and other stakeholders able to guide the development of the service and make referrals from their own client base.
- From the 'launch' of the service with the first cohort of volunteer mentors in March 2015, it has been fully subscribed. The Council's Partnership Manager at the Department of Work and Pensions has commented publicly on the significance of the service in meeting local need.

- The contract started on 1 October 2014, and is run by a single project manager who has a base at the City Offices within the Economy & Arts Team.
- Since this time, 21 volunteer mentors have been recruited. Each one goes through a rigorous selection procedure and is trained over an intensive three days.
- These volunteers have given over 350 hours of support to 37 people seeking employment opportunities. More volunteers are constantly being identified.
- Whilst the programme is designed to be a long term one, helping people gradually along a journey to become 'work ready' which can involve overcoming many personal challenges, 7 of the mentees have now secured employment.
- Given the positive response to the service by all those who come into contact with it, officers are proposing a one year extension to the current contract – funded by the Council up to £47,000 – to provide time to apply for grants to underpin longer contract, to be secured from an external body such as the Big Lottery.
- The cost of a one year extension, running from 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017, would be £47,000. The Council also makes in-kind contributions of office space, management time and IT equipment.
- The mentoring service directly supports the Community Strategy outcome of a prosperous economy, which is introduced as follows:  
*“This is the time to work in new ways both to encourage new business and entrepreneurship and to tackle worklessness and promote a low carbon economy, ensuring long term prosperity.”*

## **DECISION**

That

- i) A direction under Contract Procedure Rule 2.4a be made and , the Assistant Director (Economy and Communities) be authorised to enter into a contract for the delivery of the Employment Mentoring Service by Sova for a twelve month period from 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017, at a cost of £47,000;
- ii) the contract be funded as detailed in in the Resources section of this Report.

**REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

This Council is committed to supporting the local economy at every level, and Councillors have been very involved with the origin and delivery of the employment mentoring service. The service is well supported by external agencies, and has good potential to grow in scope as the volunteer team increases and gathers experience. As Welfare Reform continues to be rolled out, the Government is seeking to ensure benefits are always a less attractive option than work, and the kind of one-to-one assistance provided by mentors will play a critical role in helping the long term unemployed – including those with disabilities – to take up work.

The process of submitting funding bids to external bodies can be a long one with several stages, and officers believe this one year extension will help to avoid damaging uncertainty for the much respected Sova project manager, for her team of volunteers and for the growing circle of mentees that they are supporting.

No other alternative options have been considered, consequently, as continuity is felt to be important in maintaining the trust and confidence of the mentees.

**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

The cost of a one year extension to the employment mentoring contract is £47,000. It is proposed that this be met from the following sources:

<b>Source</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Department of Work and Pensions	£8,000	Ringfenced for purposes aligning with wider transition to Universal Credit  Already received, and subject to carry forward from 2015/16.
Department of Work and Pensions	£10,000	Ringfenced for purposes aligning with wider transition to Universal Credit  To be invoiced on monthly basis and received during 2016/17 as part of existing legal agreement with DWP.
Housing Services	£15,000	Underspend from 2015/16 – transferred to earmarked reserve pending approval of this Decision Notice

Economic Prosperity Commissioning Budget	£14,000	Underspend from 2015/16 – transferred to earmarked reserve pending approval of this Decision Notice
<b>Total</b>	<b>£47,000</b>	

Officers have also made an application to the DWP's Flexible Support Fund for a contribution to the one year cost. At present there is no indication as to when this might be determined, but if it is successful it is proposed that any surplus from the above be ring fenced for match funding for the proposed external funding bids to support the longer term extension of the service.

### **CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE DECISION**

Officers from the Economy & Arts Service have been in discussion with the Employment Mentoring Steering Group as an external agency closely involved in providing support for jobseekers. They have also consulted with internal colleagues from the Housing and Benefits Teams. All are supportive of the extension, and keen to see more mentors recruited to enable more hours of support to be provided across the District.

Officers have also confirmed that the extension will not cause the overall value of the contract to exceed European procurement thresholds.

### **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

In a District like Winchester where the majority of people are well off, well educated and well housed, it can be particularly isolating to be unemployed. The mentoring programme has been developed to provide tailored, one-to-one solutions for individuals for whom more mainstream services have not been successful. By discontinuing the employment mentoring service the Council risks:

- reputational damage as a Council that does not appear to care about the most vulnerable in the District;
- a long term financial burden of having to provide housing and other support for individuals unable to find work without assistance;
- social divisions within the community between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', potentially leading to frustration and unrest, which is not in the spirit of the 'Active Communities' outcome of the Council's Community Strategy.

### **FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE**

n/a

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED**

None.

**DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

n/a

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision: 21.07.16

Councillor STEVE MILLER – Portfolio Holder for Estates and Local Economy

**APPENDICES:**

None