



DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

PROPOSED INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMY AND ESTATES

TOPIC – REVISION OF ACCESS TO WORK AND APPRENTICE GRANT CRITERIA

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.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

If you wish to make representation on this proposed Decision please contact the relevant Portfolio Holder and the following Democratic Services Officer by 5.00pm on Thursday 6 October 2016.

Contact Officers:

Case Officer: Kate Cloud, Head of Economy and Arts, 01962 848 563, kcloud@winchester.gov.uk

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

SUMMARY

- In February 2016, Cabinet approved a recommendation to allocate £5,000 for support to job seekers in the form of Access to Work and Apprentice Grants (Proposed Grant Allocations for 2016/17, [CAB 2754](#) - 10 February 2016 refers). Take up for both schemes has been slow, with only one successful applicant on each scheme in the last financial year (2015/2016). Officers have considered comments from job seekers, apprentices, local employers, the Department of Work and Pensions and participants on the successful [Employment Mentoring Service](#) and are proposing a number of changes to the grant criteria to make the schemes more effective.

- The current criteria for the Access to Work Grants are available here: www.winchester.gov.uk/business/business-grants/access-work-job-seekers-grant/ and for Apprenticeship Grants are here: www.winchester.gov.uk/business/business-grants/apprenticeship-grants/
- The proposed amendments to the scheme are as follows:

Access to Work Grants

- At present the job seeker must have been offered a permanent job to qualify. Officers would like to amend the criteria in order for the grant to be able to fund basic qualifications, licences or transportation that could be an obstacle to accepting a post when offered. For example, a Security Industry Authority licence or Door Supervisor Training Course, which would enable a job seeker to take up work in a security firm, or membership of the [Wheels to Work](#) scheme which would enable someone to travel to work. Otherwise job seekers are trapped in a vicious circle of not having a job and therefore not being able to fund these items, but needing to have them in order to be offered a job.
- The revised criteria also propose a reduction of the amount of time the person must have been unemployed for, from at least six months to at least two months. Just as [Universal Credit](#) is designed so that people can move in and out of work and not lose all their benefits, the Council's scheme should not penalise those that may have had some temporary work during longer periods of unemployment.
- Officers also propose to open the scheme to participants on the [Employment Mentoring Service](#), regardless of how long they have been unemployed for. Applicants would still need to have been or currently be receiving Universal Credit, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance or Income Support. The revised criteria also extend the items the grant could be spent on, to include IT equipment and broadband facilities to assist those who have completed the Employment Mentoring Service IT training for their job searches.

Key Changes Proposed to Apprenticeship Grants

- The apprenticeship grant scheme allocates up to £1,000 to an apprentice for tools of the trade which will be owned by them. In some cases, transport costs to the workplace may be considered. Current criteria limit the grant amount for essential equipment to £200. Officers suggest this is to be increased to £500.
- Currently the applicant apprentice must be living in the Winchester District. However, employers in for example Bishop's Waltham and Wickham would naturally recruit from local communities which happen to be beyond the Winchester District boundary in Fareham Borough. This may be replicated around the border of the District. This is borne out by the Council's own apprenticeship programme with 50% of apprentices living outside of the District. Officers propose to extend the scope of the Apprenticeship Grants so that apprentices working within the Winchester District can benefit from the

scheme, but they will not necessarily have to live within the district as well. This would help local firms recruit more apprentices and those apprentices would in turn be making a contribution to the local economy. Only those who are earning less than the [living wage](#) would be eligible.

Both schemes align with the Council's Community Strategy outcome of economic prosperity, and the proposed changes seek to ensure best use of the Council's finances in support of the corporate 'efficient and effective' outcome.

PROPOSED DECISION

That the revised criteria for

- a) Access to Work Grants, and
- b) Apprentice Grants

be approved for immediate implementation, as set out at Appendix 1 and 2 to the Decision Notice respectively.

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

The amendments would enable the Access to Work Grants to help remove practical barriers which could prevent a job seeker in taking on a paid role. Officers and the Portfolio Holder considered and discounted the discontinuation of both the schemes as those that have benefited value it and are still in employment: the Council's approach to supporting job seekers has for some years taken the form of providing tailored, individual assistance rather than blanket solutions. The Portfolio Holder has recently approved ([Portfolio Holder Decision Notice 700](#) (21 July 2016) refers) a 'One Year Extension Of Employment Mentoring Contract' which this scheme complements.

Officers have also considered encouraging neighbouring local authorities to take up a similar scheme to benefit job seekers from outside of the District. These discussions are on-going but will require political decisions from other local authorities which are outside of this Council's control. In the meantime, local employers are struggling to appoint apprentices so officers propose a unilateral move by the City Council in the first instance.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

There are no implications for existing resources, other than to make better use of the allocation of £5,000 for these grants programmes.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE PROPOSED DECISION

Officers have consulted with Winchester Jobcentre Plus staff, local employers, job seekers and the Project Manager for the Employment Mentoring Service which is run by the national charity Sova.

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

Councillor Steve Miller – Portfolio Holder for Economy & Estates

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Winchester District Access to Work Grant Fund Guidance Notes
Appendix 2 - Apprentice Grant – Criteria and guidelines

Appendix One – PHD 717

Winchester City Council Winchester District Access to Work Grant Fund Guidance Notes

If you would like to speak to a member of the Economy and Arts team about your application please send contact details to businessgrants@winchester.gov.uk to book this chat.

Introduction

Winchester City Council is committed to helping job seekers to find work and has allocated funding to assist apprentices and job seekers.

What is it?

The job seekers' Access to Work Grant Scheme is a one-off grant award of up to £1,000. It is for the sole benefit of the job seeker, as set out in a successful application form and is designed to remove any practical barriers which might prevent the job seeker from taking on their role. The grant can be applied for at any time during the financial year using a short application form.

Who can apply?

Applicants must prove that they live in the Winchester District, and be able to prove a need for the grant which will not be met by other means. The application form can be downloaded here: www.winchester.gov.uk/business/business-grants/access-work-job-seekers-grant/

What are the timescales?

Applications will be subject to an assessment and scoring mechanism, then allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The application will be acknowledged on receipt, and will be assessed within a three week period. If the application is successful a grant agreement will be drawn up and signed by both parties within one further week. Therefore, a grant could be available to a successful applicant within four weeks of the application.

What can the grant be spent on?

The application form should clearly state what the grant would be spent on or contribute towards, and why it is needed. This should be on items required to allow job seekers to fulfil their role, which are not otherwise supplied by the employer. These are grouped into categories and may be split into any one of these or a combination, up to the grant limit of £1,000:

1. Transport costs to the workplace for the first month of employment (could include the Wheels To Work scheme)
2. Appropriate clothes for the workplace
3. Essential equipment (e.g. tools, personal protective equipment (PPE))
4. Anything else which is essential for returning to the workplace that is not usually provided by an employer

This is not an exhaustive list, and it is not expected that job seekers would seek a grant to pay for costs which their employer should legitimately be meeting. The grant can potentially be used for any cost for the employee of returning to work, which is not reasonably met by their wages, benefits, training provider, employer or other grants applied for. The Head of Economy and Arts at Winchester City Council will make the final decision over the eligibility of the application.

How will the grant be paid?

The grant will normally be paid by BACS unless a more appropriate method is agreed as part of

the grant assessment process. **It is extremely important that you do not spend prior to formal notification of grant approval.**

Key criteria

1. The applicant must provide evidence that they have been offered a permanent job, or that their lack of a training item (e.g. a Door Supervisor Training Course), a licence (e.g. Security Industry Authority licence), or affordable transportation (e.g. Wheels to Work) is preventing them being offered a job.
2. The applicant must have been unemployed for at least two months prior to being offered a job, and have been or are receiving Universal Credit, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, or Income Support.
3. A completed, signed application form must be submitted.
4. The application form should clearly set out what the grant will be used for, and why it is needed.
5. Supporting evidence such as a list of items provided (or not provided) by the employer, or other evidence as to why a grant is needed and the items cannot be funded elsewhere, should be submitted with the application form.
6. The job seeker must remain in employment for 13 weeks. If they leave before this they will have to pay the money back in instalments to Winchester City Council.
7. The grant recipient may be required to take part in general publicity regarding the scheme, such as photo calls, providing quotes for press releases and to assist in the evaluation of the scheme.
8. The grant may be split into several payments at milestones to be agreed as part of the grant assessment process.

Winchester City Council Audit Checks

Winchester City Council reserves the right to visit you at home or at work to check grant purchases have been made in accordance with the grant scheme criteria, application form and grant agreement.

Publication of information

Winchester City Council will publish an anonymised list of grants on its website (www.winchester.gov.uk).

Notes to applicants

Successful applicants will be required to sign a grant agreement, and will be subject to a review to ensure the grant has been spent in accordance with the application form and grant agreement. A successful applicant is responsible for their own tax liabilities as a result of receiving this grant.

Winchester City Council has allocated funds to support job seekers in this financial year and this may not be available in future years. Applications will only be approved where there is sufficient budget to fund the grant.

For help and advice in completing this form please contact:

Economy and Arts Support Officers (Carol Hussey and Zoe Sipsma)

Tel: 01962 848 196 or 01962 848 303

Email: businessgrants@winchester.gov.uk

Appendix Two – PHD 717 Winchester City Council Apprentice Grant – Criteria and guidelines

If you would like to speak to a member of the Economy and Arts team about your application please send contact details to businessgrants@winchester.gov.uk to book this chat.

What is it?

The apprenticeship grant scheme is a one-off grant award of up to £1,000. It is for the sole benefit of the apprentice and is designed to remove any practical barriers which might prevent the apprentice from taking on their role. The grant is given in small sums every three months, in the form of specific items the apprentice needs, or vouchers to purchase those items, and is subject to certain criteria set out below. The grant can be applied for at any time during the financial year using a short application form.

Who can apply?

Applicant apprentices must prove that they live or work in the Winchester District, and be able to prove a need for the grant which will not be met by other means. **Please note that once you have been awarded a grant from Winchester City Council you cannot apply again in subsequent years. Any transport costs will be paid for a maximum of 12 months.** Applicants must be earning less than the [living wage](#) in order to be eligible.

What are the timescales?

Applications can be made at any time during the year. They will be subject to an assessment and scoring mechanism, then allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The application will be acknowledged on receipt, and will be assessed within a three week period. If the application is successful, the applicant will be asked to provide further evidence such as proof of residency within Winchester District, and a grant agreement will be drawn up and signed by both parties within one further week. Therefore, a grant could be available to a successful applicant within four weeks of the application.

What can the grant be spent on?

The application form should clearly state what the grant would be spent on, and why it is needed. This should be on items required to allow the apprentice to fulfil their role, which are not otherwise supplied by the employer or training provider. These are grouped into the following categories:

1. Transport costs to the workplace or training location (maximum £1,000 grant)
2. Appropriate clothes for the workplace (maximum £200 grant)
3. Essential equipment e.g. tools. (maximum £500 grant)
4. Anything else which is essential for undertaking the apprenticeship which an employer would not normally pay for.

This is not an exhaustive list, and it is not expected that apprentices would seek for the grant to pay for costs which their employer should legitimately be meeting. The grant can potentially be used for any cost for the apprentice of taking on their apprenticeship, which is not reasonably met by their wages, benefits, training provider, employer or other grants applied for. The Head of Economy and Arts at Winchester City Council will make the final decision over the eligibility of the application. **It is extremely important that you do not spend prior to formal notification of grant approval.**

Key criteria

1. The applicant must be an apprentice or have the formal offer of an apprenticeship at the time of the application.
2. A completed, signed application form must be submitted.
3. The application form should clearly set out what the grant will be used for, and why it is needed.
4. Supporting evidence such as a list of items provided (or not provided) by the employer or training provider, or other evidence as to why a grant is needed and the items cannot be funded elsewhere, should be submitted with the application form. This will be verified with the training provider.
5. The grant recipient will be required to take part in general publicity regarding the scheme, such as photo calls, providing quotes for press releases and to assist in the evaluation of the scheme.
6. The grant may be split into several payments depending on the reasons given for the grant request.
7. The applicant should provide evidence that they are earning less than the living wage.

Notes to applicants

Successful applicants will be required to sign a grant agreement, and will be subject to a three month review to ensure the grant has been spent in accordance with the application form and grant agreement. A successful applicant is responsible for their own tax liabilities as a result of receiving this grant. The grant may be given in specific items required, vouchers or travel tickets, and is unlikely to be given in cash form.

Winchester City Council has allocated funds to support apprenticeships in this financial year and this may not be available in future years. Applications will only be approved where there is sufficient budget to fund the grant.

This fund does not replace or compete with the Government's incentive to employers or any other grant scheme.

More information about apprenticeships can be found at <http://apprenticeships.org.uk/>

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Winchester City Council reserves the right to visit you at home or at work to check grant purchases have been made in accordance with the grant scheme criteria, application form and grant agreement.

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