

**Proposed Decision to be taken by
the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care on or after
3 June 2016**

**Consultation on the Proposal to close Warwickshire
Employment Support Team (WEST)**

Recommendation

That the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care approves the commencement of a public consultation on the proposed closure of the service.

1 Background

- 1.1 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) has identified the need to make around £92million savings by 2018. This figure has arisen from reductions in the grants we receive from Government, pressures from inflation and additional pressures from our changing population. On 6 February 2014 WCC agreed a medium term financial plan covering the period 2014 – 2018. This medium term financial plan underpins the delivery of our One Organisational Plan.
- 1.2 The One Organisational Plan (OOP) requires savings of £280,000 from Warwickshire Employment Support Team (WEST). The proposal in the OOP is “based on exploring alternative delivery, funding or decommissioning the service”. Alternative funding has not been secured in part due to additional financial strains on public finances. In order to realise the savings, WEST service would need to decommission all council funded operation which would require the full closure of the service. If this decision were taken, attempts would be made to seek opportunities to secure some of the specialist skills held by WEST staff within other services.
- 1.3 Warwickshire Employment Support Team (WEST) is a countywide service for people with a learning disability, Autism or Asperger’s who want to find and sustain paid work. The specialist team help find people full and part-time employment by providing:
- expertise on disability employment and benefit issues;
 - personal profiling and job matching;
 - developing the skills people need for employment; and
 - on-going support to employees and employers.
- 1.4 WEST customers are considered to be undertaking ‘supported permitted work’ through the support of the service. ‘Supported permitted work’ is work where a person claiming certain benefits is supervised by the local authority or another specified support service which provides or finds work for people with disabilities. Supported permitted work has no restriction on the hours worked and can be for an unlimited period. Individuals cannot earn more than £115.50 a week after tax and national insurance deductions.

- 1.5 The proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment is a national measure which forms part of the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF 1E). In Warwickshire, performance has been positive with an increase year on year from 5.8% in 2012/13 to 11.1% in 2014/15, significantly above average. This has been achieved through a range of measures.
- 1.6 WCC has a statutory duty to provide information and advice about the availability of employment support for disabled adults under the Care Act 2014. There is also a duty to provide information and advice about provision for young people aged up to 25 in preparing for adulthood, including finding employment, under the Children and Families Act 2014. These duties do not require the Local Authority to provide the additional support provided by WEST.
- 1.7 The Care Act 2014 *does* require the Local Authority to meet specific individual needs where an adult has been assessed as having a need arising from/relating to a physical or mental impairment or illness, who is unable to achieve at least 2 outcomes (work/employment is listed as an outcome) and this is likely to impact significantly on their wellbeing. This would be considered as part of an assessment for Adult Social Care.
- 1.8 There are approximately 150 WEST customers at any one time supported by the 8 individual (6 FTE) employment support staff, including the manager.

2 Proposal for consultation

- 2.1 Consultation regarding the closure of the WEST service may yield a negative response as experienced by similar recent consultations. However all possible steps will be taken to try to ensure current and future service users receive support by other means.
- 2.2 Alternative avenues of support include:
 - Greater use of the Learning Disability Wellbeing Hubs for North Warwickshire, South Warwickshire and Rugby.
 - Signposting customers to support available through Job Centre Plus such as Disability Employment Advisors and Work Choice.
 - Signposting customers to support available from community and voluntary sector organisations such as Scope, Mencap and Remploy.
 - For customers living in an accommodation with a care setting; ensuring their commissioned support provider enables them to meet their employment outcomes.
- 2.3 The main stakeholders and the nature of the consultation proposed are:
 - Current WEST customers – facilitated face to face group meeting. Individual meetings may be held where customers would find a group situation challenging.
 - Future WEST customers and their families - facilitated face to face group meeting mainly through Special schools.
 - Employers of WEST customers – informed by letter and invited to submit views.

- Other related service providers (eg Learning Disability Hubs, Job Centre Plus, Groundworks) – contact by letter signposting to web based questionnaire.
- Community and voluntary sector organisations - contact by letter signposting to web based questionnaire.

We will vary the consultation methods to ensure equitable involvement and access and to allow diverse voices to be heard. We intend to use an independent organisation/consultant for face to face consultations with WEST customers.

- 2.4 The consultation will run for a period of 8 weeks and consultation results will be summarised in a future report. A preliminary equalities impact assessment has been undertaken to ensure equality of opportunity and participation for customers and their families and so that any negative impacts can be mitigated against. This will be updated in light of the consultation to take account of any further information received.

3 Conclusion

- 3.1 WEST must deliver a challenging savings requirement. The only option to achieve the full savings required is to close the service and support customers to source alternative avenues of support, the majority of which are not funded by the Local Authority. The consultation results will inform the next steps.
- 3.2 To advance this, it is recommended for the consultation for closure to be agreed. The indicative timetable is as follows:
 Consultation start: June 2016
 Consultation close: August 2016
 Report to Cabinet: October 2016
 Implementation of Cabinet decision: November 2016 onwards

4 Background papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

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