

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

**Consultation on the Future of the Warwickshire  
Employment Support Team Service (WEST)**

**Recommendation**

That the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care approves the commencement of a public consultation on the future of the Warwickshire Employment Support Team Service whilst continuing to explore alternative sources of funding.

**1 Background**

- 1.1 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) has identified the need to make around £92 million 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”. These have largely been unsuccessful to date, with the exception of a Big Lottery bid and the potential of European Social Funding as described below.
- 1.3 WEST has recently secured £40,000 per year for 3 years from the Big Lottery to work with new referrals from the younger age range of the WEST customer group.
- 1.3 An application for European Social Funding has been made that would require WCC to identify a minimum of £90,000 per year for 3 years to secure £70,000 per year of match funding for that period from the application. A decision as to whether WCC funding is available will need to be made before the final application is submitted, which is likely to be late August. There would be no budget to fund this through WEST and alternatives would have to be identified. The outcome of the recent referendum has resulted in some uncertainty regarding deadline dates. Other than the Big Lottery funding outlined above no other funding sources have been identified at this time.
- 1.4 In the event of the European funding application not progressing, and no other sources of funding secured, in order to realise the full savings, the WEST service as it stands would have no budget at its disposal other than the grant received through the Big Lottery. Instead, opportunities will need to be sought to secure some of the specialist skills held by WEST staff within other services.

- 1.5 The current 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 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. All WEST customers have allocated social workers within Adult Social Care.
- 1.10 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 future of the WEST service includes the possible closure of the service given the savings to be delivered. This 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 and by negotiating with other agencies to ensure they are able to meet their obligations to this group of adults.
- 2.2 In the event of a closure of the service the available alternative avenues of support for current service users will be informed by their individual needs. The potential support mechanisms currently identified for this group and for future service users includes, but is not exclusive to:

- Greater use of the Learning Disability Wellbeing Hubs for North Warwickshire, South Warwickshire and Rugby to access information and advice.
- 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 We have been unable to identify funding to enable the specialist service to continue in the current form and therefore as part of the consultation on the future of the service we would welcome realistic suggestions for alternative sources of funding or other alternative provision which could enhance or supplement the services referred to in paragraph 2.2, especially relating to job opportunities through employer development, skills development with customers in readiness for employment and seamless support to the customer.

2.4 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 and colleges.
- Employers of WEST customers and representative bodies e.g. Chamber of Trade – 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, special schools and colleges – 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 and potential 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 The consultation results will inform the next steps.

3.2 The indicative timetable for the consultation and any consequent decisions is :

Consultation start: 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016  
Consultation close: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016  
Report to Cabinet: December 2016  
Implementation of Cabinet decision: January 2017 onwards

#### 4 Background papers

None

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