

Cabinet (Resources) Panel

28 July 2021

Report title	Wolverhampton Youth Employment Hub	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Michael Hardacre Education, Skills and Work	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration	
Originating service	Regeneration	
Accountable employee	Julie Obada Tel Email	Head of Skills 01902 556456 julie.obada@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Regeneration Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	20 July 2021 22 July 2021

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work, in consultation with Director of Regeneration to:
 - a. Approve the Council entering into the required grant agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to set up the Youth Employment Hub at the Way in Wolverhampton to support young people aged 16-24 years old into employment and training opportunities.
 - b. Approve the creation of the necessary supplementary revenue budgets to deliver the project.
 - c. Approve the Council entering into any agreements necessary for it manage the Hub at the Way.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is asked to note:

1. That Black Country Impact (Wolverhampton) team will be required to support the Youth Hub with key workers and progression staff employed by the Council. Black Country Impact has received an extension and will continue to support unemployed young people until 2023.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To seek delegated approval to receive grants from DWP's Flexible Support Fund to set up, manage and deliver the Youth Hub at The Way in Wolverhampton.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 During the past year, the Coronavirus pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of young people, which has directly resulted in an increase in youth unemployment. Wolverhampton currently has the fourth highest percentage of unemployment in England at 14.7%% with a total of 3125 young people claiming benefits (May 2021). This represents an increase of 1275 claimants since before the Pandemic.
- 2.2 The regional Youth Employment Taskforce, chaired by Cllr Ian Brookfield, has led on the development of a co-ordinated youth offer to tackle youth unemployment across the region. A key feature for the city's Youth Offer is to enable young people to access support into skills and employment through a virtual Youth Employment Platform and through the development of physical Youth Hubs.
- 2.3 Youth Employment Hubs are a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) led initiative intended to support young people 16-24 year old, who are claiming benefits (Universal Credit and Job Seekers Allowance) and have significant barriers to employment. The aim is to provide a young person with a standalone, distinctive, individual package of support that will include mentoring to move them closer to or into work.
- 2.4 The first Youth Employment Hub in the region was officially launched at The Way in Wolverhampton on 8 October by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Ian Brookfield in partnership with the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Andy Street, and Helene Dearn, DWP West Midlands Group Director and a young person who had successfully been supported by Wolverhampton's Black Country Impact Youth Employment Initiative. A second Youth Employment Hub will be at the City of Wolverhampton College premises in Bilston.
- 2.5 Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Youth Employment Hub has not opened to the public and young people have not attended The Way. However, plans are in place to develop and deliver the Youth Offer at The Way as soon as local restrictions allow and working within public health guidance.
- 2.6 The Hub will provide a 'one stop shop' supported by DWP work coaches delivering DWP interventions from the Hub in conjunction with a project worker/manager at the venue. This will allow for work coaches to deliver support to customers removing many of the barriers that young people face when attending the formal setting of a job centre.
- 2.7 The Hub will offer a service to support young people referred from the three Job Centres in the city, Molineux House, Chapel Court and Bilston. These Job Centres cover geographical areas within West Midlands and some of South Staffordshire.

3.0 Approach for Wolverhampton

- 3.1 The Hub represents a physical location for the range of services available to young people in the city to progress them into employment outcomes and will service as a key route for young people to access funded initiatives such as Black Country Impact, Kickstart, apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience.
- 3.2 The Way Wolverhampton Youth Zone is based in School Street Wolverhampton and provides activities for young people in Wolverhampton. The centre will deliver the Youth Hub service during the daytime, whilst also accommodating its other activities.
- 3.3 The Way have embraced the development of the Youth Hub, rooms have been allocated for the reception and café facilities will be open, alongside their other activities which will be run at the same time. This will give a wide offer to young people who are attending the Youth Hub.

Resource

- 3.4 The Council proposes to employ a Co-ordinator and a Receptionist / data officer through funds available from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to provide dedicated resources to coordinate delivery and performance / claims reporting.
- 3.5 The Council will also locate staff employed through the Black Country Impact youth employment initiative within the Hub, to further strengthen the package of support to young people, to help achieve positive outcomes.
- 3.6 Discussions are underway with a range of youth employment, skills and wellbeing providers in the city who will be encouraged to use the facilities at the Hub to promote and engage with young people.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 **Option One** would be to make no change to the existing arrangements in the city and to continue to provide support to young people through the different offers available from different providers in the city. This new arrangement would ensure that providers are brought together to provide the best possible support to young people in the city through a co-ordinated approach.
- 4.2 **Option Two** would be to partially implement the Youth Hubs offer in the city with City of Wolverhampton College as the lead utilising their location in Bilston as the main location. This would provide a service in the South East of the city particularly from those young people from the Bilston area but would not accommodate for the wider youth unemployment situation across the city.
- 4.3 **Option Three** would be to set up the main Youth Hub in the city at The Way in the city centre led by The Council's Skills and Enterprise Team in partnership with DWP and The Way Management Team. The second Youth Hub will be led by the City of Wolverhampton College in Bilston.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 The Youth Hub located at The Way in Wolverhampton will perform a vital role within the Relighting Our City strategy priority Generate More Jobs and Learning Opportunities to support young people in their pathway into sustainable employment.
- 5.2 The Youth Hub will provide a centrally located recognisable venue for unemployed young people to access during the daytime.
- 5.3 The Youth Hub will be led and managed by the Council in partnership with DWP and The Way Wolverhampton ensuring that there is a clear referral route for young people who are claiming Universal Credit and Job Seekers Allowance to access the packages of support available at the Hub.
- 5.4 If the Council does not take the decision to lead, manage and resource the Youth Hub at The Way in Wolverhampton then it will be more difficult to deliver the city's Youth Offer to support young people in our city to access the services that they need to move them into sustainable employment.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The Council will be required to enter into a grant agreement with DWP to deliver the Youth Hub at The Way in Wolverhampton, for a period of 12 months. Delegated approval is sought within this report.
- 6.2 The costs of the Youth Hub including staffing costs are estimated to total £95,855. This will be funded from DWP grant of £85,775 and £10,080 from existing revenue budgets within the Skills service.
[VS/16072021/U]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Where the City of Wolverhampton Council acts as lead body for externally funded projects, the Council will be required to enter into a funding agreement with the funder which outlines the project and also sets out rules and regulations that must be complied with. There may be clawback if the Council does not comply with the obligations.
[SZ/16072021/P]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 The Youth Hub will help to support the equalities implications on young people who have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which has resulted in an accelerated increase in youth unemployment over the last few months. The scheme will provide the mechanism for moving more young people into sustainable employment.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 The Youth Hub will be delivered within the city centre where young people can readily access services without impacting significantly on the environment. Public transport will be recommended as a means of travelling to the Youth Hub.
- 9.2 The Youth Hub will require the creation of two posts including a Youth Hub Co-ordinator and Youth Hub Receptionist.
- 9.3 Recruitment into sustainable employment is one of the key indicators for a healthier lifestyle. This programme will support healthy lifestyles and will ensure that young people have access to relevant health and wellbeing support within the Council and coaching and mentoring support as part of the programme.
- 9.4 The Way Wolverhampton has put in place measures to ensure that it is Covid-19 secure.
- 9.5 DWP have conducted an independent risk assessment of the premises to ensure that it is suitable to deliver the Youth Hub.
- 9.6 The Council will conduct its own risk assessment of the premises prior to delivering the project.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 None.