

18th January 2021

Agenda Item: 13

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION, LEARNING & SKILLS

DIGITAL RESOURCE TO DELIVER DFE-FUNDED CHILDREN'S PROJECTS

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to establish a 1 fte fixed term (12 months) Digital Development Officer (Band A) post in order to deliver two projects funded by the Department for Education which are linked to the Council's Children and Families Service.

Information

2. The Department for Education (DfE) has provided funding for the Council to undertake two projects that will improve two services within the Council's Children and Families Service. Common to both projects is the requirement for new website builds and/or extensive website development.

Wellbeing for Education Return Project

3. The Council is working in partnership with Nottingham City Council to establish and provide a central 'Local Offer', which will be a single place that young people in Nottinghamshire, as well as their parents and professionals (e.g. teachers), can gain extensive mental health and emotional wellbeing support.
4. Core to the project will be a newly-created website acting as the single place for young people, professionals and families to access support materials, online help such as video classes and a directory of all the relevant service areas available to them in the area.
5. The website will be extensive in size and will be branded in a style to appeal to the target audience of 11-16 year olds, similar to Leeds' [MindMate example](#). It will serve as a one-stop shop of practical advice for all mental and emotional issues affecting young people, particularly those of secondary school age.
6. The partnership is already in consultation with local groups of young people aged 11-16 years to ensure that the newly established Local Offer offers them the right levels of support and with the right messages that are most appropriate to them. This feedback will inform much of the content on the new website

7. The overall funding from the DfE for the Wellbeing and Education Return grant is £117,976. From this £16,400 has been allocated to the Council's Communications and Marketing team to deliver the new website. These funds will contribute to the cost of a 1 fte fixed term post of a Digital Development Officer who will have the required skills to create and deliver the website. This fixed term will be required beyond the launch of the website as it will be needed to train officers within the service to self-serve for future maintenance and development.
8. The new website will contribute to improving mental health outcomes by providing round-the-clock information and online support and help meet the wider aims of the project. At present the provision of emotional and mental health support sits across a range of services and partner agencies from both within and outside of the County Council. The Children and Young People's Mental Health Executive Board seeks to coordinate this range of provision, as well as providing an oversight of targets and outcomes. The creation of a new website on which all services are represented and described provides a unique opportunity for the coordination of services to be realised. This should reduce delays and confusion for those wanting to access mental health services, enable earlier more timely intervention, and thereby drive down costs associated with escalating concerns.

D2N2 Teaching Partnership – COVID-19 Recovery Infrastructure

9. The D2N2 Social Work Teaching Partnership project is focused on addressing the following challenges faced by children's social workers, social work students and frontline staff that have been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic:
 - adapting their working practices to accommodate government restrictions, whilst doing their best to maintain their support to families and service users
 - conducting their work in isolation without the immediate support of colleagues and managers
 - managing to engage with service users, peers, and their managers and tutors
 - disruption of students' learning, with lack of peer support, and placement postponements leaving many students feeling stressed, and worried about their immediate futures.
10. The Teaching Partnership has already come together and worked as a collective during this difficult period, developing solutions to placement problems and sharing ideas about how best to sustain social work training and support the workforce.
11. In reviewing the impact and implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Teaching Partnership has identified a need to address the following key issues, to adequately support students and social work practitioners over the next 12 months and beyond:
 - mental health support
 - relationship support
 - financial support
 - placement and practice education support
 - the impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority communities and the wider implications of the Black Lives Matter movement
 - managers' resources – team building/team morale/peer support for themselves
 - organisational/strategic guidance (whole workforce initiatives)

- continuous professional development (CPD) events – migrated to virtual platforms, but interactive wherever possible.
12. Whilst the Teaching Partnership has already delivered some successful short-term operational responses to Covid-19, many of the identified needs above are more person-centred, focussing on the personal impacts of Covid-19 which influence how the practitioner manages their work and their own wellbeing.
 13. Due to the current Covid-19 working restrictions, it is essential that any solution to address these needs can to be accessed on a virtual/online basis. The DfE has agreed to provide the Teaching Partnership with an additional £20,040 to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. £17,240 of DfE funding will be allocated to primarily develop the functionality and content of a website which currently does not deliver the solutions required to adequately support staff and students.
 14. The DfE funding will further contribute to the cost of the fixed term post of the Digital Development Officer who will work alongside staff from the Teaching Partnership to develop the D2N2 website so that it offers the needed support to practitioners and students by improving online elements such as the Health & Wellbeing Hub, a designated CPD function (including webinars and podcasts), and enhanced support for managers.
 15. The new online facilities will then contribute to the aim of building a well informed and appropriately supported workforce, and enabling the continuation of high-quality training, development and recruitment of social care students.
 16. For Nottinghamshire, its involvement with the D2N2 Teaching Partnership has generated a big increase in the numbers of local students applying for jobs with the Council, with the intake of newly qualified social workers growing over the past two years. This has helped to stabilise Nottinghamshire's vacancy levels and helped to control agency costs for vacancy cover. However, there is a need to ensure adequate support and CPD to these new staff, to help retain them – and one important vehicle for doing this will be the D2N2 website.
 17. Equally, the Council's existing social workers, who have worked extremely hard to maintain services during the current pandemic, need access to a range of support and advice – to help them through the challenges that the pandemic has generated outside of work (relationship pressures, finances, childcare, care of elderly relatives, isolation, mental health) – which they have had to juggle alongside their professional responsibilities. To maintain stability across the Council's experienced workforce, there is also a need to ensure that they have accessible support, and accessible professional development options. Running parallel to this is the need to support managers in maintaining staff morale and team cohesiveness during the pandemic and during recovery – and this too will be one of the key focuses of the website development, providing them with resources and ideas to support and sustain their teams.
 18. Nottinghamshire's turnover has been at around 5% over the past few years, representing an average vacancy level of between 15-20 vacancies at any one time across the Council's entire social work workforce. This is well below the national average, and there is a desire to keep it at this level or lower, despite the impact of the pandemic. The costs for agency cover, if new and experienced staff are not retained, sits in the region of £65,000 per vacancy, per year and – even with a recruitment process that is streamlined, and can fill vacancies faster – it is still far better, financially and operationally, to retain the high quality

staff that are already employed than it is to expend resources on recruitment and on agency cover. This investment in online infrastructure will form a valuable part of the Council's wider ambition to support, retain, engage with, and stabilise its social work workforce.

Suggested Approach

19. Both projects' deliverables are a dedicated website/online presence. To achieve the projects' objectives, a digital specialist is required who has the skills to design and build websites, as well as creating online content that is appropriate to the target audience. The proposed approach is to establish an additional Digital Development Officer (Band A) post, at a cost of £41,473, in the Communications and Marketing team for a fixed-term of 12 months; the postholder will work with each of the teams and their audiences to deliver both projects. The 12-month fixed term will ensure both websites can be properly managed post-launch with a sustainable plan delivered for ongoing maintenance and development. This length of contract will also significantly improve the Council's opportunity to recruit and retain such highly skilled personnel.
20. The DfE funding will then meet over 80% of the costs for the post with the remainder coming from the Communications and Marketing budget. Where capacity allows, this post will then be able to provide additional support to the Communications and Marketing team on other corporate projects including those from the Children and Families Service or generate further income streams from projects for partner organisations.

Other Options Considered

21. The Wellbeing for Education Return project management group sought and received quotes from external agencies to develop the website. On average these were 3-4 times the cost of the £16,400 allocated to build/manage the website internally. External agencies also carry extensive on-going content hosting and maintenance costs beyond the initial year. Managing the website internally incurs none of these costs and provides greater control to ensure quality and standards are maintained.
22. The Communications and Marketing team considered delivery of the projects within its existing structure, but this was prohibitive given the current corporate priorities which have been further escalated due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of digital and online information.
23. Agency staff were considered for the project delivery but this would prove to be more costly to the Council and increase the risk of the postholder leaving for other employment which would be damaging for business continuity and successful and timely completion of the projects.

Reasons for Recommendations

24. The reasons are to resource the DfE funded projects with the required specialist digital support to enable Council services to deliver two high quality websites that meet the needs of service users and the conditions of the external funding.

Statutory and Policy Implications

25. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

26. The total funding from the DfE for these two projects is £33,640. The Council has received the funding in this financial year (2020/21) but as much of the work will extend into next financial year (2021/22), this will be carried forward to meet the costs which fall into that year.
27. The cost of 1 FTE fixed term (12 months) Digital Development Officer (Band A) post plus on costs is £41,473 and will be funded as follows:
- £16,400 from the Wellbeing for Education Return grant
 - £17,240 from the Teaching Partnership grant
 - £7,833 from the corporate Communications and Marketing Team budget.

Human Resources Implications

28. Recruitment will be undertaken in line with Nottinghamshire County Council's recruitment policy. A recruitment exercise will be undertaken to identify suitable candidates for the fixed-term role.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

29. For any new website built internally they will comply with the latest accessibility standards with is now standard practice for the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That Committee approves the establishment of a 1 fte fixed term (12 months) Digital Development Officer (Band A) post to deliver two projects funded by the Department for Education for the Children and Families Service.

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Constitutional Comments (EP 17/12/20)

30. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 18/12/20)

31. The cost of 1 FTE fixed term (12 months) Digital Development Officer (Band A) post plus on costs is £41,473 and will be funded as follows:
- £16,400 from the Wellbeing for Education Return grant
 - £17,240 from the Teaching Partnership grant
 - £7,833 from the corporate Communications and Marketing Team budget.

HR Comments (BC 17/12/20)

32. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. The post will be recruited to in line with the agreed vacancy control and recruitment procedures.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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