

Forest Heath District Council

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Report of the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Tourism

CABINET

15 JANUARY 2013

CAB13/057

CAREERS GUIDANCE SOFTWARE PACKAGE (Key Decision Reference: JAN13/04)

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The effectiveness of Careers Information Advice and Guidance (Careers IAG) for young people has been identified as a key strand of Suffolk County Council's (SCC) Raising the Bar programme (a joined-up approach to raising attainment and aspiration across the whole age range from early years to further education in Suffolk). Due to the transfer of responsibilities for Careers IAG to schools, a new market of online products is emerging that can support this provision. One such product is U-Explore.
- 1.2 Suffolk County Council is leading an evaluation of U Explore which won't be complete until April 2013.
- 1.3 U Explore have proposed a two year package that would enable schools/education providers in west Suffolk to have licences for students/parents to have access to the system; local support for one year to help embed the system; and the ability to localise the information (near me) for a total cost of £45,000 (plus VAT) for FHDC and SEBC. U Explore is already operational in Waveney DC. Mid Suffolk and Babergh DCs are also considering procuring the package.
- 1.4 There are other providers of online careers advice and it is proposed that a procurement process be followed to ensure that this opportunity is open to other providers and we achieve the best available package and best value for our investment.
- 1.5 The benefits of district/borough council intervention in careers advice include the opportunity for schools in West Suffolk to have uniform access to high quality careers advice; the opportunity to directly influence the aspiration and attainment levels locally – resulting in growth in the local economy; the ability to start to build strong relationships with schools and local education providers; and the ability to help local businesses by providing work ready employees.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Delegated Authority be given to the Head of Economic Development and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Tourism and other stakeholders to start a procurement process to acquire a two year careers guidance package funded from unallocated Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI).**

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3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

- 3.1 The recommendation meets the following aim contained within the FHDC Strategic Plan:
- 3.2 A stronger local economy which is capable of growing (vibrant and sustainable communities need a strong local economy, accessible to all and supported by effective education and training).

4. Key issues

- 4.1 It is unusual for careers type guidance to be procured at district level as there are long standing relationships between county councils and schools and other education providers. Suffolk County Council has been approached to fund U Explore and did come close to issuing the tender, however SCC required the software to be available to everyone (open access) whereas U Explore relies upon having people sign in/register so that individuals can be tracked and linked to preferred colleges etc. This difference of approach resulted in SCC withdrawing from the tender process. SCC has also provided support to the project and is leading the evaluation of the pilot, working in partnership with an independent educational research company to produce quantitative as well as qualitative evaluation (final evaluation will commence in January 2013 and be completed by April 2013).
- 4.2 The traditional view of education related activity happening at County level is likely to continue to be challenged, not least by the ability for local schools to become academies in charge of their own budgets. Local district/borough councils will increasingly become involved with attainment and aspiration levels of young people and one of the benefits of our intervention with this software is the opportunity we will have to start building relationships directly with schools in our area.

- 4.3 There are significant issues in both FHDC and SEBC with regard to the aspiration and attainment levels of young people. In addition, feedback received from local employers highlights the need to provide stronger links between businesses (and their operational needs) and the education/training of the labour pool. Therefore the future growth of the local economy has a direct relationship with the aspirations and abilities of young people.
- 4.4 U-Explore (www.u-explore.com) is a platform that supports schools, colleges and academies to deliver statutory, curriculum-focussed careers education, providing students with information about job roles, businesses and careers pathways and bringing the world of work into the classroom. U-Explore have stated that they have been developing their product for almost 10 years and it is used by around 1000 schools around the country; officers have been shown endorsements from experienced users of the product.
- 4.5 U Explore is being trialled in Waveney DC and Enterprise Lowestoft are strong advocates of the system. Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils are also considering procuring the system for their schools on the same two year trial basis – the formal decision has yet to be taken. Officers have discussed the opportunity of close liaison with Babergh/Mid Suffolk on this project.
- 4.6 There are similar products to U-Explore currently on the market (i.e. Plotr and Moogle). These products will be investigated further and will be invited to take part in any procurement process.
- 4.7 Careers guidance software is most effective when it is embedded into the locality and in particular with local businesses. To this end there is a role for local economic development teams to work with key local businesses and to advocate the benefits of the system to local Chambers of Commerce.
- 4.8 It also important to engage the local Job Centre Plus offices so that the range of opportunities offered by the software is up to date, relevant and comprehensive. Haverhill JCP is particularly keen to pilot U Explore in its area.
- 4.9 As the cost of the software would be greater than £5,000 officers will need to obtain three quotes for evaluation before proceeding with the procurement.
- 4.10 A careers software package could be funded from un allocated LABGI funding. The cost of the software package could be weighted in a similar way to other shared costs.
- 4.11 The funding is for a two year pilot period. After this time the schools will have the opportunity to directly procure licences. In addition, as the number of users increases the commercial opportunity for businesses to pay for job advertisements will increase.

5. Other options considered

- 5.1 That SCC procures the service for all schools in the county. This option may still be available; however this will not be for some months and will need to follow the results of the review.

- 5.2 That schools in our area procure a system directly. The drawback of this option is that there may be a patchwork of provision across West Suffolk. Schools may choose different providers or no provision at all. The advantage to funding a two year pilot is that the provision will be available for all for long enough for the schools to assess effectiveness.
- 5.3 That the system be funded commercially by businesses paying for job advertisements. This option may be achieved eventually, however this model would require a number of users to be registered to the site, otherwise businesses will not be reaching enough people.
- 5.4 That other providers be investigated. This option will be explored through the procurement process.
- 5.5 To do nothing is also an option however the opportunity to provide a two year trial period across all of our schools will be lost. The ability to engage directly with schools and to influence attainment and achievement levels would also be missed.

6. Community impact

6.1 Crime and disorder impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 No impact from this report/proposal.

6.2 Diversity and equality impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 No impact from this report/proposal.

6.3 Sustainability impact *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 No impact from this report/proposal.

6.4 Other impact *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 No impact from this report/proposal.

7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 A meeting has been arranged with Mildenhall College the outcome of which will be reported at the meeting. Other Local schools will be contacted prior to any Tender process commencing. Similarly discussions with key businesses/Chambers of Commerce/Job Centre Plus about business engagement and wider engagement will be commenced.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 A careers software package could be funded from un allocated LABGI funding. The cost of the software package could be weighted in a similar way to other shared costs.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
	High/Medium/Low		High/Medium/Low
That other District Councils in Suffolk choose to support different careers support packages.	Medium	Liaison with other districts. Alignment of procurement documents.	Low
That the schools do not wish to take up the Licences.	Low	Close liaison with the schools prior to procuring the system.	Low
That businesses fail to engage with the opportunity.	Medium	Work with the Chambers and JCP to promote the opportunity to businesses.	Low

10. Legal and policy implications

10.1 There are no legal or policy implications as a result of this report/proposal.

11. Ward(s) affected

11.1 All Wards.

12. Background papers

12.1 Not applicable.

13. Documents attached

13.1 None