



EXECUTIVE 16th November 2023

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| Report Title | Social Work Degree Apprenticeships |
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| Lead Member | Cllr Jason Smithers, The Leader of the Council |

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| Key Decision | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there public sector equality duty implications? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972 | |

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek approval to make live a tender opportunity valued at £1.23 million for delivery of Social Worker Degree Apprenticeships on behalf of North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council and Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Apprenticeships offer an opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and behaviours within specific occupations that are then tested against national benchmark standards to prove competence.
- 2.2. Across the periods of 2024, 2025 and 2026 between North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) it is expected that up to 55 members of staff will be

enrolled onto the Social Worker Integrated Degree Apprenticeship. The purpose is to enable career progression within the current social care workforce but more vitally, to build resilience and fill vacant roles for Social Workers within a regulated area of the three organisations to meet workforce need against rising customer demand.

- 2.3. The spend to enable this will be met from each organisation's Apprenticeship Levy at a total of £400,000 per organisation. The aggregated contract value is £1.23 million. There are sufficient funds within each organisation's levy fund to meet this need.
- 2.4. It is anticipated that there will be three cohorts. Each cohort will be on the apprenticeship programme for 36-months of training, followed by four-months per cohort for End Point Assessment purposes. This makes the total contract length required to cover all three annual cohorts to be six-years and four-months to qualification.
- 2.5. This report requests approval for the Council to proceed with the tender opportunity as the lead organisation in making live the procurement opportunity, allowing invitations to tender, prior to scoring bids and awarding the contract.
- 2.6. Disaggregation of the Apprenticeship Service from West Northamptonshire Council will conclude on 1st April 2024, which will see the novation of 15 Apprenticeship places on the contract issued to West Northamptonshire Council. The remainder of the contract will be managed by the NNC on behalf of its own learners and those of Northamptonshire Children's Trust via a service level agreement.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive approve the Council's Social Worker Apprenticeship Degree which will be procured through the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) Apprenticeship Training Dynamic Marketplace DPS which is compliant with the Public Procurement Regulations 2015 (as amended).
- 3.2. Reasons for Recommendation:
 - The proposal fully incorporates the Council's "Grow our Own" strategy and starts to use Apprenticeships in a more strategic means for workforce development, acting to retain and support staff to develop their careers.
 - Securing social worker apprenticeship training will enable us to support opportunities for our care leavers and the recent key policies that have been agreed in this area.
 - In meeting future workforce needs via Apprenticeships programmes we are increasing utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy Account, helping to safeguarding against potential expiry of funds and ensuring maximisation of spend on programmes that will have return on investment and positive impact for the Council.

- Social workers are part of a regulated service, and we must therefore plan to ensure we have resilience and availability of staff to provide a compliant service.
 - It is also recommended that the Crown Commercial Services Apprenticeship Dynamic Purchasing System Apprenticeship route is utilised to run a competitive tendering process to ensure providers bidding have completed base-line pre-checks for quality and achievement rates. Further questions and requirements specified within the documentation ensure providers bidding can meet specific requirements as set by the organisations enabling tailoring of the apprenticeship programme.
- 3.3. Alternative Options Considered: Consideration was given to releasing the opportunity via Lots. This would have allowed each organisation to set their own questions and criteria however this would not give us the buying power required to be able to stipulate the need for Practice Educators to be supplied, trained or funding towards salaries provided and created a greater risk that each organisation would be working with a different training provider. This could create issues related to work experience weeks not co-aligning as required to allow the rotation between organisations as currently planned and utilised in previous models which proved beneficial. Based upon this the Lead Social Workers decided they would like to proceed as outlined above.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Council's Apprenticeship Digital Apprenticeship Service team currently serves North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council and Northamptonshire Children's Trust.
- 4.2 The joint contract in place since 2019 for the delivery of this Apprenticeship is now fully utilised and requires renewal to ensure training and development provision for future Trainee Social Workers is available. It is planned that 15 new Social Worker Apprentices will start annually for the next four-years. It is anticipated the first of the four cohorts will start in September 2024. To enable this, the contract is required to be in place by February 2024.
- 4.3 Within the specification for the Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship specific references have been made to request bidding providers to:
- Provide Practice Educations who are current practicing social workers to support our trainee social workers to relieve the current shortage of Practice Educators existing within the NNC and NCT workforce.
 - Provide at no, or minimal cost, PEPs training for the organisations to be able to develop future practice educators within the current workforce
 - To ensure the programme is weighted equally between children and adults social care training to enable easy rotation of trainee social care workers between the three organisations; rather than progressing to external work placements where risk of poaching of staff is prevalent.
 - To include additional training specific to local authority regulation and requirements for social workers.

- 4.4 It is only through combining the organisations' buying power and releasing the one tender opportunity the Council can specify such requirements due to the number of Apprentices that will be starting on programme at the same time. If the Council was to release the specifications individually, it would not have the same abilities to ask for the above to be included at no additional cost.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. All organisations have worked jointly through the utilisation of fortnightly meetings to develop the specification and relating questions to providers to ensure it meets all needs of each organisation. The final specification has been shared and all agreed upon on 6th October 2024.
- 5.2. Consideration was given to releasing the opportunity via Lots. This would have allowed each organisation to set their own questions and criteria however this would not give us the buying power required to be able to stipulate the need for Practice Educators to be supplied, trained or funding towards salaries provided and created a greater risk that each organisation would be working with a different training provider. This could create issues related to work experience weeks not co-aligning as required to allow the rotation between organisations as currently planned and utilised in previous models which proved beneficial. Based upon this the Lead Social Workers decided they would like to proceed as outlined above.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Should permission for the joint procurement be granted, the Council is ready to make live the tender documents to allow providers the opportunity to competitively bid to win the contract against its specific requirements. The Council aims to award the contract in February 2024 and build a partnership with the provider in readiness for the first 15 Apprentices to start training in September 2024.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. The cost of the apprenticeship training at £24,000 per Apprentice will be paid utilising the Apprenticeship Levy.
- 7.1.2. The cost of travel to and from training will be met using local budgets. To help reduce such costs, it is stipulated that the successful provider will be within a 60-mile limit of Northampton, with blended delivery maximisation requested to reduce the level of travel required.

7.1.3. Where the Council will be supplying the practice educator, it has built in agreements that allow for payments towards the practice educator salaries to be paid to the Council via our in-house training provider status to help mitigate against costs.

7.2. **Legal and Governance**

7.2.1 Novation of the contract to West Northamptonshire Council will be required before 1st April 2024 when the disaggregation of services will be achieved.

7.2.2 Procuring the Council's Social Worker Apprenticeship Degree under the CCS Apprenticeship Training Dynamics Marketplace DPS is compliant with the Public Procurement Regulations 2015 (as amended). The CCS Apprenticeship Training Dynamic Marketplace DPS provides access to an extensive range of apprenticeship training programmes that fully supports Education and Skills Funding Agency funding rules which allows public sector bodies the freedom to choose who they contract with.

7.3. **Relevant Policies and Plans**

7.3.1 Developing new Social Workers in an area which is notoriously hard to recruit and retain staff within also supports the Council's Corporate Plan:

- Objective 2 – Brighter, better futures - Assist the Children's Trust to provide higher standards of support
- Objective 6 – Modern public services - Provide good quality and efficient services valued by our customers

7.3.2 This proposal fully supports the HR Services plan (2023-2024) by acting to be "effective, proactive and professional people service that anticipates and meets the changing needs of the workforce and enables staff to deliver the best possible outcomes for our residents and the communities."

7.3.3 This firmly sits within the key projects of:

- Investing in You – Provide opportunities for you to reach your full potential, work with you to help you achieve your career aspirations and empower you to grow and succeed.
- Attracting and Growing Our Talent - by utilising the "grow our own strategy, fully exploiting apprenticeships" and enabling "career pathways that give you choices about where to take your next steps".
- Investing in you – supports our commitment to our care leavers and implementation of key policies that have been agreed in this area.

7.4. **Risk**

7.4.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. As this is related to internal workforce development of employees to enhance careers while ensuring the Council can meet its regulated duties of providing social workers, consultation is not required.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. This report has not been considered by an Executive Advisory Panel.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1. This report has not been considered by the Council's Scrutiny function.

7.8. Equality Implications

7.8.1. An Equality Screening Assessment has been drafted and approved ahead of this Report being presented to the Purchasing Gateway Group.

7.9. Climate and Environment Impact

7.9.1 Market engagement has been organised to ensure local universities that are closer to Northampton are aware of the opportunity to minimise the need for travel, releasing harmful gases into the atmosphere. Online learning and support will also be utilised to its maximum possibility. Where travel is unavoidable, we will aim to encourage apprentices to share transport, if possible. Contract review meetings with the provider will be undertaken remotely, to minimise environmental impact as well.

7.10. Community Impact

7.10.1. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care as reported by the Professional Association of Social Work and Social Workers found that the social cost of childhood adversity as measured by reduced quality of life, lowered economic productivity, poorer health and increased crime is £23 billion per annum. Where families in need are supported effectively by social care their children will experience improved outcomes and they will be supported to access appropriate services to improve their own economic and social circumstances. By developing the council's workforce to have more social workers available in proportion to help and support, will contribute to lower this figure in the future.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1. Please see statement at 7.10.1

8. Background Papers

8.1 None