

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

19 November 2014

EMPLOYMENT MENTORING SERVICE

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

[CAB2556](#) – Commission for a Jobseeker Mentoring Service, 12 February 2014

[OS25](#) – Finding of the Informal Scrutiny Group on Young People and Employment,
23 January 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Following approval by Cabinet earlier this year, a new form of support for jobseekers in Winchester has been commissioned ([CAB2556](#) – Commission for a Jobseeker Mentoring Service, 12 February 2014 refers).

The Employment Mentoring Service recruits and trains volunteer mentors who can work on a one-to-one basis with jobseekers, helping them in a practical way to tackle some of the many barriers which lead to long term joblessness.

This report provides a brief overview of the service, and seeks feedback from Town Forum on ways which Members might support the project to ensure best results for jobseekers in the Town area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Town Forum considers ways in which its Members might be able to support the Employment Mentoring project to ensure that it is provided successfully for the needs of jobseekers within the Town area.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

1.1 In February this year, Cabinet approved a report proposing the commissioning of a new service to support local jobseekers ([CAB2556](#) – Commission for a Jobseeker Mentoring Service, 12 February 2014 refers). Following a competitive procurement exercise, the Council has now contracted national agency Sova to establish and provide the service for two years.

1.1 Sova is a charity that works across the country with people who find themselves in difficult situations. They do this by making sure those people have someone on their side to help them to build better lives, and come to Winchester with a 35-year track record of delivering high quality mentoring services.

1.2 Sova will recruit and train volunteers to mentor unemployed people across the Winchester District. Locally-recruited mentors from a range of backgrounds, interests and ages will provide practical and moral support, as well as basic advice and signposting to other services for unemployed residents.

1.3 Because the Town area is inevitably where the greatest concentration of jobseekers within the District live, the Town Forum is invited to consider how best it might support the project, particularly in terms of mentor recruitment and the encouragement of referrals for jobseekers in their wards.

2 Unemployment in Winchester

2.1 Members will know that the Winchester District traditionally has low levels of unemployment, thanks largely to its excellent schools and the demographic of the local population. Statistics for September 2014 show that there are 448 people in the Winchester District who were registered as unemployed and claiming job seeker's allowance, equating to 0.6% of the total working-age population of the District.

2.2 However, a further 6.2% of the population of working age (and double this figure in the St John and All Saints, St Luke's and Wickham wards) are claiming other forms of benefits including Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support. This indicates that they are unable to work now, due to a disability or sickness, or because they are caring for young children or

elderly relatives. However, they may want to work in the future, particularly when they are reassessed as part of the Welfare Reforms currently in progress. The mentoring service can help these people build confidence and motivation and make small achievable steps towards employment in the future.

- 2.3 Moreover, the official figures do not include those who are 'underemployed' and not fulfilling their full potential. By having a mentor at their side and learning about the local employment market, those with part time, low-paid or unfulfilling work can increase their chances of changing direction or climbing the career ladder.
- 2.4 The number of long-term unemployed in the Winchester District is also higher than Hampshire's average. This service will reach out to the long term unemployed, helping them break down the physical, and often emotional, barriers preventing them from working. It also hopes to reach people who are not registered as unemployed and are currently "off the radar" when it comes to other forms of support.
- 2.5 The number of NEET (not in employment and or education) people in the Winchester District has increased both in number and rate since this time last year, with JobCentre Plus reporting an increase in middle-aged NEETs. The service can provide holistic non- judgemental support designed to build on the strengths of these – often very demoralised – people, and encouraging them to learn new skills.
- 2.6 Members of the Town Forum who took part in an Informal Scrutiny Group into 2011/12 looking into youth unemployment will recall the feeling of that Group, namely that it is precisely because Winchester has a low level of unemployment that the Council is in a position to provide a one-to-one service to help, rather than the generic support which has traditionally been offered and often fails to meet the complex needs of the long term unemployed.

3 The Employment Mentoring Service

- 3.1 Sova has been appointed on a two year contract, starting in September 2014, to run the service on behalf of the Council. Alex Solomon has been appointed by Sova as the Project Manager to run the new service in the Winchester District and will work alongside the Economy and Arts Team in the Council offices.
- 3.2 The new service will help unemployed people throughout the Winchester District, but there will be a focus on the areas where unemployment rates are higher. These are Stanmore and Winnall in Winchester Town, as well as Wickham and Bishop's Waltham. However, the service is open to anyone from within the District boundaries.
- 3.3 A steering group has been set up to provide advice and practical support to help deliver the service, and to develop an effective referrals process. The

steering group is made up of representatives of stakeholder organisations, such as JobCentre Plus, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Trinity Winchester, as well as the Council's own housing service. Cllr Anne Weir, in her role as Shadow Portfolio Holder, supported the commissioning process and sits on the steering group.

- 3.5 Members of the Town Forum can enhance the project by encouraging people from their wards to consider becoming mentors. Potential mentors will be interviewed by the project Manager and offered three days of training. They will be expected to be available for around three hours per week, and may mentor more than one jobseeker depending on the level of support required. Volunteers will be subject to a DBS (Data and Barring Service) check, as they will be in one-to-one contact with vulnerable people. Mentors will meet jobseekers at locations where the jobseeker feels at ease, and will keep a written log of interactions.
- 3.6 Town Forum Members can also support the project by identifying unemployed people who might benefit from the service, once the first mentors are trained (January 2015) and encouraging them to self-refer. This is particularly important for 'hard to reach' jobseekers who may not be claiming benefits at all, or may be reluctant to have contact with official agencies.
- 3.7 Members have the opportunity at this meeting of the Town Forum to meet the Project Manager and find out more about the service. They are requested to consider ways in which they might be able to support the Employment Mentoring project to ensure that it provides successfully for the needs of jobseekers within the Town area.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 The commission supports the Economic Prosperity outcome of the Winchester District Community Strategy, whilst joint working across Council teams to secure the best results for local people supports the ambition to be an Efficient and Effective Council.
- 4.2 The procurement of this one-to-one Jobseeker Mentoring Service was included in the Portfolio Plan for Economic Development and approved at the January 2014 meeting of Full Council (CL90 (Appendix 1) – which can be found at www.winchester.gov.uk/assets/files/19125/CL090.pdf)

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 A full account of the resourcing of this service is set out in the February Cabinet report. There are no additional implications from this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

None