

**CABINET**

**22<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009**

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**ACTION FOR WILTSHIRE – PROGRESS REPORT AND DECISIONS**

**Executive Summary**

The first part of this report informs Cabinet of the progress made on initiatives to tackle the effects of the recession in the county.

Cabinet are asked to support the specific expenditure proposals approved by the Action for Wiltshire Programme Board to resource initiatives to combat the impacts of the recession in Wiltshire. The overall allocation of expenditure for this purpose was approved by the Implementation Executive on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

The second part of this report looks at Apprenticeships and the Future Jobs Fund (**Agenda Item 9A & 9B**) as part of the Action for Wiltshire programme.

**Proposal**

That the Cabinet note the progress of the programme of work that has been initiated by Wiltshire Council to take forward the recommendations of the report prepared for the Wiltshire Assembly.

Cabinet are asked to note the specific expenditure proposals approved by the Action for Wiltshire Programme Board

**Reason for Proposal**

There is statistical evidence that demonstrates the local impacts of the recession in the county. Timely action is needed to enable an effective response to some of these impacts.

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**CABINET**

**22<sup>nd</sup> September 2009**

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**ACTION FOR WILTSHIRE – PROGRESS REPORT**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report informs Cabinet of the progress made on initiatives to tackle the effects of the recession in the county.
2. Cabinet are asked to support the specific expenditure proposals approved by the Action for Wiltshire programme board to resource initiatives to combat the impacts of the recession in Wiltshire. The overall allocation of expenditure for this purpose was approved by the Implementation Executive on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
3. Cabinet are also asked to accept and endorse the recommendations from the Action for Wiltshire programme board on Apprenticeships and the Future Jobs Fund.

**Background**

4. After the first meeting of the Wiltshire Assembly in Autumn 2008, the Council commissioned on the Assembly's behalf a study of the likely impact of the economic downturn on the County and what could be done about it. The report was prepared by George Bright, Chair of the West Wilts Economic Partnership and former Principal of Wiltshire College.
5. The report considered by the Implementation Executive on the 13<sup>th</sup> May was concerned with the recession and a report on its impact in Wiltshire which was considered by the Wiltshire Assembly on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009. The report, commissioned by the Council on behalf of the Family of Partnerships, included a range of recommendations.
6. There are six strands to the recommendations in the Bright report, covering businesses, people and communities:
  - i. Wiltshire Business Support Service: 'to establish a service for businesses which brings together the private and public sector to provide a local personal service'.
  - ii. Wiltshire Street Scene Programme: 'to involve the community in working together to sustain the town centre environments of our market towns'.
  - iii. Wiltshire 'Potential' Programme: 'to create a range of opportunities for young people to develop their education and skills further, to gain experience that will support applications for employment in due course and to gain skills that help to promote sustainability'.

- iv. Wiltshire Citizens' Advice Service: 'to create a stronger support service for individuals and families in Wiltshire who are affected adversely by the credit crunch and economic downturn'.
- v. Wiltshire Community Finance Initiative: 'to create new local arrangements for the provision of credit... a community based finance initiative that will provide savings and loan facilities to individuals, small businesses and social enterprises.'

### **Decisions of the Implementation Executive**

- 7. On 13 May, the Implementation Executive considered the report of the Service Director, Performance and Risk, which contained recommendations from the Wiltshire Public Service Board on the use of the Performance Reward Grant.

The IE supported the use part of Performance Reward Grant to support some initiatives to combat the recession. A sum of £1m over two years could be set aside, subject to suitable bids.

- 8. In relation to the proposals in the Chief Executive's report for the 'Action for Wiltshire' programme of work to combat the local impacts of the recession, the IE agreed to:
  - a. Endorse the initial programme of work initiated by Wiltshire Council to take forward the recommendations of the report prepared for the Wiltshire Assembly.
  - b. Designate up to £500K of the Performance Reward Grant to support urgent initiatives to combat the recession, including the Business Support Service, the Citizens' Advice Bureau and an increased capacity to manage apprenticeship and volunteering opportunities for young people.
- 9. Members of the Implementation Executive emphasised that after the allocation of the funding for the Action for Wiltshire programme, there should be no continuing financial implications arising from programme projects, taking into account the projected significant resource constraints that will be faced by the Wiltshire Council.

### **Progress in Implementing the Action for Wiltshire Programme**

- 10. The Action for Wiltshire Programme is based on the recommendations in the report for the Wiltshire Assembly by George Bright. Some adjustments are being made to reflect feedback from consultation with organisations across the county. In particular, the recommendations were discussed by the Wiltshire Public Service Board and the Wiltshire Co-ordinating Group, with a view to maximising partner organisations' contribution to the programme.
- 11. The IE agreed that these action areas should receive designated funding as urgent initiatives to combat the local impacts of the recession – the

Business Support Service, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and an increased capacity to manage apprenticeship opportunities. The Chief Executive has delegated authority to allocate the following funding:

12. ***Business Support Service***

A sum of up to £50,000 has been allocated to fund a free emergency business support service, to advise and support local businesses in times of crisis. The local Wiltshire telephone line will be channelled through Business Link in line with current advice services, and urgent queries would be responded to within 2 hours by a provider brokered by business link. Emergency advice would be free up to a maximum period of 8 hours and in exceptional cases, and upon a simple application, additional emergency support could be approved for another 8 hours.

A sum of £50,000 has been allocated to fund the emergency support service project managed by the Economy & Enterprise Service. Entry levels are expected to be in the region of 5 per week i.e. 220 to the end of March 2010.

Businesses can call 01225 718222 to access the advice.

13. ***Citizens Advice Bureau helpline***

A sum of up to £288,000 has been allocated to the Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau to answer calls from people wanting help and advice as a result of the recession.

The CABx in Wiltshire have dealt with an 11% increase in enquiries but are currently only answering 30-40% of all calls made. In West Wiltshire there has been a 39% increase in clients advised per month since last May. Debt issues are up 13%, employment issues up 51%, benefits issues up 30%, housing issues up 14% and relationship issues up 26%. Approximately 23% of callers to the bureau are not seen on the day but they are advised to phone, attend an outreach drop - in session or to seek advice, using the national Citizens Advice website. In West Wiltshire the CAB answers 75 calls per week, but this is only 50% of the calls made. Overall the Wiltshire Bureaux deal with an average of 220 calls per week. The risk of not responding to this demand is that clients are not able to access advice to resolve their problems and the impact of not managing a situation impacts on their health and family relationship. Clients are currently more likely only to come to the bureau when the situation is at crisis point and so it is more time consuming to resolve.

The telephone line was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2009 and increased capacity will allow the Bureaux to answer an extra 300 calls a week.

14. ***The Wiltshire potential programme for young people***

This programme will support young people (aged 16 to 24) identified in the Wiltshire Assembly Report as being at greater risk of not securing employment prior to next year's cohort entering the jobs market. The programme will have a particular focus on those young people identified as not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

Two key elements of the programme are the Wiltshire Council Apprenticeships Programme and work opportunities through the Future Jobs Fund. Both of these will draw on links with partners in the voluntary sector, the local Chambers of Commerce and further information on these elements are provided in the accompanying reports to Cabinet (**Agenda Item 9A & 9B**).

The Action for Wiltshire Programme Board has approved the single management infrastructure requirements of the Future Jobs Fund, Apprenticeship, Train2Gain and ESF programmes at a net cost of £250,000.

The Board has also approved a sum to meet the subsidy required by some employers at a maximum cost of £150,000 with £50,000 revenue and £100,000 capital.

The Board has also approved £32,000 of funding for;

- Careers workshops for graduates returning to the county to help them find jobs, work experience or volunteering opportunities. The workshops began in September and are being run by Bath Spa and Bath University and will include advice and support on how to compete effectively in a narrow job market, and to be able to present their skills and experiences most effectively as more jobs become available when the economy recovers.  
£7,500 has been allocated to this initiative.
- A mentoring programme for NEETs. This project matches senior staff within Wiltshire Council to young people not in employment, education or training, through a mentoring arrangement.  
£9,500 has been allocated for this initiative
- A work experience programme for NEETs. This project would enable NEET young people to experience short term work experience opportunities. This will enable them to experience different professions and careers in order to support them in gaining employment.  
£15,000 has been allocated to this initiative.

15. ***Benefit take-up campaign***

A campaign is being launched to promote benefit take-up in the county. This will support people who are entitled to benefits as a result of the recession, but who have no experience or knowledge of a very complex system. Previous benefit take-up campaigns focusing on vulnerable groups will also be reinvigorated.

The Action for Wiltshire programme board have approved £71,173 of funding for this project over 12 months.

In addition to this the authority will consider if a benefit take-up campaign could be supported in the long run as the return on investment for the county could be significant.

16. Other projects and initiatives that the Action for Wiltshire board are taking forward in order to support the people, communities and businesses of Wiltshire both during the recession and into recovery include;
- **Improving the 'street scene'** - Research is taking place to look at the 'street scene' of towns across the county to assess the effects of the recession on empty shops, graffiti and other problems caused in local areas. Examples of good practice in maintaining and promoting the 'street scene' of an area are being communicated to Area Boards.
  - **Area Boards** - Area Boards are being asked what other actions they could take to mitigate the impacts of the recession of their area.
  - **Community Finance Initiative** - A working group has been established comprising key partners to research models of community finance for the county. An appropriate model of finance will be researched and in development provisionally from January 2010. This model would then look to be operational from March 2010.
  - **Area Action Force** - Support from the Wiltshire Strategic Economic partnership (WSEP), South West Regional development Agency, Job Centre Plus and other partners for emergency response to redundancies occurring, including job clubs. Ongoing work is taking place with Jobcentre plus to meet needs when redundancies occur.
  - **ESF Response to Redundancy** - £300,000 has been awarded to Wiltshire in partnership with Swindon, to provide advice and training through the colleges and other training providers for people who have been made redundant or are at risk of redundancy.
  - **Mortgage rescue scheme** – avoiding homelessness by preventing repossession. The Council is working with a number of partners and the first cases under this scheme have been taken forward.
  - **Court desk advice** – the Council is using funding made available by Government to support an advice desk at the County Courts in Salisbury and Trowbridge, to help people who turn up at court to face possession proceedings but have no legal representation.

### **Funding arrangements**

17. Funding release will be subject to reports being provided on the measurably improved outcomes that can be achieved through the financial provision. Funding will be conditional upon the Council being satisfied that there should be no continuing financial implications arising from Action for Wiltshire programme projects. A check will be made to ensure that there is no duplication with existing grant aid funding to the recipient organisations from the Council, or other sources. Funding release will be phased as considered appropriate by the Programme Board and quarterly monitoring information will be requested from recipient organisations.

## **Main Considerations for the Council**

18. Wiltshire has much employment in small businesses and the public services which reduce its vulnerability to major job losses but there has nonetheless been a considerable increase in unemployment in the context of the recession. In July 2009 the JSA Claimant Count in Wiltshire was 7,202, having stood at 3,092 in July 2008. The July figure was 2.7% of the working population, compared with 3% across the South West and 4.1% for the UK as a whole.

The Claimant Count in June 2009 was 2.7%, below both the regional (3.0%) and national (4.1%) averages. Trowbridge Community Area had the highest Claimant Count rate of all the Community Areas, with 4.0%. Several Community Areas had higher rates than the Wiltshire average of 2.7%: Calne (3.5%); Westbury (3.3%); Melksham (3.0%); Chippenham (3.0%); Devizes (2.9%); Salisbury (2.9%); Warminster (2.8%) and Corsham (2.8%). The Claimant rate in Wiltshire had increased since June 2008, in line with the regional and national averages. All of the Community Areas had experienced an increase in claim rate since the same period ending a year earlier.

(Source – Wiltshire Strategic Economic Partnership Quarterly Economic Review, July 2009)

19. Data on mortgage repossession orders produced by the Government Office for the South West (GOSW) shows that orders processed by the Salisbury County Court increased year on year between 2007 and 2008 by 33%. The GOSW report includes reference to West Wiltshire as being 'badly affected'. (Source – GOSW Analysis of Mortgage Repossessions in the South West April 2009).
20. In a survey of public opinion in Wiltshire, 63% agreed that 'the Council should lead in getting us back on track'. In difficult financial circumstances there can be a temptation to focus within an organisation, to concentrate on balancing the budget; of course that's always important, but the Council must manage this financial challenge in a way which supports people and communities during the recession, and helps to pave the way for an early and sustained recovery.

## **Environmental Impact of the Proposal**

21. At the meeting of the Wiltshire Assembly the issue of sustainability was emphasised and the Action for Wiltshire Board will be considering how this can be fulfilled.

## **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

22. The recession is likely to have differing impacts on social groups within the population and on differing communities within the county. This issue has been examined in the Bright report to the Wiltshire Assembly. Monitoring

and review as the programme develops will be key, to inform an Equalities Impact Assessment that will be considered by the Programme Board.

### **Risk Assessment**

23. The Programme Board will consider risk assessments of the overall programme and where they are required, of specific projects.

The parts of the Wiltshire Potential Programme discussed in the next section of this paper (**Agenda Item 9A & 9B**) on Apprenticeships and the Future Jobs Fund are of more significant risk given the value of the programmes.

### **Financial Implications**

24. The source of funding and the previous decisions of the Implementation Executive are set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 above.
25. Funding will be conditional upon the Council being satisfied that there should be no continuing financial implications arising from Action for Wiltshire programme projects. The actual expenditure will need to accord with the grant conditions and financial regulations, to ensure value for money.

### **Legal Implications**

26. The actions to be taken forward by the Council as set out in the 'menu of actions' are governed by the legal framework within which the Council operates. Where there is any uncertainty as to the legal position on any specific issue, advice will be sought from Legal Services.

### **Options Considered**

27. The Citizens Advice Bureaux in Wiltshire are uniquely placed in terms of their established role and existing and potential capacity, to take forward the initiatives set out in paragraph 16 in this report and therefore alternative options in relation to other agencies are not recommended to Cabinet. The options considered in relation to Apprenticeships and the Future Jobs Fund are contained within the accompanying respective reports.

### **Conclusions**

28. The intended delegated action to be taken by the Chief Executive reflects the conclusions reached having taken all of the above into account.

### **Proposal**

29. That Cabinet notes the funding of up to £71,173 to be paid to the Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureaux for a 12 month benefit take-up campaign, as approved under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive.



That Cabinet notes the funding of up to £250,000 to provide the management infrastructure requirements of the Future Jobs Fund, Apprenticeship, Train2Gain and ESF programmes.

That Cabinet notes the funding of up to £150,000 with £50,000 revenue and £100,000 capital required by some employers to deliver their Future Jobs Fund projects.

That Cabinet notes the funding of up to £32,000 to be used to take forward the Wiltshire Potential Programme projects as outlined in paragraph 14, as approved under the delegated authority of the Chief Executive.

30. That a further progress report including a proposal to provide support for a community finance initiative is submitted to a Cabinet meeting at the earliest opportunity.

### **Reason for Proposal**

31. There is statistical evidence that demonstrates the local impacts of the recession in the county. Timely action is needed to enable an effective response to some of these impacts.

**KEITH ROBINSON**, Chief Executive  
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### **Background Papers**

The following background papers were used as references during the preparation of this report:

The reports to the Implementation Executive of the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2009.

The Impact of the Credit Crunch in Wiltshire – a report to the Wiltshire Assembly – electronic link to the Executive Summary:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wilts-assembly-150309-credit-crunch-report-exec-summary-extracts.pdf>

Electronic link to the Wiltshire Assembly web page:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council/wiltshirefamilyofpartnershipsworkingtogether/the-wiltshire-assembly.htm>

Wiltshire Strategic Economic Partnership Quarterly Economic Review, July 2009.

Government Office for the South West (GOSW) Analysis of Mortgage Repossessions in the South West, April 2009

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