

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY INTERIM MANAGING DIRECTOR

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	13 MARCH 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	13
TITLE:	BUILDING BETTER OPPORTUNITIES - STRONGER TOGETHER PARTNERSHIP (WEST OF BERKSHIRE UNITARY AUTHORITIES)		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	CORPORATE SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To update Members on the work undertaken to date on an application to the Big Lottery funded Building Better Opportunities project across the West of Berkshire.
- 1.2 The Council submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) in late 2015 to deliver a £1.3 million Building Better Opportunities (BBO) project across the West of Berkshire - for a programme called "The Stronger Together Partnership." The project is European Social Fund (ESF) funded, with the match being provided by Big Lottery which is for projects across England that tackle poverty and promote social inclusion. There is no requirement for the Council to provide any match for this project.
- 1.3 The BBO project, which is aimed at unemployed people 25+, will align with the Elevate Berkshire programme (supporting unemployed young people 16 to 24) to deliver the aspiration to have an ageless skills and employment offer to socially and economically inactive residents of West of Berkshire unitary authorities, Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council. The majority of the activity funded by the £1.3 million will be delivered for the benefit of Reading residents; notably in wards with high levels of social and economic inactivity.
- 1.4 The expression of interest was successful and a full application is due to be submitted by the end of March 2017. If the full application is successful this project will run from September 2017 for a period of three years. It is proposed that Reading Borough Council will act as the accountable body for this project.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That members agree to Reading Borough Council (RBC) being the accountable body for the Stronger Together Partnership.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 This project is in-line with the Council's Narrowing the Gap agenda and commitment to support socially and economically inactive residents to be in Education, Employment or Training; supporting them to be less dependent on local and central Government - in turn leading to future cost avoidance for the Local Authority by people being economically active.
- 3.2 This project also aligns with the Berkshire wide City Deal (Elevate Berkshire) initiative for which Reading Borough Council is the accountable body. This initiative is aimed at supporting young people aged 16 to 24 years to get into education, employment or training. The Council endorsed the City Deal at the Policy Committee of 20 January 2014 and Council on 28 January 2014. This initiative was funded via Cabinet Office and EU funding to run from 1 April 2014 to March 2017 initially. This was extended to 31 October 2018 due to a delay in the receipt of the EU funding element.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 In late 2015, the Council submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) to deliver the £1.3 million Building Better Opportunities (BBO) project across the West of Berkshire - for a project called "The Stronger Together Partnership." The project is European Social Fund (ESF) funded, with the match being provided by Big Lottery which is for projects across England that tackle poverty and promote social inclusion. There is no requirement for the Council to provide any match for this project.
- 4.2 The BBO project, which is aimed at unemployed people 25+, will be aligned with the Elevate Berkshire programme (supporting unemployed young people 16 to 24) to deliver the aspiration to have an ageless skills and employment offer to socially and economically inactive residents of West of Berkshire unitary authorities, Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council. The majority of the activity funded by the £1.3 million will be delivered for the benefit of Reading residents; notably in wards with high levels of social and economic inactivity.
- 4.3 The project will specifically target people 25+ in the South Reading area; supporting them to move closer to the labour market and into employment. The partnership is made up of 15 Voluntary and Community Sector partners, who will deliver a holistic model of support to those cohorts and characteristics of people over represented on unemployment data. Work will also be undertaken by Reading UKCIC to engage local employers to support them to implement new recruitment methods and approaches to diversify their workforce.

4.4 The EOI submitted by the Council was successful and we have been asked to submit a final application by the end of March 2017. The Programme Manager for Elevate Berkshire, on behalf of the Council and the Stronger Together Partnership made up of 15 local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, is currently drafting the full application with the support of Reading Voluntary Action (RVA).

4.5 More information on the Building Better Opportunities programme can be found here - <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/esf>.

4.6 If successful it is proposed that Reading Borough Council will act as the accountable body for this programme.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 This project links to the Council's 'Narrowing the Gap' and cost saving agenda.

5.2 This project also links to the Council's strategic aims:

- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The partnership is underpinned by 15 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations across the West of Berkshire.

6.2 VCS partners have shaped the project and prospective participants have fed into the stage 2 application.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 The project has demonstrated 'due regard', in line with the Equality Act 2010, in its development and will so in its implementation. The project is justified in targeting specific cohorts and characteristics of people - as evidence shows that certain characteristics are overrepresented in unemployment data. On the premise that the focus of this project is to move unemployed people nearer to the labour market - the project is justified in targeting certain cohorts of people over others. Moreover, the project has been assigned particular characteristics of people to target.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Council as the accountable body for this programme will produce a Partnership Agreement (PA) that underpins the activity of the partnership. This PA will mitigate the risk to the Council around any potential future claw back or de-commitment of funding. This is an ESF funded project.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 12% of the £1.3 million will be retained by this Council to manage the project over the three years from September 17. The Council's own internal service,

New Directions, will receive £200k. The remainder will go directly to the VCS partners delivering the activity (in the main across Reading).

- 9.2 The key outcome of the project is to support inactive people to move closer to the labour market and into employment. This will remove the need for these people to be dependent on local and central Government - leading to cashable savings / future cost avoidance for the Local Authority.
- 9.3 This project is funded by Big Lottery (providing the match 50%) and ESF (providing the other 50%). The match provided by the Big Lottery is subject to the same ESF requirements - meaning the total project is ESF.
- 9.4 ESF projects are subject to a number of compliance considerations - with non-compliance or a failure to deliver outcomes leading to money being 'withheld' or 'clawed back' from the lead body (RBC)
- 9.5 As Reading Borough Council is not delivering all of the activity being fund by the Big Lottery project - and is in-effect the vehicle to administer money to the VCS - the responsibility for compliance and non-delivery must rest with the partners.
- 9.6 To mitigate the risk on RBC - each partner will sign a PA setting out that all partners within the Stronger Together Partnership are equal partners, with RBC reserving the right to withhold money if it feels a partner is not delivering in-line with ESF regulations. Moreover, each partner will indemnify RBC should money be clawed back in the future.
- 9.7 A great deal of work will be undertaken with partners, via the Programme Manager for Elevate Berkshire, to mitigate the risk of non-compliance.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Agenda and minutes of the Policy Committee meeting 20 January 2014
- 10.2 Agenda and minutes of the Council meeting 28 January 2014.