

Cabinet – 17 March 2010

Connecting to Opportunities Fund

Portfolio: Councillor Andrew, Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Service: Walsall Partnership

Wards: All

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan: No

1. Summary of Report

To present Cabinet with the funding proposal to the Connections to Opportunities (C2O) Fund to address the severe concentration of worklessness and low skills, which exist across the Borough, particularly in the most deprived areas and those affected by the recent economic down-turn. The report also requests Cabinet make a recommendation for Council to approve Walsall Council acting as the accountable body for the funding.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet support the proposal for the Connecting to Opportunities Fund.
- 2.2 That Cabinet recommends Council approval for Walsall Council to act as the accountable body for the funding.
- 2.3 That Cabinet note that subject 2.2, Clive Wright, Walsall Partnership, will be the accountable body officer.
- 2.4 That Cabinet agree to the use of the robust monitoring process that has been implemented for Working Neighbourhoods Fund, to monitor this project.
- 2.5 That Cabinet receive a monitoring report every six months

3. Background Information

- 3.1 Advantage West Midlands (AWM) notified Walsall Council of the availability of the Connections to Opportunities (C2O) funds in early 2009.
- 3.2 Each local authority has received notification of an allocation of C2O funds available to them.

- 3.3 The requirement to access the funding is to develop a programme which addresses the worklessness agenda, including increasing people's skills levels, particularly utilising the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the programme delivery.
- 3.4 On 30 April 2009, a workshop was held, similar to a Target Action Plan (TAP) workshop, involving over 35 organisations to identify possible activities.
- 3.5 From the outcomes of the workshop and in consultation with the Partnership for Walsall Enterprise and Regeneration (PoWER) Pillar Group, a programme has been developed named "A Passport to Employment". This will assist individuals in the Borough to identify, improve and develop their employability skills, using volunteering and promoting employment within the VCS. The proposal has been developed in consultation with Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA).
- 3.5.1 The individual would have an initial self assessment and then, via personalised support, be placed as a volunteer. This will provide additional skills and work experience to support the volunteer back in to employment in the future. Organisations taking part in the project will also be provided with support. Personal achievements will be recorded and will enable further up-skilling to be identified.
- 3.5.2 There will be three levels to the "Passport":
- Bronze: Self Assessment: identification of a suitable placement, training or other activities to help improve identified employability skills
 - Silver: Completion of Placement: representative from placement organisations completes a skills assessment to enable identification of further skills development and identification of further placements
 - Gold: Indication of Achievement: reasonable competency at all levels and be support in to a volunteering placement and / or employment opportunity
- 3.6 The proposal has been developed with links to the Worklessness and Skills programmes, funded through Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) and also the region-wide proposal for the use of Future Jobs Fund (FJF).
- 3.7 The full AWM application was submitted in late 2009 and approval for the project was received in early January 2010.
- 3.8 The application is in the name of Walsall Partnership. It is proposed that the programme documentation and monitoring will be the same as the process which is already successfully in place for WNF. This will mean a Grant Agreement being in place between Walsall Partnership, Walsall Council and the delivery agent, setting out programme outputs, outcomes and milestones.

3.9 The project's expenditure profile is as follows:

2010 / 11	2011 / 12	2012 / 13
£160,000	£240,000	£190,000

3.10 A monthly monitoring form will be completed by the delivery agent and sent to Walsall Partnership who will assess levels of activity against those projected. If there is any variance, then this will be discussed and a resolution agreed.

3.11 The Worklessness Steering Group will receive a regular report from the delivery agent, setting out achievements and identifying issues. The Steering Group will be able to provide a wide range of expertise and experience in delivering programmes of this nature and be able to assist in identifying solutions.

4. Resource Considerations

4.1 Financial:

4.1.1 The funding proposal totals £590,000. It is proposed that Walsall Council acts as the accountable body. The funding will provide support for up to 350 individuals.

4.1.2 The accountable body officer will be Clive Wright, Walsall Partnership.

4.1.3 There has been no expenditure to date.

4.1.4 If funding is not spent with the relevant financial year, there is no opportunity for funding to be carried forward in to the next financial year.

4.1.5 The project must be completed by March 2013.

4.1.6 The process set out in the proposed "Protocol for Walsall Council Acting as the Accountable Body" has been followed.

4.1.7 Within the grant agreement used by Walsall Partnership, under section 11 – Advance and Recovery of Sums Due – it states that "The Council has a right to recover, on behalf of the Partnership, in whole, or in part the funds provided under this agreement, if they are not being used for the agreed purposes, including any monies advanced which have not been used correctly". Therefore, if any project is found to be in breach of its contractual arrangements, then recovery of funding will be sought.

4.1.8 For Grant Agreements with effect from 1 April 2010 / 11, which will include this project, a new section will be included which states that "should the Council be audited and clawback of grant required, the Council has the right to recover, on behalf of the Partnership, in whole or in part, funds subject to clawback".

4.2 Legal:

- 4.1.2 The Council is required to act as the accountable body for this funding, in line with previous funding streams. There may be an issue of 'claw back' of funding if the programme is audited and it is found that the project has not been robustly commissioned, evidence and outcomes achieved. However, this should be mitigated, due to the regular monitoring of the programme by Walsall Partnership and the Worklessness Steering Group.

Council officers whose remit these funds falls within will need to ensure that they are satisfied that at all times the funding conditions are being met and that processes are put in place to monitor and audit compliance as well as proper financial practices and management system are in place.

4.3 Staffing:

- 4.3.1 None directly arising from this report.

5. Citizen Impact

the proposed project will provide a range of skills and support for those citizens in the Borough who have become disengaged from employment and those who require additional skills to ensure they are able to apply for the future jobs market.

6. Community Safety

None directly arising from this report.

7. Environmental Impact

None directly arising from this report.

8. Performance and Risk Management Issues

8.1 Risk:

- 8.1.2 The C2O funding is provided by AWM where a rigorous process has been undertaken to assess and approve the proposal in terms of robustness. Monthly monitoring will be required to ensure delivery remains on track.

8.2 Performance Management:

- 8.2.1 Walsall Partnership and the Worklessness Steering Group will undertake the monitoring of the programme.

8.2.2. The PoWER Pillar Executive group will take a strategic overview of the impact and outputs of the project.

9. Equality Implications

None directly arising from this report.

10. Consultation

A wide range of partners / stakeholders have been engaged in the development of the application. AWM have been informed of progress at regular stages.

Background Papers:

None

Authors:

Jo Lowndes
Partnership and Performance Manager
☎ (01922) 654714
✉ lowndesj@walsall.gov.uk

Andrew Rumble
PoWER Manager
☎ (01922) 653527
✉ rumblea@walsall.gov.uk



Tim Johnson
Executive Director

18 February 2010



Councillor Adrian Andrew
Deputy Leader and
Portfolio Holder

18 February 2010