

To: **Executive**
17 October 2023

Re-procurement of an Occupational Health Provider for Staff
Executive Director: Resources

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Council's contract to provide an Occupational Health (OH) service for staff through its current occupational health provider contract with Cordell Health terminates on 30 June 2024. Agreement is needed at this time on the approach to securing a suitable arrangement to put in place from 1 July 2024, subject to procurement. This report incorporates issues and opportunities to ensure that the provision of an occupational health provider for the future takes into account the needs of both staff and management.

2 Recommendation

That the Executive:

- 2.1 Approves the proposed re-procurement of an occupational health contract for the provision of occupational health service for staff who work for the council in any capacity, including schools.
- 2.2 Following the completion of the procurement process, delegates the contract award to the Executive Director: Resources in consultation with the Executive Member, Finance and Business Change.

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Council currently spends approximately £80,000 a year on its current occupational health service, which provides a variety of services, such as; pre-employment screening, sickness referrals, ill-health retirement, management guidance and advice as well as health surveillance such as; statutory hearing tests, night worker assessments as well as immunisation, disablement advice, home visits, emergency planning advice, health related risk assessments, training and advice services, and health promotions when required. The provision of these services supports managers with staff absence management and employees early return to work which has a positive impact on sickness absence levels.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Consideration has been given to securing a provider to supply both occupational health and counselling services, which was the approach undertaken the last time the service was procured. However, as there were no bids at that time to provide both services, separate procurements are being undertaken on this occasion.
- 4.2 If we were no longer to provide an occupational health service then this would be considered to have a negative impact on managing staff absence and would likely have an adverse impact on the level of days lost to sickness absence.

5 Supporting Information

Occupational Health Provision

- 5.1 The Council's current contract for the provision of occupational health services terminates on 30 June 2024. The Occupational Health service is a key component of the Council's managing sickness absence policy and supports the Council's aim to minimise employee sickness absence levels and facilitate employees' return to work after periods of absence. The provision of an OH service also ensures that the Council meets certain statutory requirements.
- 5.2 Council employees' average sickness figure for 22/23 was 8.42 days per employee compared to 7.7 days per employee for all Public Sector Employees in 2022. The public sector figure has steadily increased over the last couple of years whilst Bracknell Forest's has remained relatively steady. This has been a consistent position and is based on a 3-pronged strategy of:
- i. Having a robust sickness absence policy in place,
 - ii. Ensuring managers are well trained and supported in the use of the policy,
 - iii. Ensuring a proactive approach to the OH service (including early intervention and in-depth management reports).
- 5.3 A professional, high quality OH provider, which the council has confidence in and supports the council's sickness absence management strategy is considered essential. Good quality OH clinicians/support staff and systems and processes, reduces the administrative burden on both management and HR, and assists the council with achieving its sickness absences targets.
- 5.4 Through accessing expert OH advice, which takes into consideration the requirements of an employees' role, such as their terms and conditions, setting and any overriding government guidance/legislation, absence can be minimised and the Council's duty of care to its staff fulfilled.
- 5.5 The OH service forms an important part of the Human Resources service level agreement purchased by schools and academies within the Borough and elsewhere, and is viewed positively by headteachers, with questionnaire feedback showing the overall service was considered either excellent or good.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 This is included in the confidential Annex.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 Recent spending on OH services has been around £80,000 per year, though this can vary as it is dependent on the number of referrals to the service.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.4 Trades Union representatives have not been consulted during the pre-procurement stage but will be consulted prior to a provider being awarded the contract on the terms of the service provision.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.5 A summary EIA accompanies this report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.6 Employers have a legal duty to implement a health surveillance programme if their employees are exposed to certain health risks. The programme should ensure that procedures are in place to detect early signs of work-related ill health, with the results swiftly acted upon. For certain health risks, there is a statutory duty on employers to provide occupational health surveillance, this can be fulfilled by appointing a competent Occupational Healthcare provider.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.7 Appointments are primarily offered by video and telephone, although face to face appointments are offered if required or recommended, to ensure OH users are fully supported. Through the tender process we will assess tenderers' ability to deliver a service that supports the council's climate change agenda, for example by offering local, accessible services that minimise the need for car journeys.

Background Papers

- Principal Procurement Plan – attached
- Summary EIA – contained within Principal Procurement Plan
- Draft DPIA – contained within Principal Procurement Plan

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