

## DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – CLEAN GROWTH AND REGENERATION

8 April 2021

Report of the Director - Economy Transport and Environment

#### I-STEP UP - REQUEST FOR CREATION OF RESERVE FUND

(1) **Purpose of Report** To update the Cabinet Member on the successful I-Step Up programme, and to request that outstanding funds be allocated to a reserve account to enable spend on this programme of work in future years.

(2) **Information and Analysis**

#### **Background**

The I-Step Up programme was developed by Derbyshire County Council to address a gap in existing provision for young people transitioning to work, learning or training at the end of Year 11 by providing young people with the skills and knowledge they need to make a positive progression. The programme has been featured by the Local Government Authority (LGA) recently as an area of best practice and has generated interest from outside Derbyshire.

Eligibility for the programme remains that the 'provision is organised to be delivered in the locality/district/borough where there is highest number of young people at risk of being not in employment, education and training (NEET)'. Eligibility criteria for individuals also remains 'those who are identified within schools as being at risk of NEET and having no identified destination at end of years 11 and 13'.

Provision of I Step Up is delivered by the Council's Adult Community Education Service (DACES) and aims to encourage young people to identify positive destinations for themselves through a mix of activities, including links with private sector businesses. It is delivered over a three/four-week period with young people being required to attend for three days each week, for five hours per day. With Coronavirus (COVID-19) impacting delivery in 2020, the programme has piloted an online format and was run on that basis during the last 12 months.

One of the unique features of the programme is that it is tailored to the needs of the cohort and individuals attending the course. The high tutor: young person ratio means meaningful relationships are developed throughout the programme; tutors' help participants not only navigate the work but support them to address wider issues that are impacting on the prospect of them remaining NEET, e.g. family dynamics, substance misuse, engaging in anti-social behaviour. The course develops a range of skills, including teamwork and communication, financial planning and budgeting, CV writing and interview skills. It also provides participants with actual experience of work through employer visits, work experience days or an employer challenge.

From 2020, Employment and Education Officers (EEOs) have worked with schools in their designated district/borough areas to identify appropriate young people without a known destination across the County. Having regard to this information, final delivery localities have been determined based upon need. However, with the advent of online delivery from 2021, there will no longer be restrictions on geographical locations, thereby making the programme more flexible and more widely accessible. The offer from 2021 will, therefore, include both face to face and online delivery opportunities to ensure we cover as many young people as possible, especially those in more isolated parts of the County where transport has been a barrier to attendance in previous years.

Traditionally, the I-Step Up programme started with an initial information session at the end of June for all interested participants. Full programme delivery usually takes place in July. Again, moving to online provision has meant the course can be offered over more months and in multiple locations simultaneously, extending its reach.

In March 2019, the Employment and Skills Board received an evaluation of the I-Step Up programme and made the decision the programme should be continued (and potentially expanded) and asked officers to seek ways to ensure this could happen. On 9 January 2020, the Board received a further report and agreed that the programme be funded and expanded for a period of three years at the cost of £50,000 per annum.

### **Current Position**

As a result of COVID-19, delivery of the programme has had to respond to the challenges of online delivery and has done so on a pilot basis – particularly seeking to assess whether the programme could achieve the same outputs as the face-to-face programme.

To confirm, the 2020 I-Step Up programme was successfully redesigned and delivered to a cohort of young people. A number of additional challenges were experienced though in relation to connectivity; young people either did not have access to a computer or broadband, which necessitated the purchase of appropriate equipment to be loaned out to participants. Despite this, the

programme supported 17 young people (average participation on face to face was 12), with 69% positively progressing; this compares well to the face-to-face version (the average for positive progress over the previous five face-to-face courses was 71%).

Learning and evaluation from the programme has resulted in further adaptation of the course materials which will inform future provision from 2021 onwards.

Due to the challenges of the pandemic, course redesign and equipment procurement, it was possible to run only one course during 2020-2021 and this has resulted in an underspend of £50,000. Some monies have been committed in financial year 2020-21 for further hardware purchases, but delays in delivery have meant the total available funding will not be spent by the year end. It is therefore proposed this funding be rolled over into a reserve account for use in future years and could provide the additional benefit of being able for use as match if external funding becomes available.

In addition, whilst it is planned and expected that funds will be fully spent in future years (including the reserve fund), it is also requested that any underspends from 2021-2022 onwards be rolled forward into the same reserve.

(3) **Financial Considerations** The current underspend is £50,000 in 2020-2021, a request is therefore made to move this underspend into a reserve to enable it to be drawn upon and spent during the lifetime of the i-step up project, as the impact of COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the overall timing and delivery of the project.

Similarly, the commitment to a further £50,000 in 2021-2022 and 2022-23 should be maintained, with a further request that any additional underspends be placed in the reserve in future years to enable the funds to be used as necessary throughout of the lifetime of the project.

(4) **Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property, social value and transport considerations.

(5) **Key Decision** No.

(6) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(7) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department.

(8) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That the Cabinet Member

8.1 Notes the success of the I-Step Up programme.

8.2 Approves the request to create a reserve fund I-Step Up to carry forward the underspend from 2020-21 and support continued delivery of the programme over the coming years.

8.3 Approves that any underspends from 2021-2022 onwards be rolled forward into the same reserve.

**Tim Gregory**  
**Director – Economy, Transport and Environment**