

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 12 September 2016
Report of: Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services
Title: Procurement of Interim Section Head of Communications & Engagement

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Council had a vacancy for Section Head of Communications & Engagement from July 8. This post is deleted from 1 April 2017 as a result of the new council structure.
- 1.2 As part of maintaining an effective communications service with minimum impact on service delivery and supporting the transitioning into the new structure, Westco has provided interim support to this role.
- 1.3 The temporary Section Head of Communications & Engagement is present at Watford three days a week and there is Account Director support available two days a month.
- 1.4 In line with the Procedures, the approval given by the Head of Service and Managing Director of an exemption not to tender is being reported to Cabinet.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the Approved Exemption to the Council's Procurement Procedures in relation to the Westco agreement.

Contact Officer:

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Report approved by: Lesley Palumbo, Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services

3.0 Detailed proposal

- 3.1 The Council had considered a number of options for covering the post of section head of communications on an interim basis. This included external agency support which proved too costly and advertising for a fixed term contract. While applications were received, none of the candidates were deemed to be the right fit for the post in this time of change. Due to the need to have appropriate cover for this post Westco were approached to provide a viable third option. It was considered that undertaking a full procurement exercise would add delay to having someone in post and cause unnecessary disruption to the service, particularly bearing in mind that the communications team has recently undergone changes in personnel.
- 3.2 Westco was set up in 2003 by Westminster City Council. They are a well established organisation and were the 2016 Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) Agency of the Year. They currently manage and operate five local government communications departments and manage a workforce of more than sixty communicators deployed across seven organisations concurrently.

Alongside the work of the interim section head, Westco's resources allow Watford to access many other areas of expertise. These include:

- Audience insight – specialising in research, data collection, big data analysis and implementation of feedback and evaluation dashboard, tools and mechanisms;
- Media handling and strategy – offering media training, media crisis handling and online media support;
- Campaigns and marketing – award winning behaviour change campaigns, place marketing and inbound marketing specialists with solid experience in creating engaging content;
- Digital strategists – skilled at developing cross channel digital strategies to address user needs, user journeys, customer profiling, and social media campaigning;
- Community engagement – expert in the development and implementation of targeted, insight led engagement strategies especially to support economic growth strategies;
- Creative design – large team of in-house creative professionals on hand to produce impactful digital and print design for a range of channels;
- Horizon scanning – access to the findings of the Westco Commission panel of experts who constantly look to the future (economical, political, social, technological) and how public sector communications and engagement can be improved going forward.

- 3.3 The interim role is being covered by Debbie Bacon whose previous assignment had been as Deputy Head of Communications at Sutton Council. Previous experience

includes heading up Marketing, PR and Business Development for BBC Multimedia (BBC Worldwide) and managing the Loyalty Scheme for Safeway, including generating supplier funding and developing strategic partnerships.

Our account director role is covered by Ian Farrow who is the Managing Director of Westco. He has worked across local government in a number of senior roles as well as being a consultant

- 3.4 This exemption was approved by the Head of Corporate Strategy & Client Services and the Managing Director on 01 July 2016 and is now being reported to Cabinet for noting in accordance with the rules.

4.0 Implications

4.1 Financial

- 4.1.1 The cost for Westco to supply these services is £48,500. The funding for this is within the salary budget for the vacant post.

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The contract procedure rules provide the facility to seek an exemption not to tender in exceptional circumstances, any exemption must be approved by both the Head of Service and Managing Director and then notified to Cabinet.

4.3 Equalities

- 4.3.1 Not applicable in relation to this item.

4.4 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Potential suppliers challenge the Councils decision not to procure the supply using a competitive tendering procedure.	1	2	2

4.5 Staffing

- 4.5.1 There are no staffing implications from this report.

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 There are no accommodation implications from this report.

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 There are no community safety implications from this report.

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 There are no sustainability implications from this report.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None