

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> July  
**Report of:** Melissa Hope – Organisational Development Manager  
**Title of Report:** Direct Award for Apprenticeship Training

Summary and recommendations	
<b>Decision being taken:</b>	To award a contract without competition for apprenticeship training to the current training provider, Multiverse Group Ltd.
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Nigel Chapman – Council Member for Focused Services and Council Companies
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Well-Run Council
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	N/A

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	<b>Approve</b> the award of a contract without a competitive procurement process for training in AI, Data and Business Transformation to Multiverse Group Ltd with an approximate value of £600k for cohort 2 (2025/2026/2027). This is a Cabinet and key decision due to the aggregated value of income to Multiverse, following previous appointment of them by the Council for apprenticeship training, being more than £750K (across years 2025/2026/2027). The current spend is approximately £495K (2024/2025)
2.	<b>Delegate</b> to the Deputy Chief Executive City and Citizen's Services authority to award further contracts if required, in accordance with Councils procurement processes.

Information Exempt From Publication
N/A

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Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Equalities Impact Assessment	No
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Risk Assessment	No
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Case Studies from Cohort 1 of Apprenticeship delivery	Yes – this contains information about Officers in the organisation

### Introduction and background

1. As part of the Council's Fit for the Future Programme, the Council identified a need to upskill staff in Data for making better and more informed decisions, AI and Business Transformation/change.
2. Historically, as with most organisations the Council has struggled to spend its apprenticeship levy. The Council therefore partnered with Multiverse and have spent approximately £135K of the Council's Levy, along with £360K from Cisco International Ltd (levy transfer arranged by Multiverse Group Ltd). Levy paying employers that have exhausted their apprenticeship levy, or non-levy paying employers, can gain transfers from other levy paying employers that have surplus funds. Multiverse Group Ltd, due to their nature of work, have a large number of large employer connections, willing to transfer to support training initiatives.
3. Thirty-three Council staff are currently being trained. Feedback and case studies from the first cohort of apprentices has been excellent, and officers now wish to progress to cohort 2, but that requires Cabinet agreement as it will take the aggregated value of services to be provided by Multiverse Group Ltd above £750,000.
4. Training consists of a mix of expert led workshops, self-paced/remote learning, peer support groups, group coaching and 1:1 coaching. The commitment is around 6 hours per week, 3 hours of learning and 3 hours applying skills with roles, and the duration is 13 months plus an end point assessment. Officers end with an accredited standard.
5. Under the contract with Multiverse Group Ltd they are currently delivering apprenticeships to 33 officers across a suite of tailored AI, Data and Business Transformation apprenticeships at Oxford City Council. This training commenced in December 2024.

6. These apprenticeships are upskilling Officers in skills to:
7. Reduce repetitive and manual tasks
8. Streamline systems and processes
9. Work in agile ways
10. Use AI effectively and safely – using Microsoft Co-Pilot
11. Collect, analyse and use data better to make informed decisions
12. Work in collaboration, using skills to support problem solving
13. There are a further 85 employees who have expressed an interest to take part in the AI, Data and Business Transformation apprenticeship. It is anticipated between 40-50 of these Officers will start cohort 2 in September 2025. It is also likely there will be further cohorts of apprentices in 2026.
14. In order to facilitate cohort 2 the Council wants to further contract with Multiverse Group Ltd and the combined value of the current contract and that required for Cohort 2 will be in excess of £750,000.

### **Rationale for award to Multiverse Group Ltd without competition**

15. The Council wants to contract with Multiverse Group Ltd without running a competitive procurement process for the following reasons:
16. There are measurable examples of impact that the apprenticeships are making within the Council. See Annex 3 for case studies of initial impact being made from Council Officers taking part in cohort 1.
17. Multiverse Group Ltd are the only provider to receive Ofsted Outstanding in all areas of delivery, meaning that they are provider of the highest educational quality.
18. The only AI apprenticeship available via the Institute of Apprenticeships, which other providers deliver, is a Level 7 AI Data Specialist but this is not at a level that suits the needs of the Council. The officers the Council needs to train are in lower to middle tier roles and therefore below Level 7, which is the equivalent to a master's degree.
19. The level 7 AI apprenticeship, that other providers deliver, is aimed at:
20. Machine learning engineers
21. Artificial intelligence engineers
22. AI Directors
23. AI strategy managers
24. Artificial intelligence specialists
25. Machine learning specialists
26. This level is too specialist and advanced and not fit for the Council's needs.
27. Multiverse Group Ltd are the only apprenticeship provider who offer a lower-level apprenticeship in AI, Data and Business Transformation that covers the subjects appropriate to the Council's need. They offer this for level 3 and 4 which is the level the Council needs.

28. Multiverse Group Ltd has demonstrated reliability in delivering high-quality training and support, ensuring that Officers receive a uniform learning experience including free training to managers (outside of apprenticeships). By continuing to partner with Multiverse Group Ltd for the same suite of learning, the Council can maintain the stability and excellence that are critical to the development of our future workforce

## **Funding**

29. Oxford City Council have exhausted their apprenticeship levy. Multiverse Group Ltd have connections to source funding for us to be able to deliver these apprenticeships via their network of partners such as Cisco International Ltd, Microsoft and Deloitte. Multiverse sourced £360K for cohort 1 and will source the full amount for cohort 2. Without this funding, we are not able to proceed.

## **Alternative Options Considered**

30. There are 2 providers of similar programmes, but the differences are such that they do not address the Council's strategy or business needs.
31. One alternative provider uses Chat-GPT and other AI tools which are superfluous to Council requirements as officers are only to use Microsoft Co-Pilot for security and GDPR reasons.
15. The other alternative provider includes AI technology that the Council does not use such as SaaS Applications.

## **Financial implications**

32. Oxford City Council have exhausted their apprenticeship levy. Multiverse Group Ltd source full funding for us to be able to deliver these apprenticeships via their network of partners such as Cisco international Ltd, Microsoft and Deloitte. Multiverse sourced £360K for cohort 1 and will source the full amount for cohort 2. Without this funding, we are not able to proceed.
33. There will be no commercial cost for the training to Oxford City Council.
34. Those who complete the AI apprentice routes will need access to a Microsoft Co-Pilot business Licence. We have budget approved for 100 licences in 25/26.

## **Legal issues**

35. As the aggregate value of the current and proposed contracts are over £750,000 the decision to award the proposed contract is a cabinet function under part 4.5 and 19.17 of the constitution.
36. Due to the aggregated value of the current and proposed contracts any contract award must comply with the Procurement Act 2023. Under the Act authorities can only award contracts without competitive procurement in a limited number of circumstances. The circumstance relevant to the recommendation in this report

being *there is an absence of competition for technical reasons and only a particular supplier can supply the services and there are no reasonable alternatives to those services*. Cabinet needs to be confident a clear case has been made for a contract award without competition.

37. Whilst Cabinet can take the decision to award the contract in principle, before any such decision can be actioned it must comply with the transparency and publication requirements under the Procurement Act 2023. These requirements mandate publication of notices informing the market of the proposed contract award and a standstill period before entering into any contract.
38. Under section 9E (3) (c) of the Local Government Act 2000 Cabinet is empowered to delegate its functions to officers.

#### **Level of risk**

39. Please see Annex 2: Risk Assessment

#### **Equalities impact**

23. Please see Annex 1: Equalities Impact Assessment

#### **Carbon and Environmental Considerations**

24. N/A

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