

Meeting:	Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board
Date:	14 th September 2026
Title:	Connect to Work update
Appendices	N/A
Report From:	Operational Skills – Economy and Skills
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1. Purpose

- To update the board on the implementation and progress of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Connect to Work grant funded programme, commissioned in Hampshire via the Operational Skills team.

2. Executive Summary

- The Get Britain Working White Paper aims to set a path to reduce economic inactivity levels and takes the first steps to delivering the Government's long-term ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate.
- The first major element in the Get Britain Working Strategy is called 'Connect to Work'. This funding aims to provide supported employment to help around 100,000 people per year nationally, focusing on those with health needs, disabilities and people with complex barriers to employment, to find sustainable work. Connect to Work commenced in 2025 and will be a five-year programme until 2030, subject to spending reviews.
- Hampshire County Council are targeted by the DWP to support nearly 5,000 people over the programme duration, with 1,700 profiled in the peak year of 2027-28. The maximum contract value is approximately £19m for the five-year programme.

3. Progress so far

- We concluded procurement via an existing framework for Connect to Work in December 2025. Three contracts were awarded for delivery to commence from January 2026 across three lot areas comprising of 'Health Pathway', 'Domestic Abuse', and 'Community Access'. The fourth and final lot - 'Social Care' - was not initially awarded but was retendered and awarded for delivery in May 2026.

- Shaw Trust are working with individuals who are under the care of health services (Lot 1). It is forecast that a significant number of referrals for Connect to Work will come via primary care, secondary care, and community health services.
- Palladium are working with individuals who are being supported by 'Stop Domestic Abuse' or any other domestic abuse support service (Lot 2). Across Hampshire, Stop Domestic Abuse provides refuge and community-based support to adults, children and young people affected by domestic abuse in need of advice, support and information tailored to their level of risk and support needs.
- The 'Community Access' Lot 3, delivered by Seetec, provides a gateway into Connect to Work for a broad range of participants who will make self-referrals or be referred by a variety of other means of support, such as via their social worker, support worker, local community centre, carer, relative, friend, advocate etc.
- Shaw Trust are also delivering Lot 4, working with individuals who have social care needs, such as learning, physical and mental health needs, and who access support via local authority adult services or via voluntary community service organisations.
- HCC has a [website](#) where participants and employers can find out more, and register interest in the programme. The information and resources available on the website will increase over time.
- DWP will only allow accountable bodies to share the key outcomes from official national data: [Connect to Work statistics - GOV.UK](#)
- The statistics show that, nationally:
 - between April 2025 and March 2026, 17,000 individuals were referred to the programme
 - between April 2025 and March 2026, 14,000 participants started on the programme
 - of 14,000 total starts, 12,000 (88%) are receiving Out-of-Work Support, and 1,700 (12%) are receiving In-Work Retention Support
 - 1,600 Out-of-Work Support participants have achieved First Earnings from employment
 - 1,000 participants receiving Out-of-Work Support have achieved a Lower Threshold Job Outcome, and 350 have achieved a Higher Threshold Job Outcome (outcome measures based on lower and higher thresholds for gross earnings received)
 - 320 participants receiving In-Work Retention Support have achieved a Higher Threshold Job Outcome

4. Challenges

- DWP data/MIS processes are labour-intensive and unreliable, placing a significant burden upon the management team and its capacity. We are in constant and constructive dialogue to resolve ongoing issues.
- The overarching quality assurance process on Connect to Work is called 'Fidelity'. Fidelity inspections will be conducted across every Accountable Body after 12 months of delivery has taken place. It is anticipated that our Fidelity inspections will take place from early 2027.

5. Stakeholder Engagement

- Significant stakeholder engagement has taken place throughout the development and early delivery of Connect to Work, but in particular during the development of the Delivery Plan to inform the shaping of the offer that we now have in place across the lots.

- HCC is developing a marketing campaign for September which will include a focus on employers. This will highlight the benefits of supported employment to businesses; these include a larger talent pool of individuals available to work, help to fill hard-to-recruit roles or roles where employers experience high turnover, as well as savings in recruitment costs and from reduced turnover.
- Employers receive a high level of input from the Employment Specialists who are supporting the individuals participating in the programme, including help around workplace issues such as job coaching and managing performance.
- Integration with other services, a fundamental aspect of Connect to Work, is a key attribute of HCC's programme. This includes working with/in NHS Primary Care Networks / Musculoskeletal Clinic settings, with the Shaw Trust team winning an internal award for their work on mobilising Connect to Work in Hampshire.

6. Next Steps

- The success and impact of Connect to Work relies heavily on the engagement of Hampshire employers to support Connect to Work by employing the economically inactive. The team would welcome any support HPPB members can offer to engage with employers. Please contact Christopher Cunningham, Christopher.Cunningham@hants.gov.uk