

Meeting:	Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board
Date:	14 th May 2025
Title:	Agenda Item 7 – Connect to Work
Appendices:	None
Report From:	Economy & Skills
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Purpose of this report

1. This report provides headline information about the Government’s new Connect to Work programme, which is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and which will be managed by the Operational Skills team within Economy & Skills.

Background

2. One of the Government’s five missions is to kickstart economic growth with good jobs and improved productivity in every part of the country. The ambition is for a more inclusive economy which enables people to get into work and to get on at work, ensuring employment opportunity for all. The Government aims to take a more collaborative, locally led approach to tackling ‘hidden unemployment’, to support local people to realise their potential through local and national growth.
3. 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.
4. In the UK, there are 1.9 million people who would like to work but are not participating in the labour market, often due to health needs or disability. In Hampshire, data suggests the economically inactive population, who would like to work, currently sits at approximately 23,000 people.
5. The first major element in the Get Britain Working strategy is a supported employment programme called ‘Connect to Work’. Connect to Work will help around 100,000 people per

year nationally, supporting those with health needs and disabilities, and people with complex barriers to employment, to find sustainable work.

6. Whilst Connect to Work will focus primarily on those who are inactive or unemployed, it will also provide support for those who are employed and are at risk of falling out of work. The Government has announced that Connect to Work will commence in 2025 and will be a five-year programme to 2030, subject to Spending Reviews.
7. Supported employment is a model that provides on-going assistance to individuals with complex needs, in finding and maintaining paid, competitive employment. It is characterised by individualised and flexible support, often both intensive and over a sustained period, with a focus on long-term sustainable employment. The DWP have stated that Connect to Work must be delivered according to two specific supported employment models – Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) – both of which are proven to yield better employment outcomes for the target groups than traditional employment support.

Approach

8. Hampshire County Council (HCC) has been designated by DWP as the Accountable Body for the delivery of Connect to Work in the HCC administrative area. (Portsmouth City Council has been designated as the Accountable Body for Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight). Every Accountable Body must submit a Delivery Plan to DWP, setting out comprehensively how Connect to Work will be delivered locally. HCC has submitted a draft Delivery Plan to DWP and is currently receiving feedback. Once the Delivery Plan has been approved by DWP, HCC will then be issued with a Grant Funding Agreement before programme delivery can commence.
9. HCC does not currently employ a team that delivers this model of supported employment. Our intention is to commission one or more external provider(s) to deliver a high-quality programme. A small Contract Management Team within Economy & Skills will commission the programme and oversee its delivery.
10. HCC are targeted by DWP to support nearly 5,000 people over the programme duration, with 1,700 people profiled in the peak year of 2027-28. The maximum contract value in Hampshire is approximately £19m for the five-year programme. We are aiming to launch Connect to Work in October of this year.

Employer engagement

11. The effectiveness of Connect to Work will rely heavily on the successful engagement of Hampshire employers to participate in the programme by employing people from the programme's target groups. This should include HCC and the NHS (which will be a key source of referrals into the programme) as employers.
12. As part of the supported employment approach, employers receive a high level of input from the Employment Specialists who are also supporting the participating individuals. This includes providing help around workplace issues such as job coaching and managing performance, and access to relevant HR materials.
13. Supported employment can also offer numerous benefits to employers, including the following:

- Employers have experienced that those employees that come via a supported employment model are often more dependable, dedicated and hardworking
- A larger talent pool of individuals available to work, which can help to fill hard-to-recruit roles or roles where employers experience high turnover
- Savings in recruitment costs and from reduced turnover
- A diverse workforce can bring a wider range of skills and perspectives to support business development, and can also lead to improved PR
- Inclusive employment practices can help employers to meet their Social Value objectives and aid their success in procurement processes

14. To enable HCC's commissioned Connect to Work provider(s) to 'hit the ground running' this Autumn, our aim is to engage several Hampshire employers who are ready to offer employment to Connect to Work participants, prior to the launch of the programme. We would welcome HPPB's advice and support in ensuring that engagement of employers in Connect to Work is as effective as possible. We will also keep HPPB updated on progress related to Delivery Plan approval, mobilisation and ultimately, programme impact.