

Meeting:	Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board
Date:	29 th August 2025
Title:	Connect to Work
Appendices:	None
Report From:	Economy & Skills, H2050
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The Purpose

1. This report provides an update on the new DWP-funded Connect to Work programme, which will be managed by the Operational Skills team within Economy & Skills H2050.

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.

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’. Connect to Work will provide supported employment to help around 100,000 people per year nationally, supporting those with health needs, disabilities and people with complex barriers to employment, to find sustainable work. Connect to Work will commence in 2025 and will be a five-year programme until 2030, subject to spending reviews.

HCC does not currently employ a team that provides supported employment and will be commissioning experienced delivery providers to provide a high-quality programme. HCC 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.

Progress Update

3. HCC submitted its Delivery Plan to the DWP in April and have passed through the three-stage approval process successfully. DWP delays in the appraisal process nationally meant HCC only received final confirmation of approval in late July. We have just received our Grant Funding Agreement from DWP, which is still to be signed.

The funding fully covers the costs of a Contract Management Team (CMT) within Operational Skills which will oversee the management of the programme; recruitment to this team is underway with the Development Manager (Contracts) already in post.

The tender call-off via the 'Skills Development for Hampshire Open Framework' is currently planned to be released this September. HCC expects significant interest in the tender given the good attendance at the market engagement webinar in June, which led to increased registrations from new providers onto the Framework. We are aiming for delivery to begin in November.

Next Steps

4. 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. It is equally important that HCC and the NHS (who will also be a key referrer) become recruiters of those adults who participate in Connect to Work, sending a strong message to the local economy.

The CMT will be developing its marketing plan imminently, which will include a campaign targeted towards employers, highlighting the benefits of supported employment to businesses, such as:

- A larger talent pool of individuals available to work, which can help to fill hard-to-recruit roles or where employers experience high turnover
- Savings in recruitment costs and in reduced turnover
- Employers receive a high level of input from the Employment Specialists who are supporting individuals, providing help around workplace issues such as job coaching, managing performance and access to other HR materials

Through the support of the HPPB, alongside the employer engagement activities being delivered by Economy & Skills, it is imperative that HCC's commissioned provider(s) can 'hit the ground running' this Autumn with several Hampshire employers ready to offer employment to Connect to Work participants. We will continue to provide HPPB with regular updates.