

Cabinet

14 January 2025

Connect to Work

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Harinder Mahil, Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment

Report from: Adam Bryan, Director of Place

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Summary

The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) has launched a new large employment programme called Connect to Work (previously known as Universal Support). This is a significant programme for Kent & Medway, aiming to reduce economic inactivity by supporting people into work. Kent County Council and Medway Council are required to submit a delivery plan to the DWP in order to receive funding.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the creation of a delivery plan and delivery of the Connect to Work programme in Medway.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Place to create the delivery plan and launch the Connect to Work programme.

2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. The Connect to Work programme will have great benefit for the residents of Medway, providing high quality employment support to hundreds of Medway residents.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. The programme delivers against the Council Plan priority 2 - benefitting from good education, quality jobs and a growing economy, and directly contributes to the KPI relating to unemployment. Connect to Work also fits within the framework of the Skills & Employability Plan for Medway. Furthermore, it is aligned with the aims of the Strategic Partnership for Health & Economy and furthers Public Health aims and wider Council aims of Prevention.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Connect to Work programme is one of the initiatives launched in the new 'Get Britain Working' white paper. 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.
- 4.2. The programme will use two Supported Employment models - Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF). It will primarily be focused on supporting people with a disability and specified disadvantaged groups. Indicative annual programme starts in Kent & Medway should reach 2900 (2,500 Kent, 400 Medway).
- 4.3. Alongside those with disabilities the following disadvantaged groups will also be eligible for Connect to Work: offenders, ex-offenders, carers, ex-carers, homeless people, Armed Forces veterans or current AF personnel, people with drug or alcohol dependencies, care experienced young people or care leavers, refugees (resettled Afghans), people on the Ukrainian scheme, victims/survivors of domestic abuse, young people involved in or at risk of serious violence, victims of modern slavery.
- 4.4. The programme is funded by an agreed amount of £3,900 per individual start and Kent County Council will be the accountable body. To access funding, KCC and Medway Council need to produce a delivery plan, detailing the proposed delivery model and how we will achieve programme starts and employment outcomes. The funding period is intended to end 31 March 2030. The programme is designed to be fully funded by DWP, there are no match funding requirements.

5. Options

- 5.1. Option 1 – Complete the delivery plan and commence the Connect to Work programme. With this option, we will work with KCC to create a delivery plan that will roll out Connect to Work across the whole of Kent & Medway benefitting residents and supporting people into work.
- 5.2. Option 2 – Do nothing and not engage with the Connect to Work programme. Under this option Medway would engage no further with the programme, residents would not benefit and there would be significantly less employment support in Medway than other areas.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. Connect to Work is fully funded by DWP, fits within our Council Plan objectives, and contributes to several strategic areas across the wider council and our partners. It can provide valuable support to a wide demographic or people who are economically inactive and meet business recruitment needs

across Medway. The benefits to engaging with Connect to Work are significant.

6.2. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed and available at Appendix A to the report.

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Lack of participation from residents	Eligible participants don't sign up to the programme	As part of the programme design, we will investigate a wide variety of routes to engage in the community. We will work with a wide range of suitable referral partners.	BII
Lack of participation from providers	Suitable providers don't bid to deliver the programme	We will run market engagement events in advance of any commissioning activity.	DII
Designated employment models don't produce outcomes	SEQF & IPS models don't produce positive employment outcomes	Both models are tried and tested models which have delivered great outcomes both in Medway and across the country. We will ensure experts in these models deliver the programme.	CII
Employers don't engage with the programme and participants	Employers don't employ participants upon programme completion.	We will need to work closely with employers to show the benefits of engaging with the programme. We will commission experts to engage employers and regularly demonstrate successful case studies.	BII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Financial burden becomes greater than funding envelope	Costs of delivery exceed the funding received.	The programme will be designed within a strict financial budget, with strict financial controls in place.	DII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. If appropriate set out details of the nature and extent of any consultation with stakeholders and the outcome of that consultation. If appropriate this section can include feedback from other committees.

9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. There are limited Climate Change implications, commissioned providers will be asked to consider climate change in their tenders.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. We have received assurance that this will be fully funded by DWP with no match funding requirements. As the accountable body, KCC will host the majority of the finance activity.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1 There will be commissioning arrangements, however this will be led by the accountable body.
- 11.2 It is likely that Medway will be required to enter into binding agreements with the DWP and /or Kent CC to set out how the funding will be drawn down and utilised. The terms of these agreements are as yet unknown but previous schemes have provided little opportunity to negotiate these terms so we will need to ensure that we are able to meet any requirements prior to signing.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

[Connect to Work Grant Guidance](#)