

Cumbria Connect to Work

Market Engagement Event – 18 July 2025

Note

- Officers present:
 - Isobel Brown – Programme Director, Enterprising Cumbria
 - Caroline Powney – Strategic Advisor – Skills, Westmorland and Furness Council
 - Garry Chambers – Consultant
 - Kevin Higgins – Supported Employment Implementation Specialist, DWP
 - Apologies from Hani Milburn-Cox – Programme Manager, Cumberland Council
- At the event, officers talked through the slides to cover the following information:
- Context of Get Britain Working white paper – Connect to Work is the first programme to be implemented from this overall strategy.
- This is also relevant to a new Economic Strategy for Cumbria – *Going for Growth*, as well as council priorities for both Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Council, which emphasise the importance of work to support people into employment, supporting both our most vulnerable residents and our employers.
- DWP talked through the models of Supported Employment: Individual Placement Support (IPS) and the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF).
- These both work through a five-stage process: Engagement, Vocational profiling, Employer Engagement, Job Matching, On and off the job support. SEQF is more suitable for those requiring more intensive support. IPS requires a greater integration with primary care, such as GPs.
- Participants on Connect to Work must be eligible through having a disability or long-term health condition or being in a defined group who are disadvantaged in the labour market, such as ex-offenders, carers, and those who were previously in the care of the local authority.
- They must also be out of work or at risk of losing their job, someone for whom the programme would be beneficial, and they must be motivated to work.
- In Cumbria, we plan to let a single contract for a Service Co-ordinator. We hope to reach between 2,700 and 3,100 participants over the five years of the programme.
- The Service Co-ordinator will build the supply chain of organisations who deliver Connect to Work as delivery partners. They will be responsible for end-to-end delivery including employer engagement.
- The service must also take account of other similar programmes that are already happening in the county – WorkWell in South Cumbria, and the Health and Growth Accelerator in North Cumbria.
- There will be dedicated staff working in the Enterprising Cumbria team, including a Partnership and Integration Manager, who will be responsible for supporting the Service Co-ordinator integrate the programme with other offers, as well as for the Employer Engagement Strategy and developing forums, such as for employers and referral organisations.
- Our commercial expectations are:
 - Payment to the Service Co-ordinator will be split between a Service Fee (85%) and Payment by Results (15%) based on starts.
 - Payment by Results will start at month 7, allowing for six months to ramp up.

- The contract will start in October 2025 with the first referrals in January 2026.
 - The maximum amount of time an out of work participant can spend on the programme is 12 months, with 4 months for those who are in work. Therefore, the final out of work starts on the programme will in March 2029 to allow for 12 months' support before the programme ends in March 2030. The final in work starts will be in November 2029.
- We expect 85% of participants to be out of work and 15% to be in work.
- 75% of CtW participants are likely to be on the IPS model, and 25% on SEQF.
- We expect this to require between 35 and 40 Employment Specialists providing support to participants.
- We have KPIs to meet on programme performance:
 - 50% of starts achieve first earnings
 - 40% achieve the Lower Earnings Threshold (equivalent to 9 hours work per week at NLW for 13 weeks)
 - 29% achieve the Higher Earnings Threshold (equivalent to 18 hours work per week at NLW for 26 weeks)
 - For in work participants, 80% are expected to maintain their existing earnings (i.e. not fall out of work).
- We will publish a Service Directory of organisations interested in delivering Connect to Work with the aim of improving integration and minimising the burden on smaller organisations.
- Ultimately, we are looking for an organisation to work in partnership with the two councils to offer a high quality service to our communities and employers. We are committed to working closely with the Service Co-ordinator to make Connect to Work a success.
- To submit a bid, organisations must register on Find a Tender: <https://www.gov.uk/find-tender>
- The Invitation to Tender and all documentation will be published on the Chest: <https://www.the-chest.org.uk/>
- We are expecting to launch the procurement in w/c 11 August, which will close in mid-September with the contract to be awarded in October. We will keep organisations informed if this timetable slips.
- Following the formal presentation, two other pieces of information were provided:
 - Commercial Model:
 - We will be looking for evidence of the engagement of local organisations through a letter from them, which would be submitted as part of the bid. This is to make sure those partner organisations are genuinely involved.
 - The programme must be Cumbria-wide, with participants receiving the same standard of delivery regardless of where they are located.
 - We are expecting to incentivise the Service Co-ordinator through an element of Payment by Results.
 - We want to spend the available funding. The contract is not expected to be competed on price, and we are expecting to compete on the number of starts. There will be a mechanism to guard against potential providers over-claiming

this number, so we would ask that bidders think carefully about a participant number that balances ambition with realism.

- Finally, under the Get Britain Working white paper, local authorities have been asked to prepare a plan for their local area to set out how they are increasing labour supply. In Cumbria, this will be overseen by a new Work and Health Board, reporting into the Joint Executive Committee that brings both councils together into a single governance structure.
- Enterprising Cumbria has supported a piece of research into Economic Inactivity that will bring together quantitative data and qualitative insight into the experience of being economically inactive. We will share this with the Service Co-ordinator when it is available to inform the delivery of Connect to Work.
- The event ended with questions and answers, with a Q&A log to be published alongside the slides and this note.