

CABINET
15th July 2025

Connect to Work

Report by Director Adult Social Care

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a. Authorise the Council to enter into grant funding agreement/s with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to develop and deliver the Connect to Work Programme for such period as the programme continues to be funded by DWP.
 - b. Authorise the Council to take receipt of grant funding in its role as Accountable Body (and as determined by an approved DWP grant cost register and delivery plan).

Executive Summary

2. Connect to Work (CtW) is a nationally prescribed and locally commissioned supported employment programme, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through grant funding. It is delivered by the Accountable Bodies that will determine how the support is delivered locally, in line with local priorities.
3. The CtW programme aims to support individuals outside the workforce and facing disadvantages to get into and to stay in work. Eligible target groups include disabled people, offender/ex-offenders, carers/ex-carers, homeless people, former members of HM Armed Forces or a partner of current or former Armed Forces personnel, people with an alcohol or drug dependency, care experienced young people/care leavers (please see [Connect to Work: Grant Guidance for England](#) for details on eligibility).
4. The Council has been designated as one of the 43 Accountable Bodies across England which will be responsible for designing the local offer to support people to find and fulfil their potential to work in line with local services and priorities.
5. The programme is expected to run for a five-year duration until 2030. DWP modelling expects around 2,000 people across Oxfordshire to access the CtW programme through the provision of the Supported Employment 5 Stage

Model and the Individual Placement Support model, both accredited as high-fidelity models of engagement.

6. The DWP funding for Oxfordshire gives an indicative programme cost of circa £8.4 million based on current demand modelling. The programme will be funded in arrears by the DWP subject to a delivery plan and grant funding agreement.
7. The CtW programme will build on the local high fidelity supported employment delivery model already in place in Oxfordshire. This is currently delivered by [Oxfordshire Employment](#), our dedicated service helping people with long-term health issues or a disability to gain and maintain employment. Oxfordshire Employment will deliver the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) pathway of the programme.
8. Market analysis and an options appraisal identified Enterprise Oxfordshire as the preferred external partner for delivering the IPS (Individual Placement Support) component of the programme, aligning with local priorities for effective collaboration.
9. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care took the decision to progress the design with Oxfordshire Employment as internal delivery and Enterprise Oxfordshire for the Individual Placement Support pathway on 29 April 2025.
10. The delivery plan was submitted to DWP and received positive feedback. Responses to clarification questions are being addressed for further submission.

Background

11. [Get Britain Working White Paper](#), published on 26 November 2024, sets out the Government's ambition to bring down economic inactivity (people without a job due to ill health, disability, lack of essential reading, writing or digital skills or caring responsibilities) levels. There are three pillars of the white paper:
 - a modern Industrial Strategy and Local Growth Plans – to create more good jobs in every part of the country,
 - improving the quality and security of work through the Plan to Make Work Pay,
 - the biggest reforms to employment support for a generation, bringing together skills and health to get more people into work and to get on in work.
12. The first major element of this Strategy is the [Connect to Work Programme](#) launched nationally in January 2025 to help around 100,000 (nationally) disabled people, people with health conditions and complex barriers to employment to seek to find sustainable work each year by offering them voluntary support based on the high-fidelity model of Supported Employment.

13. Connect to Work Programme (CtW) will build on the existing DWP funded Supported Employment programmes; Local Supported Employment (LSE) and Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care (IPSPC).
14. CtW is a separate programme complementing other local or national supported employment programmes such as NHS England's Individual Placement and Support for people with severe mental illness (IPS SMI) and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' Individual Placement and Support for Alcohol and Drug Dependence (IPS-AD) programme. Individuals will not be able to access these programmes and CtW simultaneously.
15. Connect to Work will be delivered by 43 Accountable Bodies in England over five years, 2025-2030. Oxfordshire County Council is the Accountable Body for local design and delivery of the programme across the geographical boundaries of Oxfordshire.
16. There are two core participant pathways under Supported Employment: Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) and the Individual Placement and Support (IPS). The main difference in the pathways is the target audience - IPS supports people with severe mental health challenges whereas SEQF is more tailored to support individuals with learning disabilities and autism. Under CtW, SEQF is expected to support 30% of the participants while IPS will support 70%.
17. Over the five years of the programme, there is an indicative target of 2,000 participants in Oxfordshire, split between the two models (70% for IPS and 30% for SEQF pathways). The indicative cost of the programme in Oxfordshire is approx. £8.4 million based on the DWP's current demand modelling. The programme will be funded in arrears by the DWP subject to an agreed delivery plan and grant funding agreement.

Delivery of the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) Pathway

18. In Oxfordshire, [Oxfordshire Employment](#), the Council's dedicated supported employment service, helps people with long-term health issues or a disability to gain and maintain employment. Oxfordshire Employment is currently the only provider that holds the Supported Employment Fidelity Accreditation within the county, providing employment support for over 75 years.
19. Oxfordshire Employment was tasked to work on the scope and potential design of CtW implementation in Oxfordshire to support around 2,000 people expected to access the CtW programme. This is through the provision of the Supported Employment 5 Stage Model and the IPS model, both accredited as high-fidelity models of engagement.
20. The commercial strategy and business case put forward options for the identification and appointment of suitable contractors. In considering the options, consideration was given to the fit of CtW with wider government and local support (as reflected in the local work, health, and skills plan). Future planning for Oxfordshire Employment's sustainability is included in the delivery

model design, allowing for further consideration in the long term. The business case was approved by the Council's Senior Leadership Board on 17th February 2025.

Delivery of the Individual Placement Support Pathway (IPS)

21. A mapping exercise was conducted to identify potential providers of the IPS pathway and a number of organisations that could be interested in delivering local Connect to Work programmes identified.
22. Market engagement took place to explore opportunities with these potential organisations, including with Enterprise Oxfordshire (a Teckal company¹, previously known as OxLEP).
23. An options appraisal was conducted to choose the IPS pathway provider, ensuring Oxfordshire residents get the most value from the CtW programme. The appraisal considered the following criteria:
 - The ability to meet the ambitious DWP timescales for the delivery of the programme and the programme outcomes
 - The capability to deliver a quality, fidelity model for IPS in Oxfordshire
 - Opportunities to tap into the existing experience and knowledge of Oxfordshire's labour market
 - Ability to focus on supporting local people into employment effectively in conjunction with Council's ambitions and existing programmes to support inclusive employment in Oxfordshire
 - Achieving ambitions which reflect the strategic vision of the Oxfordshire Way and other local strategy across health, employment, and communities
 - Deliver social value including keeping investment and jobs local as well as building capacity of local organisations and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE).
24. The appraisal concluded that the option of a mixed model where Oxfordshire Employment delivers the '5 Stage Supported Employment' Workstream and the Council commissions Enterprise Oxfordshire for the IPS pathway would be the best route for a successful delivery of this programme in Oxfordshire. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care supported this approach on 29th April 2025.

Programme Delivery

25. The programme will expand current local provision and provide an opportunity to bring together multiple referral pathways and a 'single front door' offering (through physical locations and on online portal).
26. The Local Supported Employment programme (LSE), developed by DWP as a test and learn model for CtW, is currently operated by Oxfordshire Employment. This is projected to run to July 2025, and it is expected that the current programme pipeline be preserved and extended until the start of CtW delivery.

27. Consideration is given in the new contract to the current SEQF programme pipeline and longer-term planning to ensure continuity of service. External provision will need to be fidelity accredited to be grant compliant. DWP have confirmed accreditation can be secured after award with sufficient mitigations written into contract terms.
28. Enterprise Oxfordshire (previously OxLEP) provides a non-fidelity accredited employment support programme in Oxfordshire and have demonstrated capability and appetite for delivery of the IPS model in their capacity as a local authority Teckal company. Enterprise Oxfordshire have completed an IPS self-assessment in advance of programme start.
29. Internal resource is in place and subject to regular review to support programme design, implementation, and mobilisation. Additional support is procured via a specialist consultant to minimise risk to the timeline, market engagement and design through initial planning phases with an option to extend into implementation phase.
30. Resourcing for the programme is included as part of the delivery design and any tendered offer (Enterprise Oxfordshire tendered services), which will be developed according to key criteria and DWP conditions.
31. The design stage has addressed key risks to ensure suitable mitigations are in place to enable delivery of a high quality, innovative programme. Key issues addressed include:
 - Sighting and accessibility of the programme (residents)
 - Equity in service/ provision
 - Enhanced, sustainable hyper local networks, that leave a legacy
 - Avoidance of duplication in offers
 - Complementary offer that strengthens existing provision
 - Engagement across stakeholders and in co-design of service/s
 - Sighting of offer
 - Best practice commissioning and accessibility/equity of opportunity (SME's - local specialists)
32. The Delivery Plan outlines how the preferred mixed delivery model combining internal delivery by Oxfordshire Employment and commissioned external partners will work in Oxfordshire. This plan was shaped through co-production and engagement, with a range of stakeholders and partners. Engagement and co-production will continue through the implementation period of the Delivery Plan.

Communications and Marketing

33. The programme will be supported with a Communications and Marketing plan that will give consideration for different audience groups, using appropriate language, visuals, and tools to ensure effective reach and engagement with potential participants and stakeholders. Marketing and communications efforts

will be flexible through the development, implementation, and delivery phases of the programme to ensure expectations are clearly communicated to all parties. ~~contracted parties and partner groups.~~

Timescales & Next Steps

34. For the Council to move into the Grant Agreement stage, as Accountable Body with DWP, DWP must first approve the Delivery Plan (including Grant Cost Register).
35. A draft delivery plan and grant cost register were submitted to DWP in May 2025. Feedback was received on 13 June 2025. The overall feedback has been positive. Work is underway to provide additional information requested on the Delivery Plan, to progress to formal panel review and sign off stage in summer 2025. Following the DWP's approval, the programme is planned to start in November 2025.
36. The implementation is contingent on programme progress against key milestones and reviews by the DWP. As the model evolves, timelines and key dates will be updated accordingly.
37. This is a 5-year programme, subject to spending reviews, ending 31 March 2030. Financial risk is included within the Risk Register and mitigations are included in the contracting arrangements.

Links to Oxfordshire's Strategic Priorities

38. This programme will expand successful Oxfordshire Employment and Enterprise initiatives to support people in accessing and maintaining quality employment.
We believe this programme and funding will give the opportunity to ensure alignment with our strategic plans and initiatives including Get Oxfordshire Working to achieve the impact.
39. Stakeholder and Partner engagement will continue and develop as the programme moves from planning to implementation and delivery phases. We will continue working with our system partners such as our local Health and Wellbeing Board, Integrated Care Systems/Integrated Care Board partners, Job Centre Plus (JCP) as well as other key local stakeholders through the project governance structure and engagement activities.
40. Work continues to inform and align with internal colleagues across key directorates such as Economy & Place, Public Health, Marketing and Comms, Co-production, Joint Commissioning, and others for early engagement into programme development and design.
41. Alongside CtW, the Council, in partnership with the Integrated Care Board and Job Centre Plus must produce a local Get Britain Working plan ('Get Oxfordshire Working'), which will deliver a whole system approach to tackling the supply and demand challenges within local labour markets, covering

market issues such as participation, progression, earnings and job quality in the labour market. Aligning our local Get Oxfordshire Working plan and CtW programmes will ensure a whole place approach and methodology.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

42. Good quality work provides people with income, social interaction, a sense of fulfilment and purpose among many other benefits. Work supports people's wellbeing and aligns with the overarching strategy for delivering Adult Social Care in Oxfordshire, the Oxfordshire Way, which focuses on using strengths-based approaches and empowering people to be independent and live well in their community.
43. The programme supports the Council's strategic priorities in tackling inequalities in Oxfordshire, creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential and working with local businesses for economic and social benefit.

Financial Implications

44. The programme is fully funded against a five-year operational period by DWP subject to a delivery plan and grant funding agreement. We do not expect any exceptional expenditure.
45. Based on DWP modelling, 2,000 people are expected to access the programme. DWP estimated the lifetime cost to be £4,200 per participant indicating a programme budget of circa £8.4 million.
46. The Council has been awarded £100,000.00 from the total project budget to fund development activities.
47. It is recommended that the proposed contract length is 5-years with review periods after 1 year, 3 years and 5 years, which will give the opportunity to review the service provided.
48. It is also recommended that there be an option to extend for 2-years, should further government funding be provided as has been the case in other programmes. This will give the Council flexibility should short-term funding be allocated before any further support programmes come in.
49. The following grant conditions should be noted:
 - Grant funding is 'in arrears' and subject to agreement by DWP who may adjust or cancel such funding dependent on review outcomes. This risk is recognised in the risk profile of the project. Relevant mitigations will be included in contracting terms as appropriate.
 - DWP volumetric assumptions are that there will be a ramp up in 2025/2026 with peak volumes (100k participants per year nationally) in 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 before reducing towards the end of 2028/2029 as the

programme winds down and a small volume and tail costs in 2029/2030.
This is subject to outcomes of future Government Spending Reviews.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

50. The delivery of the CtW Programme will require entering into and complying with the DWP grant agreement conditions and guidance which will need legal input and support.
51. The Council is authorised to enter into such grant agreements in accordance with the financial procedure rules of its constitution and such arrangement will be monitored by the Councils s151 officer and relevant directors to ensure such funds are appropriately accounted for and used in accordance with the grant agreement terms and conditions.
52. The grant agreement conditions will be mirrored into any agreement with Enterprise Oxfordshire or any other Delivery Partner, including a condition for any subcontracted parties to adhere to such conditions.
53. The grant and project are pursuant to section 2 of the Employment and Training Act 1973 where the Secretary of State shall make such arrangements as he considers appropriate for the purpose of assisting persons to select, train for, obtain and retain employment suitable for their ages and capacities or of assisting persons to obtain suitable employees (including partners and other business associates).

Comments checked by:

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Staff Implications

54. Internal resource is in place to support programme design, implementation, and mobilisation. Additional support is procured via a specialist consultant to minimise risk to the timeline, market engagement and design through initial planning phases with an option to extend into implementation phase.
55. Resourcing for the programme is included as part of the delivery design and any tendered offer (Enterprise Oxfordshire tendered services), which will be developed according to key criteria and DWP conditions.

56. HR business partners are engaged in the design discussions to ensure that recruitment to specific posts is made in accordance with the Council's own policies and procedures.
57. Resourcing across the project is kept under regular review through the assigned project management function.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

58. CtW is a flagship initiative under the Government's 'Get Britain Working' strategy and is aligned with Oxfordshire's broader goals to reduce economic inactivity and promote inclusive growth. It is designed to complement local health, skills, and employment systems, ensuring a joined-up approach to tackling inequality.
59. The core mission of CtW is to support individuals who are currently outside the workforce and face significant barriers to employment such as disability, long-term health conditions, caring responsibilities, or homelessness. By focusing on these groups, the programme directly addresses structural inequalities in access to work and contributes to the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities.
60. In addition, the delivery plan supports workforce equality and inclusion by:
 - Promoting disability confidence among employers
 - Supporting Access to Work applications and job carving
 - Implementing EDI strategies with mandatory training, staff networks, and race equality standards.
61. The programme features KPIs and delivery frameworks to monitor progress in addressing employment disparities across urban and rural areas. The stakeholder plan, for instance, aims to reduce these disparities by 2029.
62. Contracting terms will require any contracting party to adhere to the relevant legislation and standards as a minimum with clear expectations as to culture, training, and onward investment in EDI.

Sustainability Implications

63. Contracting terms will include the Council's standard terms and expectations for sustainability and environmental impact. It is not anticipated that a separate Climate Impact Assessment will be required at this stage.
64. Conditions will be mirrored into any agreement with Enterprise Oxfordshire or any other Delivery Partner, including a condition for any subcontracted parties to adhere to such conditions where applicable.

Risk Management

65. The development plan includes a fully developed risk assessment and management plan which is kept under review. The following risks have been identified and appropriate mitigations included in the delivery plan:

- Programme timetable managed by DWP
- Programme resource and capacity for planning, implementation, and delivery
- Duplication of provision
- Volumes of participants (in line with DWP profiling)
- IPS procurement of a delivery partner
- Cashflow / defrayed payments
- Continuation of grant funding (review based).
- Enterprise Oxfordshire's capacity to support the programme in the short-term
- Recruitment challenges given volume of Employment Advisors required at peak delivery

Annexes:

1. Delivery Elements: [Connect to Work Annex 1- Delivery Elements.docx](#)
2. Options Appraisal: [Connect to Work Annex 2 CtW Options Appraisal Template V1.0.docx](#)
3. Informal Cabinet report (April): [CMDASC20250429 Reports pack.pdf](#)
4. Timeline (Updated): [Connect to Work Annex 3 Timeline June.xlsx](#)
5. Risk Register: [Risk Register - CtW Programme.xlsx](#)

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