

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL DECISION

DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR CATHERINE GIBBONS THE CABINET MEMBER FOR SKILLS



WITH ADVICE FROM: THE DIRECTOR OF HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND S151 OFFICER

DECISION NO: 25/26 HSC 165

SUBJECT: ACCEPTANCE OF CONNECT TO WORK EQUITY FUNDING AND APPROVAL OF SPEND IN LINE WITH AGREED DELIVERY PLAN AND WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY GRANT FUNDING AGREEMENT.

KEY DECISION: YES

REASON: The value of the grant is £520,000.

BACKGROUND:

Connect to Work (CtW) is a national programme supporting people with disabilities and other disadvantages into paid work. Strategically it supports the Government's Get Britain Working White Paper and aims to achieve 80% employment rates nationally and support local strategic and political priorities for employability, health and growth. Specifically, Connect to Work will be a key delivery strand of the regional Get West of England Working Plan and [North Somerset Council's Economic Growth Plan 2025 – 2035](#).

CtW will be delivered across North Somerset as well as the Mayoral Combined Authority area (Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire). CtW will run from January 2025 – March 2029. Currently North Somerset does not benefit from funding from the Mayoral Combined Authority to have a comparative Regional Employment Service, which underpins the preparatory and triage services needed to make CtW successful, and therefore some resource has been allocated to North Somerset to ensure CtW can benefit from this infrastructure to support referrals and triage.

To ensure there is an equal and consistent offer to residents across the entire CtW delivery area the following elements of support are included in the budget for the North Somerset CtW delivery plan:

- Equity Funding for North Somerset consisting of:
 - Connect 2 Work Triage and Support Officers: 2.0 FTE (Years 1 – 4)
 - Senior Economic Development Officer: 0.5 FTE (Years 1 – 4)

These posts fit into the wider budget as follows:

Cost Heading	Total (£)	Description
Staff costs and Overheads	£479,579	2 x FTE L6 Connect 2 Work Triage and Support Officers 0.5FTE Senior Economic Development Officer (Employment and Skills) 20% overheads to include redundancy payments, pay increases, travel, expenses, DBS checks, staff training
Participant Budget	£26,000	To support participants with unexpected costs which might support them into work e.g. clothing, travel, equipment, access to small training costs e.g. CSCS cards.
Marketing costs	£4,000	Estimate for leaflets, newsletter, materials for events
Legal and procurement costs	£4,000	For data sharing agreement and annual audit costs
Office Equipment	£3,800	Estimate for replacement equipment for staff including laptops, wheelie cases, any chairs or associated items from VDU checks
Other relevant costs	£1,900	Room and venue bookings, Lamplight, catering

TOTAL COST	£519,217
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In line with the requirements of the [Supported Employment Model](#), these roles will provide triage support to ensure the effective referral of participants from Expression of Interest (EoI) to the correct Employment Specialist Coaches within the external delivery elements. The management resource will support with linking CtW to other local employability and skills support across North Somerset. A grant agreement between North Somerset Council and the MCA will be in place to manage delivery.

DECISION:

- To accept the Connect to Work equity funding and delegate the signing of the Grant Funding Agreement to the Head of Economy.
- To agree spend of the Connect to Work equity funding in line with the Grant Funding Agreement with the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and in line with the delivery plan staffing arrangements set out in the background section of this document.
- To create and recruit 2 FTE Connect 2 Work Triage and Support Officers, L6 starting no sooner than Feb 2026 and ending by 31st March 2029.
- To fund 0.5FTE of role DEECD0053 from February 2026 – 31st March 2029.
- To gross up the income and expenditure budgets in the relevant years.

REASONS:

- Alignment with strategic priorities - accepting the equity funding and implementing the proposed staffing model directly supports both national and regional employment strategies — including Get Britain Working, Get West of England Working, and North Somerset's Economic Growth Plan 2025–2035. This ensures that North Somerset is fully integrated into wider efforts to boost employment and reduce inequalities.
- Ensures equity across the region - the staffing model ensures that North Somerset residents receive the same level of support as those in MCA-funded areas. Without this, there would be a disparity in access to employment services, undermining the principle of inclusive growth.
- Supports the supported employment model - the inclusion of triage coordinators and a part-time manager is essential to delivering the Supported Employment Model effectively. These roles ensure that participants are matched appropriately with Employment Specialist Coaches, improving outcomes and reducing drop-out rates.
- Maximises use of external delivery infrastructure - by accepting the funding and aligning with MCA infrastructure, North Somerset can benefit from established systems for referrals and triage, avoiding duplication and ensuring efficient use of resources.
- Strengthens local partnerships and integration - the management resource will play a key role in linking CtW with other local employability and skills programmes, helping to build a more cohesive and responsive support ecosystem for residents.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

Alternative Staffing Models - Alternative configurations, such as reducing the number of triage coordinators or reallocating management capacity, were considered. However, these models would compromise the integrity of the Supported Employment Model, which relies on consistent and timely triage to ensure participants are matched with appropriate support. Reducing staffing would risk delays in referrals, uneven service quality across the region, and reduced capacity to link CtW with wider local employment and skills initiatives.

Not to Accept the Grant Funding - Declining the equity funding would result in a significant gap in service provision for North Somerset residents, creating inequality in access compared to neighbouring areas covered by the Mayoral Combined Authority. Without this funding, North Somerset would lack the infrastructure to deliver the CtW programme effectively, undermining both regional strategic goals and local economic growth priorities. It would also risk reputational damage and missed opportunities for partnership working and future funding.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Costs

The anticipated costs and budget is as follows:

Cost Heading	Total (£)	Description

Staff costs and Overheads	£479,579	2 x FTE L6 Connect 2 Work Triage and Support Officers 0.5FTE Senior Economic Development Officer (Employment and Skills) 20% overheads to include redundancy payments, pay increases, travel, expenses, DBS checks, staff training
Participant Budget	£26,000	To support participants with unexpected costs which might support them into work e.g. clothing, travel, equipment, access to small training costs e.g. CSCS cards.
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Other relevant costs	£1,900	Room and venue bookings, Lamplight, catering

There is further background work to show annual breakdowns if needed.

Funding:

All activity will be fully funded from the Connect to Work Programme Grant from the West of England Combined Authority. No activity will take place or spend until the Grant Funding Agreement has been signed.

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

These recruitment and contract changes will be managed by Human Resources to ensure proper legal practices are followed in the appointment of officers or staff into positions. The spend of the money will be delivered in line with terms and conditions of WECA's Grant Funding Agreement with the Council.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Economic development work aims to create and keep jobs in North Somerset. Overall, this should have a positive impact on carbon output as commuting is reduced.

CONSULTATION

Support will be available across all of North Somerset so ward member engagement is not applicable, however PESC (Planning, Economy, Skills, and Climate) Scrutiny Panel were consulted on 16th December.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Inherent risk score	Residual likelihood	Residual impact	Residual risk score	Comments
Risk of not being able to engage and recruit the right participants	MED	1	4	MED	The service is well established and has consistently attracted the right

to achieve enrolment numbers/targets					demographics. Staff have raised profiles and tested various engagement methods to reduce risk. Ongoing marketing and communications will further support this
Risk of increased needs being presented by target groups, impacting on delivery and progressions	HIGH	4	3	MEDHIGH	This is highly likely as it has been seen across the current iteration of the project. The ONS delivery team have significant knowledge and experience of wrap-around support and provision and working collaboratively with other services to provide a program of support.
Risk of strategic partners not referring into Opportunity North Somerset Employment and Skills Hub	MEDLOW	1	3	MEDLOW	Monitor referral routes and analyse data to identify partners needing more service information. Maintain relationships through the 'Opportunity North Somerset Network' to encourage referrals and sharing
Risk of a failure to establish a single "One Front Door", which may undermine efforts to simplify the employment and skills ecosystem, potentially leading to fragmented services, reduced collaboration, and decreased effectiveness in meeting regional	LOW	1	1	LOW	The benefits of a single brand will be clearly communicated to demonstrate the benefits for all users, through utilising existing strong partnerships and regularly communicating with Executive Members. Learning from the success of this model previously will be applied.

employment and skills objectives					
Risk of participants not completing the programme and associated outputs and outcomes	MED	2	3	LOWMED	This risk is present in current delivery. It is mitigated against through close working with participants, ensuring they are supported throughout their journey to achieve the outputs and outcomes. The team have significant experience of managing this risk and report any issued through case load management reviews.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

An EIA assessment has identified a number of positive impacts from the implementation of this programme. A summary is below:

Group	Impact	Rationale
Disabled people	Low positive	
People from different ethnic groups	Low positive	
Men or women (including pregnant women or those on maternity leave)	Low positive	
Lesbian, gay or bisexual people	Neutral	
People on a low income	Low positive	
People in particular age groups	Low positive	
People in particular faith groups	Low positive	
People who are married or in a civil partnership	Neutral	
Transgender people	Neutral	
Other specific impacts, for example: carers, parents, impact on health and wellbeing.	Low positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to Work will target cohorts where high levels of unemployment have been identified including young people, over 50s, those working in atypical or precarious work (which has over representation from racially minoritised communities) and those on a low income. • The project will encourage the council to work with employers and other partners to break down barriers to inclusion and equality

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Some support will be required from HR in relation to recruitment and paperwork associated with VTCs and RTFs. Ongoing support will be required from finance to ensure compliant grant funding claims are provided to WECA.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Issue details - Connect to Work - Modern Council](#)

SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):

Signed: Cabinet Member for Skills

Date:

WITH ADVICE FROM:

Signed: Director of Healthy and Sustainable Communities

Date:

Signed: S151 Officer

Date: