

OPEN

11 November 2024

Connect to Work Programme (Universal Support)

Cheshire+  
Warrington  
Joint Committee

Report of: Gemma Davies, Director Economy and Housing, Cheshire West and Chester Council

Report Reference No: CWJC/05/24-25

Significant/Key Decision?	Yes/No
Cheshire West and Chester	No
Warrington	Yes
Cheshire East	Yes

### Purpose of Report

- 1 This report outlines a programme of work which will support economic development across Cheshire and Warrington. The programme will be co-ordinated and delivered as one, in line with and in preparation for devolution for the sub-region.
2. The Connect to Work Programme will provide a single delivery plan for a major strategic issue: supporting economically inactive<sup>1</sup> adults, return to and sustain employment. In March 2024, it was estimated that 18,500 economically inactive people resident in Cheshire and Warrington wanted a job. The programme directly supports the Governments mission to break down barriers to work.
- 3 The recommendation from Growth Directors is that Cheshire West and Chester Council act as the Lead and Accountable Body for this piece of work.

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1 Individuals who are not working, have not been looking for work within the last 4 weeks or who are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks. Examples of economically inactive individuals include individuals not looking for work because: they are students, they are looking after the family or home, of illness or disability or they have retired.

## Executive Summary

- 4 This report provides an overview of the new Connect to Work Programme and how it would be delivered in a co-ordinated manner across the whole of Cheshire and Warrington. Growth Directors have been aware of this programme for some time, as it was initially proposed by the Conservative Government. It has since been adopted, with some amendments by the new Labour Government. The aim of the Connect to Work Programme is to enable people who are disabled, with a long-term health condition or experiencing complex barriers to seek and find sustainable work. It will better connect local work with health and skills support and will be a key part of the government's "Get Britain Working Strategy" (due to be published in the Autumn 2024).
- 5 This programme is to be discussed at the Joint Committee meeting as partners will be agreeing to a project that will respond to a major economic priority identified by Cheshire and Warrington – supporting more of our residents to be able to access and sustain employment.
- 6 This document will provide high level details of the Programme – the associated funding, outputs to be achieved and the next steps required.
- 7 As the £4.5m funding is a grant allocation, calculated via a national formula, Growth Directors would like to recommend that the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee approve the request for Cheshire West and Chester Council to accept and lead on the delivery this Programme on behalf of residents in Cheshire and Warrington.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee is recommended to:

1. Acknowledge the information in this report
2. Acknowledge and confirm that Cheshire West and Chester Council (as recommended by Growth Directors) will:
  - a. Accept the £4.5m funding per year on behalf of Cheshire and Warrington.
  - b. Lead on the development and submission of a sub-regional delivery plan for the Connect to Work Programme.
  - c. Act as Lead and Accountable Body for the new Connect to Work Programme for Cheshire and Warrington, a programme that would directly respond to an identified economic priority of the sub-region.

## Report Detail

- 8 In the 2023 Spring Budget, the previous Government announced that it would be looking to support economically inactive people to overcome their barriers to employment. This was to be called Universal Support. The first three pilot

strands of this model were Pioneer, Individualised Placement and Support for Primary Care (IPSPC) and Local Supported Employment (LSE). These programmes were launched in England and Wales in Autumn 2023.

- 9 In April 2024, a letter from DWP was sent to the three Chief Executives for Cheshire and Warrington, along with a draft prospectus for the Universal Support programme. This indicated that the expected allocation for the sub-region would be £4.5m a year with the end goal of supporting 1,300 people per annum.
- 10 Since the general election, the new Labour government has been developing its own approach to supporting the 93,000 people who are disabled, with a long-term health condition or experiencing complex barriers to seek and find sustainable work each year. It will aim to better connect local work with health and skills support. This will be central to its “Get Britain Working Strategy”.
- 11 DWP have recently sent details of the new proposed “Connect to Work Programme” to the Accountable Bodies for each of the 45 delivery areas. This included draft guidance and funding agreement, technical documents and a template for the local area’s delivery plan. Final versions of these documents are expected to be published in Mid-November 2024.
- 12 The Connect to Work Programme will be voluntary and available to adults (18+) who meet the eligibility and suitability criteria. It will complement other employment support programmes commissioned by the NHS (IPS in Severe Mental Illness) and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (IPS in Alcohol and Drug Dependency). It is expected that 85% of the budget would be used to support adults who are out of work and 15% used to support adults in work to retain employment
- 13 Cheshire and Warrington Growth Directors agreed in July 2024, that Cheshire West and Chester should act as the Lead and Accountable Body for this new programme. This was due to the Council’s extensive experience of delivering employment support programmes (including two of the pilot strands listed above) and adhering to both the Individualised Placement and Support (IPS) and Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) fidelity models<sup>2</sup>.
- 14 As the Accountable Body for Cheshire and Warrington, Cheshire West and Chester Council would be responsible for:
  - The commissioning and establishment of the Connect to Work Programme

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<sup>2</sup> [What is IPS? - Individual Placement Support - IPS Grow Quality in Supported Employment Delivery | British Association for Supported Employment](#)

- Establishing the governance arrangements required across the delivery area
- Development of the delivery plan, co-produced with Cheshire East and Warrington Local Authorities and key stakeholders
- Shaping the Connect to Work Programme around local services and priorities
- Managing the day-to-day operations and be accountable for the use of funding
- Ensuring outcomes for participants are delivered
- Providing information and evidence to DWP
- Determining the delivery model for the area: in-house, outsourced or mixed
- Identifying a single point of contact for the programme

15 There will be funding available to support the Accountable Body to procure and appoint delivery partners, carry out relevant recruitment and training required, develop processes and procedures and marketing activity in line with the programmes branding guidelines. This will be available during the implementation phase of the programme.

16 The draft documents provided by DWP have included both an indicative unit cost for participants and volumes expected from Cheshire and Warrington (broken down by Local Authority area). The indicative unit cost per participant for the sub-region is £3,800 and the expected volume of participants to reach at the programmes peak is 1,300 per year<sup>33</sup>.

17 The budget for Cheshire and Warrington is £4.5m a year, which has been calculated using a national formula.

18 The volume of starts (at peak) for the three Local Authorities is broken down as follows:

- |                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| • Cheshire East             | 400 |
| • Cheshire West and Chester | 700 |
| • Warrington                | 200 |

The funding and volumes will only be confirmed following the approval of the local delivery plan. This will be developed by local areas, supported by DWP officers.

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<sup>33</sup> Peak activity is expected to be 9 months after the first participants start the programme and ideally should be sustained for a couple of years.

- 19 The funding will be ringfenced, with spend only allowed if it meets specified cost register cost categories set out by DWP. Activity should align with economic, skills and growth hub planning as well as the Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)<sup>4</sup>
- 20 The contract between DWP and Cheshire West and Chester Council will be from the date the Grant Funding Agreement is signed and 31 March 2030.
- 21 Funding is not guaranteed for this period as it will be subject to future spending reviews.
- 22 There is a willingness to start to plan an early adoption of the new Connect to Work Programme from all three Local Authorities as Warrington and Cheshire East Council are currently supporting economically inactive adults through activity funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). This fund is currently due to end on 31 March 2025.
- 23 Although IPSPC and LSE are operational in Cheshire West, without an extension period granted, the referrals will need to end in December 2024. Without the introduction of the Connect to Work Programme there will be a stalling in employment support for some of our most vulnerable residents.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 24 Without accepting this grant, there will be no targeted employment support provision for economically inactive adults in Cheshire and Warrington. This would prevent residents from developing their skills and capabilities to seek and progress into employment, restricting their earning potential and the viability and performance of our businesses who may require additional talent to thrive and grow.
- 25 This sub-regional grant, would also be the first opportunity to pilot a devolved way of working, ensuring provision available is co-ordinated and consistent across the whole of Cheshire and Warrington.
- 26 This programme links to the:
  - Cheshire West and Chester’s Borough Plan, especially the “Opportunity for a Fair Local Economy” mission.
  - Cheshire East Council’s Corporate Plan, especially the “Fair” aim, “...to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents

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<sup>4</sup> [Home - Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

- Warrington Borough Council's Corporate Strategy, especially the pledge: "Everyone benefits from our thriving economy"
- The programme also links to the Government's mission to support people who are disabled, with a long-term health condition or experiencing complex barriers to seek and find sustainable work and will be part of the forthcoming "Get Britain Working Strategy".

### **Other Consultation and Engagement**

27 To date there has been no consultation or engagement, other than meetings between DWP, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and the three local authorities. However, should there be an agreement to accept this grant funding and deliver this programme, there will be a requirement to develop and submit a delivery plan for the sub-region. This will be developed in partnership with key stakeholders including:

- The Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- DWP
- Primary and Community Care
- Charities and local groups (such as Faith Groups or those supporting residents with specific conditions)
- Prison work coaches and mentors
- Rehabilitation centres
- Domestic Abuse Refuges.

28 It is anticipated that these partners will also play an active role in the Partnership Group required to oversee the delivery of the programme once the Programme is operational.

29 In addition to the partners above, the team will engage with the Business Advisory Board, giving them an opportunity to shape the programme as it develops.

### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Legal implications*

30 Cheshire West and Chester Council as Accountable Body would be responsible for ensuring the spend and activity supported is in line with the Grant Funding Agreement. This will involve the establishment of systems and processes to ensure eligibility and suitability rules are adhered to and that no fraudulent activity occurs. This will apply to direct and commissioned activity across the whole sub-region.

31 The Programme and decision appear to fall within the current Terms of Reference for the Committee albeit further decisions lie with Cheshire West and Chester. Progress reports should be provided in due course.

### *Finance implications*

- 32 The Connect to Work Programme would bring in an additional revenue budget of £4.5m to the sub-regional annually until 2030 – however this would be dependent on the outcome of future spending reviews and programme performance nationally. This funding is a grant allocation and is not subject to a competitive bidding process.
- 33 There would be no requirement of any ECW budgets being utilised to support the delivery of this programme.
- 34 Given that funding levels to 2030 are uncertain the joint committee and accountable body need to consider how activity would be funded or reduced in the event that funding levels change.
- 35 Implementation funding is also outlined in the report which should help to reduce the burden on existing resources for the accountable body.

### *Risk Management*

- 36 A detailed risk register will be developed alongside the delivery plan to ensure we have identified the risks associated with the Programme and any mitigating actions needed. This will include due diligence checks required when commissioning some activity to delivery partners, ensuring all delivery partners check that participants accessing the Connect to Work Programme are both eligible and suitable and that any financial claims are in line with the DWP cost register.
- 37 This risk register will be monitored as part of the operational and strategic partnership groups that will be established to support the successful delivery of the programme.

### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 38 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this programme. Please see attached Background paper. The programme will have a positive impact on many of the priority groups identified. The delivery team will be working closely with a range of stakeholders to ensure that as many eligible and suitable residents as possible are able to benefit from the support provided through the programme.

### *Policy*

- 39 The Connect to Work Programme's key mission is to support those economically inactive adults who are also part of an identified priority group to develop skills and capabilities to seek, access and sustain employment. This not only will generate benefits for the economy, but also our residents. Research has shown that employment can positively impact on an individual's health, as well as improving their earning potential.

- 40 By supporting both businesses and residents, the Programme will also help to ensure that the employment opportunities available in Cheshire and Warrington are accessible by the residents that live in the sub-region.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Gemma Davies Gemma.davies@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Equality Analysis for the programme
Background Papers:	