

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	10 MARCH 2026
Report Title:	CONNECT TO WORK
Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING JANINE NIGHTINGALE, CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES
Responsible Officer:	MARTIN MORGANS, HEAD OF PUBLIC REALM
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the policy framework of procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	Connect to Work (CTW) is a new 5 year programme to be delivered by Local Authority areas in England and Wales, with funding being made available from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In South East Wales it has been proposed that the programme be led by Cardiff Council as Grant Recipient Body for 10 Local Authorities in South East Wales. Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC) funding allocation is £4,055,200 from 2025/26 to 2029/30 to support 1,096 participants. It is a voluntary, high fidelity Supported Employment programme connecting work, health and skills support. The aim is to help disabled people, people with health conditions and those with complex barriers, find and stay in work.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with an overview of the UK Government's Connect To Work programme, to agree a proposal that Cardiff Council act as the regional Grant Recipient Body, and to authorise officers to enter into required agreements to deliver Connect To Work in Bridgend County.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Get Britain Working White Paper was published in November 2024, which outlines the UK Government's strategy to tackle rising economic inactivity and reform employment support systems. It sets out the ambition to reverse declining employment rates, a direct response to a rise in economic inactivity specifically in relation to long-term sickness and health-related barriers to employment
- 2.2 The Get Britain Working White Paper is structured around 3 main pillars:
- Modern Industrial Strategy and Local Growth Plans; creating more employment opportunities across the UK.
 - Improving Job Quality and Security.
 - Transforming Employment Support Systems
- 2.3 To tackle ill-health as a major driver of economic inactivity, a new employment programme has been launched. The UK Government funded, and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) managed programme – Connect To Work (CTW) – will support around 100,000 people nationally over the course of the 5 year programme between April 2025 – March 2030.
- 2.4 As of February 2025, there were over 88,000 people claiming Universal Credit and over 43,000 people claiming Employment Support Allowance, in the South East Wales Region. As of September 2025, there were 37,000 people on long-term sick in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) Health board footprint. According to NOMIS, in Bridgend, the total population is 147,000 as of 2024, of which the working age population (aged 16-64) is 90, 414. To September 2025, there were 21,500 residents that are economically inactive, of which 10,000 are long-term sick.
- 2.5 The Work and Health Programme has shown a need for dedicated and specialist provision to support this cohort within the region, with over 29,000 people accessing support to go into sustained employment. Referrals to the Work and Health Programme ended in September 2024, with support ceasing for participants completely in July 2026. The CTW programme will become the successor programme.
- 2.6 CTW is a voluntary Supported Employment project which aims to help disabled people, those with health conditions and people with complex barriers to find sustainable work including those with a disability or long-term health conditions (including neurodivergence), mental health needs, substance dependency (drug or alcohol), homelessness or at risk of homelessness, offenders or ex-offenders, carers, victims/survivors of domestic abuse, young people with care experience, refugees, former Armed Forces personnel and/or their families and victims of modern slavery. It also provides support to those who are in work but are at risk of falling out of the labour market.
- 2.7 The programme's primary focus for this voluntary provision will be those of working age who are not required to seek employment as a condition of benefit support. CTW will take a local approach to tackling unemployment by connecting employment, health and skills provision in each local authority area. CTW will complement existing

employment support projects by focussing on people who aren't being reached by mainstream services.

- 2.8 Unlike many Employment Support projects which focus on preparing individuals to find and stay in work, the CTW programme takes a different approach. As a Supported Employment initiative, it offers specialist, long-term, and tailored support, using a 'place and train' model (individuals are placed in a job role first and then receive on the job training), alongside ongoing assistance and workplace adjustments to help individuals succeed in employment.
- 2.9 CTW will provide out of work participants with intensive support for up to 12 months. It will also include support for up to 4 months for people in-work who are at risk of losing their job. The support will be based on the well evidenced Individual Placement and Support or Supported Employment Quality Framework fidelity models as appropriate to the participant. Help will include early access to jobs based on job preferences, access to a wide range of support including job and skills matching, on the job training and help to sustain employment, which might include job coaching at work, training, support from a workplace mentor and regular workplace reviews. Support will be provided to the employer as well as the participant. CTW will also provide tailored self-employment support where appropriate.
- 2.10 CTW delivery will use both models of supported employment:

Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) which is 25% of total numbers (274) for Bridgend who would require support into work and up to 4 months support to sustain work using the more intensive SEQF fidelity model and would support individuals with learning difficulties and autism. This is done by intensively supporting the participant through a five stage project journey, which consists of:

1. Engagement - With a starting point of assuming everyone can work, supported employment proactively engages with individuals
2. Vocational Profiling - Spend time building a rich, strengths-based profile, in partnership with the person, to help match them to the right career.
3. Employer Engagement - Employers are valued as equal partners within the Supported Employment Model and their business requirements need to be at the heart of all conversations. Completing a Job analysis with them to build a picture of their business needs
4. Job Matching - Using the vocational profile and Job analysis supported employment matches the right person into the right role, based on the aspirations of the individual and the business needs of the employer.
5. In-work Support and Career Progression - Personalised support to enable individuals to learn and integrate into every aspect of their job and providing the support the employers need to feel Disability Confident in Action.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) which is 75% of total numbers (822) for Bridgend which is a 'place train and maintain' model bringing together vocational profiling, employer engagement, job finding and on and off the job support for participants. Employers are supported to take on participants and tailored self employment support is also offered. It uses the IPS fidelity model to support people

with mental health challenges, which also follows the five stage model, but with less intensive support expected.

2.11 CTW will be delivered across England and Wales, split into 43 regions of Local Authorities in England and 4 regions in Wales. Each region is required to have a Grant Recipient Body (GRB) to represent the Local Authorities in that area and distribute grant payments according to the regional funding profile. It is proposed that Cardiff Council is the GRB for South East Wales representing 10 Local Authorities including Bridgend.

2.12 As GRB Cardiff Council will be responsible for developing a regional delivery plan that brings together the delivery approaches of all ten Local Authorities in South East Wales. This plan must outline how the offer will be implemented across the region and must be approved by the DWP before delivery can begin and a grant agreement issued.

2.13 The GRB is responsible for:

- Determining how each Local Authority plans to deliver the programme, whether in-house delivery, commissioning external providers or a combination of both. Cardiff Council will not carry out procurement on behalf of other Local Authorities; DWP's Commercial Team will provide commissioning support.
- Overseeing the implementation of the delivery plan, working with the regional Local Authorities, Health Boards and other local key stakeholders.
- Establishing governance arrangements with the regional Local Authorities.
- Identifying how the region will work together to identify, check and secure eligible and suitable participants.
- Managing the day to day operation of the programme and have overall accountability for the grant funding and how the grant operates.
- Ensuring outcomes for participants are delivered in line with DWP performance indicators.
- Agreeing marketing activities to raise awareness of the programme with employers and potential participants.
- Managing the financial and operational performance, quality and audit of the overall programme across the region.
- Engaging with the DWP, meeting regularly to review performance, operational or financial risks or issues and considering contingency measures

2.14 To enable Cardiff Council to act as the GRB they are establishing a new Central Support Team to coordinate and manage the CTW programme. This team will be funded through an administration fee of 10% of the overall grant allocation for the region. Each local authority will be required to cover their own internal charges from their allocated funding.

2.15 To ensure appropriate governance of the programme, Cardiff Council will create 2 new groups with a structured timetable of meetings

- A Strategic Group will be established to provide oversight on key issues that require escalation, such as persistent underperformance, accountability, partnership working (particularly with the Health Boards and Care Providers), and strategic risk management.
- A Regional Operational Group to ensure smooth and effective delivery of the programme. The group will have programme oversight, performance monitoring, addressing delivery challenges including referrals, stakeholder engagement, compliance and reporting, and feedback to ensure continuous improvement.

2.16 It is proposed that The Enterprise and Employability Programme Manager represents BCBC on the CTW Strategic Group led by Cardiff Council and the Employability Team Leader represents BCBC on the CTW Operational Group.

3. Current situation/ proposal

3.1 The funding offer for the Bridgend CTW programme is set out below. There is no option to transfer funds between financial years.

Bridgend Connect To Work 2025/26 to 2029/30						
Total allocation (includes 10% Admin contribution to Cardiff)						
<i>Funding</i>	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	TOTALS
Bridgend Allocation	£262,700	£599,400	£1,376,400	£1,320,900	£495,800	£4,055,200
<i>Participants Bridgend</i>	71	162	372	357	134	1096

3.2 It is anticipated that CTW will commence regionally on 1st April 2026 so it is not anticipated that any of the 2025-26 Bridgend allocation of £262,700 will be drawn down. Cardiff has a regional allocation for initialisation costs for 2025-26, which can be utilised to prepare for the start of the project, including to train staff prior to a 1st April 2026 start, providing those staff have been appointed.

3.3 Work completed on CTW so far:

- In June 2025, Bridgend received the indicative funding shown in the table in paragraph 3.1. above
- In December 2025, Bridgend submitted information to Cardiff Council as GRB, under Delegated Power, to be included in the delivery plan.
- In December 2025, CTW job descriptions were written and submitted for job evaluation
- In January 2026, to be ready for 1st April 2026 start, BCBC HR agreed that these jobs could be advertised internally, with successful applicants only being officially appointed once funding is confirmed.

3.4 Foreseeable milestones to complete for CTW, dates of which are not confirmed:

- DWP approve delivery plan
- BCBC Cabinet approve participation in the project.
- Structure of team confirmed and appointed people placed in post
- Project receives a 'Go Live' date from GRB.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The Employability Bridgend project demonstrates the sustainable development principle by ensuring that by meeting the needs of the present they do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs this is evidenced through the 5 ways of working:

- Long term – it is important that residents, are provided with support in early adulthood which sets them up for their lives.
- Prevention – working with BCBC colleagues and other agencies to ensure that residents, seeking support are referred to Employability Bridgend for support.
- Integration – It is important that BCBC departments work together to ensure that support for vulnerable residents, is joined up.
- Collaboration – working together to ensure that Employability Bridgend has the right offer to support vulnerable residents, is vital to the Corporate Well-being aims of helping people become more healthy and resilient, and supporting a successful economy.
- Involvement – Employability Bridgend will continue to attend networks, such as the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that the support offer is up-to-date and shared and the voices of residents in need of support are respected and actioned where possible.

6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

6.1 There are no climate change or nature implications as a result of this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 The implementation of this project will enable the Council to further its Corporate Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting responsibilities by supporting residents of the County Borough, including vulnerable adults and Care Experienced Young People to increase life skills and find and sustain employment to enable more independent lives.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The funding available to BCBC to deliver CTW is set out below.

Bridgend Connect To Work 2025/26 to 2029/30						
Total allocation (includes 10% Admin contribution to Cardiff)						
Funding	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	TOTALS
<i>Bridgend</i>	£262,700	£599,400	£1,376,400	£1,320,900	£495,800	£4,055,200
<i>Admin Charge</i>	-£26,270	-£59,940	-£137,640	-£132,090	-£49,580	-£405,520
<i>Final Bridgend Allocation</i>	£236,430	£539,460	£1,238,760	£1,188,810	£446,220	£3,649,680

8.2 Year 1, 2025-26 funds will be foregone, due to the insufficient lead time from DWP to be able to start. This is the same across many local authorities.

8.3 Year 2, 2026-27 funding for this financial year would not allow this project to stand alone. However, coupled with other projects within Employability it becomes viable.

8.4 Year 3, 2027-28, is the first year that this project has sufficient funds to become a standalone project, with a 56% increase in funding.

8.5 Year 4, 2028-29 is very similar to year 3. However towards the end of year 4 the project will start to scale down, with staff contracts coming to end in anticipation of significantly less funding in year 5.

8.6 Year 5, 2029-30, will see project closure. We will enter year 5 with a significantly reduced budget and staff numbers. However, there is a chance that if the project is successful that DWP may renew the contract. This will not be known until towards the end of the project.

9. Recommendation(s)

9.1 To agree that Cardiff Council act as the Regional Grant Recipient Body.

9.2 To agree that The Enterprise and Employability Programme Manager represents BCBC on the CTW Strategic Group led by Cardiff Council and the Employability Team Leader represents BCBC on the CTW Operational Group.

9.3 Delegate authority to the Corporate Director Communities, in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal & Regulatory Services & HR & Electoral and Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change to negotiate and enter into a regional CTW funding agreement and any further deeds and documents which are ancillary to the agreement or that are necessary to deliver CTW.

Background documents

None