Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Public Report
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 10 November 2026

Report Title
Progress update on the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme and the Connect to Work programme (Pathways to Work)

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?
No

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report
Andrew Bramidge, Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment

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Ward(s) Affected
Borough-Wide

Report Summary
This report provides an update on delivery and performance of the Pathways to Work programme, including the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer and Connect to Work programmes, together with programme development, employer activation, VCSE delivery and triage activity.

Recommendations

1. That progress on the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, Connect to Work and the wider Pathways to Work programme be noted.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Presentation to OSMB on Pathways to Work

Background Papers
Cabinet Report on Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, 14 April 2025
https://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/documents/s151836/Cabinet%20Report%20-%20EIT%20P2W.pdf

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board Update Report. 9 September 2025
https://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/documents/s154073/Pathways%20to%20Work%20Data%20-%20OSMB%20Briefing%20Note%20Sept%202025%20v2.pdf

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
Cabinet – 14 April 2025
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 09 September 2025

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

Progress update on the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme and the Connect to Work programme (Pathways to Work)

1. Background

1.1 The Economic Inactivity Trailblazer (supporting our economically inactive residents into employment) and Connect to Work (focused on supporting disadvantaged groups) are DWP funded programmes, managed in South Yorkshire by the Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) and form part of the Pathways to Work programme. Funding is passed on to each of the local authorities, who have responsibility for delivery of the programme within their area.

1.2 Funding for the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer is currently agreed only until 31 March 2027, and Connect to Work under the integrated settlement, is due to run until 31 March 2030.

1.3 Significant progress has been made since the last report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in September 2025, when mobilisation and implementation were still in progress.

1.4 Below is a report based on the 6 key areas of delivery: the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, Connect to Work, Programme Development, Employer Activation, VCSE Partners, and Triage.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Below is a highlight view of the progress made since the launch of the Economically Inactive Trailblazer and Connect to Work as part of the Pathways to Work system.

2.2 Setting up the Team

Since last year, the team and system has been enhanced substantially with the additions of staffing in key roles such as:

- Commissioning Manager,
- Employer Activation and Partnerships Manager,
- Programme Developer,
- Performance Monitoring Officer.

These additions to the team have been introduced throughout the year and have had significant impact on the building of the system, and the efficiency and innovation that has been added over the last 12 months.

2.3 RMBC Economic Inactivity Trailblazer and Advance (In-Work Support)

- Since the launch of the Pathways to Work service, 956 participants have started on one of the programmes. Of these, 790 participants were economically inactive at the point of enrolment, while 166 were already in paid employment and received in-work support. Of the 790

Economically Inactive participants engaged, 281 reported as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

- The programme has supported 210 participants into fully evidenced employment, with a further 20 job outcomes awaiting evidence and an additional 24 participants holding confirmed job offers that are yet to commence. 50 of these Jobs were achieved by NEET participants.

- In addition, 196 participants have progressed into professional skills training while engaging with Pathways to Work. Longer-term employment outcomes remain positive, with 82 participants sustaining employment for 13 weeks or more and 40 participants sustaining employment for 26 weeks or more, all of which have been fully evidenced.

- In September the service was visited by the National Evaluator for the DWP the National Centre for Social Research who heard from staff, participants and local partners regarding the support the project is providing. The evaluator chose Rotherham from the South Yorkshire collective for their evaluation. We are looking forward to receiving the findings of the visit in the coming months.

- Please note that these figures are in addition to the participants supported through the Employment Solutions (Elevate) delivery model. The Elevate team support residents who are unemployed and claiming work related benefits. Since April 2025, the Elevate team has engaged with 675 residents and has assisted 203 residents to gain employment.

2.4 **Connect To Work**

Connect to Work is a DWP funded programme operated in South Yorkshire within the integrated settlement and will run until March 2030.

Connect to Work operates two strands, the Supported Employment Quality Framework strand, which started delivery in September 2025 and the Individual Placement and Support strand which commenced delivery in July 2026.

In Rotherham the SEQF strand is delivered internally by the Supported Employment team within Adult Social Care and the IPS strand is currently delivered through our commissioned partners The Growth Company and South Yorkshire Housing Association. The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority also commission directly further activity for individuals with medium to long term health issues on the IPS pathway.

- Since September 2025, the Supported Employment team has engaged 161 neurodivergent residents through Connect to Work, achieving 114% of DWP expectations. To date, 55 participants have entered paid employment, with 48 sustaining employment for at least

three months and 20 achieving six-month sustainment, all ahead of expected performance curves.

- The programme has also supported 12 residents already in work, with 7 successfully sustaining their employment. In addition, the service recently achieved Supported Employment Fidelity accreditation from the British Association for Supported Employment.

- The commissioned IPS programme, delivered by Growth Company and South Yorkshire Housing Association commenced slightly late of schedule in July 2026, provides intensive employment support to residents with experience of the criminal justice system, those at risk of homelessness, and survivors of domestic abuse. Despite a three-month delayed start, services have engaged 37 residents, with 8 securing employment and 4 achieving three-month sustainment, and remain on track to recover performance by year-end.

2.5 **Programme Development**

With the employment of a Programme Developer the service has started to co design training directly with employers and generating a successful course to job approach, where the employer's language systems, cultures and values are shared with residents before meeting with the employer. This training is open to all residents accessing employment support.

- A **Course to Job** programme was developed in partnership with Concentrix to address recruitment and retention challenges while preparing residents for customer service roles. The programme focuses on the communication, customer service and compliance skills required to succeed in the role.

  So far of the 19 participants taking part in the course, 12 have gone on to successfully obtain roles at Concentrix, 2 have moved into work in other roles and 1 has returned to university, showing a 79% positive progression route for the course.

- In addition, we have also commenced delivery of **Construction Skills Certification Scheme** (CSCS) courses internally since September 2026, allowing residents to access construction qualifications and the pass to work on sites as well as receiving work experience and taster sessions with the construction company ESH. 19 residents have now accessed this provision, which includes those under 19 who would usually be ineligible in other funding streams.

- The programme developer also launched a **Youth Programme**, a test and learn course designed for young people and delivered this to a small cohort earlier this year, following the successful trial the course has been honed and will be delivered at a larger scale in the coming months, this course focuses on the development of skills, recognition of strengths and development areas, building motivation and job identification.

2.6 Employer Activation

The Employer Activation role has focused on internal and external developments to increase inclusive employment opportunities for residents since the Employer Activation post was filled in March 2026.

- Internally, a coordinated employer engagement approach has been established through improved systems, stronger cross-service working, standardised onboarding, and the introduction of single point of contact management for strategic employers. Enhanced referral pathways and intelligence sharing have improved employer access to support, reduced duplication, and strengthened workforce development outcomes.

- Externally, partnerships and networks have been strengthened through closer collaboration with training providers, education partners, business organisations, and neighbouring local authorities, increasing opportunities for employers to access cross partnership support and share best practice. Increased relations with Chamber have supported growth in employer activity.

- Greater engagement across business forums, networking events, and strategic boards has raised the profile of employment and skills services while strengthening relationships with employers and key stakeholders across the region.

- Support for local businesses to achieve social value TOMS whilst providing opportunities, further support for residents and closer working relationships.

2.7 **Voluntary and Community Sector Delivery and Development**

As part of the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme, we have commissioned voluntary and community sector providers to deliver direct personalised support and wraparound services to residents.

Currently 9 VCSE services are commissioned to provide employment support with 2 of these also delivering wraparound services in addition to 2 other VCSE partners delivering wraparound support.

Wraparound support currently available is based on improving health outcomes to lead to greater opportunity to secure employment with services such as mental health support, solution focused therapy and physical fitness support being commissioned for economically inactive residents.

On personalised support, VCSE delivery is maturing and overall performance has seen a significant uplift in outcomes this year, with performance increasing in Q2 and Q3 and job outcomes rising by over 240% since Q1.

So far through VCSE partners have to date, the network has supported the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme through;

- Engagement of 168 residents.
- Supporting residents to achieve 28 job outcomes of which 12 have sustained employment outcomes.

2.8 **Triage Service**

The Pathways to Work triage is a single front door for all related employment support requests from residents, ensuring a smooth transition to the relevant service to meet their needs.

The triage service has attended local events such as school / college careers fairs, job centres, DWP events and job fairs to increase awareness of the Pathways programme and to reach those out in the community looking for support.

Since April 2026 the Connect/Pathways to work Triage service has taken 1392 Referrals into the service, of those 928 successfully engaged into an employment service.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 This report is for noting.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The report reflects programme performance data, partner feedback and operational delivery experience across the Pathways to Work system.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Monthly highlight/progress reports are submitted to SYMCA, and contract meetings are conducted monthly. Reporting has now moved to the VERTO system and internal reporting is done via the Inclusive Economy Board.

5.2 In regards future planning for the Economic Inactive Trailblazer, funding from April 2027 is currently unclear, with no definitive decision yet made. This picture is expected to be clearer post budget.

5.3 Confirmation is needed on future funding of the programme. This is a priority to avoid impacts on project staffing and activity that has been commissioned to the local VCFSE.

5.4 Current discussions are ongoing with SYMCA to look at potential increases to the Connect to Work funding from April 2027 until March 2030, following the success of current delivery.

5.5 Further development of the Course to Job approach that expands across employers and sectors now proof of concept has been delivered.

5.6 Further development and delivery of youth specific training provision to ensure young people (NEET) receive targeted support that improves engagement, progression, and employment outcomes.

5.7 Whilst this remains dependent on funding, continued growth and maturity in local Voluntary and Community sector organisations in employment support, developing high quality and high achieving, hyperlocal place-based community support.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no HR implications arising directly from this report

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 There are no implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults arising directly from this report

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 There are no Equalities and Human Rights implications arising directly from this report

11. Implications for CO_2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are no implications for CO_2 Emissions and Climate Change arising directly from this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Delivery of employment and skills relies on collaboration with SYMCA, DWP, commissioned providers, VCSE organisations and employers. This is managed through the Employment and Skills Board under the Rotherham Together Partnership.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The principal risk is the uncertainty regarding future funding from April 2027. Ongoing engagement with SYMCA and performance monitoring will help mitigate delivery risks.

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This report is published on the Council's website.