

CABINET
11 JANUARY 2022

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Jon Clarke, Children and Young People Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Ian Williams, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval for a one-off investment in a range of interventions to support local young people giving them greater prospects of securing work.

Summary

2. Youth unemployment has been a persistent problem in Darlington for many years and it has increased more during the pandemic. Long-term youth unemployment in particular has grown significantly.
3. A multi-agency group was established and chaired by the Chief Executive and has been considering appropriate interventions over the summer of 2021.
4. At the group's last meeting on 29 September, it agreed that the package of additional supports outlined in this report would effectively augment existing services delivered by a range of stakeholders and make a positive impact on helping young people to access employment.
5. There has been major success in bringing employment to Darlington with Amazon setting up a major facility and 1700 jobs soon to be created by Government relocations. Maximising the potential of young people is key to sustained future prosperity of Darlington. These interventions will help ensure all young people are able to access quality employment opportunities.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that up to £70,000 of Contain Outbreak Management Funds/Covid Reserve are released to fund the package outlined in this report.

Reasons

7. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) Youth unemployment has been comparatively high for years in Darlington, has worsened as a consequence of the pandemic.
- (b) The consequence of high long-term youth unemployment has detrimental economic and social impacts on the borough.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Seth Pearson : Extension 6090

S17 Crime and Disorder	No specific implication
Health and Wellbeing	No specific implication
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No specific implication
Diversity	No specific implication
Wards Affected	All Wards Affected
Groups Affected	Young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	Yes
Council Plan	This report aims directly to support the Council Plan's priority of maximising the potential of our young people
Efficiency	No specific implication
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report considers the employment prospects or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

8. Even prior to the pandemic, youth unemployment in Darlington was a priority issue. The local 18-24 year old claimant count had exceeded the regional average every month since at least January 2013 and was consistently in the top five to ten per cent of local authorities nationally for this metric. Whilst some of this is due to Darlington not having a university, even after adjusting for this Darlington consistently exceeded the national average.
9. The claimant count (those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance plus those who claim Universal Credit who are out of work) for Darlington 18–24-year-olds, at 10.1%, is the 24th highest of 374 British local authority areas. The average for the North East is 7.6% and for Great Britain is 6.5%. There were 735 Darlington residents aged 18-24 in September 2021

claiming benefits for reason of unemployment.

10. Youth unemployment was higher than for other age groups before the pandemic, and it has increased faster. Before the pandemic, 17% of 16–24-year-olds in Darlington were unemployed, compared to just 4.7% of over 25s.
11. Learning and Work Institute estimates modelling suggests that nationally long-term youth unemployment could potentially exceed 200,000 during 2021-22, treble pre-crisis levels, and remain significantly above pre-pandemic levels until 2026.
12. In Darlington, the number of 18–24-year-old jobseekers claiming for longer than six months increased 69% between February 2020 and August 2021, from 346 to 585. This is of particular concern as the scarring effects of long-term unemployment for young people in terms of future job and pay prospects are well documented. Without intervention the growth in younger residents claiming for more than six months is likely to have significant implications for the cohort's life chances and affect their ability to take advantage of the employment opportunities which are being generated.
13. The risk of youth unemployment varies significantly across different groups of young people:-
 - (a) Ward – youth unemployment varies across areas: 2.9% of 18–24-year-olds are claiming unemployment-related benefits in Hummersknott Ward, compared to 16.2% in Park East.
 - (b) Qualifications – young people with lower levels of qualification are far more likely to be unemployed, particularly during recessions.
14. Locally, youth unemployment has been identified as a priority issue for action by partners, in recognition:-
 - (a) Of the above evidence showing the ongoing issue of youth employment in the borough, which has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid on local employment opportunities for young people.
 - (b) That the reasons for youth unemployment are complex, and affected residents often face multiple barriers to quality work.
 - (c) That the collective experience of local stakeholders over the past decade has demonstrated that no one single lever can be pulled to effectively solve the problem; a multifaceted, partnership approach to the issue is required in order to maximise the likelihood of effectively tackling youth employment.

Proposed Approach

15. A horizon-scanning exercise has been undertaken to identify effective approaches to tackling youth unemployment, which will remain an ongoing element of our approach to ensure that activity is evidence-led and based on what works. Based on this research, six key steps have been identified as vital components of a successful approach and so are proposed as a framework for local work to address youth unemployment.

16. The six steps are:

- (a) Agreeing clear objectives
- (b) Understanding the challenge
- (c) Researching what works
- (d) Mapping what support and services are already available
- (e) Developing options for interventions to improve outcomes
- (f) Understanding how we know if it's working.

17. Work has already begun on a number of the steps, including developing strategic and operational groups to tackle youth unemployment, desktop analysis of the issue locally, horizon scanning of effective initiatives elsewhere, and high-level mapping of local programmes.

18. A number of actions, highlighted in the below table, are intended to allow partners to develop work under a number of headings.

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
Youth-friendly steering group	Establish multiagency group of key local stakeholders to develop a Youth-Friendly Darlington vision and drive action
Mapping	Map existing provision, including accessibility/effectiveness/appeal of offer for all
Youth consultation	Recruit 6-12 peer researchers to engage 60 participants to improve understanding of local youth employment landscape and barriers
Skills audit	Engage circa 15 local employers to understand their current and future skills needs
Skills development	Develop and deliver bitesize employer-led training to create identified required skills
Youth-friendly campaign	Work with local employers to become 'youth-friendly'
Navigation portal	Develop a localised resource for young people to better find and access support and opportunities

19. Interventions will be delivered in a Covid-safe way to prevent contact and hence transmission. The navigation portal which will be a major product of this proposal will provide a mechanism for young people to search employment support and opportunities on line in a Covid-safe way.

Activity to Date

20. Officers have engaged with a number of specialist external organisations as potential partners for the proposals, including Youth Employment UK, the leading national youth unemployment charity with 9 years' experience in delivering evidence-based services, co-produced with young people, and expert policy and research. A costed proposal, based on the bid and discussions with potential providers during its development, has consequently been developed (**Appendix A**) which is intended to form the basis of a specification should Cabinet agree to release the funds being requested.

21. Should the funding proposed in this report be approved, additional funding will be sought from external sources, including national funders and local employers to, in particular, secure ongoing funding for the relevant element of the proposal (specifically, ongoing maintenance costs for the digital navigation resource).
22. A group of council officers has been established to:-
 - (a) Identify relevant internal and external representatives to develop an operational group to drive action
 - (b) Consider what level of resource relevant areas of the council can contribute to work
 - (c) Agree and further develop the proposed approach
23. As a result of the initial meeting of this group:
 - (a) A broader invite list – to include identified relevant partner agencies – has been drawn up and an initial meeting will be set up
 - (b) Economic Growth colleagues have agreed to allocate half of a new Skills and Investment Officer to support work, primarily focussing on employer engagement.
24. It is proposed that progress regarding the proposed programme would be made to Cabinet aligned to the Council Plan reporting processes with the portfolio lead for Children and Young People receiving regular briefings.
25. In addition, public sector agencies will be engaged through the Public Sector Executives Group chaired by Ian Williams.
26. Youth Unemployment is likely to be a key focus for the emerging Levelling Up Darlington Plan and the model of a focused, multi-agency operational group reporting to Cabinet and engaging with partners through the Public Sector Executives Group is anticipated to be a template for taking action forward.

Financial Implications

27. As per Appendix A, the initial costs of the project are estimated at £70,000 with an ongoing £10,000 annual charge. The initial costs will be funded through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund where appropriate with any remaining costs paid for from the Covid reserve. There are sufficient funds available within these allocations to cover this initial outlay. It is anticipated that ongoing annual charges may be funded by contributions from partners.

Procurement Advice

28. The Group Director of Operations has been consulted on these proposals.

Equalities Considerations

29. Though it is not considered necessary to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment, careful consideration is being given to how people of protected characteristics will be benefitted.

Consultation

30. Key partner agencies have been involved in developing and agreeing these proposals including DWP, Darlington College and Tees Valley Combined Authority. An internal officer group has also been established to shape these proposals including officers from People's Services and Economic Development.

Outcome of Consultation

31. The proposals have been approved by external partners, including PSEG member agencies, the Department for Work and Pensions, and Council officers, all of which have agreed the proposed approach will be helpful in terms of developing a comprehensive evidence base and driving effective delivery actions already identified from our existing understanding.
32. Work is being undertaken by officers, with relevant stakeholders, to identify additional potential funding sources. This includes horizon-scanning for national opportunities and working with partners who may be able to access internal resource to understand the criteria and, consequently, determine whether any proposals could fit with this. Updates on the progress of this work will be provided on an ongoing basis.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROPOSAL FOR DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Engaging young people and key stakeholders

1. Darlington has already developed key partnership networks of employers, policy leads, stakeholders and educators. The provider will bring these groups together along with young people as a key leadership group to drive the youth friendly place agenda. Together the group will set out a full plan that will identify the measures it wants to drive impact against such as claimant count, number of youth friendly vacancies etc.
2. The group will have oversight of the mapping work and support the development of a campaign that will engage employers, providers and young people. Utilising key assets such as the Good Youth Employment Charter and Young Professional Programme.

Mapping local provision

3. The provider will create a data tool that will capture the current provision of the local area, this will include education and training opportunities, youth employment services and other provisions.
4. Once the data capture has been completed and verified by local stakeholders, the provider will analyse the information and provide a report based on its findings and recommendations.
5. The provider will support the youth friendly place leadership group and Darlington BC to understand what gaps it has in provision and identify solutions and opportunities for closing those gaps, utilising funding opportunities and government policy developments.

A digital hub

6. The data from the mapping exercise will become the basis of building a digital hub for young people, providers and employers to access to connect to the current provision and showcase future opportunities.
7. The Darlington Hub will be built and managed by the provider. Providers consulted by officers have found that in other areas local employers are willing to contribute to cover the cost of the modest costs involve in manging the hub.

Support young people to become Young Professionals

8. The provider will lead a campaign with young people in the Darlington are to encourage young people to sign up to and complete a young professional programme, which will include direct and constant access to the Digital Hub and confidence-building support to use the resource to find local services, training and employment opportunities.

Create Youth Friendly Opportunities

9. The provider will also work with local employers to encourage them to sign up to be a youth-friendly employer and make their opportunities youth friendly. These opportunities will be listed through the Digital Hub and young people will be able to connect directly with good quality employers.

Estimated Costings

Project Management	Establish and direct a local multiagency leadership group, coordinating with local organisations, providers, young people and DBC leads.	£20,000
Mapping	Bespoke build of a mapping tool, analysis, reporting & recommendations, insight dissemination and support with proposals	£15,000
Digital Hub	The design and build of a digital navigation hub, and marketing and promotion to increase user base. Annual hosting and quarterly updates.	£15,000 £10,000 per annum
Young Professional Campaign	Work with young people, schools, colleges, providers and youth organisations to build a borough wide Young Professional campaign.	£10,000
Youth Friendly Employer Campaign	Work with employer groups to build a borough wide youth friendly employment campaign.	£10,000