

CABINET
8 September 2026

LEASE OF PREMISES FOR AN EMPLOYABILITY HUB – ENTERPRISE HOUSE

**Responsible Cabinet Member –
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to take a lease of Unit 3C & 3D Enterprise House, Darlington for the purpose of providing a location for the Darlington Employment Hub and Council employability programmes.

Summary

2. It is proposed that Enterprise House will be the location for the Darlington Employment Hub and DBC employability programmes to enable all services to operate from a single, central, accessible location as shown on the plan at **Appendix 1**.
3. As part of the delivery of the Get Britain Working White Paper, the Department for Work and Pensions funds the employability programmes and has pressed for the establishment of an Employability Hub in Darlington.
4. The current premises at Bennet House basement is inadequate.
5. Existing vacant council owned premises were assessed as potential locations and were found to be unsuitable due to either accessibility issues, capital costs and/or timescales for making premises suitable for the intended use.
6. The landlord of Enterprise House has committed to carrying out the fit out works at their own cost to enable immediate occupation of the premises and therefore timely delivery of the services.

7. It is proposed that the Council takes a 6 year lease with a tenant break option at year 3 at Enterprise House and otherwise on terms which are assessed to be in line with the market and referenced at **Part III** of this report at **Appendix 2**.
8. The rent will be paid from employability programmes funding.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) Cabinet agrees to enter into a lease of Units 3C & 3D Enterprise House.
 - (b) Cabinet agrees to delegate the approval of final lease terms to the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection which are summarised at Part III, Appendix 2.

Delegations

It is recommended that Cabinet agrees to delegate the approval of final lease terms to the Executive Director Economy and Public Protection which are summarised at Part III, Appendix 2.

Reasons

10. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) To enable the provision of the Darlington Employment Hub and delivery of employability programmes from a suitable and centralised location.
 - (b) To meet Government objectives as set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper
 - (c) To provide a fit for purpose, timely and cost effective solution to delivery of employability services
 - (d) The lease terms and rent are in line with the market and offer value for money

Trevor Watson
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

author : Sarah Wayman

Council Plan	
Addressing inequalities	Enterprise House provides enables customers with physical and mental disabilities easy access to services.

Tackling Climate Change	The new premises is being refitted with low voltage LED lighting, a new heating system and double glazed windows.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Unit 3C & 3D Enterprise House were identified as being fit for purpose, with no initial capital costs for the Council and an inclusive rent offering value for money and which is capable of being funded by the programmes
Health and Wellbeing	The Enterprise House accommodation offers better working conditions for Council staff currently located in the basement of Bennet House
S17 Crime and Disorder	
Wards Affected	All wards in Darlington will benefit from this hub.
Groups Affected	Unemployed, 16-18, disabled, those with MH issues, veterans, long term health conditions, carers, homeless, drug and alcohol addictions, refugees, asylum seekers, care leavers, survivors of domestic abuse, young people involved in, or at risk of serious violence and victims of modern day slavery
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not request a change to the Budget & Policy Framework.
Key Decision	NO
Urgent Decision	NO
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The hub and associated programmes have fast track eligibility for care leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

11. Lead by the Darlington Employment Initiative, the requirement to take a lease for a new centralised Employability Hub has arisen from three main drivers;
 - (a) a DWP objective for each Local Authority to provide an Employability Hub in support of the Get Britain Working White Paper
 - (b) the increasing unsuitability of the current premises at Bennet House
 - (c) no available suitable existing Council owned premises.
12. DWP are the main funders of the council employability programmes Connect to Work (CTW), Work Well (WW) and Youth Guarantee (YG). Further funding has been made available from DWP for Employability Hub staff.
13. Darlington is the only local authority in Tees Valley without an Employment Hub and DWP were urging for one to be established in Darlington to fit in with the Get Britain Working White Paper and future funding for employability programmes
14. DWP will provide a work coach to be housed in the hub to make the joined up working easier. The space will not only be used for staffing but have secure 1:1 rooms and training facilities. External agencies will be invited along to offer sessions to unemployed people all under one roof - these will range from careers advice, debt, health and wellbeing. Employers will also attend the hub on a regular basis to interview candidates we put forward for roles.
15. The Connect to Work (CTW), Work Well (WW) and Youth Guarantee (YG) programmes currently operate from the basement of Bennet House. Bennet House is no longer viable for the following reasons:
 - (a) The team has now grown from 2 to 12 and a larger premises is required.
 - (b) Sensitivities arising from the diversity of customer groups accessing the services are incompatible with other services provided from the building.
 - (c) There is no disabled access to the basement. CTW and WW both work with people with mental and physical disabilities resulting in many customers requiring fully accessible premises.
 - (d) The premises does not offer enough space to provide the required five 1:1 meeting rooms to facilitate service provision to the current volume of customers.
 - (e) Some rooms are inadequate with no sockets, heating, damp problems or lacking privacy.
16. Prior to exploring the Employability Hub location at Enterprise House the Council's own vacant property portfolio was inspected, costed and assessed for suitability. None of the available options were suitable due to either accessibility issues, capital costs and/or timescales for making premises suitable for the intended use.
17. Unit 3C & 3D Enterprise House were identified as being fit for purpose, with no initial capital costs for the Council and an inclusive rent offering value for money and which is capable of being funded by the programmes.

18. Due to the pressures outlined in paragraph 6 and the inability to operate an Employability Hub from Bennet House, Darlington Employment Initiative has taken an initial 6 month lease of the premises at Enterprise House under delegated powers pending a Cabinet decision on the longer term lease.

Financial Implications

19. The rent will be paid from the Connect to Work, Work Well and Youth Guarantee programme funding. The funding is issued by central government / NHS and administered via TVCA. The Employability Hub receives further funding from DWP for staffing and this will assist to offset the rent.

Legal Implications

20. The Council's internal legal department will be instructed to deal with the granting of the lease to DBC.

Estates and Property Advice

21. Estates and Property Advice is embedded within this report.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

22. Energy use from this building will be included within our reported carbon emissions.

Equalities considerations

23. Enterprise House provides enables customers with physical and mental disabilities easy access to services.