

Pilot, refinement and embedding



The pilot and refinement phase explores how early testing, collaborative design and responsive adjustments shaped a practical, community focused model. This section shows how continuous learning, venue trials and iterative improvements helped embed a reliable, scalable approach rooted in real-world experience.

Testing what works

A series of early trials helped shape a model that was practical, accessible and truly ready for everyday use.

- **Co-design and partner input** – The Employment and Training Hub used adult and children’s social care, Learning and Skills, National Careers Service and VCSE partners to test assumptions and shape room layouts, workflows and service boundaries before opening.
- **Accessibility walkthroughs** – the Hub invited the council’s disability accessibility forum to trial the space, then adjusted details like door weights, colour contrast and room positioning to reduce anxiety and improve way finding.
- **Venue suitability testing** – Hub on Tour trialled a wide mix of venues, including leisure centres, and dropped low yield sites, concentrating on places with greater need and stronger engagement.



Refining the approach

Learning from delivery informed targeted adjustments that strengthened flow, improved quality and enhanced the overall effectiveness.

- **Recruitment process adjustments** – the Hub simplified employer processes for roles like school crossing patrols by moving from lengthy online forms to CVs plus quick fire interview days, removing digital barriers and speeding up hires.
- **Programme pilots to embedded offers** – the Hub tested small cohort prototypes (e.g. Skills for Success) and not embedding them until outcomes were evidenced.
- **Focusing on productive venues** – Hub on Tour refined its schedule to predictable, recurring sessions in high need locations, while maintaining periodic presence in every town.
- **Dedicated support for care-experienced young people** – outreach into supported accommodation needed a more relational approach, leading to the creation of a dedicated co-ordinator role focused on weekly presence and supported transitions into employer activity.

“Some locations for the Hub on Tour just didn’t work, like a couple of the leisure centres where no one spoke to me all morning. So, we knocked those on the head and focused on the places where people really needed us. We go where it makes a difference.”

Michael Elliott, Recruitment Co-ordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Expanding and embedding

Proven practices were scaled to create a reliable, consistent borough wide offer that people and partners could depend on.

- **From project to system offer** – the Hub transitioned from a time limited initiative to a core, economic, development anchored service funded from the council’s base budget, aligning people pathways with growth sectors.
- **Predictable community schedule** – Hub on Tour established a clear rhythm (e.g. ‘first Tuesday each month’), enabling people and venue partners to plan around repeat visits and sustain engagement.



Key decisions

- Anchoring in economic development ensured the Hub aligned people's skills pathways with employer demand.
- Values-driven team recruitment created a cohesive and proactive Hub team able to adapt quickly.
- Low-cost outreach design allowed Hub on Tour to scale across the borough, using minimal portable equipment.
- Voluntary, low-pressure engagement enabled Hub on Tour to build trust by allowing community members to choose if and when they interacted with the team, with support often beginning through a simple, friendly conversation.





Key learning

“We probably should have anticipated the growth. When we first started, we never thought we’d outgrow the space. Now we’ve already had to convert more rooms, and we could still do with more.”

Julie Marsden, Economic Development Manager
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Insights from early delivery highlighted what genuinely mattered for reach, engagement and creating meaningful, lasting impact across communities.

- **Human-centred environments matter** – the Hub’s calm, modern, ‘not a council office’ feel reduced psychological barriers and improved uptake.
- **Stable funding drives adaptability** – the Employment Hub’s core funded model enabled durable fit out, rapid responses to redundancy risks and sustained cross council collaboration.
- **Go where need is greatest** – Hub on Tour achieved better outcomes by prioritising high need neighbourhood venues while keeping an all borough footprint.
- **Face-to-face recruitment changes outcomes** – Hub on Tour found in person introductions often overcame employer concerns about CV gaps more effectively than digital sifts.