

Planning and preparing



Effective planning lays the foundation for a sustainable, high impact employment model. This stage focuses on understanding community needs, identifying gaps in support and shaping clear objectives, as well as building the systems, partnerships and infrastructure required to deliver an accessible and integrated offer across the borough.

Identifying the case for change

A strong case for change emerged by combining data, community insight and operational lessons about what people and employers needed from a more accessible employment model.

- **Confirmed gaps through labour-market, customer relationship management (CRM) and partner insight** – mapped registrations by ward and overlaid transport constraints, then validated with family hubs/VCSE partners to pinpoint neighbourhoods least likely to travel into central services.
- **Validated unmet demand through early partner conversations** – family hubs, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) groups and providers confirmed many people were unaware of employment support or felt uncomfortable accessing central services.
- **Recognised the need for a single co-ordinating hub** – fragmented provision across multiple providers and employers highlighted the need for one team to connect pathways, unify messaging and streamline referrals.

Setting objectives and benefits

Objectives were set to ensure the model created tangible improvements for people, employers and the wider skills system.

- **Built community visibility quickly** – early aims focused on increasing awareness, trust and engagement in neighbourhood venues where people already felt comfortable.
- **Created strong progression routes** – medium term goals centred on moving people into training, work tasters and employment across high demand sectors.
- **Developed a co-ordinated ecosystem** – longer-term objectives sought an integrated approach where employers, training providers and VCSE partners worked through shared processes.

“It was decided the Hub would sit in Economic Development because our end was about supporting businesses... making sure people in our community understood where the jobs of the future are and what skills they needed. That’s what excited me – it wasn’t just regeneration, it was inclusive growth.”

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

Identifying and managing risks

Risks were identified early and mitigated through design choices that supported stability, flexibility and inclusion.

- **Increased reliability by anchoring delivery in high footfall venues** – scheduling outreach alongside existing community activity reduced the risk of low attendance.
- **Reduced anxiety related drop-off with graduated engagement** – using small local sessions and tools like virtual walkthroughs supported people who were nervous about entering new environments.
- **Co-ordinated risk management across partners** – regular forums enabled early identification of issues and rapid joint responses.

Assessing infrastructure needs

Infrastructure planning ensured that both central and community based delivery could operate smoothly and create a coherent offer.

- **Created the high capacity central Hub for end-to-end support** – training rooms and interview spaces enabled employers to run assessments and final interviews on site.
- **Equipped outreach with mobile-ready tools** – tablets, QR codes and instant registration flows allowed local conversations to convert smoothly into service uptake.
- **Selected a town-centre location to maximise access** – having the central Hub in an easily reachable area ensured that people with low confidence, poor access to transport or limited awareness could still engage, which was especially important for care recruitment.

Developing a realistic timeframe

A phased approach ensured the model grew sustainably, with the right people, systems and capacity in place before scaling.

- **Opened the Hub before borough-wide outreach** – central capacity was established and tested before expanding to community locations.
- **Sequenced programme enhancements based on readiness** – the offer of undertaking qualifications, employer day one involvement and new modules were added only after early cohorts validated demand.
- **Introduced specialist roles at the right moment** – dataled evidence informed decisions such as when to create posts such as a health and social care recruitment co-ordinator.

Engaging the right people

“Skills matter, but attitude and values matter more. We hired people who genuinely care, who support each other and who see every person as someone worth investing in. That culture is the engine of everything we achieve.”

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

Engagement planning identified who needed to be involved, what they contributed and how they connected to the wider model.

- **Involved employers as co-designers and delivery partners** – employers shaped recruitment events, reviewed candidate readiness and used Hub facilities to streamline hiring.
- **Empowered VCSE and community venues as access points** – local partners hosted sessions, signposted people and shared insight into emerging needs.
- **Integrated tutors and skills teams into the pathway** – learning staff delivered curriculum content, tailored preparation and helped strengthen learner progression.
- **Recruited people who embodied the culture needed for the Hub to succeed** – the team prioritised values-based recruitment, selecting people with the right attitude, empathy and teamwork ethos. This ensured a consistent culture across the Hub, with staff motivated to go the extra mile for people seeking work and for one another.

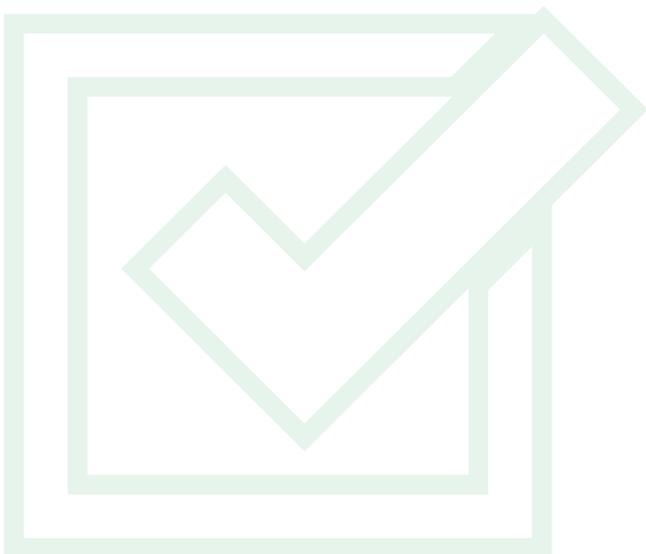


Key decisions

“Strong leadership really does make a difference. We’ve been supported from day one with a permanent team, and that stability has allowed us to build relationships and maintain momentum.”

Fallon Dunleavy, Employment and Training Hub Manager,
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

- Designing outreach as a structured pathway into the central Hub ensured that initial conversations in neighbourhood settings translated into training participation, assessment centre attendance, and meaningful employer interviews with stronger preparation.
- Phasing programme enhancements and specialist recruitment roles gradually, based on emerging data and delivery capacity, ensured the model remained sustainable, responsive, and manageable for the team as demand grew.





Key learning

Learning from the planning phase emphasised the importance of adaptability, integration and designing for real world use.

- **Ensure outreach converts into structured opportunities** – contact alone does not create outcomes; clear routes into training and recruitment are essential.
- **Use existing spaces to scale efficiently** – partner venues and Hub facilities support growth without requiring additional estate or long-term leases.
- **Sequence developments based on lived experience** – refinements introduced gradually strengthen delivery and avoid overwhelming staff or people.

“If this was on the outskirts, it wouldn’t have the same impact. Being in the town centre makes it easy to get to, easy to drop in – and part of everything else happening around it.”

Kevin Sedgwick, Business Relationship Manager
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council