

# Reaching the future workforce

How combining central and satellite employment hubs engaged new carers and connected them to adult social care employers



A practical approach toolkit

Based on Stockton-on-Tees Employment and Training Hub's approach



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# Introduction



Adult social care continues to face significant recruitment and retention pressures, and many areas are seeking practical, scalable ways to widen access to employment. This toolkit presents a model from Stockton-on-Tees, showing how a central Employment and Training Hub, supported by a mobile Hub on Tour, can extend reach, reduce barriers and accelerate progression into care roles. By combining a high quality central service with community based outreach, the model offers an effective way to engage people who may not otherwise access employment support.

The resource is intended primarily for local authorities, combined authorities, economic development teams and workforce commissioners – those responsible for shaping local employment systems and strengthening workforce pipelines. While wider organisations may find elements useful, the full model is most relevant to places with responsibility for system level planning, co-ordination and commissioning.

To support busy users and avoid misaligned expectations, the introduction highlights how people in different roles can navigate the content. Strategic leaders will gain most from the initial sections setting out the workforce context, overall model and recommendations, which explain the strategic value and system wide impact of the approach.

Operational leads may focus on the explanation of how the Hub and Hub on Tour function together, alongside the building blocks covering planning, governance, partnerships, digital systems and workforce development. Delivery teams – including outreach staff, tutors and employer engagement specialists – will find the most value in the practical methods, barrier removal techniques and day-to-day processes outlined in the implementation and workforce sections.

Across all components, the toolkit aims to provide clarity, structure and practical insight, enabling each role to focus on what is most relevant to its responsibilities and apply the learning effectively within local contexts.



# The context



Adult social care in England continues to face major recruitment and retention pressures, with vacancy rates far above the wider economy. Thousands of roles remain unfilled as the domestic workforce shrinks and turnover stays high. With demand for care rising, the sector cannot maintain a stable workforce without more accessible and effective routes into employment.

- **High national vacancy rates** – the sector continues to operate with around 7% of posts unfilled, more than double the rate seen across the wider economy and reflective of persistent workforce shortages.
- **Declining domestic workforce** – approximately 85,000 fewer British nationals work in adult social care compared to 2020, increasing reliance on a limited labour pool while demand continues to rise (Skills for Care: The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, Workforce supply and demand trends, 2024/25)
- **High turnover patterns** – around one quarter of staff leave their roles each year, limiting continuity of care and forcing providers into constant cycles of recruitment.
- **Impact of working conditions** – workers without stable hours, qualifications or training access are almost three times more likely to leave, highlighting the importance of clear development pathways.
- **Rising future demand** – projections indicate that around 470,000 additional workers will be required by 2040, placing even greater pressure on already stretched recruitment pipelines.
- **Barriers in high unemployment communities** – many people live near job opportunities but lack practical access due to limited transport, long bus journeys and uneven local infrastructure.
- **Psychological barriers to employment** – long-term worklessness, anxiety, poor confidence and uncertainty around modern recruitment processes prevent many people from progressing into available roles.

This resource looks at how Stockton-on-Tees has responded to these challenges with their innovative Employment and Training Hub and local outreach.



# About the organisation

The Stockton-on-Tees Employment and Training Hub is a central service that supports people aged 16 and over with all aspects of employment, skills development and career progression.

The service is led and funded by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, in collaboration with local learning providers and community partners who help staff and shape the offer.

The Hub provides a welcoming, accessible space where people can receive help with CV writing, interview preparation, job searches, apprenticeships, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), funding advice and personalised one-to-one guidance. The Hub also hosts an online portal through which users can browse vacancies, access training opportunities and keep up to date with local employment events, ensuring support is available both in person and digitally.

The Hub works closely with partners across the borough – including local learning providers, youth services and employer networks – to offer a broad range of training opportunities. Providers benefit too, with the Hub offering support to advertise vacancies, connect with suitable candidates and receive assistance with local recruitment activity. Hub on Tour extends the Hub's reach by taking support directly into Stockton's communities.

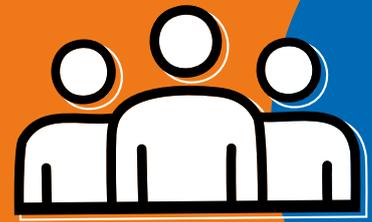
The Hub has demonstrated notable impact since opening, helping hundreds of local people move into work and empowering many others through skills development and tailored guidance.

**“The Hub is unique in the way it reaches out to local people... our Hub is for everybody – people in work, out of work, any age, any background. We would never turn anybody away.”**

**Sophie Proud**, Recruitment Co-ordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council



# The approach



## The challenge

In Stockton-on-Tees, the national workforce challenges are reflected locally. Local employers continue to report difficulty recruiting for roles across multiple sectors, including adult social care, even when training is provided and entry requirements are low.

- **Uneven local labour market** – vacancies exist, but several neighbourhoods experience high unemployment and multiple barriers to participation.
- **Transport and proximity gaps** – infrequent buses and long journeys turn short distances into practical barriers for interviews, training and shifts.
- **Social and digital barriers** – anxiety, poor confidence and limited digital access, combined with fragmented support, lead to missed opportunities.

**“Across the borough you can have places where what looks ‘close by’ actually means multiple buses, long journeys or one bus an hour, so people simply won’t travel.”**

**Sophie Proud, Recruitment Co-ordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council**

## Addressing these challenges

To address these challenges, Stockton-on-Tees local authority extended the reach of its central Employment and Training Hub by introducing Hub on Tour, a mobile, community based model that takes the full employment offer directly into neighbourhoods across the borough.

As a genuine extension of the Hub – not a standalone programme – Hub on Tour ensures that people who face barriers such as transport, confidence or lack of digital access can still benefit from the same high quality guidance, training pathways and employer connections available at the central site.



## What the Employment and Training Hub offers

The central Employment and Training Hub offers a single, accessible gateway into work and skills for people across Stockton-on-Tees. This includes:

- **A universal front door for all** – open access support for any age, background or experience level, offering personalised careers guidance and clear pathways into work or training.
- **A completely open, non-mandated model** – people choose to engage, unlike Jobcentre programmes, where attendance can be mandatory. This results in higher quality, more motivated candidates.
- **A professional, work focused setting** – a modern, welcoming space that builds confidence, routine and readiness for employment through practical one-to-one support.
- **Direct routes to local employers** – fast, free recruitment support for businesses through fairs, interview days and co-ordinated candidate matching.
- **Barrier aware support and progression** – help with digital access, CVs, applications and onward referral to well-being, housing or financial support to keep people moving forward.

## How Hub on Tour extends these opportunities

Hub on Tour takes the central Hub's full offer directly into neighbourhoods, making support accessible to people who would not otherwise travel into Stockton due to transport, confidence or health barriers. This includes:

- **Meeting people where they are** – outreach in 50+ trusted venues (libraries, warm spaces, food banks and family hubs that provide joined-up support for whole families locally rooted).
- **Lower practical and psychological barriers** – local drop-ins provide low-pressure first contact for residents facing transport, anxiety or isolation.
- **On-the-spot enrolment** – staff register people via tablets in community venues, reducing drop-off and enabling immediate progression.
- **Progression, not just outreach** – local 1:1 support builds confidence, then transitions people into the central Hub and employer activity.

**“The Hub on Tour microsites are really useful, especially for people who are quite far away from the labour market, because we’re taking the support directly to them rather than expecting them to come to us.”**

**Sophie Proud**, Recruitment Co-ordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council



## Results

The following points summarise the key features of the Employment and Training Hub's approach as demonstrated through its delivery and results in 2025 across all sectors.

- **Delivered support at significant scale** – over 10,000 residents registered, an average of 132 weekly walkins, and outreach delivered across 54 Hub on Tour locations, ensuring borough-wide access to employment support.
- **Strengthened employer engagement** – worked with 653 businesses and delivered 27 recruitment and community events, creating fast, direct routes between residents and live vacancies.
- **Used targeted recruitment campaigns to meet sector demand** – supported more than 100 residents into work through large employer drives and enhanced specialist provision with the introduction of a care sector recruitment co-ordinator.

## Key decisions that informed success

Strong early choices shaped a model that is financially efficient, accessible and trusted by both people and employers.

- **Positioned the Hub as economic infrastructure** – linked providers with local labour supply to strengthen resilience and inward investment.
- **Core-funded stable staffing** – sustain relationships with employers, partners and residents.
- **Used existing community spaces** – avoided rental costs by starting with venues that already have footfall and trust.
- **Designed outreach as a pathway** – ensured every conversation led to training, employer activity or interviews.
- **Embedded dual focus (people and employers)** – co-ordinators worked both sides to speed matching and shape provision around real vacancies.

## Key learning

The Stockton model demonstrates that employment support is most effective when it is human, local and rooted in genuine partnership working.

- **Welcoming, informal environments build trust** – people engage more fully when support feels safe, friendly and free from formality or sanction.
- **Collaboration unlocks momentum** – close relationships with VCSE partners, public health, housing and employers remove barriers quickly and consistently.
- **Confidence and realism improve retention** – preparing people for the true nature of roles reduces dropouts and strengthens long-term employment outcomes.
- **Data-led targeting increases impact** – using labour market insight and community intelligence ensures support reaches those who need it and aligns with priority sectors.



## Recommendations

The recommendations provide practical, evidence based steps for planning, implementing and sustaining the Employment and Training Hub and Hub on Tour model. The checklist covers key areas such as securing leadership backing, co-ordinating multi-agency stakeholders, integrating digital tools, ensuring robust governance and monitoring outcomes that matter to both people and employers.

Each recommendation is supported by actionable insights drawn from Stockton-on-Tees' approach. Use the checklist to adopt and adapt this model to widen access to work, improve recruitment speed and build a sustainable employment pathway that strengthens workforce resilience and supports long-term economic stability.



# Timeline

Year	Key activity
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ COVID revealed fragmented support, prompting proposal for a central Employment and Training Hub.</li><li>■ Early planning aligned partners and identified health and social care as a priority sector.</li></ul>
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Council advanced approvals and funding, building foundations for long-term Hub delivery.</li><li>■ Core team recruited in December to design, structure and launch the new service.</li></ul>
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Employment and Training Hub launched in February, offering accessible support across all sectors.</li><li>■ Refurbished, purpose-built building opened, enabling expanded employer engagement and training activity.</li></ul>
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Hub on Tour launched, delivering employment support directly into community locations borough-wide.</li><li>■ Rapid service expansion as councillors requested presence across all wards and neighbourhoods.</li></ul>
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Hub on Tour scaled further, strengthening reach, visibility and community engagement.</li></ul>
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Recruitment began for a dedicated care sector co-ordinator as programme demand significantly increased.</li></ul>
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Virtual reality (VR) onboarding tools introduced to reduce anxiety and improve people's confidence entering the Hub.</li></ul>

**“Wherever initiatives are happening, we’re present. It’s hard to avoid us in the borough because we link straight in with whatever the council or community teams have going on. Wherever people in our community go, you’ll usually find us there too.”**

**Sophie Proud**, Recruitment Co-ordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

