

## North East Mayoral Strategic Authority

### Economic Inactivity Trailblazer year two

Call for projects for priority two strand 2b:  
Specialist employment support for social  
housing tenants

## **1. About the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority**

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority covers the seven local authority areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The North East faces a range of economic and social challenges, including lower productivity and GVA compared to national averages, as well as poorer health outcomes, including reduced healthy life expectancy. The region also has some of the highest levels of economic inactivity in the country.

Certain groups, including social housing tenants, are disproportionately affected by economic inactivity. People living in social housing are significantly more likely to experience economic inactivity than those in other tenures, with evidence indicating markedly higher rates, particularly driven by health, disability and wider structural barriers.

## **2. The Economic Inactivity Trailblazer**

The DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer is a flagship initiative under the UK Government's plans to reduce economic inactivity and support more people into work. The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority has successfully secured funding to deliver year two (2026/27) of the programme.

The Trailblazer is designed to:

- Align with DWP priorities on tackling economic inactivity.
- Maximise the impact of existing local and national resources.
- Focus on groups facing the most significant barriers to employment.
- Be bold and ambitious in its design and delivery.
- Pilot new, integrated models of support.
- Drive long-term system reform across sectors.

The Trailblazer is closely aligned with the ambitions of the [Get Britain Working White Paper](#), aiming to bring together local health, skills, and employment systems to better support working age residents who are economically inactive due to long term health conditions, caring responsibilities, or other complex barriers.

In the North East, the Trailblazer will use locally tailored approaches, strengthening collaboration between health, employment support and skills providers, and testing new approaches to improve employment outcomes.

## **The evidence base**

In order to target this work on the areas of greatest need we have been informed by our [Local Growth Plan](#) which outlines our target sectors; the North East Evidence Hub and our employment and skills strategy, [A New Deal for North East Workers](#), which outlines the target populations that are currently under represented in the labour market, and our future skills and employment needs.

In addition, a number of research reports were commissioned as part of the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer in year one, which are available on the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority website.

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority has reviewed the available evidence to inform the development of the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer and this call for projects. Applicants should reflect this evidence base and existing good practice in their proposals, demonstrating how it will inform and be embedded within project delivery. Applicants are not required to submit additional evidence but must clearly show how their approach aligns with existing evidence and learning.

## **The objectives of the Trailblazer**

The North East Economic Inactivity Trailblazer in year one was centered around three priority areas:

- Priority one: Better pathways into employment.
- Priority two: New ways of working.
- Priority three: Systems reform taking an integrated approach to health and employment.

## **Year two expectations**

These three priorities remain for year two, and there will also be a greater focus in year two for projects to:

- Measure distance travelled for each participant.
- Demonstrate collaboration with others to achieve greater cross referrals between provision, to ensure participants access the correct support.
- Move customers to be job ready or into work.

The remainder of this document sets out the details for the open call for specialist employment support for social housing tenants. This should be read in conjunction with the guidance note for this call for projects.

### **3. Specialist employment support for social housing tenants**

This priority will fund region wide, specialist employment support for social housing tenants, delivered across the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority area.

The priority recognises that social housing tenants are disproportionately represented among those who are economically inactive or furthest from the labour market, and that barriers to employment are often complex, compounded and structural. These may include long-term health conditions, caring responsibilities, poverty and debt, low confidence, limited work experience, trauma, digital exclusion and limited access to flexible or suitable employment.

This project will support tenants to progress towards, enter and sustain employment, where appropriate, through a person-centred model that combines barrier removal, progression support, employer engagement and a targeted paid placement element to unlock real job opportunities. Delivery should draw on principles, such as place-based delivery, community engagement and integrated employment and support services within social housing settings.

Delivery will build on the trusted relationship between social landlords and tenants, while working in partnership with employers and wider support services to generate learning on what works for this cohort in the North East.

#### **Purpose of the project**

The purpose of this project is to deliver a region wide, integrated employability offer for social housing tenants, which uses the existing trusted relationships between social housing landlords and tenants to:

- Support tenants who are economically inactive to sustainably engage with employment support.
- Address employment, wellbeing and practical barriers in an integrated way.
- Strategically use targeted paid placements to create and unlock suitable job opportunities.
- Improve employer confidence and capability to recruit and retain economically inactive social housing tenants.
- Providers are encouraged to consider the approaches tested and evaluated in the Jobs Plus model within their proposal.
- Support learning and system change by testing and embedding effective employment support approaches within social landlords' wider tenancy sustainment and resident support activity, where appropriate, and contributing learning to inform future system change.

Delivery will draw on the wider role of social landlords as anchor institutions, including access to wraparound support such as financial inclusion, tenancy sustainment and crisis support, to stabilise participants alongside employment progression.

This priority is intended to complement, not duplicate, existing employability provision or core services provided by social housing landlords.

### **Aims of the project**

This project aims to:

- Support social housing tenants to progress towards, enter and sustain employment.
- Reduce economic inactivity and in-work poverty among social housing tenants.
- Address trauma, health-related, caring and practical barriers that limit labour market participation.
- Use paid placements strategically to enable employers to offer suitable, flexible roles.
- Generate learning on effective housing-led employment support models.

### **4. Eligible activity**

It is anticipated that projects will deliver the following activities to achieve the aims of this priority.

#### **Engagement, assessment and participant support**

The provider will deliver tailored, person-centred support to social housing tenants across the region. This will include:

- Outreach and engagement through housing management teams and other relevant support services.
- Holistic assessment of each participant's circumstances, including employment history, skills and aspirations; health, wellbeing and caring responsibilities; financial, digital and practical barriers; housing-related factors affecting work.
- Development of personalised action plans, supported by ongoing one-to-one keyworker support.

Projects are expected to demonstrate how delivery will meet the needs of individuals who experience additional or compounded disadvantage within the social housing tenant cohort, including (but not limited to) disabled tenants, older residents, care-experienced individuals, people from Black, Asian and minoritised communities, and people with neurodivergent needs.

Support must be trauma-informed, flexible and recognise that tenants' readiness and capacity to engage may fluctuate.

Delivery may include place-based activity within social housing settings, for example working with defined communities or neighbourhoods to embed employment support locally, where providers choose to test a Jobs Plus model approach.

### **Barrier removal and progression towards work**

Delivery must include targeted activity to address barriers commonly faced by social housing tenants, including:

- Confidence-building, motivation and preparation for work.
- Support to address health, caring and wellbeing related barriers.
- Digital inclusion and access to job search tools.
- Support to address gaps in skills, qualifications or recent work experience.
- Progression into volunteering, training or other preparatory activities where employment is not immediately appropriate.

Support should include better-off in work calculations and financial planning to ensure that moving into work does not increase financial hardship, particularly where tenants are managing debt, benefit transitions or fluctuating incomes.

Participants may progress at different paces, and projects **must evidence distance travelled**.

### **Employer engagement and paid placements**

The provider will undertake employer engagement activity, directly linked to individual participants' employment journeys. This will include:

- Working with employers to identify or create suitable paid placements aligned to participants' needs.
- Supporting inclusive and flexible recruitment practices.
- Providing advocacy for participants where required.
- Using targeted paid placements to enable employers to offer placements that would not otherwise exist; reduce perceived risk for employers recruiting tenants who require additional support; and support flexible hours, phased starts or adjusted roles.

**Paid placements** must be used strategically and proportionately, with clear criteria for eligibility, duration and value, and must demonstrate additionality. All paid placements are expected to be time limited and transitional, with a clear route to sustained employment beyond the placement period. Paid placements should be used as a targeted intervention to reduce employer risk and create opportunities that would not otherwise exist. The model proposed should complement,

rather than duplicate, wider initiatives such as Jobs Guarantee or Apprenticeship Brokerage provision.

Placements are expected to be a minimum of six weeks, with the option to extend up to 12 weeks, where this is likely to support progression into sustained employment. Placements may be hosted by the applicant organisation or by external employers. However, the funding under this priority may only be used to fund placements with external employers (i.e. not as part of the project delivery organisations). Providers should consider delivering approximately 20–30 paid placements as part of the overall project, proportionate to the total cohort and funding available. These placements should be a distinct offer, different from existing provision and incentives.

### **In-work support and sustainment**

The provider will offer ongoing support to participants who move into work, including:

- Regular check-ins during the early stages of employment.
- Support to address issues that arise in work, for example health, confidence or routines.
- Liaison with employers where adjustments or flexibility are required.
- Planning for progression and sustainability.

### **System coordination**

The provider will operate as part of the wider Trailblazer system and must:

- Work collaboratively with housing providers, health services, DWP, local authorities, skills providers and voluntary sector partners, as part of the wider ‘no wrong front door’ approach and local hub model.
- Establish and maintain clear referral pathways into and out of the service.
- Avoid duplication with existing employability programmes or statutory services.
- Contribute to joined-up working across housing, employment, health and skills systems.

## **5. Eligible participants**

Residents in the North East area will be eligible for support under this priority if they are:

- Social housing tenants living in the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority area.
- Economically inactive.
- Aged 18+ years old.
- Have the right to work in the UK.

There is no minimum time period of economic inactivity.

Eligible participants must meet the following **definition of economic inactivity**:

*Economically inactive individuals are those not in work and not actively seeking work (unlike unemployed individuals who are actively seeking work).*

*Not all economically inactive individuals claim benefits. For those that do, this would include those claiming either “legacy” benefits or those within specific conditionality regimes in Universal Credit (UC). The former includes Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS). The latter includes claimants within the Preparation Requirement or Work Focused Interview Requirement conditionality regimes (or equivalent).*

## 6. Outputs and outcomes

Applicants must demonstrate how their proposals will deliver the eligible activities, outputs and outcomes set out in this specification. Projects are also expected to contribute to learning what works for the target group in the North East.

Applicants are expected to submit proposals which demonstrate impact and additionality. Project activities should deliver, as a minimum, the following outputs and outcomes.

**The following outputs are expected:**

Output	Target	Definition	Evidence
Number of residents engaged	275	Resident is engaged and enrolled onto a project that aims to support with breaking down barriers and moving resident closer to or into the labour market.	Participant registration form

**The following outcomes are expected:**

Outcome	Target	Definition	Evidence examples
Number of people in employment, including self-employment,	125	The number of people who were previously unemployed or economically inactive, who have received support, and who have been in employment, including self-employment, for at least a 2 week of a four-week period following that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job offer letters</li> <li>• Screenshot of HMRC employment record (with participant consent)</li> <li>• Self-employment registration (e.g. HMRC UTR)</li> </ul>

following support		support. This includes those moving into the “Working with requirements” or the “Working enough i.e. no working requirements” regimes on Universal Credit system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Payslips covering the required 2 weeks in 4-week period</li> <li>• Employer confirmation email</li> </ul>
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Please refer to the project application guidance document for additional information regarding outputs and outcomes definitions and evidence requirements.

In addition to core Trailblazer outputs and outcomes, the provider will also be required to:

- Evidence distance travelled, including improvements in readiness for work.
- Contribute learning on housing-led employability models; the role placements and inclusive recruitment practices have in supporting social housing tenants into sustainable employment; what works for social housing tenants in the North East.

Projects are not expected to deliver system reform in isolation, but to contribute to programme-level learning and improvement. In addition to individual outcomes, proposals are expected to demonstrate how learning from delivery will support wider system change, including how effective approaches could be embedded into landlords’ day-to-day resident support and tenancy sustainment activity over time.

## 7. Key dates

The key dates for this call for projects are as follows:

- Market engagement event and high level priorities for each call for projects shared on Wednesday 3 June 2026.
- Open call for projects launched on Wednesday 17 June 2026.
- Applications must be received by noon on Friday 3 July 2026. Any application not fully completed and submitted by this date and time will not be assessed.
- Interviews may be held, if required, with an assessment panel on Monday 13 July 2026. Applicants are requested to hold this date in diaries as alternative dates will not be available.
- Successful applicants will be expected to enter into contracts during August 2026.
- The projects must be mobilised in August and ready to take referrals from no later than 1 September 2026.
- An exit and sustainability plan should be developed and submitted by 1 December 2026.
- All activity and spending must be complete, and outputs and outcomes achieved by the 31 March 2027.

## **8. Budget**

There is a budget allocation of £630,000 for this project. The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority expects to fund one regional project. All funding must be spent by 31 March 2027.

Eligible costs include:

- Direct staffing costs.
- Training and development costs for participants.
- Participant travel costs and expenses.
- Provider management and overheads.
- Costs for project level data collection, monitoring, learning and evaluation.

## **9. Applications and assessment process**

### **Applications**

Providers should submit a completed application using the standard template. Each question has a word limit, and any text exceeding this limit will not be assessed. Additional documents or appendices will not be considered. All bids must demonstrate how they will achieve full regional coverage and meet the requirements set out in this specification.

Consortium or partnership bids are encouraged. Where such bids are submitted, applicants must clearly set out the roles, responsibilities and contributions of each partner, including arrangements for governance, decision making and financial management. A single lead organisation must be identified. This organisation will be accountable to the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority for delivery, performance management, reporting and compliance with the funding agreement, and will be responsible for ensuring effective coordination across partners.

Providers are expected to demonstrate within their application:

- Experience in delivering employment support.
- A track record of supporting social housing tenants.
- Capacity to deliver at scale across the region.
- Strong links with local employers in the north east.
- The ability to mobilise in august and begin delivery no later than 1 September 2026.
- A commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
- Systems in place for safeguarding, risk management and data protection.

All applications will be assessed in line with the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority award criteria, as set out in the project application guidance document.

### **Assessment**

Further detail on the assessment process is included in the project application guidance document.

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority may hold an assessment panel and invite applicants to interview on 13 July 2026. Applicants are advised to hold this date, as alternative dates will not be available.

## **10. Alignment with other projects and programmes**

Applicants must demonstrate how their proposal aligns with, and does not duplicate, existing projects and programmes. This includes other Economic Inactivity Trailblazer funded projects, as well as Connect to Work, the ICB Health and projects funded through Growth Accelerator, and, where relevant, the Adult Skills Fund.

Proposals must clearly set out:

- How the offer differs from generic employability support.
- How it adds value beyond existing social landlords' support.
- How specialist employment support, employer engagement and wellbeing provision are integrated into a coherent model.
- How delivery will complement existing place-based employment, skills or housing-led programmes and avoid duplication.

Providers will be expected to liaise with Local Authority employment leads, employment partnerships, and participate in quarterly MSA provider forum meetings to support coordination and alignment across the system.

## **11. Quarterly claims and payments**

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority's claim process operates quarterly in arrears with projects able to claim for actual expenditure on project activities, on a quarterly basis, after the money has been spent. Applicant organisations are required to cashflow project activity.

Claims are due one month following the end of the quarter. The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority will pay claims when:

- A fully completed claim form has been approved by the Authority together with supporting information, including a detailed transaction list and evidence of defrayment.
- Any project specific funding conditions have been complied with.
- Financial, output, milestone, risk and progress information has been uploaded correctly onto the portal.

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority may withhold 10% of the project value until all project closure actions have been satisfactorily completed.

## **12. Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

The monitoring information for each participant will be collected via the monthly submission of Participant Registration Form, exit forms, outputs and outcomes forms, and data capture schemas. It will be the responsibility of each provider to ensure every participant has completed this information. Monitoring returns, along with claims, will be submitted on a quarterly basis, and sample checks will be completed by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority.

The evaluation of the Trailblazer is vital to inform future direction. All participating organisations must participate in the programme level evaluation by collecting and providing data, taking part in qualitative interviews, completing surveys and allowing their data to be processed and analysed for this purpose.