

More than housing, more than a job

How holistic, individually focussed employment support can change lives, strengthen communities and boost the local economy

An NFA policy brief

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**Championing
better homes and
communities**

The policy challenge

This brief will be useful to you if you are:

- an elected councillor who wants to know what the evidence says about how best to help local people get into work or find less precarious work, and help local businesses find the labour and skills they need;
- a local or national policymaker interested in how active, tailored support to improve employability can boost household standards of living, community cohesion, and raise general levels of well-being;
- someone working in a health, support or social housing role who wants to know how partnership working can help tackle barriers to employment.

This research – why?

Why should housing providers be a key part of local employment services? Does the evidence show that they may be more effective than mainstream national support services in reaching, engaging and motivating the economically excluded?

The UK remains the only G7 country that has higher levels of economic inactivity now than before the Covid-19 pandemic; in 2024, for instance, a record 2.8 million people were out of work due to long-term sickness. To remedy this, the [Get Britain Working White Paper](#) (November 2024) sets out ambitious employment rate targets and reforms to employment support.

One initiative is the **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funding announced in 2024 for ten pilot employment support schemes based on the US JobsPlus model**. It differs from more conventional employment support by using social landlords to target communities where levels of economic inactivity are particularly high. This means it is community-led, and its hyper-local, person-centred and holistic support focusses on how to remove specific barriers to employment alongside improving interview and job application techniques, signposting training and upskilling, and rebuilding confidence and self-esteem.

Chronic shortages in social housing supply mean that providers have to prioritise households in greatest need, and inevitably this means a higher concentration of residents whose circumstances make them more likely to face barriers to paid, secure work: [ONS figures](#) show that a quarter of all working-age adults who are economically inactive live in social housing. Many have little or no contact with formal government-provided employment support services.

“When a neighbour told me about JobsPlus, I was struggling with my self-confidence and couldn’t work out my next steps. The whole team were so welcoming, they’ve created a safe space where nobody judges. I’m now a community champion, which has given me a sense of purpose and value.”

Louise, JobsPlus participant, East Finchley, LB Barnet

What works

The evidence gathered from evaluation of [UK JobsPlus](#) so far suggests that lasting results from this kind of work come from a sound foundation in a set of clear economic and person-centred principles.

- **Employability support must be local and accessible to remove barriers to job-seeking**, offering welcoming and holistic ‘wrap-around’ assistance.
- **Social housing providers are, the evidence suggests, ideal facilitators** because they already have a [strong, recognisable presence in the community and understand local residents’ needs](#), both among tenants and non-tenants.
- **Their established presence makes it easier to recruit community champions** who can tell real-life success stories that may reassure those who are disengaged and have come to mistrust systems, services and professionals.
- **Geographical saturation** removes the complexity of eligibility, giving everyone, whether social housing tenants or not, access to support to find work, or – just as important – to find less precarious, better-paid or more secure work.
- **Focus on confidence, well-being and long-term progress makes these gains sustainable** when combined with tailored help and further in-work support.
- **Longer-term funding helps recruit and retain key team members** who can build community trust with both residents and employers. This also makes this type of service a strategic delivery partner for local economic growth.
- **Targeted support is invaluable for young people who are especially disadvantaged in today’s labour market**; those who [grow up in low-income households are more than three times more likely to be neither earning nor learning](#).

Key findings

The JobsPlus programme was fully mobilised in all ten pilot sites¹, including the London Borough of Barnet, by March 2026. LB Barnet already has, in fact, long experience of community based employability support through its [decade-long BOOST programme](#) delivered through its housing provider Barnet Homes (wholly council-owned).

The Barnet BOOST experience

The London Borough of Barnet manages its housing stock through an arms-length management organisation (ALMO), Barnet Homes, owned by the council and an NFA member.

JobsPlus aligns closely with [ALMO best practice](#) that puts resident involvement, locally led independent governance, and extra resident support services at its core; and Barnet Homes has offered customers and all Barnet residents similar employment support since 2015. BOOST is a holistic, wrap-around service based in easy-to access central community hubs such as libraries, rather than government-style agency offices. It has shown that co-locating support for housing, mental health, benefits, training and movement into better paid work encourages more people to make the most of the help on offer. It effectively cuts through practical and psychological barriers to employment. Barnet’s JobsPlus pilot builds on these learnings.

¹ East Finchley, London, led by Barnet Homes; Penge, London, led by Clarion Housing Group; Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, led by Clarion Housing Group; Wybourn, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, led by Great Places; Leyton, Waltham Forest, London, led by L&Q; Wirral, Birkenhead, Liverpool, led by Magenta; Living; Toxteth, Liverpool, led by Plus Dane; Swale, Kent, led by Southern Housing; Maltby, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, led by South Yorkshire Housing Association; Stockton, Tees Valley, County Durham, led by Thirteen Group

"I'd never been unemployed, so when I was made redundant and struggled to find another job at the same level I went on a downward spiral. I locked myself in a room for two years, got into debt and at times had suicidal thoughts. BOOST supported me at my own pace. They got to know me and what I needed help with. Having all the support in one place made it easier. It gave me hope and got me back into work - everyone should have access to a BOOST."

Tina, BOOST participant

BOOST has delivered sustained outcomes for over a decade, helping 3,711 local residents into employment between July 2015 and March 2026. Early on, analysis of the scheme's cost-benefit using the Manchester New Economy Model suggested that for every £1 invested, £2.78 was returned to the economy through, for instance, more local and income tax payments and increased spending by better-off households. This rose to £5.99 for every £1 when wider public-sector savings were included, such as lowered demand on benefits and health provision.

BOOST's most recent data also shows the model can respond to shifting labour market conditions and engage priority groups. In 2025/26, the service supported 314 residents into work, including 90 young people aged 18–30 and 181 individuals who were not on benefits. Both groups are made up of those who the statistics show are least likely to be in contact with national Jobcentre agencies or similar employment support and so are unlikely to be offered structured help out of economic inactivity. The majority – 85 per cent – had sustained employment beyond a three-month follow-up.

Who is JobsPlus reaching?

Interim evaluation across JobsPlus is encouraging and offers insights already useful to any local authority or housing provider considering setting up similar services.

Unprecedented numbers of people are economically inactive in the UK, and yet it is difficult to reach those with long-term health problems, disabilities or caring responsibilities who have little reason or incentive to approach Jobcentre Plus, the UK government agency which helps people of working age find jobs. **Results so far suggest the JobsPlus approach can bridge this gap:**

- 36% of JobsPlus participants have had parental and caring responsibilities; and
- 28% of participants have had a health condition lasting or expecting to last more than 12 months.

Only 9% of participants disengaged from the programme in the first four weeks. This low drop-out rate sits alongside encouraging qualitative data that suggests participants in all pilots felt their contact with the service was a positive experience. **Further data suggest JobsPlus can reach those who most need support:**

- 28% of participants had no or low qualifications;
- 25% of participants were aged 16–24;
- 81% of participants were out of work at registration;
- 13% of participants had never worked; and
- 48% of participants had below average well-being, with 21% experiencing very low well-being.

Initial successes

Although the UK pilot is in its early stages and there are a number of variables in the way each service has been set up, first evaluations show some positive employment outcomes:

- Around 20% of participants have so far found work;
- Of those who moved into work or a new role, close to half (47%) secured permanent contracts;
- Participants reported improvements in mental health and well-being, confidence, social inclusion and job readiness.

The context & challenges

Disadvantage in the labour market

Research carried out by [Learning and Work Institute](#) (L&W), [Communities that Work](#) (CtW) and the [Institute for Employment Studies](#) (IES) highlights the scale and concentration of labour-market disadvantage among social housing residents. Compared to people in other housing tenures, social housing residents are twice as likely to be unemployed or disabled; more than three times more likely to be lone parents or lack qualifications; and, when in work, are more likely to be lower-skilled and earn around a third less.

This suggests that social housing providers, with a **hyper-local understanding of (a) the community-specific barriers individuals are likely to face and (b) the type of support they are most likely to engage with**, are uniquely positioned to reach those who will benefit most from Jobs Plus. Pilot sites have a high concentration of social housing and a relatively high proportion of households where nobody is in paid work. They were also selected to reflect a mix of urban and rural areas.¹

Evidence

Qualitative data strongly demonstrates the well-being, health and community co-benefits of person-centred, holistic support programmes such as BOOST and JobsPlus. But policymakers will want **better quantitative measurement** of such outcomes and their benefits to local job markets, economies and health provision to more effectively advocate for these approaches.

Funding

A key strength of JobsPlus is that it draws on the social capital of community champions to boost engagement, often in communities where **trust in systems and services** has broken down. Once such trust grows, it can become a powerful vehicle for change. If, however, resources and funding are cut for short-term financial gains, community trust is likely to disappear again. Long-term, this communal disappointment puts engagement across all public services and in civic society at risk and has long term financial consequences, such as increased demand on health provision and benefits.

Scaling up

Results from the US JobsPlus model show that ‘place saturation’ is a key component of the approach because it **aims to build a culture of work across an entire community**. This suggests that a scaled-up JobsPlus in the UK may need to set – and resource – minimum participant numbers to succeed.

Linking employers and workers

Interim evaluation of JobsPlus shows that local employers must be involved to make sure the service is demand-led, so that **specific local skills gaps can be filled** as it grows.

Where does this research come from?

Working closely with colleagues from L&W, CtW, IES and [MDRC](#), the author conducted key informant interviews with staff, participants and partners at NFA member and Jobs Plus delivery partner Barnet Homes. This brief was further informed by a review of the longitudinal evaluation of JobsPlus in the US, interim evaluation of the UK JobsPlus pilot and key sources on UK employment, including ONS data.

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