

Barnsley's Pathways to Work: Overview of Community Grants (June / July 2026)

Introduction

Pathways to Work is Barnsley's borough-wide approach to supporting residents who are out of work to move closer to skills, training and employment in a way that works for them. We recognise that for many people, the first steps towards work do not begin with formal employability provision, but with trusted relationships, confidence building and practical support in community settings. VCSE organisations play a key role in this early engagement.

In Year 1, Barnsley Council established the Pathways to Work model, including a commissioned Pathways Hub delivering employment, skills, health and wellbeing support. Alongside this, VCSE organisations were funded to undertake early engagement activity, supporting residents who are economically inactive or facing significant barriers to begin their journey towards the Pathways offer.

For Year 2, we are seeking to build on this by strengthening the role of VCSE organisations within the wider system. This grant funding is intended to support VCSE partners to:

- Reach residents who are out of work and not yet ready to engage with formal provision
- Provide informal, preparatory support focused on building trust, confidence and readiness
- Help people understand Pathways to Work and feel confident about taking a next step, including connecting them into Pathways Hub provision when appropriate

VCSE organisations are not expected to deliver structured employability or skills provision as part of this funding as that support is commissioned separately.

We are particularly looking to work with organisations that have strong local relationships and can reach residents who are least likely to engage with statutory or formal services.

Context

Barnsley has around 35,900 economically inactive residents (23.3% of the working-age population). Many face overlapping barriers such as ill-health, caring responsibilities or low skills, and are not yet engaged with employment support.

In 2023, Barnsley launched the Pathways to Work Commission, bringing together expert partners to explore how best to support residents, particularly those furthest from the labour market, to move towards employment. The Commission found that a significant proportion of economically inactive residents would consider work if it aligned with their circumstances.

Pathways to Work has been developed in response, creating a more joined-up local system that supports residents from early engagement through to employment and beyond, with VCSE organisations playing a key role in reaching and preparing individuals for this journey.

The role of Barnsley CVS

Barnsley Council is working closely with Barnsley CVS to work collaboratively on this grant. We have asked Barnsley CVS to manage the identification and engagement grant, managing applications and queries, coordinating reports, and troubleshooting issues in meeting agreed targets.

Grants

Grants from £500 up to £7,500 are available to VCSE organisations in Barnsley to deliver community-based engagement that supports residents to move closer to the labour market and, when ready, into Pathways to Work provision.

Funded activity should focus on identifying, engaging and supporting people who are not currently accessing employment or skills support, using informal, trust-based approaches. The expectation is that organisations will support individuals to take a next step and refer them into the Pathways Hub when appropriate.

Priority groups

Pathways to Work is open to anyone who needs support to move towards employment. However, local insight shows that some groups face the most significant and persistent barriers, and make up a large proportion of those who are economically inactive. We are particularly seeking to reach:

- People with health conditions
- Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Carers and former carers, including parents of young children

We also recognise a wider set of groups who may benefit from this support, including:

- People who are care experienced
- Neurodivergent people
- People experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- Survivors of domestic abuse
- Refugees
- Ex-offenders

These groups are not exhaustive. We welcome applications that demonstrate the ability to reach other residents who face barriers to work.

Students and people who have retired with no intention of returning to work are not in scope.

Expectations of delivery

Funding is intended to support light-touch, flexible engagement over time, helping individuals to build confidence, address barriers and consider their next steps. VCSE partners are not expected to deliver formal employability or skills provision.

Successful organisations will be expected to refer participants into the Pathways Hub where they are ready to:

- take initial steps into learning, including developing basic skills such as English, maths or digital
- engage with personalised employment support to overcome barriers and move closer to, or into, work
- access health and wellbeing wraparound support where this supports their progression

Further information and training on available provision will be provided to successful applicants.

Referrals should not be made at the point of first contact, but at an appropriate stage when the individual feels ready to engage with more structured support.

Referrals should be submitted via the Pathways website: <http://pathways-to-work.co.uk/>

Providing clear and relevant information will support effective triage and ensure individuals are directed to the most appropriate provision. Consent to collect, store and share participant information must be obtained in line with GDPR requirements. The referral form includes basic resident details (such as name, contact information and employment status), referrer information, and a free text section to outline the individual's circumstances, barriers and support needs.

Branding

Use of Pathways to Work branding is not mandatory and should be applied where appropriate, particularly where it supports engagement. Where used, it must comply with the Pathways to Work branding guidelines, which will be provided.