

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT HUB TO HELP RESIDENTS GET JOBS

Plans are being drawn up to create an employment hub run by Wokingham Borough Council to help residents into jobs. The hub, which will be in or close to Wokingham town centre, will support residents right across the borough as it recovers from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges this has created with increased unemployment.

The hub will allow residents to get locally available, accessible and individually tailored support directly, when they need it, close to home. A range of partner agencies, including the Department for Work and Pensions, National Careers Service, Wokingham Job Support Centre and the Optalis Supported Employment Service, will be involved to provide comprehensive advice and help.

An exact location is still being looked at but the aim is for the hub to be open five days per week and will be accessible to those with mobility issues. There is also an aspiration to run drop-in centres at locations across the borough. It will have space to deliver training and digital skills, space for sessions run by outside bodies and partners, access to computers to assist with job searches and a welcome/reception area.

Cllr Stuart Munro, executive member for business and economic development, said: "Our employment hub will provide a one-stop shop for anyone looking for work in our borough. Rising unemployment is a problem we've seen grow in the last year across the country, which may still get worse as we come out of lockdown, so we have stepped up to provide the facilities our residents will need to help them get back into work."

Wokingham borough does not have its own Jobcentre Plus, with the nearest ones in Reading and Bracknell. This creates additional barriers and costs especially for those facing greater challenges or the 'hidden' unemployed, including those who want to work but have given up looking, working less than they want, young people relying on parents or older people relying on savings.

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Over the last year Wokingham borough has already seen a significant increase in unemployment, more than doubling albeit from a relatively low base rate. The aim is to create a space in which people can access expert advice and support to help them navigate their way into sustained employment or education, to drive unemployment rates down as quickly as possible in the borough.

Services will focus on providing the skills to enable people to get into work, retraining older people and maximising opportunities in high demand sectors such as care workers, the green economy and film production. There will also be short training opportunities for high demand employment sectors such as the CSCS card (required for work on construction sites), safe lifting (for work in the care sector) and food hygiene.

Setting up the hub would cost about £80,000 to refurbish and fit out, with annual running costs and maintenance expected to cost £10,000 a year. The hub will have staff from the council's property, adult education and not in employment, education or training (NEET) teams, with ongoing support from the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus.

Optalis supported employment service who provide employment support for people with disabilities, including people with mental health issues, will also be involved. The centre will also work in partnership with the council's youth services and education and training providers, offering attractive spaces for meetings and training.

As government business support schemes wind down there are widespread predictions of a further spike in unemployment on top of the increases already seen. The council's plans for the employment hub would ensure that as this happens, we will be ready to support the borough's residents who are searching for work.

A [decision on the employment hub](#) will be made by the council's executive during its meeting on Thursday (25 March).

- ENDS -

Further information:

1. More from Cllr Stuart Munro, executive member business and economic development, on stuart.munro@wokingham.gov.uk
2. Alternatively, contact the council's communications, engagement and marketing team via CEM@wokingham.gov.uk