

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 25 February 2025

By: Director of Adult Social Care and Health

Title: Proposal to close the Steps to Work Service for people with a learning disability

Purpose: To consider the outcome of the public consultation and to make a decision on the proposal to close the Steps to Work service for people with a learning disability.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) Agree the proposal to close the Steps to Work Service, including Shine Car Valet based at County Hall in its current format and implement a revised supported employment offer with job coaches aligned to a re-modelled Learning Disability Day Service offer; and**
 - 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Adult Social Care and Health to take all necessary actions to give effect to the above recommendation.**
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Cabinet agreed on 26 September 2024 to launch a consultation exercise relating to the proposal to close Steps to Work and stop supporting the people currently accessing the service (the papers are available: [here](#)). Under the proposal, those people who are currently in paid or unpaid work would be able to carry on in their roles, whilst those accessing pre-employment training or actively seeking employment would be found employment support from the independent sector.
- 1.2 This proposal, as well as other potential service changes being explored by Adult Social Care and Health, is to help close the Council's funding gap.
- 1.3 The consultation ran between 3 October and 28 November 2024. The impact of the new funding settlement for the Council has been taken into account when making the proposals in this report. As a result of the consultation exercise some amendments have been made to the original proposal.

2 Background

- 2.1 'Steps to Work' is the Council's supported employment provision, providing pre-employment and job seeking support to people with a Learning Disability or Autistic people with an assessed Care Act eligible need, provided through the Council's Learning Disability Directly Provided Services (LD DPS). The Shine Car Valet service at County Hall is part of this service, providing work experience that assists in finding paid work.
- 2.2 Steps to Work is one of several supported employment services in East Sussex although the only one that works county wide.

- 2.3 Steps to Work is run by the Council and employs twelve members of staff when fully staffed, although there are currently some vacancies. The service provides accredited training to prepare people for work and supports them to find and retain employment by matching them with job coaches.
- 2.4 People accessing Steps to Work can complete a 16-week training programme prior to getting support with job seeking, or they can access job seeking support without the training element. They receive weekly support until they have found a job, and once they have found employment the service will support them, for up to six months, to settle in and retain the job.
- 2.5 The service works with local employers to build relationships and identify employment opportunities. It also runs the Shine Car Valet service at the Council's County Hall building in Lewes. Shine Car Valet offers work experience and a range of transferable skills, with the aim of helping people transition into paid employment.
- 2.6 People are referred to the service by the care management teams in adult social care. The criteria for accessing the service is that people must be aged 18+ with a learning disability and/or an Autism diagnosis. There are currently 61 people using the service. Of these, 31 are either training or actively job seeking, while the rest are either due to start work soon or are already in employment with light touch support.

3 Proposal that was consulted on

- 3.1 The proposal is to close Steps to Work (including Shine Car Valet at County Hall, Lewes) which helps people with a learning disability to prepare for, access, and retain employment and to support people to access alternative services in the community.
- 3.2 The estimated annual revenue savings in a full year for this proposal are £194,000.
- 3.3 To determine the potential savings, we took the overall gross budget for the service and subtracted any ongoing costs of providing alternative services. One-off costs, including the costs of restructuring staff, have been considered in the context of the ongoing saving but not included in the figures presented.

4 Insight

- 4.1 An eight-week public consultation on the proposal ran from 3 October to 28 November 2024. We asked people for their views on the proposal and how they would be affected if it went ahead.
- 4.2 All the feedback received during the consultation is available within the Members' and Cabinet Rooms for Members' consideration.
- 4.3 84 responses were received across the survey, consultation meetings and other feedback methods:

Respondent method	Total
Survey	55
Email and letters	12
Consultation meetings (attendees)	17

- 4.4 The majority of respondents across all response methods disagreed with the proposal to close the Steps to Work service, including the Shine Car Valet. The responses were as follows:

Answer	Number	Percentage
Strongly disagree	56	67%
Disagree	13	15%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	4%
Agree	6	7%
Strongly agree	3	4%
Not sure	3	4%
Didn't answer	0	0%

4.5 The full consultation results report can be found in Appendix 1, but the key messages included the following themes:

- The service is immensely valued as a way of helping people get into work, and in building confidence. Staff are well regarded, while those working at Shine Car Valet service are visibly proud of the service they provide;
- Paid employment outcomes from the service are on the rise and the proposal runs counter to the government's policy to encourage people into work;
- The service provides supported employment which other local providers do not and waiting lists for other services are already long;
- People's ability to find work would reduce if the proposal went ahead. Their stability and support structure would disappear, with knock-on effects for their living standards, mental health and independence;
- The economy would suffer locally, as people would end up claiming benefits despite not wanting to. Any money saved by the proposals is likely to be offset by higher costs elsewhere;
- The Council should find savings elsewhere instead and strengthen joint working with other agencies to continue to support those who benefit from the service.

Equalities Considerations

4.6 In considering these proposals, Cabinet must have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

as required under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010.

4.7 To better understand the likely impacts of the proposal on those who have one or more protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out (a copy of which can be found out in Appendix 2).

4.8 The responses from the consultation were used to inform the analysis carried out in the EqIA. Cabinet members must read and have regard to the EqIA when making the decision about this proposal.

4.9 The Equality Impact Assessment told us that the impact of the proposal to close Steps to Work will have a disproportionate impact on adults with learning disabilities (i.e. the

protected characteristic of disability) and their carers. No impacts were identified for any other protected characteristics.

- 4.10 All people accessing the Steps to Work services have a learning disability or have complexities such as sensory impairment, physical disabilities and other health conditions which may impact on them further. A change in the service may cause anxiety and lessen opportunity for social interaction, skills development and employment.
- 4.11 Other impacts of the original proposals identified were that the interaction with community organisations and employers could be lost, and there would be an impact upon social skills, employability and qualifications.
- 4.12 The full equality impact assessment can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

5 Revised Proposal for this Service

- 5.1 Our priority in Adult Social Care and Health is to meet our legal duties under the Care Act. To help us to do this, we have identified funding areas that we think need to be protected when we are looking at savings options.
- 5.2 These priority areas are the community care budget, carers support services, funding for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, and funding for staffing frontline and care market roles.
- 5.3 While we recognise the importance of the Steps to Work services, the budget pressures we face mean that we have to make difficult decisions about how we spend our money. There are other organisations offering supported employment services to people with a learning disability and/or autism. Given the financial pressures we face, it is difficult to justify continuing to run this service, in the current way, when alternatives exist.
- 5.4 The feedback received through the consultation recognised the need for the local authority to make savings, but thought these should be made elsewhere and not through cutting Steps to Work. We received feedback from a number of people that felt the Council should cut other non-essential services and retain the Steps to Work services.
- 5.5 Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify a way to close the funding gap and retain the current Steps to Work service. However, careful consideration has been given to all the feedback received through the consultation, and this had led to the development of a revised Learning Disability Directly Provided Services (LD DPS) employment support offer.
- 5.6 The original proposal included the re-provision of employment support via the independent sector. It is recognised that this change would potentially have been disruptive to adults currently accessing the Steps to Work services. Consequently, Cabinet are now recommended to agree to implement a revised service offer, whereby four job coaches are retained, and these posts will be based at and managed from the LD DPS Day Services at Beeching Park and St Nicholas. The service would continue to offer a county wide service. In effect, the Council would be re-provisioning the employment support internally which will minimise the disruption for those adults currently accessing the services, but will still achieve the necessary saving.
- 5.7 Maintaining an internal supported employment provision will:
 - Reduce the disruption for adults and their parent/carers, ensuring continuity of support for those currently accessing Steps to Work;

- Maintain the choice available for adults requiring employment support, with a Council run provision complimenting supported employment services in the independent sector;
- Continue to contribute to the Council's objectives around employment as a social care outcome; and
- Reduce the impact on Care Management resource.

5.8 Retaining four job coaches that will operate from and form part of the existing Learning Disability Day Services, as recommended in this report, would mitigate the disproportionate impacts upon people with learning disabilities identified through the EqIA (as summarised in section 4 above).

6 Impacts and risks

6.1 This section explores the impacts and risks of going ahead with the proposal, including those outlined in the EqIA.

6.2 Financial implications:

	Current Budget	Revised Budget		Total Savings
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Expenditure budget	427	224	224	
Income budget	(9)	0	0	
Net budget	418	224	224	
Net savings	0	194	0	194

The calculation of the revised budget assumes that:

- Re-provisioned services will be provided internally by four job coaches as set out in section 4;
- One-off costs to remodel the service will be absorbed in current ESCC budgets or met corporately.

6.3 The table below explores the potential impacts the revised proposal would have on the health and care system, organisations, services and residents.

Health and care system	All adults who access Steps to Work have an assessed eligible Care Act need and whilst the proposals are not a reduction in services, there would be a change to how they are provided. This could have an impact on the social care system which may need to review some adults, alongside offering a carers assessment to unpaid carers. The changes as a result of this proposal could impact on adults' emotional wellbeing and there is a possibility this could increase demand on health settings, particularly specialist provision such as the SPFT CLDT although this is assessed as low impact. Through retaining job coaches aligned to the LD DPS day services, adults accessing support from Steps to Work would be
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	able to continue receiving their current level of support therefore mitigating the impacts of the change.
Organisations and services	Organisations and services could be impacted in different ways, particularly because Steps to Work is a county wide service and alternative provision is not readily available across the whole county. There is a particular concern about availability in the West of the County and therefore a potential corresponding impact on unemployment in the area. There could also be an increased demand on Job Centre Plus, on organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, and on other supported employment providers. There could be an impact on day service providers, including the LD DPS provision, if alternative employment support cannot be identified. Demand for these services may increase if adults are no longer in employment / volunteer positions and / or training. The revised proposal would offer employment support for the adults currently accessing Steps to Work, therefore lessening the impact on other organisations.
Residents	The adults who access Steps to Work, and their parent/carers, are East Sussex residents. This proposal has caused a degree of anxiety already and, if agreed, could cause further anxiety and disruption as the service provision would change. This change could put additional stress on adults receiving a service and unpaid carers, for example: • Acting as a barrier to maintaining existing work; • Making it more difficult to find new work opportunities; • The emotional impact of managing this proposed change for both adults using the service and their parent/carers. Through retaining job coaches, adults would be able to maintain their employment support and therefore the impact would be reduced. The Shine Car Valet would still close under the revised proposal; however, the adults who currently attend would have a job coach to support them to identify alternative employment and training opportunities which will lessen the impact of that provision no longer being available.

6.4 The main risks of the original proposal made to Cabinet were:

- Alternative Supported Employment providers might be unable to offer the support required due to capacity, location or a combination of both;
- Adults accessing the service might not want the alternatives offered and therefore not receive support to find employment;
- Adults currently in work could struggle to maintain their employment without the on-going support provided by Steps to Work.

6.5 These risks are mitigated through the revised proposal to retain four job coaches and align these posts with the existing Council run Day Services. This would ensure that

adults currently receiving a service from Steps to Work could continue with this support and create capacity for adults requiring this support in the future.

7 Outline implementation plan

- 7.1 If the revised proposal to close Steps to Work but retain a revised service offer with four job coaches operating as part of the existing Learning Disability Day Service provision is agreed, the provisional implementation timeline is as set out below:
- 25th Feb 2025 – Cabinet Decision
 - March 2025 - Adults reviews will commence and take place over a four-week period.
 - April 2025 - As the reviews identify alternative provision, adults will be supported to transition to their revised service with the job coaches aligned to LD DPS Day Services.
 - June 2025 - Steps to Work closes.
- 7.2 To ensure the timescales for delivering savings can be met, we have taken steps to begin consulting staff affected by the proposals set out in this report; however, the final proposals for staff consultation won't be known until after Cabinet have decided on the future of Steps to Work, including the Shine Car Valet service.

8 Conclusions and reasons for recommendations

- 8.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget. The 'State of the County' report presented to Cabinet in June 2024 set out a projected £55m deficit on the 2025/26 budget. Savings proposals requiring public consultation that would help to close this gap were presented to Cabinet in September 2024.
- 8.2 The total savings proposals for the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/26-2027/28 set out in November 2024 were £20.628m, across all Council departments. The Adult Social Care & Health (ASCH) contribution to the savings total is £11.455m. In addition to these savings proposals, in order to achieve a balanced budget, the Council is also drawing on its financial reserves.
- 8.3 It is clear that the majority of respondents value Steps to Work and the service it provides. Supporting adults into work achieves positive outcomes that would be jeopardised were the service to cease. However the financial position of the Council requires Adult Social Care and Health to make savings. Cabinet are therefore recommended to agree to close the Steps to Work service, including Shine Car Valet based at County Hall, Lewes.
- 8.4 In order to mitigate the impacts on those adults currently using the Steps to Work service, and adults who may need the service in the future, Cabinet are recommended to agree to implement a revised employment support provision that retains job coaches as part of a re-modelled day service provision. This would retain Council run support and mitigate the risks and impacts identified through the consultation process whilst still achieving the required savings.
- 8.5 Cabinet members must read and have regard to the EqIA when making decisions related to this proposal.

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Local members

Councillor Wendy Maples, All

Background Documents

Consultation responses

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consultation results report

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment