



# **Local London Economic Inactivity Trailblazer Evaluation**



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# Executive Summary

This report gives an evaluation of the Local London Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programmes. Nine London Boroughs that make up the sub-region have been trialling a range of targeted, innovative, locally planned and delivered approaches to support economically inactive residents into work. This evaluation covers year one, from April 2025 to March 2026.

These programmes are still new. Fieldwork took place when programmes were between two and nine months old, so data on formal job outcomes are still coming through. This evaluation takes a qualitative look at the experience of those involved. It looks at what is generating change in participants, and how they move closer to employment as they engage with Trailblazers.

## Who the programme is reaching

Trailblazers are designed to reach people who are more likely to be economically inactive, including women, individuals with disabilities and long-term health conditions, and carers. The data suggests it is finding them. In most boroughs, the majority of participants are women. Across all nine boroughs, significant proportions of participants self-declare a health barrier affecting their daily life. In some boroughs this is over 90%. Many participants have been out of work, education or training for two or more years. Caring for children or other adults is also common.

This is not a uniform picture. Each borough reflects its own population and the work it is delivering. But the thread running through is consistent: these are people for whom the journey to work is genuinely complex.



## What progress looks like at this stage

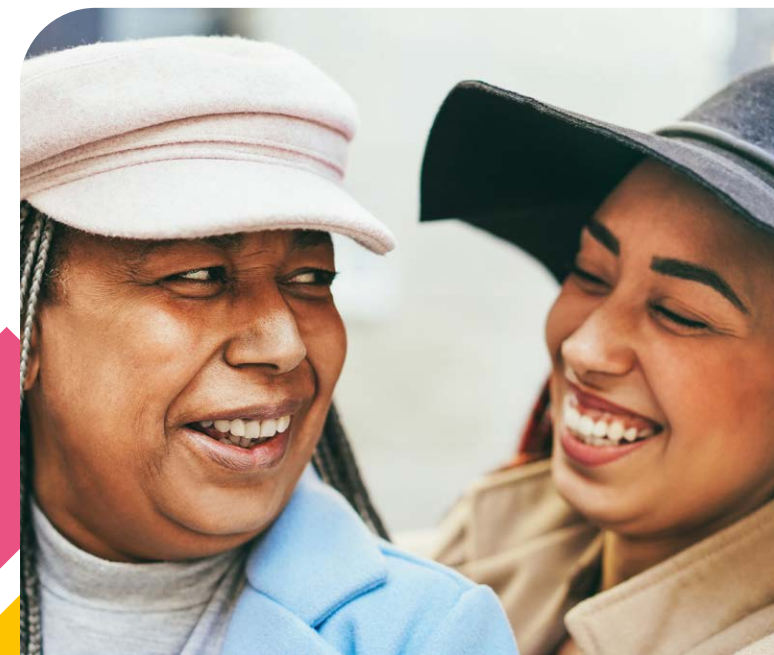
For people facing multiple barriers like these in their lives, the journey toward work does not follow a neat, cause-then-effect path. What is found across Trailblazers, is that the vital steps toward employment: gaining skills, attending training, securing a placement, starting a business, tend to become possible only after something less visible has developed in a participant first: confidence, self-belief, a sense that work is genuinely within reach. These factors are not soft preconditions. For someone who has been out of work for years, arriving at that belief is itself significant progress and what makes the practical steps that follow possible. This evaluation finds evidence of those internal shifts across the programme.

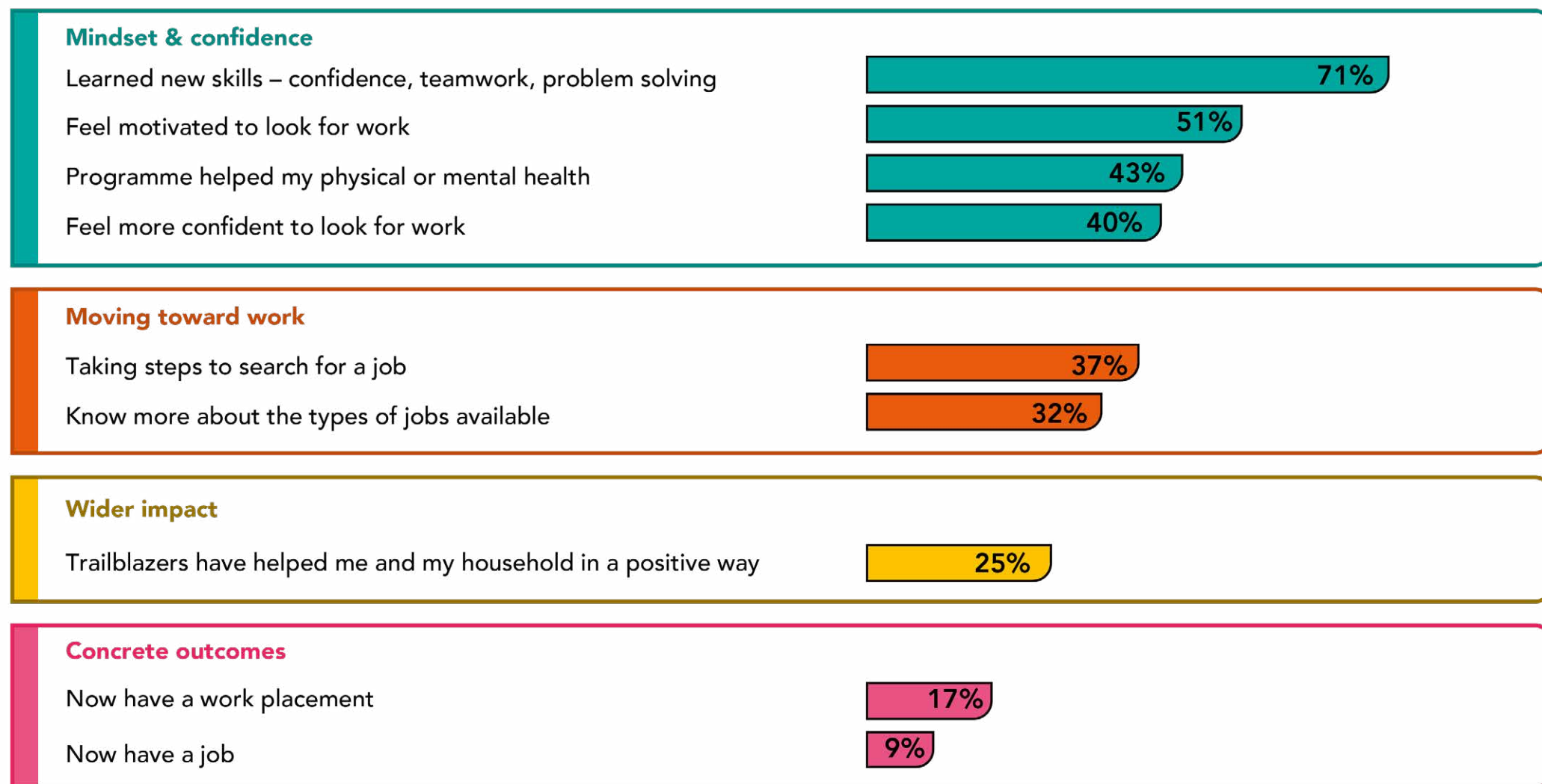
“  
Moving from a negative  
headspace to a more  
positive outlook”

Figure 1 shows participant survey responses to the question: *what difference has the programme made in your life?*

The pattern is consistent with the progression described above. The personal, intrinsic shifts that come first are the most widely reported: building confidence, motivation and inter-personal skills. Extrinsic change follows: taking steps toward work, building knowledge of what is available and learning industry specific skills. Concrete employment outcomes are also present, as are wider impacts felt in families, communities and the local economy, but for a cohort this far from the labour market, they are being built on that earlier foundational change.

Qualitative evidence supports this. Participants described moving from a “negative headspace” to a “more positive outlook,” by joining peer support networks and gaining soft skills alongside certification and training. Employers involved in placement programmes reported reconsidering what they actually needed from candidates. One employer, reflecting on how the programme had prompted them to do that, put it directly: *“you don’t always need those qualifications, and you don’t always need that experience. It’s a bit more about your attitude.”*





**Figure 1:** Participant survey responses to the question *what difference has the programme made in your life?*

## What is driving success

Across the Trailblazers, three common features of delivery emerged as really supporting progress.



### 1. Person-centred delivery



### 2. The power of devolved, flexible funding



### 3. Partnerships

#### 1. Person-centred delivery



Where progress was observed, it was consistently accompanied by relationship-based, wrap-around support tailored to individual circumstances: staff with lived experience, using informal settings, flexible scheduling within school hours, sustained in-work support during the

first months of a placement. Participants across boroughs attributed their engagement and progress to the quality of the relationships around them, and to feeling that the support adapted to their lives rather than requiring their lives to adapt to it.

## 2. The power of devolved, flexible funding



Borough ownership of funding gave delivery teams the creative authority to respond quickly and practically to what participants actually needed when they needed it. Whether it was equipment or transport or to extend placements through subsidies. In Greenwich, approximately £8,000 per placement was channelled directly into participant wages, removing financial risk for employers. In Redbridge, short intensive training courses with a

guaranteed interview at the end were made possible by the flexibility to design them around caring responsibilities. Across strand 2 support, grants of up to £5,000 supported business start-ups without early-stage debt.

Acting quickly and practically made a material difference to whether participants could take their next step towards good employment.

## 3. Partnerships



The most effective programmes drew on deep relationships with community organisations, specialist providers, and employers. In Enfield, partnership with the Business and IP Centre (BIPC) produced notably low drop-out rates through properly pre-screened referrals. In Bexley, working with Family Hubs extended reach for a programme to

dads who could attend while looking after children and who were not engaging elsewhere. In Greenwich, relationships with specialist organisations enabled support for residents with learning disabilities and neurodiversity. Partnerships shaped both who could be reached and what support was possible once they were.

## What got in the way

The first year of delivery was not without challenges.

Compressed timescales were the most consistently cited challenge. Rapid delivery planning and mobilisation squeezed the lead-in time available for programme design, outreach, and relationship-building, all of which are essential when working with cohorts who require longer-term engagement. Several programmes described having weeks to deliver what needed months.

Administrative and financial complexity created friction. Reimbursement processes requiring significant documentation generated cash flow pressures that fell hardest on smaller charities and community organisations, which were often best placed to reach hidden populations but least able to absorb delayed payments. The volume of invoicing required to evidence placements' created a burden that risked deterring the smaller employers so essential to those placements success. Limited data sharing between some boroughs and delivery partners caused unnecessary duplication.

Reaching economically inactive residents outside existing referral systems remained genuinely difficult. Where referrals came through traditional routes, the match with programme goals was sometimes poor. And within cohorts, multiple complex needs such as English

proficiency combined with digital literacy, health, and caring responsibilities, meant some participants could not always access training as designed. Also, where job placements did not work out, the capacity to support participants into an alternative was not always available, and some were lost to the programme at that point.



## Looking ahead

The first year points to three priorities for future service design.

## Reducing points of friction

Longer planning and lead-in times would help in reaching and sustaining engagement with more participants. Streamlining financial and reimbursement processes would reduce both risk and administrative burden for smaller delivery partners, who are often best placed to engage the people these programmes are designed to support. A review of how Trailblazer eligibility interacts with other Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)-funded provision would also help ensure participants are not caught between overlapping requirements, freeing delivery staff to focus on support rather than administration.

**Invest in partnerships.** Specialist support for complex needs, neurodiversity, and childcare need strong referral networks and tailored local engagement. On employer engagement, the new subregional training strand offers a foundation to build on. Coordinating employer relationships at a cross-borough level would reduce the burden on individual boroughs, who are currently building those connections one by one.

**Build on what the evidence shows is working.** Confidence and resilience building should be embedded as core programme features. Flexible schedules, wrap-around support, and continued support once someone is in work are consistently present where the most economically inactive make progress. In addition, expanding paid placements and building on successful business start-up support will be key to sustaining outcomes and widening access.

## In summary

Trailblazers in 2026 shows a programme doing something genuinely difficult, reaching people for whom work has felt out of reach, and creating the conditions for change. The evidence from year one shows that when provision is designed around people's actual lives, and when delivery teams have the flexibility to act on what they find and take a relationship-led approach, progress happens.



# Background and Context

Local London was founded in 2016 and is a partnership of nine London boroughs in the north east and south east of the capital: Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, Bromley, Enfield, Greenwich, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, and Waltham Forest. It is one of four sub-regional partnerships in the capital. Local London is home to around 2.7 million residents and 100,000 businesses, with an economy contributing about £68 billion annually. The sub-region has grown faster than any other part of Outer London since 2010 (1).

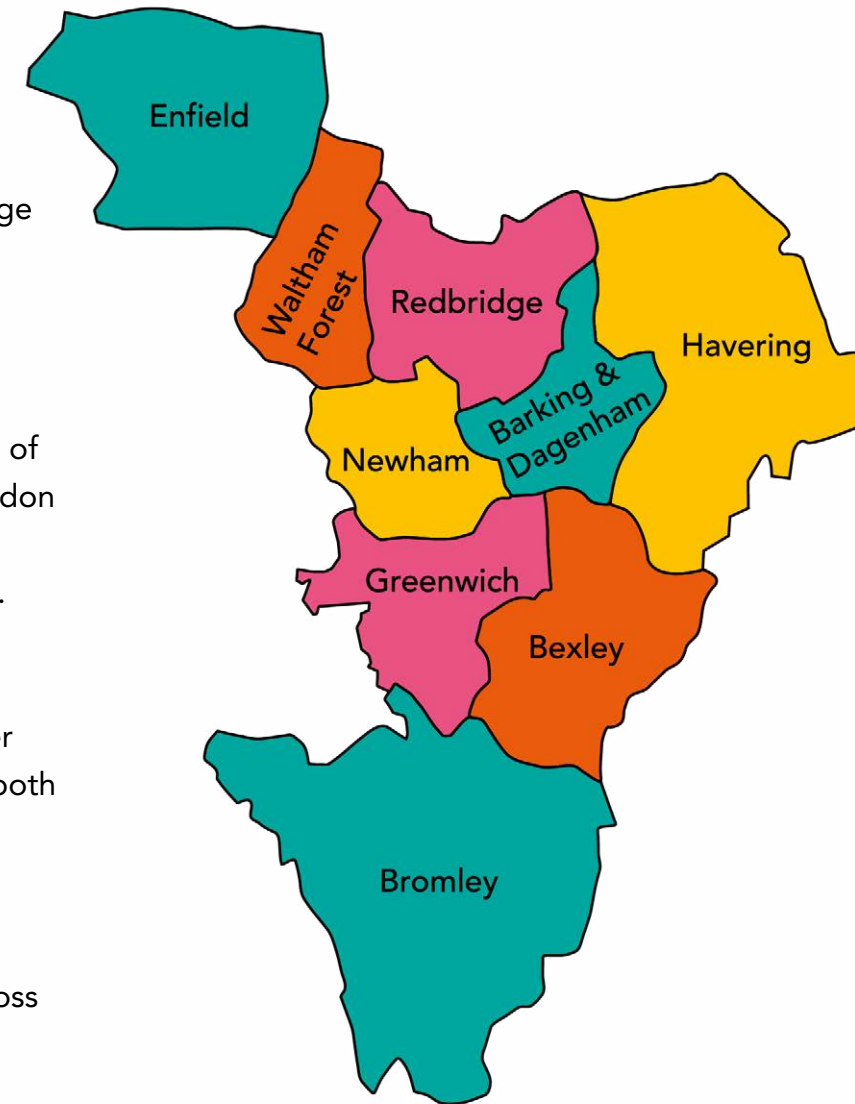
**Greenwich, London and the Thames river**



Economic inactivity is a significant challenge across the sub-region. Rates of economic inactivity among working-age residents range from 27.4% to 35.2% across the nine boroughs, with disabled people and women making up the highest proportion of economically inactive residents. Local London accounts for 27.5% of the economically inactive female population across London. Inactivity rates are particularly high in Newham (52.8%), and in Barking and Dagenham and Waltham Forest (both over 39%), figures that are significantly above both London and national averages.

From spring 2025, Local London began launching the Trailblazers programme across its nine boroughs. Trailblazers is a DWP-funded programme trialling innovative approaches to support economically inactive residents to move closer to the job market.

**Reference 1:** Local London, *About Us* (2026), <https://local.london/about-us/>



➤ **2.7 million residents**

➤ **100,000 businesses**

It is one of four sub-regional Trailblazer programmes in London, administered by the Greater London Authority (GLA) across the capital, with a minimum of £6.25 million in funding allocated across the GLA area. Local London's programme targeted 1,000 starts.

Local London identified several groups particularly likely to be economically inactive across the nine boroughs, including women, individuals with disabilities and long-term health conditions, and carers. To ensure the greatest impact, programmes were designed with teams in each local authority to respond to areas of high need and fit with existing local support. Trailblazer activity was organised into three strands: training and job support (Strand 1); self-employment and business start-up support (Strand 2); and childcare contributions (Strand 3). Each borough submitted a delivery plan outlining its approach across the strands. Funding agreements were made with each borough between April and September 2025.



### Strand 1

Training and job support



### Strand 2

Self-employment and business start-up support



### Strand 3

Childcare contributions

| Borough              | Delivery Start Month  | Investment Level | Strand Mix |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------|
| Havering             | April 2025            | Low              | 1, 3       |
| Redbridge            | April 2025            | High             | 1, 3       |
| Barking and Dagenham | June/July 2025        | High             | 1, 2, 3    |
| Bexley               | June/July 2025        | Medium           | 1, 3       |
| Enfield              | June/July 2025        | Medium           | 1, 2, 3    |
| Greenwich            | June/July 2025        | High             | 1, 3       |
| Waltham Forest       | June/July 2025        | High             | 1, 2, 3    |
| Newham               | August/September 2025 | High             | 1, 2, 3    |
| Bromley              | August/September 2025 | Low              | 1, 3       |

**Table 1:** Local London Trailblazer Funding Provision Per Borough, showing when funding began; Investment Level: Low (<£500,000), Medium (£500,000-£799,999), High (≥£800,000); and which of the three strands funding was used for.

# Methodology

Local London commissioned Always Possible to lead an evaluation of the Trailblazer programme. Always Possible is a UK-based evaluation and insight agency with a focus on research for the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Between October 2025 and March 2026, the Always Possible research team led a mixed-methods evaluation to assess the implementation and impact of Local London's Trailblazer programme.

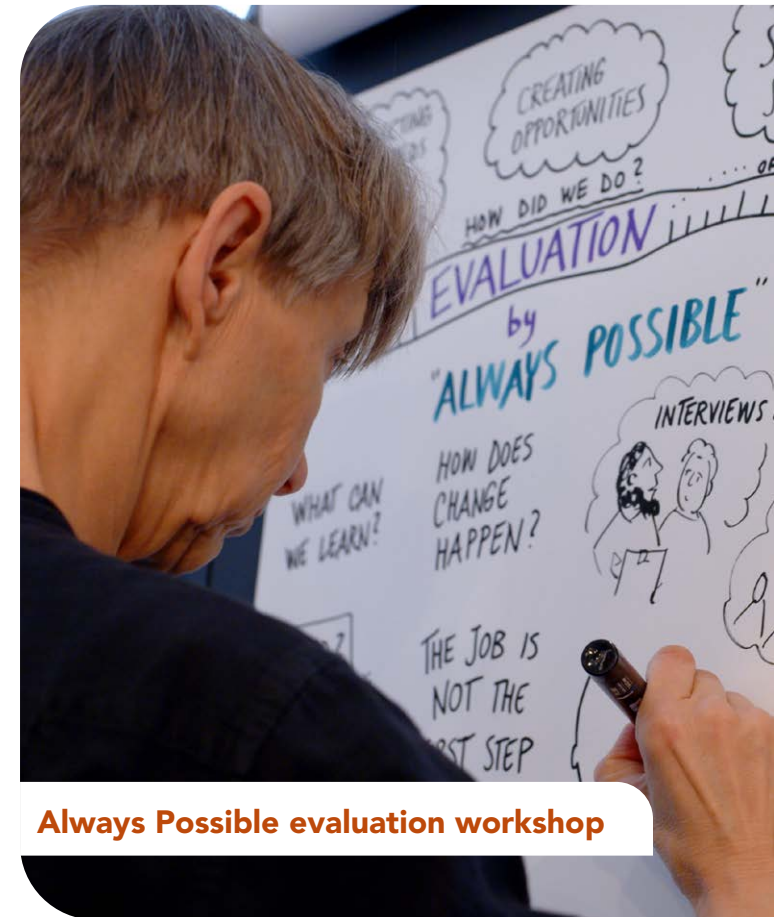
## Research Questions

The evaluation was organised around three areas: Impact and Outcomes, Process and Delivery, and Systems Change. These reflected where the innovative work of Trailblazers was happening and shaped the approach: what data to collect, who to speak with and what areas within a large programme of work to prioritise.

Within each area, the evaluation explored a set of key questions. These are listed below. They were starting points rather than a fixed framework. Qualitative evaluation follows the evidence, and what emerged was shaped as much by what participants, staff and partners told us as by what we set out to find.

### Impact and Outcomes

- What progress did participants make towards improved employability?
- How effective was delivery in the three delivery strands in achieving employment goals?
- What can we learn about challenges facing different key groups?
- How do Trailblazers compare with other similar interventions?



Always Possible evaluation workshop



### Process and Delivery

- What can we learn about effectiveness of different Trailblazer models in different situations and locations?
- What lessons learnt at a delivery level can inform future service design?

### Systems Change and Integration

- How effectively did Trailblazers align and integrate with employment, health, and skills systems at a local level?
- How effective were employer engagement methods in creating accessible opportunities?
- What evidence is there to advocate for continuation or scaling of these local approaches?

Across all three areas, the evidence kept returning to the same underlying focus: what happens to participants, what can be learned from that, and what actions by boroughs and Local London made a difference.

## Fieldwork

**Data for the evaluation were collected through four methods:**

- (a) a programme staff and delivery partner self-administered online survey (14 responses);
- (b) a programme participant self-administered online survey (75 responses); and
- (c) case study interviews and focus groups across select Trailblazer programmes with staff, delivery partners, and participants (52 participants; see Table 2).

Monthly Management Information data returns and project delivery plans were reviewed alongside the qualitative data. These provided the participant cohort profiles for each borough's programme activity and helped contextualise what participants and staff described in interviews and surveys.

Participant and delivery staff surveys contained a combination of close- and open-ended questions about what has worked about the programme, programme impact and outcomes, and programme challenges.

Programme leads in each borough supported distribution of the survey links and instructions to relevant participants and staff. For the participant survey, there was a survey prize draw to motivate participation. Survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency.

Local London priorities and the need for ensuring programme diversity informed the Trailblazer selection for the case studies. This approach allowed the evaluation to cover a breadth of interventions across the sub-region while gathering rich, contextualised insights from multiple perspectives within individual programmes.

| Borough        | Borough Staff | External Partners, Employers | Programme Participants |
|----------------|---------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Strand 1       |               |                              |                        |
| Bexley         | 5             | 2                            | 3                      |
| Greenwich      | 2             | 2                            | 3                      |
| Redbridge      | 4             | 4                            | 1                      |
| Strand 2       |               |                              |                        |
| Enfield        | 2             | 2                            | 6                      |
| Newham         | 1             | 1                            | 4                      |
| Strand 3       |               |                              |                        |
| Enfield        | 2             | 2                            | 2                      |
| Havering       | 2             | 0                            | 0                      |
| Waltham Forest | 2             | 0                            | 0                      |
| Totals         | 20            | 13                           | 19                     |

**Table 2:** Breakdown of case study participants by borough, strand and type of interviewee

“

For the participant survey, there was a survey prize draw to motivate participation. ”

The case studies used one-to-one interviews and small focus groups conducted in-person and online to explore in depth the experiences of select Trailblazer programmes by collecting evaluation data from a number of different perspectives.

**These were a combination of recorded conversations with:**

- (a) delivery staff,
- (b) delivery partners,
- (c) employer partners, and
- (d) programme participants.

Borough programme leads identified relevant staff, partners, and participants, who were then invited to take part by the programme lead or directly by the research team via email.

One-to-one interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes, whereas focus group discussions lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

**All discussions were structured around five questions:**

- (a) how the programme has been implemented,
- (b) what about the Trailblazer programme has worked,
- (c) where there have been challenges or limitations,
- (d) impact and outcomes, and
- (e) proposed changes for scaling and replication.

Interviews and focus groups were recorded, and audio files were transcribed to ease data analysis. Two researchers reviewed the transcriptions to capture themes that answered the five key questions. Themes were exported to a master data synthesis table that facilitated cross-borough analysis. Two researchers met to sense-check assumptions and agree on the final analysis.



# Research Insights



## Framing the evaluation

Trailblazer programmes began working with participants at different points between April 2025 and January 2026. This variation reflects the practical realities of setting up provision. For example partner contracting arrangements, recruitment timelines, and local planning processes all affected when individual programmes could begin delivery. As a result, at the point of data collection, programmes had been running for anywhere between two and nine months. The programme metrics in Table 3 reflect where delivery stood at the end of March 2026, and should be read with that range in mind. Formal employment outcomes are still emerging, particularly for programmes that started later in the period.

This evaluation looks at what sits behind those numbers. Because the overarching success of the Trailblazer delivery model lies in moving away from a “one-size-fits-all” approach, we recognise that different success measures apply in different boroughs. Each borough has shaped its programme to local needs, success looks different across the sub-region. The findings that follow reflect that variation.



| Borough              | Strand 1<br>Starts | Strand 1<br>Number<br>of People<br>Upskilled /<br>Trained | Strand 1<br>Number of People<br>Job-<br>Searching | Strand 1<br>Job Starts | Strand 1<br>Good Work<br>Jobs | Strand 2<br>Starts | Strand 2<br>Number<br>of People<br>Engaged<br>in<br>Business<br>Activities | Strand 2<br>Number of People<br>Upskilled<br>in AI /<br>Digital | Strand 2<br>Number of<br>Business<br>Plans<br>Created | Strand 2<br>Number<br>of<br>Business<br>Start<br>Ups |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Barking and Dagenham | 182                | 62                                                        | 71                                                | 16                     | 3                             | 25                 | 23                                                                         | 23                                                              | 10                                                    | 0                                                    |
| Bexley               | 102                | 60                                                        | 67                                                | 26                     | 2                             | *                  | *                                                                          | *                                                               | *                                                     | *                                                    |
| Bromley              | 100                | 70                                                        | 57                                                | 4                      | 4                             | *                  | *                                                                          | *                                                               | *                                                     | *                                                    |
| Enfield              | 79                 | 57                                                        | 63                                                | 13                     | 4                             | 24                 | 24                                                                         | 24                                                              | 17                                                    | 13                                                   |
| Royal Greenwich      | 173                | 45                                                        | 87                                                | 45                     | 13                            | *                  | *                                                                          | *                                                               | *                                                     | *                                                    |
| Havering             | 71                 | 34                                                        | 42                                                | 14                     | 5                             | *                  | *                                                                          | *                                                               | *                                                     | *                                                    |
| Newham               | 142                | 124                                                       | 142                                               | 45                     | 18                            | 27                 | 26                                                                         | 0                                                               | 0                                                     | 14                                                   |
| Redbridge            | 315                | 98                                                        | 127                                               | 27                     | 19                            | *                  | *                                                                          | *                                                               | *                                                     | *                                                    |
| Waltham Forest       | 118                | 67                                                        | 57                                                | 29                     | 10                            | 38                 | 36                                                                         | 26                                                              | 20                                                    | 7                                                    |
| Gateley Global*      | N/A                | N/A                                                       | N/A                                               | N/A                    | N/A                           | 45                 | 11                                                                         | 34                                                              | 34                                                    | 0                                                    |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>1282</b>        | <b>617</b>                                                | <b>713</b>                                        | <b>219</b>             | <b>78</b>                     | <b>159</b>         | <b>120</b>                                                                 | <b>107</b>                                                      | <b>81</b>                                             | <b>34</b>                                            |

**Table 3:** the output and outcome measures for the Trailblazers. As of 31st March 2026.

\* = Gateley Global delivers Strand 2 for Bromley, Bexley, Greenwich, Havering and Redbridge. N/A = Not Applicable.

## Understanding participants

### Who the trailblazers are working with – the barriers and needs

Registration information gathered across boroughs gives a picture of the complexity of needs within Trailblazer cohorts. Table 4 summarises key barriers by borough.

| Borough            | Women | Self-declared health barrier | SEN while at school | No qualifications | Out of work 2+ years | Caring responsibility |
|--------------------|-------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Barking & Dagenham | 60%   | 67%                          | 2%                  | 3%                | 44%                  | 32%                   |
| Bexley             | 57%   | 94%                          | 8%                  | 8%                | 38%                  | 11%                   |
| Bromley            | 69%   | 42%                          | 18%                 | 9%                | 42%                  | 23%                   |
| Enfield            | 64%   | 41%                          | 1%                  | 10%               | 39%                  | 27%                   |
| Greenwich          | 55%   | 40%                          | 16%                 | 5%                | 25%                  | 16%                   |
| Havering           | 38%   | 72%                          | 20%                 | 30%               | 38%                  | 13%                   |
| Newham             | 56%   | 27%                          | 0%                  | 5%                | 34%                  | 27%                   |
| Redbridge          | 65%   | 99.7%                        | 3%                  | 2%                | 37%                  | 38%                   |
| Waltham Forest     | 47%   | 77%                          | 15%                 | 10%               | 29%                  | 24%                   |

**Table 4:** Summary of demographic indicator (Women %) and barriers faced by participants, drawn from registration information captured in borough management information returns.

SEN = Special educational needs

#### Key

- Demographics
- Health barriers
- Other barriers

The table shows a pattern. Across boroughs multiple barriers exist. This shows the Trailblazers are finding their target participants. But health conditions, caring responsibilities, limited qualifications, and extended time out of work appear together within the same cohort.

Analysis of the delivery staff survey highlighted that staff see barriers to work as shaped by both individual circumstances and the wider system around residents, particularly childcare, health, digital access, language, benefits rules and employer demand. Together, these barriers point to cohorts who need more intensive, tailored, and longer-term support than standard employment provision typically offers.

Delivery staff described the barrier landscape in their boroughs in specific ways:

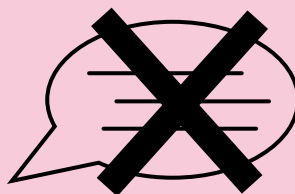
**"Market conditions have impacted delivery – vacancies are down 12% locally, with employers being hit with employer National Insurance contributions (NICs) and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) impacting recruitment and the availability of entry level roles."**

(Delivery staff survey response)

Economic context and labour market conditions locally plays a part alongside personal barriers:

**"Many of the participants have very high needs – they have a lot of mental health needs, neurodivergence, they would have benefitted from 1:1 support with someone like me, a coach, on top of the group programme but mostly they just need support over longer periods of time."**

(Delivery staff survey response)



**"English as a second language, digital and childcare are very common barriers in Enfield. In the east of the borough, there are wards which have 30% no-qualification rate in working age adults."**

(Delivery staff survey response)

The following example illustrates how one barrier can shape the entire experience of trying to find work. For participants with caring responsibilities, particularly single parents, childcare was frequently described as the primary obstacle. A participant shared that the high cost of childcare and the stigma experienced by stay-at-home mothers made working feel like a struggle for survival rather than somewhere they could find agency. They also struggled with the logistical difficulty of managing separate school drops and childhood illnesses, which led to unpaid time off.

**“They want people to work, and then there’s all this stigma of being a stay-at-home mum. I feel guilty, because people look at you like you’re lazy. You’re not lazy. There’s so many things I want to do. When you have people say, ‘you chose to have kids.’ I know, but then it’s a sacrifice. It’s finding the balance between, let’s say, you having a career and being a mum.”**

(Greenwich, Strand 1, Participant)

### Defining “hidden” populations

In the context of the Trailblazer programme, the term “hidden populations” is used to refer to economically inactive individuals who face complex, overlapping barriers to work and typically do not engage with mainstream employability services, including other current employability programmes such as Restart or Connect to Work. Because these residents are often not receiving benefits or actively seeking work through traditional channels, they can be less visible to all government services and difficult to identify and recruit. The evaluation encountered the term in use by some boroughs and it is found in literature related to engaging certain cohorts with employment and training programmes (2).



## What progress did participants make on their pathways to employment

### What progress looks like

What counts as progress for someone carrying multiple, overlapping barriers and often years outside the labour market is not immediately visible, and does not follow a predictable path. What the evidence from Trailblazers shows, consistently across

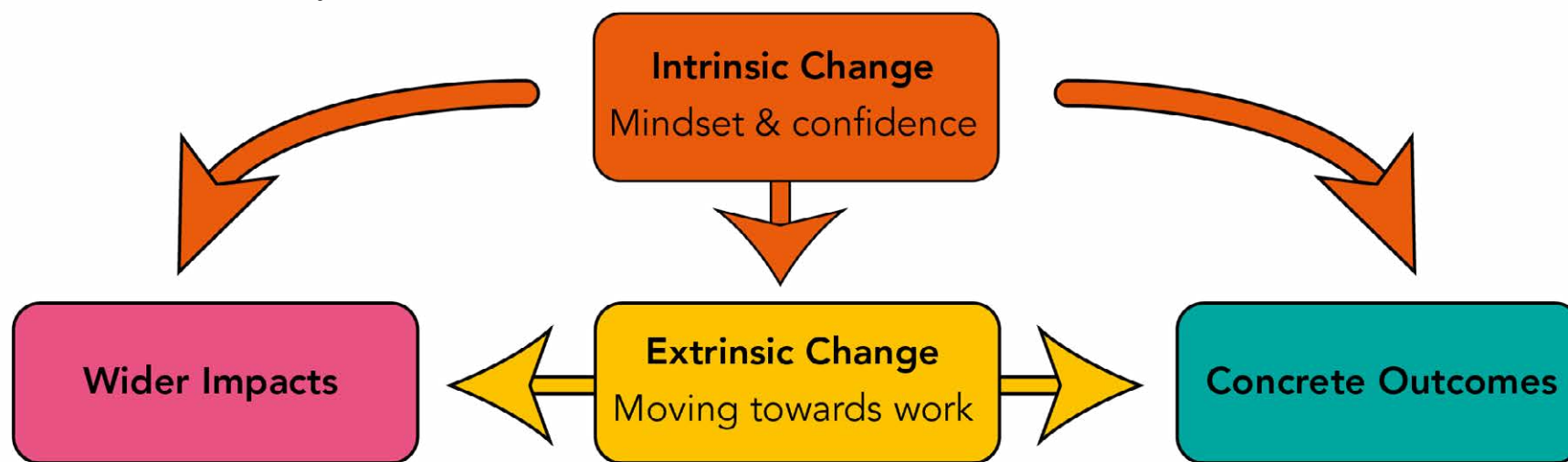
boroughs, strands, and very different programme models, is that progress moved in a direction, but rarely in a straight line.

This pattern is consistent with established frameworks of behaviour change.

The Transtheoretical Model (3) describes how people move through distinct stages of change. The early stages are intrinsic in nature. They involve shifts in how a person

sees themselves and what they believe is possible. Only once those shifts have taken hold do the observable, external, extrinsic steps become viable. These include practical interactions with the world of work: seeking training, applying for work, then securing work or starting a business.

The Trailblazer evidence maps onto this progression. Participants moved through four broad stages, shown in figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Model for Trailblazer economic activity change

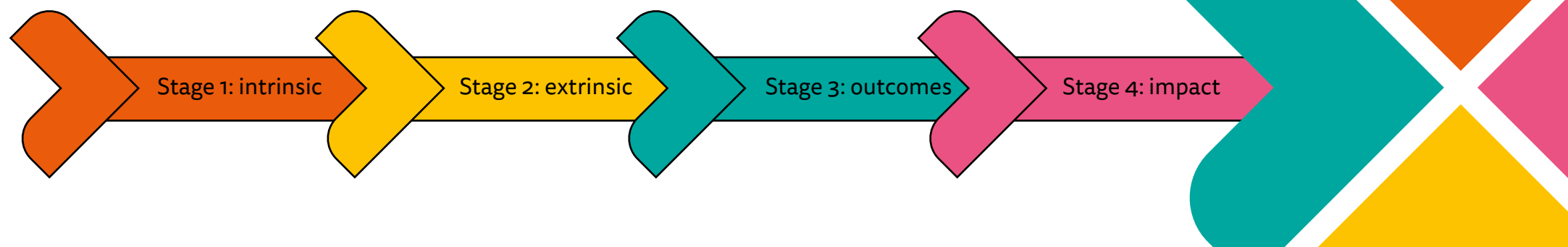
**Reference 3:** Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51(3), 390-395.

The first stage is intrinsic change: shifts in mindset, self-belief, and sense of place in the world of work. The second is extrinsic change: building skills, gaining qualifications, and developing employer-readiness. These extrinsic changes are made possible by the intrinsic shifts that precede them. The third stage is concrete outcomes: placements, job starts, and business launches. The fourth is wider impact: effects that spread beyond the individual into families, communities, and the local economy.

This evaluation finds stronger evidence of intrinsic change than of extrinsic change or concrete outcomes. Three interconnected factors explain this. First, intrinsic changes occur earliest in the progression, so there has been more time for them to develop and be observed. Second, most Trailblazer programmes were at an early stage at the point of data collection. Third, the full journey from economic inactivity to sustained employment takes time. For many participants, that journey extends well beyond a single programme year.

### Before the Job, there's the person: Intrinsic Progress

The participant survey results are consistent with this progression. In the response to the question asking what difference the programme has made in their life, the greatest percentage of respondents agreed with items centred on mindset shifts such as confidence, motivation, and mental health, as shown in table 5. A smaller percentage of respondents had developed more understanding of available jobs and searching for work. And an even smaller percentage of respondents had secured a work placement or a job thanks to the programme. Whilst this is a clean and tidy picture, the pattern is perhaps not surprising given when the data was collected. Most participants were still mid-programme. More will have experienced skills and confidence shifts simply because that is what the earlier months of delivery focused on. The neatness of the graph reflects the progression, but it is also partly a function of timing.



| Difference made                                                                                                     | % agree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| I have learned new skills (like talking to people, confidence, teamwork, problem solving) thanks to this programme. | 71      |
| I feel motivated to look for work thanks to this programme.                                                         | 51      |
| The programme has helped my physical or mental health in a positive way thanks to this programme.                   | 43      |
| I feel more confident to look for work thanks to this programme.                                                    | 40      |
| I am taking steps to search for a job thanks to this programme.                                                     | 37      |
| I know more about the types of jobs available to me thanks to this programme.                                       | 32      |
| The programme has helped me and my household in a positive way thanks to this programme.                            | 25      |
| I now have a work placement thanks to this programme.                                                               | 17      |
| I now have a job thanks to this programme.                                                                          | 9       |

**Table 5:** What difference has the programme made in your life?



The qualitative data reflect the same pattern. Across the case studies, the evidence points to five themes in sequence: mindset shifts and improved confidence; the development of soft skills and peer support networks; the acquisition of hard skills needed for employment; employment success for some participants; and early, wider impacts on families, employers, and communities.

### Mindset Shifts and Improved Confidence

There is evidence of changes to programme participants' mindsets, shown by improved confidence and self-worth, a more positive outlook on the future, greater readiness to engage with the world of work, and improvements to mental wellbeing.

Programme staff observed participants move from being “rabbit-in-headlights” or “shy” and “timid” to being able to articulate their feelings and talk about their problems, often for the first time. They reported seeing participants “come out of their shell”. Programme participants echoed this, with one sharing that they “can talk about my problems” and that “talking actually really helps”.

The word “confidence” appears the most in the survey and interview data. Programme staff, delivery partners, and participants alike shared improvements in participants’ confidence. The concepts of being “worthy” and “self-worth” often accompanied these statements, suggesting that they go hand-in-hand with confidence in creating mindset shifts.

**“I lost [confidence] for quite a while, being out of work and a lot of other stuff that’s gone on in that time, that I kind of lost that confidence to be a bit more social and just get myself out there a bit more. And also it’s given me an idea of business ventures around social aspects, like the walks and things like that.”**

(Bexley, Strand 1 Participant)

Improvements in confidence and self-worth helped participants move from what was described as a “negative headspace”. From there, they reported being able to have a “more positive outlook on life” and “a sense of purpose”. Relationships with support staff played a significant role in sustaining these shifts over time. As one programme participant noted, “I feel like a flower which is coming into bloom”.

### Soft Skills & Peer Support Networks

Soft skills and peer support networks developed together, rather than separately. Taking part in group activities appears to be a major contributor to how this happens, contributing to developing those soft skills needed to be successful in the world of work. Soft skills mentioned include “communication skills”, and “the ability to tailor communication to different audiences”.

**“I feel also more optimistic as well because we come from kind of this area, it’s quite deprived. And there’s a sense of doom and gloom around. It’s quite hard to explain if a person’s not from here. You know, almost like crabs in a bucket kind of thing, where people expect you to fail.”**

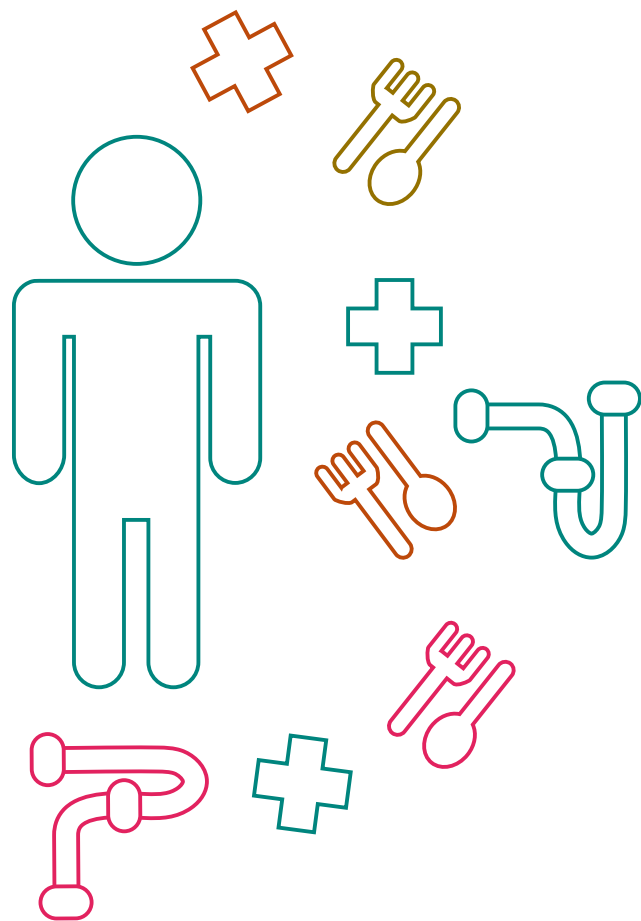
(Newham, Strand 2 Participant)

There is evidence that programme participants gained a sense of place through taking part. Across Trailblazer programmes, words such as “friendships”, “community”, “being in a space with others on a similar journey”, and “strong support networks” are present. The peer support benefits extended further. Through these participants learned that “they are not alone in their struggles;” some developed a “collaborative spirit”, and “felt supported by the community”. The community built through these networks is likely to support impact beyond the programme itself. Programme participants can lean on these peer supports as they continue their journey into work.

**“Just getting out, interacting with new people, is pretty good for me. Obviously, that’ll help once I start – because the big concern is going from being self-employed to being back working in an office. It’s a different environment. And this is kind of setting me up to sort of bridge that gap a little bit.”**

(Bexley, Strand 1 Participant)





## Moving Towards Work: Extrinsic Progress & Concrete Outcomes

### Hard Skills

A number of Trailblazer Strand 1 programmes focused on job skills training, with sectors targeted to reflect local employment need. These included construction, healthcare, hospitality, retail, and social care.

For example, Greenwich programme participants gained the qualifications to support their food hygiene, human resources, paediatric first aid, safeguarding, and plumbing skills, with an aim to help them into job roles where those skills were needed. In Redbridge, participants gained construction, healthcare, and social care qualifications. Some of these career training pathways included unpaid placements that further developed participants' sector-specific hard skills.

**"The training is quite intensive, and it's face-to-face, full-time, Monday to Friday. They learn about work sites, what services we provide, the organisation structure, the vision, values, jobs available, skills required, career progression, presentation skills to prepare them for upcoming interviews. They learn about our policies and procedures that we have in place, again to prepare them for the upcoming interviews, because they will be competing with existing staff."**

(Strand 1 Delivery Partner)

Across the Strand 2 Trailblazer programmes, participants gained the skills needed to start a business and succeed as entrepreneurs. This entailed developing a viable business pitch, delivering the business pitch, how to use budgets and funds, digital upskilling, and hard skills in relation to artificial intelligence.

### Employment Success

Strand 1 programmes are showing early evidence of success in helping participants move into employment.

First, the Trailblazer programmes helped participants “discover things” that they “wouldn’t have wanted to do” and had “started considering”. Career exploration emerged as a meaningful part of the process.

Second, job placements reinforced that exploration. Whether paid or unpaid, they gave participants direct experience and

helped them get a sense of direction. Furthermore, those who participated in placements left with current skills and professional references to add to their Curriculum Vitae (CVs), making them more competitive for future roles.

Third, some participants secured job offers by the end of the Trailblazer programme. For example, Redbridge reported that “between 80 and 85%” of participants that entered their courses had received a job offer.

It was reported that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and other onboarding requirements slowed the conversion of job offers into confirmed starts. As a result, some of these successes are not yet visible in the programme data. There is also evidence that some participants lost patience with the onboarding processes and disengaged before taking up their offer.

**“Learning about technology and how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can support you with so many aspects of your business which is so important when you are starting out and don’t have the funds to employ lots of different specialists.”**

(Enfield, Strand 2 Participant)



**Discover things**



**Reinforce direction**



**Secure job offer**

Finally, programme participants have successfully gained employment. Through placements, some participants were offered contract extensions or permanent roles. Others have used the knowledge and skills gained from the Trailblazers programmes to secure employment on their own.

There is also early evidence that Strand 2 Trailblazer programmes are finding success in helping participants start their own businesses. Participants are solidly “on the journey” to business start-up, as evidenced by “some of them taking the steps to register the business.”

Programme participants have also started a “marketplace to advertise their businesses”. More specific and successful outcomes include the development of a job search app using AI and a pop-up café. It is important to note that these early successes were possible in just six to seven months since the boroughs received funding to do this work.

**“We completely redid my CV at one point, and then I started getting replies [from employers]... It was just mind-blowing... I’ve been [looking for a job] for just under a year, and I’ve finally found a job now.”**

(Redbridge, Strand 1 Participant)



## Wider Impacts

The effects of the Trailblazers are reaching beyond individual participants into their families and local communities, and into some employment landscapes in the sub-region.

For example, a man returning home in a better mood “radiates positivity” to his partner and children, while a single mother who has set up her own business is a positive role model to her children. One participant who had a paid placement reported using the income to address rent arrears and debt that had accumulated while she was struggling to find flexible work, highlighting the impact the programme is having on helping participants with financial recovery.

The Trailblazer initiative is having an impact on the local employment market. Boroughs have strengthened their professional relationships through the delivery of Trailblazers.

They established and/or strengthened links with local employers. Funding job placements

gave employers a route to address immediate staffing needs without the friction of standard recruitment processes. Some employers also reported that the programme prompted them to re-evaluate what they actually required from candidates.

Programmes have also generated learning about local structural barriers that is already informing service design.

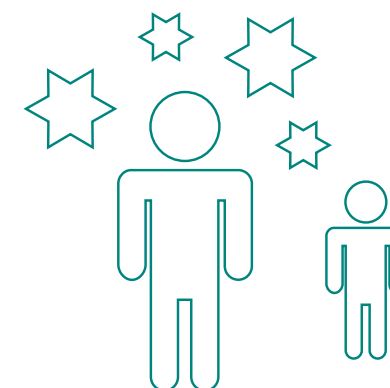
For example, Greenwich and Havering used Trailblazers programme activities to reach residents who had not previously engaged with any local provision. To effectively support care leavers and other participants with higher support needs, the delivery leads in Greenwich learned to draw on specialist partners, such as “Unity Works,” drawing on their expertise in supporting participants with complex barriers into and through work. In Enfield, early steps through their strand 2 programmes toward establishing Community Interest Companies point to potential for lasting community-level impact beyond the programme itself.

**“You don’t always need those qualifications, and you don’t always need that experience. It’s a bit more about your attitude – keen, happy to learn, can pick things up quickly – then you will succeed in that role.”**

(Greenwich, Strand 1, Employer)

**“I’m achieving my dream and I feel proud that I can be a role model for my kids.”**

(Enfield, Strand 2 Participant)



## What worked in delivery and in the wider system

The evidence from delivery points to a consistent pattern: success was not driven by a single model or metric, but by a combination of sustained support, tailored provision, and practical opportunities built around individual circumstances. A shift away from a traditional “unemployed to employment” approach.

### People-centred, holistic approaches

A consistently strong feature of effective delivery was the commitment to relationship-based, wrap-around support tailored to individual needs. Delivery staff moved away from more administratively constrained approaches, prioritising flexible hours,

adapted job specs, and a focus on participant attitudes over compliance requirements. Several staff contrasted this favourably with more prescriptive provision. The DWP Restart programme, for context, requires advisors to adhere to 22 customer service standards. Trailblazer delivery staff described having the freedom to respond to what was in front of them, rather than what a checklist required.

To be able to offer flexibility and a focus on participant attitudes, trust was built through informal environments and staff with lived experience of the challenges participants were facing. Across the Trailblazers, employment advisors and delivery staff are praised by participants and other stakeholders for their person-

centred and holistic approach and depth of understanding.

In Enfield (Strand 2), delivery staff have personal experience as business owners, helping them understand participants’ real business start-up anxieties. In Bexley (Strand 1), they move conversations outside which proves to be transformative. Regarding delivery design, in Enfield (Strand 2), delivery teams found that compressed, flexible schedules (e.g., three days a week within school hours) could maintain high engagement among participants with complex lives and in Greenwich (Strand 1) they are able to offer placements with flexible hours ranging from 8 to 25+ hours a week.

- Sustained support
- Tailored provision
- Practical opportunities



- Flexible schedules
- Flexible hours
- Adapted job specs

**"Proper Blokes Club is outdoors. You're in nature, having these conversations, fresh air, exercise. I think that makes it different. Sometimes it's easier to have conversations outside the four walls... When you come home, you feel like, actually, I've done something today."**

(Strand 1, Trailblazer Lead)

**"I think if you're just doing a lot of one-to-one and they're not getting that pastoral care, they disengage very quickly. Whereas these programmes demonstrate that they engaged and there was a higher rate of completion. That just shows it's needed to keep them motivated – that motivation and encouraging each other."**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)



**"The mentors, tutors and support staff are so encouraging they give you the motivation to make this really happen."**

(Enfield, Strand 2 Participant)

**"The lead delivery staff member is so kind, professional and it has helped me to regain my trust of men."**

(Enfield, Strand 2 Participant)



In Greenwich and Bexley (Strand 1), sustained in-work support during the first three to six months helped participants through the initial period of returning to work. In Enfield (Strand 2) participants have access to business mentors after they have finished the programme.



**"The grant is also a big boost, you have access to money on top of your savings or anything else you might be doing financially."**

(Enfield, Strand 2 Participant)

**"We will have access to some more courses and a mentor, we can come back to ask questions and continue to learn from others."**

(Enfield, Strand 2 Participant)

**"Normally, within those first three months, I say that's when you can get not attending, not taking the placement seriously, travel issues, childcare issues... And the in-work support is where we step in and then sort of guide them through."**

(Greenwich, Strand 1 Employment Adviser)

### The power of devolved, flexible funding

Devolved funding allows local authorities to be highly responsive to specific local needs and gives delivery leads the “creative authority to be able to kind of innovate”.

This flexibility means programmes can act practically and quickly to remove immediate barriers to employment.

In Redbridge (Strand 1) they are able to deliver short and intensive training with a guaranteed interview at the end which is more fitting to those with wider barriers around caring responsibilities and childcare. In Greenwich (Strand 1), approximately £8,000 per placement covers

salary costs, removing financial risk for local employers and charities. A light-touch advisory approach allows a larger share of funding to flow directly into participant wages rather than overheads. In more traditional supported employment models, a significant portion of funding goes toward programme staffing costs. Greenwich’s approach inverts this, directing a larger share directly into participant wages.

In Enfield and Newham (Strand 2), they offer grants up to £5,000 to cover start-up costs without participants taking on early-stage debt, alongside dedicated sessions with the DWP to help participants manage the “real sticking point” of transitioning from Universal Credit to self-employment.

**“The best thing about it was it gave me the creative authority to be able to kind of innovate a little bit as well. Being in the business and enterprise team, I wanted to kind of do a pitching event, and never got to realise that dream. So it enabled me to bring something that I’ve always dreamt about to the forefront.”**

(Strand 2, Programme Lead)

**“One of the clients who finished the last cohort of the construction. She had been offered a job, and she just needed the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). I was able to get it for her, literally in just a couple of days... if we hadn’t been able to support her with that through the Trailblazer funding, she probably wouldn’t have been able to start working.”**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

### Starting where people actually are: redefining employability and reaching hidden populations

A consistent feature of effective delivery was starting from a realistic understanding of participants' lives, rather than from a fixed idea of what job-readiness looks like. The programmes target economically inactive and hidden populations, such as those with caring responsibilities, neurodiversity, or long-term health issues who typically do not engage with mainstream services, Jobcentres or traditional externally funded programmes like Restart or Connect to Work.

For instance, in Bexley (Strand 1), success is measured by increases in "confidence, persistence, and perspective, rather than just immediate job starts" and in Greenwich (Strand 1), through paid placements they are focusing on 'hidden residents' who would typically fail to secure an interview through standard recruitment routes.

Greenwich also introduced a highly successful "70% Model" and non-competitive recruitment process for Strand 1. Rather than running a competitive recruitment process through which these participants would typically be unsuccessful, the programme matches a single candidate who is approximately 70% job-ready to a role, with the understanding that the employer would mentor them to bridge the remaining 30% gap.

**"CVs alone won't help. Many have mental health challenges and need support to become ready to look for work. The intention was never direct job outcomes, but readiness to engage with advisors and employment support."**

(Strand 1, Delivery staff)

**"Some of these people might have poor credit ratings...this is where the programme is very, very innovative in that sense, it's willing to take a chance on people and give them that opportunity to build capacity, scope their idea, and see where that journey can take them."**

(Strand 2, Programme Lead)

**Candidate is  
approximately  
70% job ready.**



**Employer would  
mentor to bridge  
the 30% gap.**

## Partnership and cross-system working

Across the case studies, partnership working emerged as a consistent feature of effective delivery, operating at multiple levels: between delivery organisations, across local authority services, and with local community networks.

In Enfield (Strand 2), partnering with the Business and IP Centre (BIPC) allowed the programme to bypass traditional recruitment issues and reach participants who were not coming through standard referral routes. Working with pre-screened candidates from community hubs, they achieved an “astonishingly low” attrition rate. Furthermore, Greenwich (Strand 1) drew on established local relationships to secure placements in diverse sectors and worked closely with a specialist organisation supporting residents with learning disabilities and neurodiversity into work.

In Bexley (Strand 1), delivery partners came together to run coffee mornings to introduce their respective offers to potential participants. In these sessions the delivery partners stay to observe the group and then attend taster walks to show they are working together.



**Delivery  
organisations**



**Local authority  
services**



**Local community  
networks**

**“So actually, just from a stakeholder relationship partnership perspective, it was a good way of trailblazing how different organisations can work together as well.”**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

**“Partnership is key. I think even with strand two, it’s again partnership. Strand one, partnership. I think that is the theme, whether it’s internal or external.”**

(Strand 3, Programme Lead)

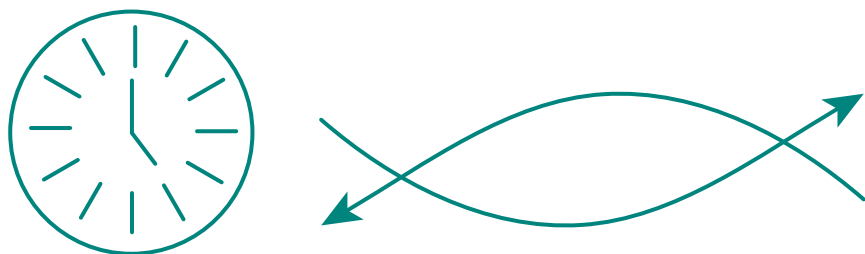
In Enfield (Strand 3), the employment team worked closely with the service responsible for universal childcare provision, allowing expertise sharing and faster operational decision-making. In addition, Employment Advisors acted as intermediaries between participants and local organisations, partnering with volunteering organisations, parenting programmes and local schools.

## The challenges

Trailblazers did not run without encountering friction and pressures. Delivery challenges were overlapping and systemic rather than isolated, and in several cases directly affected what programmes could achieve in year one.

## Timescales

The first year of the Trailblazer programme was significantly shaped by compressed timeframes. From the approval of delivery plans and confirmation of funding to the hard implementation deadline of March 2026 was a narrow window, and boroughs found it difficult to build the kind of sustained engagement that this cohort requires. Boroughs reported it difficult to support economically inactive individuals who typically need longer-term support to move toward work. For example, in Enfield (Strand 2), a late start meant delivery had to be highly accelerated in terms of learning but also the delivery of start-up grants and evaluations, and in Redbridge (Strand 1) insufficient lead time left delivery teams designing programmes while already running them.



**“Two weeks, it’s very hard to get everything on an introduction level within two weeks. And then you’re also kind of asking the learner to remember everything that’s brand new over a two week period, and then to sit an interview. It’s very intense.”**

(Strand 1, Delivery Partner)

**“I think they need to design programmes giving you at least three months – that’s kind of development time and potentially even some development funding. If you just have like five grand of your money early to go: right, what is the plan? Because we’re constantly transitioning from one programme of funding to another.”**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

**"The programme came in over Christmas, so we had to take into account Christmas and half-terms, things like that, which caused us a little bit of a delay where we'd like to have been a bit further ahead. And now delivery of the grants and evaluations is the next step, with not much time to turn that around."**

(Strand 2, Delivery Partner)

**"In order to have the reimbursements for the salary costs, they have to invoice us. And if you think we've got 50 placements and they have monthly invoicing, that's 300 invoices coming through over a period of time, all need to have authorisation... it generates a lot of work, especially for employers who have never supported one of these programmes before, in getting the invoicing correct."**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

### **Administrative and financial complexity**

Administrative and financial complexity created friction at multiple points in delivery, with knock on effects for partners, employers, and participants.

In Greenwich (Strand 1), reimbursement of employers required significant evidence including payslips and tax letters. This generated some incorrect invoices and repeated back-and-forth between grant administrators, Local London, boroughs, and employers. The delays placed real cash flow pressure on smaller organisations, particularly charities providing placements who were covering salary costs upfront. In Redbridge (Strand 1) they experienced long wait times for participants to gain their DBS. In Enfield (Strand 2), the allocation of grants and the absence of a shared data portal between delivery partners created further administrative friction.

**"The project is quite admin and management information heavy. So a lot of time goes into making sure that we've got the right paperwork and it's all evidenced properly. And also the kind of management information that needs to be sent up the line. So yeah, simplify the compliance side."**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

### Delivering on strand 3 objectives

Strand 3 proved significantly harder to deliver than the other two strands. With expected funding for that strand being re-purposed into Strand 1 in a majority of Boroughs.

In several boroughs, existing government-funded childcare schemes had already partially met the need the strand was designed to address, which put a ceiling on uptake before delivery had really begun. Getting information to eligible residents and positioning it clearly within the already complex childcare funding rules landscape contributed to low uptake.

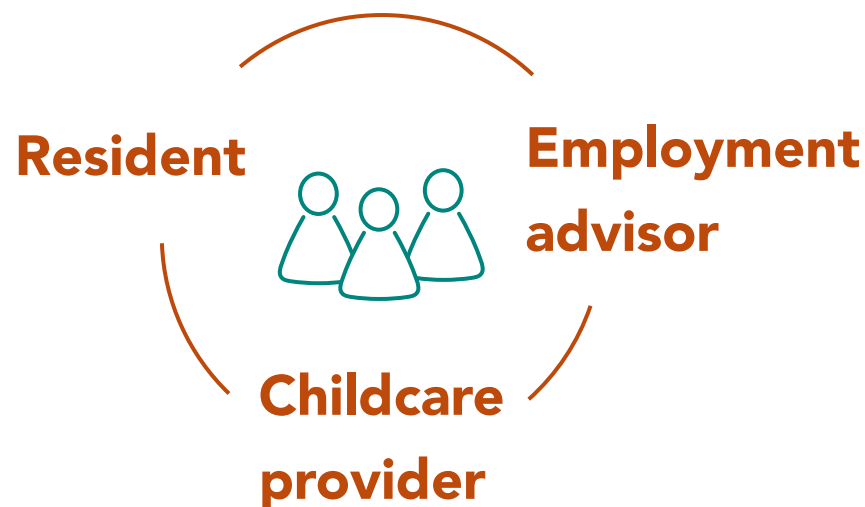
Enfield had the most success. They built a direct payment model connecting the resident, an employment advisor, and a childcare provider, and paid providers directly rather than sending money through residents first, which overcame one barrier. That cut out delays and kept things moving. Even so, take-up stayed low, and finding nurseries within reach of participants proved harder than expected.

Havering and Waltham Forest both struggled to find demand at all. Neither could identify residents who needed the support in the way the strand had anticipated. Both boroughs pivoted. Havering

moved toward information sessions targeting community groups, raising awareness of childcare funding and employment support more broadly. Waltham Forest tried to establish a crèche-style mobile provision through external partnerships, but childcare regulation requirements and the difficulty of finding a suitable provider meant it could not be set up within the programme timeframe.

**"It's much more now about raising awareness and targeting parents simply to get the information out there about childcare funding, childcare support. It's raising awareness."**

(Strand 3, Programme Lead)



### Reaching target populations and referral issues

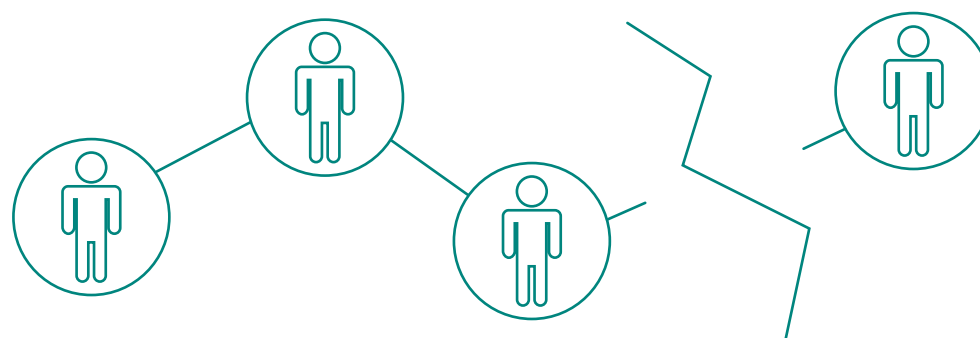
Reaching people who were not connected to any existing system was, by definition, difficult. The populations Trailblazers was designed for were not on Jobcentre books, not claiming benefits, and not walking through any obvious door. Finding them required active outreach rather than passive referral, and in year one the infrastructure for that was not always in place.

In Havering (Strand 2), stakeholders noted a severe lack of early traction, stating, “We weren’t getting any direct referrals”. In Bexley, finding unemployed men was surprisingly difficult despite being, in theory, available and eligible.

Where referrals did come through Jobcentre Plus routes, the match with programme goals was sometimes poor. An employment adviser shared that the Jobcentre in their borough sometimes referred individuals approaching retirement or those without a genuine intention to work, which made successful employment outcomes nearly impossible to achieve.

**“What I found is lads that are unemployed are extremely difficult to get....In my head, before doing all of this, I thought we’d be inundated, because they should be the most available. Whether they’re putting barriers up in front of themselves, I don’t know. We are getting lads coming in, which is great, and I feel like they’re benefiting. But I know there are lots more.”**

(Strand 1, Delivery Partner)



**“** Reaching people who were not connected to any existing system was difficult. **”**

### Navigating the complex needs and diverse circumstances of participants

Delivery staff faced some challenges managing the profound complexity of participants' lives, which included physical and mental health issues, language barriers, and demanding caring responsibilities.

In Strand 1 placement programmes and Strand 2 business start-up sessions, the range of digital literacy, English proficiency, and

prior experience within single cohorts was wide. That made it hard for trainers to find the right pitch, and for employers to know what they were getting.

In Greenwich (Strand 1) not all candidates were near being job ready and needed more support before going for the placement or if the placement didn't work out. Specialised support and capacity was needed to manage these residents. Additionally, in Strand 2

programmes, participants faced anxieties regarding the transition from Universal Credit to employment or self-employment. They felt the support and information provided regarding this transition was too brief, leaving them fearful of the financial risks involved in making the move.

**"English and maths was an interesting one, because we didn't realise how important that was for employers. Because initially it was like, here are the jobs. But then when you're assessing the level of English and maths, lots of people weren't getting through the minimum, and then employers were obviously reluctant then to take those people."**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

**"Some of them, through their own health issues and barriers, couldn't really get themselves motivated or meet that deadline because of their health condition. And it's not any fault of their own. It's just that incapacitated them in being able to meet that deadline."**

(Strand 2, Programme Lead)

# Learning for Future Service Design and Delivery



| Area                                  | Recommendation                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Programme Management & Administration | Revisit who trailblazer programmes can serve                                                                           |
| Programme Management & Administration | Allow longer planning and lead-in times                                                                                |
| Programme Management & Administration | Integrate streamlined and user-friendly programme delivery support systems                                             |
| Partnerships                          | Establish specialist and employer partnerships early, with dedicated support from Local London on employer engagement. |
| Delivery                              | Include confidence and resilience in programme success measures                                                        |
| Delivery                              | Build flexibility into how programmes are delivered                                                                    |
| Delivery                              | Design hard skills training around the cohort. (See more about hard skills on page 26).                                |

**Table 6:** Summary of Recommendations

## Programme management and administration

### Revisit Who Trailblazer Programmes Can Serve

The working definition of “economically inactive” does not always map cleanly onto who is actually ready to engage. In some cases it excludes people who are genuinely ready but whose circumstances put them just outside the criteria. In others, residents may withhold or adjust information during assessment to protect their Universal Credit entitlement, not realising that in doing so they are locking themselves out of support that could help them move beyond needing it.

Giving delivery teams more flexibility to make informed local judgements about eligibility would help programmes reach the people the current definition is missing.

### Allow Longer Planning and Lead-In Times

Compressed delivery timelines, particularly for Strand 1 projects, limited the ability to identify, engage, and prepare for programme delivery. This suggests that allowing in the future more time upfront for programme design, outreach, relationship-building, and alignment with local systems would produce greater programme delivery successes and outcomes.

Waltham Forest’s experience attempting to establish mobile crèche-type partnerships mid-delivery illustrates the lead time this kind of arrangement requires. Regulatory requirements, provider availability, and logistical complexity mean these partnerships cannot be improvised. They need to be in place before delivery starts.

**“What happens if somebody is getting Universal Credit and we meet them for the first time? Because they’ve got that fear of losing their benefit, they’ll be telling us, ‘Yes, I’ve been actively looking for work. I’m ready to start working in two weeks.’ But once you start talking to them, you find out they’ve not been looking for work.”**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)



**"I think they need to design programmes giving you at least three months development time – potentially even some development funding... Because we're constantly transitioning from one programme of funding to another. We're constantly – every two years – redesigning the service based on whatever pot of money we've got. But you don't ever get time to breathe and think, let's do this right, which is why we've changed our minds about four times in terms of how we've done it."**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)

### **Integrate Streamlined and User-Friendly Programme Delivery Support Systems**

Invoicing and reimbursement processes need to be simpler and faster, particularly for the smaller, community-rooted organisations that are often best placed to reach hidden populations but least able to absorb cash flow delays. If participation is financially punishing for those partners, the programme will lose them.

A shared data system between boroughs and delivery partners would reduce duplication and make the resident

experience feel more joined-up. This does not need to be complex infrastructure. It needs to be functional and shared.

For Strand 2, the grant process needs clearer structures around sizing, timing, and distribution. Accessibility and uptake will improve if the process is less effortful to navigate.



## Partnerships

### **Establish specialist and employer partnerships early, with dedicated support from Local London on employer engagement.**

Building the right partnerships takes time that year one did not always provide. The evidence suggests that where partnerships were established early and deliberately, they made a material difference to reach and quality of delivery. Where they had to be built mid-programme, they were harder to sustain and less effective.

### **For year two, two recommendations stand out:**

The first is specialist partnerships for participants with complex needs. In Greenwich, drawing on Unity Works brought in expertise in supporting residents with learning disabilities and neurodiversity that the programme itself could not do.

The learning from that experience points toward incorporating specialist partners into service design from the outset, rather than calling on them reactively. As one delivery lead put it, the priority is *“calling upon their expertise in a more structured way into year two”* to better support participants who are not yet fully job-ready or who face multiple barriers.

The second is employer engagement. Boroughs reported spending significant time and resource approaching multiple employers to secure one or two placements. That is not a sustainable model. There is a case for Local London to play a more active coordinating role here, using its strategic relationships at GLA level to support borough-level employer engagement rather than leaving each council to build those connections independently.

**“I do think Local London could have done a little bit more just to help us with employer engagement. They do a lot themselves, and they’ve got more strategic conversations happening at the GLA level.”**

(Strand 1, Programme Lead)



## Delivery

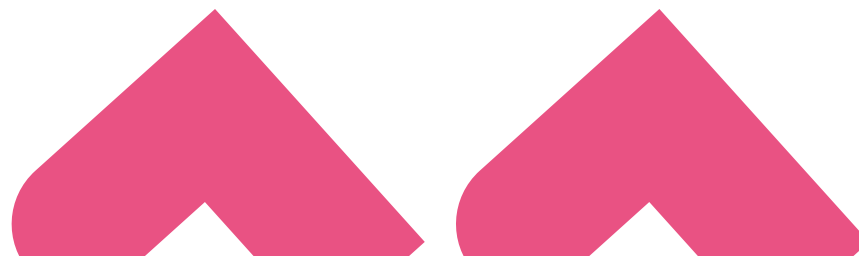
### **Include confidence and resilience in programme success measures**

There was a call from borough staff to feed into Trailblazers design more space for participants to build confidence and resilience. Future programmes should include building confidence and resilience as “core features” rather than simply soft outcomes, potentially embedding them directly into business planning modules.

In practice this means building dedicated space for confidence and resilience development into programme structure from the outset, rather than hoping it emerges alongside skills training. As one delivery partner put it: “I think more of a focus on building confidence and building resilience, because these are things that startups must have.” The same applies across Strand 1. Where programmes did this deliberately, the evidence suggests it helped engagement and made subsequent steps towards work more achievable.

### **Build flexibility into how programmes are delivered**

Across Trailblazer programmes, staff and delivery partners highlighted the value of being able to address participants’ needs on a case-by-case basis. For example, Bexley shifted its training course from a rigid 11-week combined course to a “menu” of services where participants can pick and choose between community walks, a structured wellness course, or both, based on their personal interest and readiness. In Enfield, the ability to access Strand 3 wraparound support alongside Strand 2 training was essential for participants with multiple barriers. Scheduling within school hours and offering hybrid options are practical design choices that made a real difference to accessibility for parents and carers. The constraint is resource. One-to-one support reached participants with higher needs more effectively, but it is harder to fund at scale. That tension needs to be acknowledged in future programme budgeting.



**“The resources to be able to do [one-to-one work]... in a group session, it’s amazing. You can knock it out in a couple of hours, and it’s time-effective and it’s efficient. But I don’t want the people that require that additional support to fall through the net.”**

(Strand 2 Programme Lead)

### **Design hard skills training around the cohort**

Trailblazer programmes should also dedicate more time to hard skills training, as well as ensure that such training is specific to targeted groups. Programme staff discussed considering making the course cohorts smaller upon learning that larger groups are more likely to expand the diversity of participant needs in the training sessions. English language and maths skills were two particular areas

that emerged as barriers to effective course learning. Smaller cohorts would allow course instructors to teach the class “appropriately, rather than having to span a wide range of skills and abilities”. Some programmes extended their courses to give participants more time to absorb the material. That kind of responsiveness is worth building into programme design from the start, with enough flexibility in the schedule to allow for it without disrupting delivery.



# Conclusion

Year one of the Local London Trailblazer programme has shown that person-centred, locally owned delivery can reach people who are a long way from the labour market and create the conditions for real progress. The evidence is early stage and the outcomes are still developing, but the direction is clear.

The programmes that worked did so because they started where participants actually were. They built trust before they built CVs. They used flexible funding to remove barriers at the moment they appeared. They drew on partnerships and specialist expertise to reach people that standard provision was not finding.

“

The programmes that worked did so because they started where participants actually were. They built trust before they built CVs. ”

The challenges of year one were largely systemic. Compressed timelines, administrative complexity, and referral gaps are not arguments against the model. They are arguments for giving it better conditions to operate in.

The task for year two is to protect what is working, address what got in the way, and build the time and infrastructure that will allow this approach to develop further.



# Appendix:

## Case studies

### Case Study 1: Bexley's Proper Blokes Club and Refilling the Well (Strand 1)

#### Programme Structure

Designed as a dual-intervention model combining the Proper Blokes Club (PBC) walking group with a structured 11-week wellbeing course called Refilling the Well (RTW) delivered by Change that Matters. Participants typically engage in two sessions per week: a nature-based walk led by a relatable peer leader and a classroom-based session focused on emotional resilience and "nervous system regulation". Wider support such as Initial Advice and Guidance (IAG), business admin training, and 30-hour work placements are also available.

#### Impact and Outcomes

- A visible shift in body language and confidence
- The first cohort saw high success rates 7 out of 10 gaining employment
- The fostering of strong peer support networks (active WhatsApp groups)
- Participants reported a "sense of achievement" and feeling "worthy" of work. The positive impact often radiated to participants' families, improving the home environment for partners and children

#### Programme Successes

- Walking serves as an "entry-level exercise" that is physically accessible and less intimidating than traditional sports or "sitting in a big circle".
- The delivery leader, is praised for his "simple" and authentic approach; his casual attire and willingness to share personal struggles helped men relate to him more than traditional advisors
- Unlike mandatory schemes like Restart, the Trailblazer model allows advisors more time for one-to-one support due to reduced administrative burdens

### Programme Challenges and Limitations

- Men remain an “extremely difficult” group to engage, particularly those who are long-term unemployed
- Stakeholders noted that Jobcentre referrals were sometimes inconsistent, occasionally including individuals who were approaching retirement or not physically able to participate in walks
- The original 11-week commitment was described by some participants as “scary” or too long, leading to anxiety about delaying employment
- A significant frustration for delivery leads is the inability to support low-income workers who wish to transition into better careers but are excluded because they are already employed

### Learning for Future Design and Delivery:

- Future iterations will detach the walks from the structured course, allowing men to build confidence through the walks before potentially “rolling on” to more intensive support and the 11-week course will be split into two shorter phases (five and six weeks) to make the commitment feel more manageable
- Instead of fixed blocks, stakeholders recommend procuring the service for the entire year to allow for a “roll-on, roll-off” model that provides consistent, long-term support
- To increase engagement, delivery partners identified a need for physical space within Jobcentres to talk to men directly and build trust before they sign up

- The programme is expanding into specific “dads’ groups” where children can attend to remove childcare barriers, and plans are in place for school roadshows to reach economically inactive parents



## Case Study 2: Greenwich's Paid Placements (Strand 1)

### Programme Structure

- The Trailblazer uses a “light-touch” innovative model designed to move economically inactive residents (including care leavers, neurodiverse youth, and long-term carers) into work through fully funded, non-competitive placements. Placements typically last six months and are fully funded (approx £8,500 per person). The programme is delivered by Greenwich Local Labour & Business within the borough.

### Impact and Outcomes

- 54 participants moved into work placements and several participants secured permanent job offers or

extensions following their placement

- Participants reported significant boosts in confidence and self-worth. Notably, one participant was able to stop taking Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) medication due to the supportive work environment, while another found the social interaction vital for managing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Beyond technical skills participants gained soft skills in networking, professionalism, and getting CV references up-to-date
- Businesses filled critical gaps, such as maternity cover, while managers developed their own mentorship and leadership skills

### Programme Successes

- By shifting funds from administrative staff to direct wages, the programme achieved a “quick win” in getting people into roles quickly
- Success was driven by employers’ willingness to value motivation and work ethic over formal degrees. One finance team hired a participant with no accounting background for a role previously requiring a degree
- High-performing placements treated participants as full staff members, including them in onboarding breakfasts, social events, and corporate updates.

### Programme Challenges and Limitations

- Complex invoicing and reimbursement processes caused significant cash-flow strain, particularly for small charities that had to pay wages upfront and wait months for repayment
- Childcare remains the primary obstacle for many participants, with issues involving high costs and lack of flexibility in the wider system
- Some participants were not “job-ready,” leading to challenges with attendance, and workplace etiquette that resulted in early terminations
- Participants found it difficult to succeed in “grassroots” startups that lacked structure; established companies with clear procedures were far more effective

### Learning for Future Design and Delivery:

- Employers suggested an initial “meet and greet” or mini-interview before the placement starts to better align expectations and participant needs
- Future delivery will prioritize corporate or established organizations that have the “headspace” to mentor and a higher likelihood of offering sustained employment
- To resolve cash-flow issues, suggestions include using a simplified portal system for payments, similar to childcare grant schemes
- For some sectors, a year-long placement was recommended to allow participants time to complete formal qualifications alongside their work



## Case Study 3: Redbridge's Steps Into Work Courses (Strand 1)

### Programme Structure

The programme was designed to bridge the gap between local labour market needs and resident qualifications. Residents were screened for work readiness and required to participate in an information session. Selected participants then completed short and intensive training courses focused on preparing them for a career in construction, health, or social care. Alongside the training, residents received individualised support from programme staff. They were also offered practical assistance, including work placements and travel vouchers to reduce barriers to attending training or starting employment.

### Impact and Outcomes

Borough and delivery staff and one participant noted an increase in residents' confidence and motivation. The programme also achieved relatively high job offer rates among residents, although barriers to job uptake, such as DBS checks, remained. Borough staff and delivery personnel also observed residents building their personal and professional networks through their participation in the programme.

### Programme Successes

Flexible and devolved funding enabled delivery teams to adapt elements of the programme as it progressed, and to respond quickly to participant needs and employer feedback. A strong emphasis on providing pastoral care helped ensure participants remained engaged, which was especially critical for those who had been out of work for an extended period. Peer support among participants also played an important role in building confidence and motivation. The deep engagement of employers ensured that the content of the courses reflected the practical skills required in the workplace.

### **Programme Challenges and Limitations**

Administrative delays and differing definitions of “economically inactive” across funding systems created implementation difficulties. This was compounded by the need to design and launch the programme within a relatively short period of time. Maths and English entry requirements created barriers for some residents, although they were referred to the necessary services to develop their skills. The short duration of the training courses limited the depth of learning that could be achieved. The absence of formal accreditations for certain job roles also limited residents’ transferable credentials.

### **Learning for Future Design and Delivery:**

Longer programme development timelines and early-stage planning support would strengthen employer engagement, staff recruitment, and course design. Greater targeted outreach, such as focused taster sessions for specific groups, could further improve recruitment and progression into employment. Enhancing the practical elements of the training, including role-playing workplace scenarios and using relevant digital tools, would be an effective way to boost participants’ preparation for the working environments they seek to enter. Course delivery partners also suggested extending the length of the courses, incorporating accredited

elements, and providing additional re-engagement support for individuals who have been out of work for long periods. Stakeholders re-emphasised the value of locally-led delivery models, as local authority employment teams can respond quickly and adapt programmes in ways that larger and more centralised models cannot.



## Case Study 4: Enfield's Self-Employment Support (Strand 2)

### Programme Structure

This Trailblazer was an intensive, structured programme designed to support economically inactive residents transitioning into self-employment and launching their own business. Delivered in partnership with the BIPC centre and Visionnaires. The programme included digital and AI upskilling, business planning, and one-to-one mentoring with experienced entrepreneurs. A flexible, hybrid approach used sessions held within school hours (10 am-1 pm) to accommodate participants with caring responsibilities. Upon completing a fully costed business plan, participants were eligible to apply for start-up grants of up to £5,000.

### Impact and Outcomes

The Enfield Self-Employment Support programme exceeded expectations with a low attrition rate (23 out of 24 participants completing the course). The projected number of business launches (10 to 12) is significantly higher than the original target of four. Key outcomes for participants included:

- A significant boost in confidence and resilience, moving many from a fear of failure to a "can-do" mindset.
- Gained a practical understanding of UK business policies, tax, and legal structures, plus skills in using Generative AI for finance and marketing tasks.

- Start-up businesses resulting from the programme cover areas such as an AI-based job search app, a pop-up café, and social value businesses focused on community support, fashion, and wellbeing.

### Programme Successes

The success of the programme was driven by strategic recruitment and expert mentorship. Rather than relying solely on DWP referrals, the borough worked closely with the Business and IP Centre (BIPC) to identify "properly pre-screened" candidates who already had viable ideas.

The use of coaches with “lived experience” as entrepreneurs helped build deep trust and a “mini community” within the cohorts. Additionally, the integration of AI was a major success, providing participants with a way to bridge capacity gaps that would normally require hiring specialists. The availability of Strand 3 wraparound support also ensured that participants with health or childcare barriers could remain engaged.

### **Programme Challenges and Limitations**

The programme faced a primary challenge of a compressed timeframe, starting late (September) and resulting in a rush to allocate grant funding before the March 31st deadline, creating anxiety about fair distribution when conversion rates were

unexpectedly high. Additional limitations included varying digital literacy among participants, anxiety amongst participants over transitioning from Universal Credit to self-employment due to insufficient information, and operational hurdles stemming from a lack of a shared data portal and initial confusion over grant evidence requirements.

### **Learning for Future Design and Delivery:**

- Future programmes should group participants by ability (IT literacy and English levels) to ensure teaching is pitched appropriately
- Building confidence should be a “core feature” of the curriculum rather than a soft outcome.
- Participants requested more “breathing

space” and hands-on practice time with mentors after the formal classroom sessions concluded.

- Establishing a formal data-sharing agreement and portal would create a “seamless” experience for applicants and allow partners to focus more on delivery than management information.



## Case Study 5: Newham's Legacy Support (Strand 2)

### Programme Structure

Newham's Legacy Support programme was designed to support residents from initial engagement through to launching a business. After completing an eligibility screening and information session, residents participated in a structured business course delivered by a third party. The course focused on developing entrepreneurial skills and refining business ideas. Residents then developed and submitted a business plan, and presented their proposal at a pitching event to a panel. Successful pitches received a grant of £2,000 to £5,000 to support the launch of their business. Residents continued to receive monitoring and follow-up support to help sustain early-stage business activity.

### Impact and Outcomes

The programme contributed to a range of personal and practical outcomes linked to starting a business. Residents reported increased sense of validation from having their business ideas taken seriously. The programme also helped residents build confidence and a stronger sense of independence as they moved toward starting their own business. Tangible outcomes included developing and submitting formal business plans, successfully securing start-up grants, and the registering of new businesses. The formation of peer networks also contributed to a sense of community and mutual support among participants.

### Programme Successes

The programme provided an accessible entry point for individuals who may otherwise face barriers to entrepreneurship. Through structured support and grant funding, the programme helped address financial barriers to starting a business. The model also showed potential in reaching under-represented groups and testing innovative approaches to enterprise support within public sector constraints. Strong uptake and completion rates indicated participant demand, while elements such as the pitch day served as both a decision-making mechanism and a confidence-building experience for participants.

### **Programme Challenges and Limitations**

The structure of the training course meant that some residents struggled to translate learning into strong business plans, highlighting gaps in financial literacy and business planning skills. Focus group participants reported varying levels of confidence in pitching their ideas, particularly in more formal or on-camera settings. Language barriers and accessibility challenges were noted for some participants, reinforcing the need for greater individualised support alongside the group-based training model.

### **Learning for Future Design and Delivery:**

The varying quality of business plans submitted indicate a need for additional and more personalised support. A skills gap in participants' engagement with some on-demand learning modules reinforces this need. Tools such as virtual reality pitch practice sessions were used to help participants build confidence, but focus group participants also suggested introducing more structured practice opportunities ahead of the final pitch. Other learning points included improving communication about eligibility criteria,

strengthening the application and selection process, and considering mentoring models in which programme alumni support future participants. Participants also noted that training content should better reflect the needs of different types of businesses, including those that require upfront capital for stock or equipment, as opposed to those offering one-time services.



## Case Study 6: Enfield, Havering, and Waltham Forest's Child Care Payments (Strand 3)

### Programme Structure

Across boroughs, flexible funding was budgeted to address childcare as a barrier to participation in employment or training. While budgets varied, all three approaches sought to respond quickly to fill childcare gaps on a case-by-case basis, such as periods before statutory entitlements became available or where existing funding did not fully cover costs. Delivery models included crèche-style support and financial assistance to top up or fully cover childcare expenses where needed. Across sites, support was typically identified through local delivery partners, such as programme teams or employment

advisers. Enrolment across boroughs was flexible with few eligibility criteria other than economic inactivity.

### Impact and Outcomes

Enfield was successful in providing childcare support to four residents. The childcare support acted as a financial bridge that allowed residents to participate in employment training, providing immediate access to the acquisition of qualifications and work experience. Childcare support recipients reported enhanced well-being from the childcare payments. The ability to attend employment training paved the road

to increased confidence and reduced isolation and stress. This opened a pathway to a more stable financial position that helped protect the well-being of their children. Externally, the childcare support delivery raised the profile of Enfield's childcare support work and strengthened professional partnerships.

### Implementation Success

In Enfield, implementation highlighted the value of a flexible and locally coordinated delivery model that responded to residents' childcare needs in real time.

The model operated through a three-way relationship between residents, employment advisers and childcare providers, enabling advisers to identify needs early and allocate funding on a case-by-case basis. Dedicated workflows for childcare support helped advisers navigate the process quickly, allowing the programme to respond rapidly when gaps in statutory childcare provision emerged. In some cases, payments were made directly to providers, reducing administrative burdens on participants, and enabled them to focus on work or training opportunities.

### **Implementation Challenges and Changes**

In Havering and Waltham Forest, delivery models evolved primarily in response to

low uptake. In Havering, a lack of eligible residents prompted a shift toward raising awareness of available childcare and employment support through targeted information sessions and integration with wider outreach activities. In Waltham Forest, part of the funding was reallocated to support paid work placements for groups with identified needs.

### **Learning for Future Design and Delivery:**

Increasing awareness of available funding and improving outreach emerged as a key priority, with potential opportunities to reach families through schools, libraries and community-based spaces. Strengthening partnerships with delivery organisations and improving data sharing

with employment services may also help identify eligible participants. The targeting of working parents is also important, particularly those at risk of leaving employment due to childcare costs, as is ensuring that support is responsive to cultural norms around childcare. Practical constraints such as securing suitable nursery places and aligning childcare arrangements with the timing of new job starts suggest the need for flexible delivery models and potentially broader eligibility criteria to support residents.

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