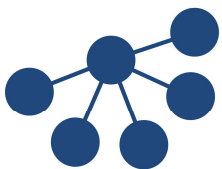




# Get Gloucestershire Working Plan May 2026



Shared Intelligence



**Gloucestershire**  
COUNTY COUNCIL



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

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# 1. Gloucestershire outlook: labour market and economic context

This section provides an overview of Gloucestershire’s geography, population and economy, situating it within the national context of the Get Britain Working (GBW) White Paper. It highlights the key stakeholders involved in developing the plan, extending beyond the upper-tier local authority to include Jobcentre Plus, the Integrated Care Board, and other partners. The section also summarises the county’s strengths, challenges and opportunities, alongside an analysis of the district’s labour market typologies as defined by the DWP.

## 1.1 The geographic area covered by the plan

The Gloucestershire Local Get Britain Working Plan covers the area of Gloucestershire County Council, which is comprised of six district and borough councils: Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester City Council, Stroud District Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council. Together, these areas span approximately 3,150 square kilometres, encompassing a diverse geography of urban centres such as Gloucester and Cheltenham, market towns, rural villages and stretches of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As of 2023, the combined population of the county is around 660,000. The plan area aligns with local public service footprints, including the Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board and DWP’s Gloucestershire Jobcentre Plus (JCP) network. Strategically, Gloucestershire benefits from strong transport connections to the West Midlands, Southwest, Southeast and Wales.

## 1.2 The national context and government ambitions

This plan has been developed in line with the UK Government’s Get Britain Working White Paper,<sup>1</sup> which sets out national ambitions to reduce economic inactivity and improve work outcomes across employment, health and skills. At the national level, several key and intermediate outcome metrics are tracked (a full breakdown is provided in Appendix I). The primary ambitions are to raise the UK’s employment rate to 80% of working-age adults (18–67 years) and to increase real earnings, particularly for households in the lower half of the income distribution. The table below outlines all the outcome metrics for Get Britain Working.

Get Britain Working outcome metrics	
Key outcome metrics	Raise the UK employment rate to 80% of working-age adults (18–67 years)
	Increase real earnings, particularly for households in the lower half of the income distribution
Intermediate outcome metrics	Reducing local variations in employment rates
	Lowering health-related economic inactivity
	Closing the disability employment gap
	Decreasing the proportion of 18–24-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)
	Narrowing the employment gap for lone parents
	Reducing the proportion of coupled households where at least one parent is out of work
	Increasing women’s employment rates

Figure 1: Get Britain Working outcome metrics

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper>

Gloucestershire County Council, as the accountable body, commissioned Shared Intelligence to support the creation of the plan. Oversight has been provided by a dedicated official group including Gloucestershire County Council, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and NHS Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board.

There are a number of national policies and programmes in place to support people into work, such as Restart and Access to Work.<sup>23</sup> A recent policy development is the government's planned introduction of V Levels as new Level 3 vocational qualification from 2027, to create a clearer route into vocational and technical careers. At Level 2, two new pathways (the Occupational Pathway and the Further Study Pathway) will help 16 to 18-year-olds progress into work, apprenticeships or higher study, with extra support in English and maths where needed.

The DWP is reforming JCP to create a new, universal service across Great Britain that will support everyone in finding meaningful work and progressing in their careers, with an enhanced focus on skills and careers advice. This reform will bring together JCP and the National Careers Service to improve the alignment between employability support and career development, helping people move into higher-paid, higher-quality work while creating a more flexible and skilled workforce.

The new service will be delivered across five pillars: developing stronger relationships with employers, supporting progression and good work through aligned employment and skills support, creating locally responsive and engaged organisations, providing a digital, universal, and inclusive service, and offering high-quality, personalised support for work, training and career progression.

Its objectives include reducing national unemployment and regional disparities, enabling individuals to upskill and make informed career choices and providing universal access to support, not limited to benefit recipients, while contributing to broader work, health and skills initiatives.

### 1.3 Engagement with stakeholders

Engagement has involved the county council, all six district and borough councils, as well as a broad range of local partners, including education providers, public sector bodies, community groups, employers and employer representative organisations. They were engaged with through a survey, workshops and interviews, and a number of stakeholders that were unable to engage directly contributed in other ways such as providing relevant literature, data and information, which helped strengthen this plan and its findings.

Equally important to the development of this plan was engaging with individuals with lived experience of the local employment, health and skills systems, supported by a range of statutory and voluntary organisations.

These contributions provided valuable insight into the customer journey, highlighting strengths, barriers, and gaps in support. The engagement approach was designed to ensure the plan reflects both strategic priorities and real-world experiences across the health, employment, and skills landscape. Further detail on the stakeholder engagement process is provided in Section 4.

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<sup>2</sup> Access to Work is a government programme that provides financial support and practical help to people with disabilities or health conditions to stay in work.

<sup>3</sup> Restart is a government employment support programme aimed at helping unemployed people over 18 who have been out of work long-term to find and sustain employment through tailored support and training.

Overall, the engagement has been designed to capture insights across the health, employment and skills landscape, ensuring that the plan reflects both system-level priorities and the lived experiences of service providers, employers and local residents.

## 1.4 Local government context

There is a two-tier local authority system in Gloucestershire, with Gloucestershire County Council as the upper-tier authority responsible for county-wide services, and six district and borough councils managing more localised functions.

Gloucestershire is preparing to submit options for devolution by November 2025, with HM Government expected to make a decision by summer 2026. This would provide opportunities for more funding and decision-making to be locally determined, and to further align countywide resources to support employment and skills support for residents.

## 1.5 Integrated Care Board structure in Gloucestershire














The Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board, known as NHS Gloucestershire, was established in 2022 to oversee the planning and commissioning of health services across the county. This formation was part of the nationwide restructuring mandated by the Health and Care Act, which replaced Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) with ICBs to enable more integrated and locally tailored healthcare.

NHS Gloucestershire is currently working with neighbouring NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) ICB to develop a cluster model with a view to a potential merger in April 2027. A new Chief Executive Officer has also been appointed for both NHS Gloucestershire and BNSSG ICB, taking up the role in October 2025. A model blueprint has been produced setting out how ICBs should operate in the future setting out an expectation that ICBs will build stronger strategic commissioning skills to improve health and reduce inequalities and to improve access to consistent high-quality care.

As part of the One Gloucestershire Integrated Care System (ICS), NHS Gloucestershire collaborates with a wide range of partners, including NHS Trusts, Gloucestershire County Council, district and borough councils, public health, the voluntary and community sector and Healthwatch Gloucestershire.

## 1.6 Summary of Gloucestershire’s strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats

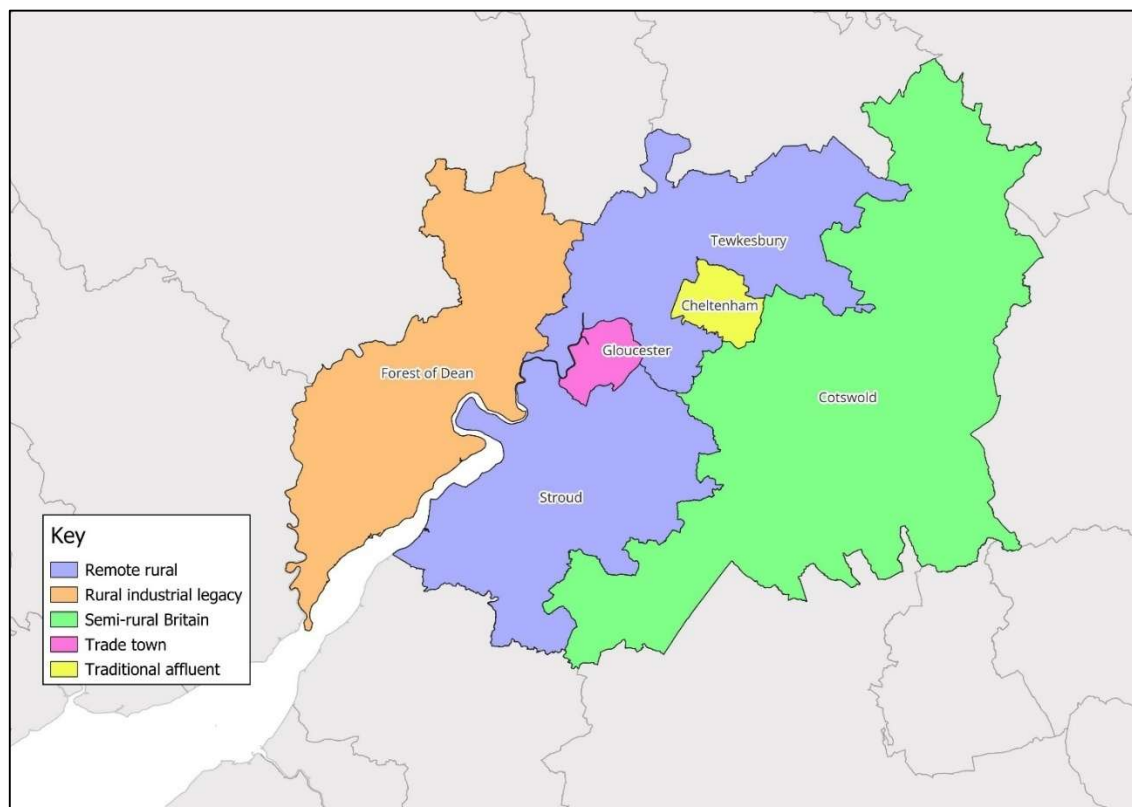
Gloucestershire has a diverse and resilient economy, supported by a strong base of advanced manufacturing, cyber and green technology sectors, a highly skilled workforce, as well as emerging opportunities. However, Gloucestershire faces several challenges including an ageing population, the loss of young talent and a predominantly rural geography that can limit access to employment, training and services.<sup>4</sup>

Strengths	Challenges
<p> <b>Diverse, high-value sectors</b> Advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, renewable energy and cybersecurity support sustainable, higher-wage jobs.</p> <p> <b>Comparatively strong employment levels</b> Higher employment and lower unemployment, claimant count and economic inactivity levels than the South West and England &amp; Wales.</p> <p> <b>Highly skilled workforce</b> 35.6% of the 16+ population have Level 4+ qualifications, higher than the South West and England &amp; Wales.</p>	<p> <b>Ageing population</b> High economic inactivity due to retirement. If trends continue, there will be more jobs than working-age people by 2035.</p> <p> <b>Pockets of deprivation</b> 7.6% of the population live in neighbourhoods ranked among the 20% most deprived in England.</p> <p> <b>Rural geography</b> Rurality creates structural barriers such as poor transport connectivity, limiting access to employment and services.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p> <b>Growing sectors</b> Cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech and green tech are growing and can help deliver higher-paid jobs.</p> <p> <b>Strategic connectivity</b> Gloucestershire’s transport connections and geographic position strengthen its role linking the South West, West Midlands, East and Wales.</p> <p> <b>Robust NHS and health and social care sectors</b> Provides a significant and stable source of employment and a foundation for accessible roles.</p> <p> <b>Strong partnerships</b> Strong networks and partnerships across the county support access to training, jobs and health services.</p>	<p> <b>Recent rise in economic inactivity</b> Economic inactivity has fallen over the last three years, but has risen slightly in recent months. There is ongoing long-term risk linked to ageing.</p> <p> <b>Economic downturn</b> Signs of slowing economic performance, including rising unemployment, fewer vacancies and declining business confidence.</p> <p> <b>Rising number of NEET</b> Increase in 16–17 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Gloucestershire.</p>

<sup>4</sup> While an ageing population presents challenges, it also offers opportunities, including access to a large pool of experienced workers, increased demand for health, care and wellbeing roles, and the potential for extended working lives, mentoring and knowledge transfer that can support productivity and inclusive growth.

## 1.7 Labour market typologies across the six districts and boroughs of Gloucestershire

To better understand sub-national labour markets, the DWP has conducted a cluster analysis, categorising local authorities into “labour market type” based on key labour market and some health variables.<sup>5</sup> Gloucestershire has a diverse economy with notable socio-economic disparities across its districts. Based on this analysis, the DWP has grouped the six districts into five broad labour market areas.



**Figure 2: Labour market typologies in Gloucestershire**

- Remote rural – Stroud and Tewkesbury
- Rural industrial legacy – Forest of Dean
- Semi-rural Britain – Cotswolds
- Trade town – Gloucester
- Traditional affluent – Cheltenham

All six of Gloucestershire’s districts fall into clusters defined by high or average employment. However, local conditions and challenges influence their categorisation. For example, the Forest of Dean is affected by lower skill levels, poor transport connectivity and higher rates of MSK conditions. Stroud and Tewkesbury are characterised by relatively few health problems compared with the national average, alongside more sparsely populated rural areas. Cheltenham is grouped with areas that have a highly skilled workforce and low levels of health problems.

<sup>5</sup> DWP’s analysis examines variations in local labour markets, considering factors such as unemployment and benefit claimants, employment rates, work-limiting disabilities, higher education attainment, musculoskeletal conditions and mental health prevalence among the working-age population.

By contrast, Gloucester is characterised by lower skill levels and average rates of MSK and mental health conditions. Cotswold is categorised as having poor connectivity, though with relatively low levels of disability and poor health.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A separate Lived Experience Report has been developed alongside the Get Gloucestershire Working plan. This report provides more detailed insight into the lived experiences of several key cohorts in Gloucestershire, adding depth to the evidence base and the DWP analysis.

## 2. Drivers and causes of labour market issues

This section explores the underlying factors shaping Gloucestershire's labour market, including the geographic inequalities in employment, economic inactivity and unemployment, as well as the supply-side and demand-side drivers that contribute to these challenges. It also examines the communities most affected by economic inactivity and the barriers they encounter in accessing and maintaining employment.

The analysis draws on insights from extensive engagement with local partners, employers, and community organisations, complemented by evidence from the economic data presented in Appendix II, prepared by the Data, Analysis and Insights Team of Gloucestershire County Council. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes of labour market imbalance and the opportunities for intervention.

### 2.1 Understanding and engaging the economically inactive

This plan recognises that certain groups are disproportionately represented among economically inactive people and therefore require targeted engagement and support. These groups typically include young people, older people, individuals with long-term health conditions or disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers with the right to work, care leavers, care givers, people with low skills and those with complex needs such as prison leavers, individuals experiencing homelessness or people that use substances and alcohol. This section will explore each of these cohorts in more detail below.

These cohorts are a priority for engagement because they often face multiple, overlapping barriers to participating in the workforce. Targeted actions resulting from this plan aim to address these barriers helping individuals access suitable employment opportunities, training and support, while also contributing to the broader economic growth and social inclusion.

Although Gloucestershire performs comparatively well nationally and regionally in terms of overall economic inactivity, this overall performance masks significant variation across the county. High levels of economic inactivity persist among these sometimes-vulnerable groups, highlighting the need for focused and inclusive strategies to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to participate in the local economy.

### 2.2 Employment, economic inactivity and unemployment – a geographical perspective across Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire has regional inequalities in employment, unemployment and economic inactivity. Analysis shows that the Forest of Dean and Gloucester experience some of the highest levels of economic inactivity and unemployment, alongside correspondingly lower employment rates, whereas Stroud, Tewkesbury and Cotswold perform comparatively well. At a more granular level, specific Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within Gloucester,<sup>7</sup> Cheltenham and the Forest of Dean face persistent employment challenges. In Cheltenham, areas such as St Mark's, Hester's Way, Pittville and St Paul's have some of the lowest employment rates and highest rates of unemployment and economic inactivity.

In Gloucester, parts of Barton and Tedworth, Coney Hill, Kingsholm and Wotton, Maston, Robinswood and the White City, Moreland, Podsmead, Tuffley, and Westgate show employment rates often below 70% and many of these also have economic inactivity rates above 30%,<sup>8</sup> highlighting employment challenges in the city.

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<sup>7</sup> Statistical geographies containing between 400 and 1200 households, with populations of at least 1000.

<sup>8</sup> Census 2021

In the Forest of Dean, areas around Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney, Newnham and Bream, demonstrate comparable patterns of low employment and high economic inactivity. These areas underscore that inner urban centres and the Forest of Dean are particularly affected by levels of employment. The sections below provide an overview of Gloucestershire as a whole, followed by a district-level breakdown, highlighting where local figures fall below England and Wales averages.

## Employment rate

Area	Employment rate (%)	Comparison and key local insights
Gloucestershire	76.1 <sup>9</sup>	Above the Southwest and England and Wales, but below the DWP target of 80%. Overall strong performance, though some LSOAs fall below 60%.
Cheltenham	75.1	Slightly below the county average but above regional and national averages. High numbers of students may contribute to low employment in some LSOAs.
Cotswold	77.1	Above county, regional and national averages. No LSOAs below 60%, though some areas in Cirencester show slightly lower employment.
Forest of Dean	73.0	Below county and regional averages. Pockets of low employment around Cinderford, Lydney and Coleford and Hartpury, low employment in Hartpury is likely to be driven by a high student population
Gloucester City	74.6	Slightly below county average but above regional and national levels. Some LSOAs have employment rates below 60%.
Stroud	78.2	Close to the DWP target of 80%, with several LSOAs exceeding 80%. Strongest performing district after Tewkesbury.
Tewkesbury	78.6	Highest employment rate in the county. Some LSOAs exceed 80%, though pockets like Tewkesbury South fall below 70%.
Southwest	73.7	Regional average for comparison.
England and Wales	70.9	National average for comparison.

Figure 3: Employment rates across Gloucestershire, the six districts, the Southwest and England and Wales (Census 2021)

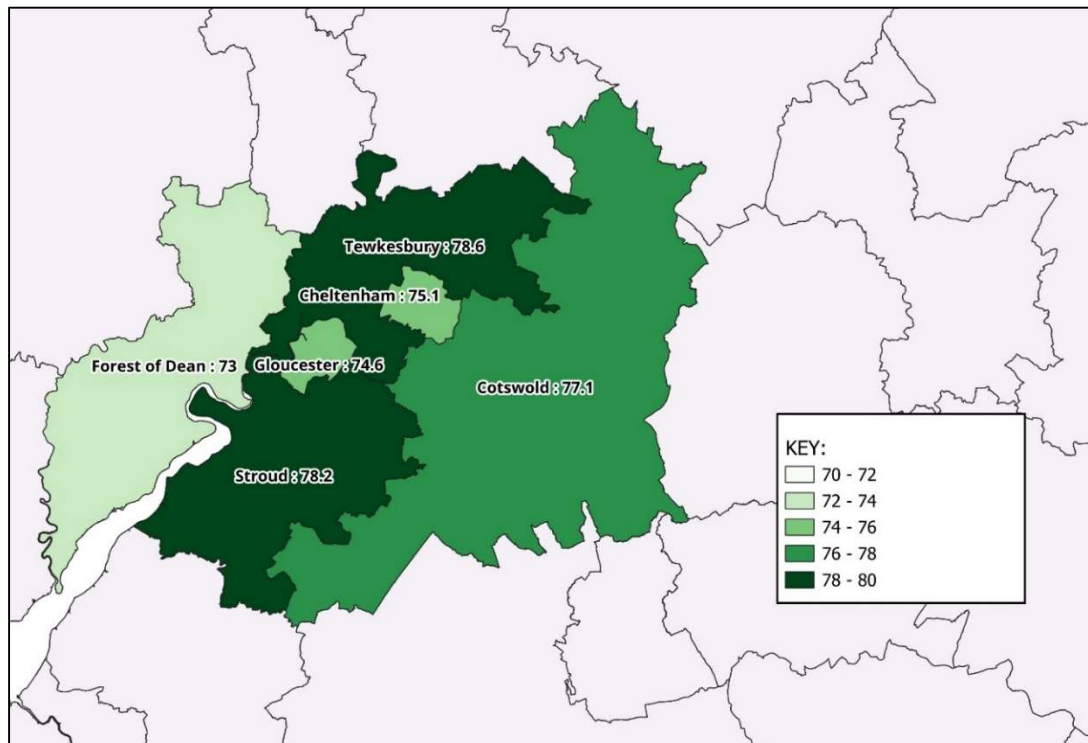


Figure 4: Employment in Gloucestershire - % of persons aged 16-64 years

<sup>9</sup> DWP's published data states the employment rate between October 2023, and September 2024 is 81.4% (+/- 3.3%pts). Timely estimates suggest that between January 2024 and December 2024 approximately 80.3% of 16-64 year olds in Gloucestershire were in employment.

## Economic inactivity

Area	Economic inactivity rate (%)	Comparison and key local insights
Gloucestershire	20.7	Lower than Southwest and England and Wales. 17.3% of LSOAs above national average, concentrated in Cheltenham, Gloucester, and Forest of Dean.
Cheltenham	21.4	Higher than county average which is likely to be due to the student population and some deprived LSOAs.
Cotswold	20.0	Below county, regional, and national averages. Areas with the highest levels of economic inactivity are generally concentrated around Cirencester.
Forest of Dean	23.6	Above county and regional averages. Hartpury and Redmarley exceeds 40% inactivity, due to Hartpury University and College. Parts of Cinderford, Coleford, Newnham, Bream and Lydney also show high levels of economic inactivity.
Gloucester	21.5	Slightly above county average, with some LSOAs having economic inactivity rates of over 30%, highlighting areas with entrenched challenges.
Stroud	18.9	One of the lowest in the county, indicating a strong labour market and lower inactivity. Some pockets of higher levels of economic inactivity e.g. Dursley showing uneven distribution
Tewkesbury	18.5	Figure 5: Employment rates across Gloucestershire, the six districts, the Southwest and England and Wales (Census 2021)
Southwest	22.8	Regional average for comparison.
England and Wales	24.7	National average for comparison.

Figure 6: Economic inactivity rates across Gloucestershire, the six districts, the Southwest and England and Wales (Census 2021)

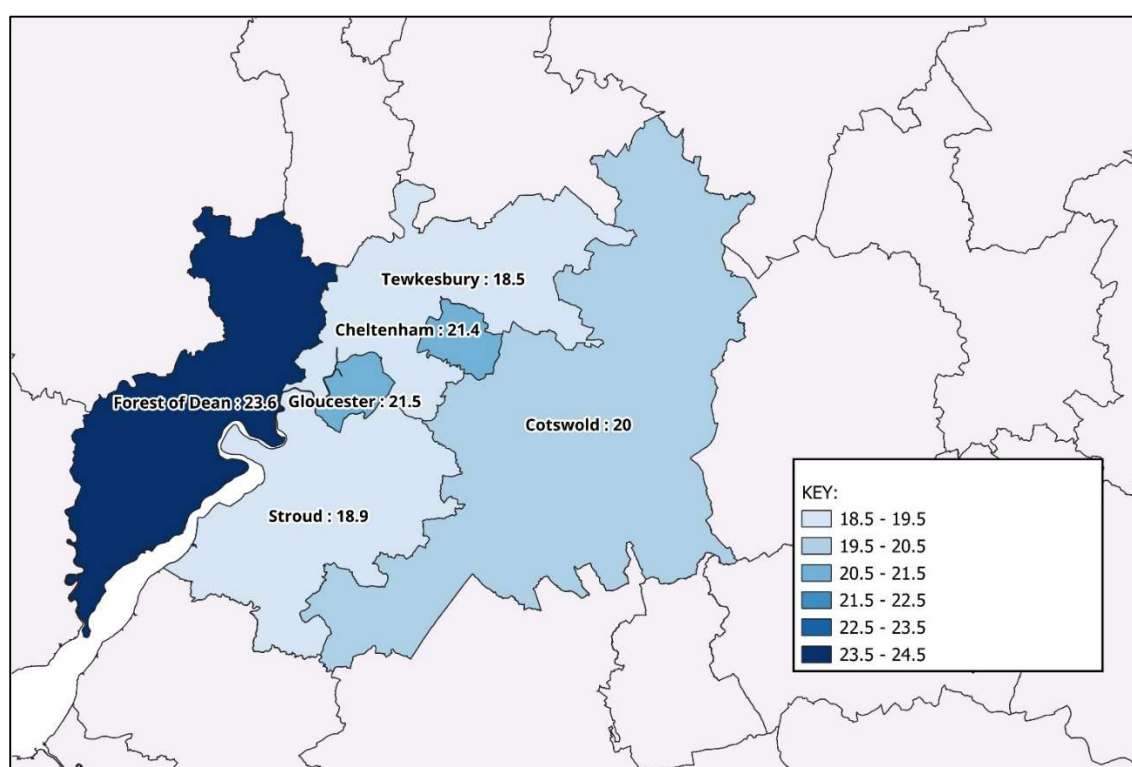


Figure 7: Economic inactivity in Gloucestershire - % of persons aged 16-64 years

## Unemployment

Area	Unemployment rate (%)	Comparison and key local insights
Gloucestershire	3.3	Below South West and England and Wales. Overall strong performance with some local variation.
Cheltenham	3.5	Slightly above county average but still below national rate; highest unemployment in deprived LSOAs such as St Paul's.
Cotswold	2.9	Among the lowest in the county.
Forest of Dean	3.4	Close to county average; some LSOAs with higher unemployment, but overall similar to Gloucestershire level.
Gloucester	3.8	Above county and regional averages. Several LSOAs exceed 5%
Stroud	2.8	Lowest in the county; reflects strong employment and low inactivity.
Tewkesbury	2.9	Below county average; some variation, with Tewkesbury South above national average.
Southwest	3.5	Regional average for comparison.
England and Wales	4.4	National average for comparison.

Figure 8: Unemployment rates across Gloucestershire, the six districts, the Southwest and England and Wales (Census 2021)

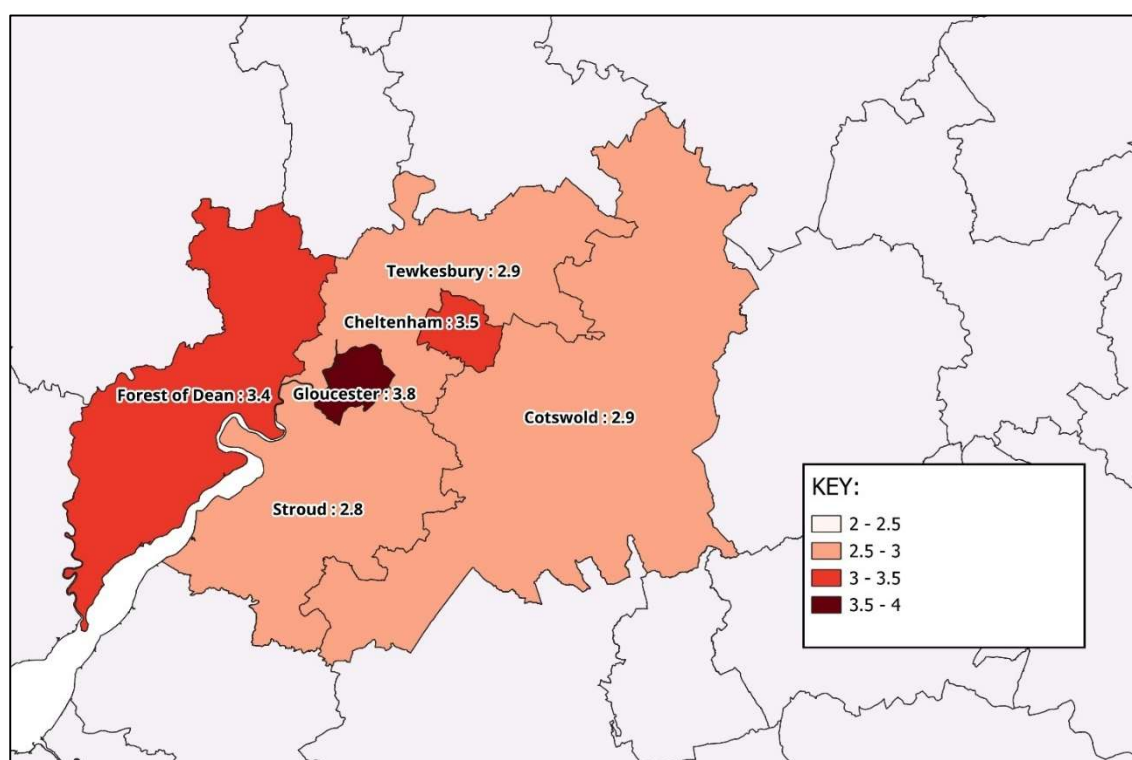


Figure 9: Unemployment in Gloucestershire - % of persons aged 16-64 years

## 2.3 Supply- and demand-side drivers and causes of economic inactivity and unemployment

Several key drivers of economic inactivity have been identified through engagement with stakeholders and informed by employment data. These can broadly be divided into supply-side drivers, which impair individuals' ability or willingness to work, and demand-side drivers, which reduce employers' need or willingness to employ individuals. Although these drivers are set out separately, they cannot be cleanly divided. Nevertheless, consistent themes from engagement and analysis highlight factors that could make Gloucestershire fall short of the employment outcomes set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper.

### 2.3.1 Supply-side drivers

#### Structural - Transport and rurality

Limited public transport is consistently highlighted as a major barrier to accessing employment, education and training, particularly in rural areas such as the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean. These two districts are judged to have low connectivity to employment centres,<sup>10</sup> and where the proportion of the population who live more than 45 minutes from a major employment centre is 43.6% and 38.7% respectively, higher than the county level of 16%.<sup>11</sup> This theme came up in almost every engagement conducted for this report, showing that it may be one of the most significant barriers to employment, and connectivity is an area of focus in several GCC plans, such as Gloucestershire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) the Economic Development Strategy.

Public transport can be costly, creating barriers for those on low incomes. In areas where transport is unreliable, this can create significant barriers to entering and sustaining employment. Arriving late for shifts due to inconsistent services can jeopardise job security. Even the perception of unreliability can deter people from using available transport provision. Although rurality itself is not necessarily a barrier to employment, evidenced by similar employment rates to urban areas,<sup>12</sup> it can intensify challenges for certain groups, such as those without private transport, individuals who rely on public transport due to physical or learning disabilities, or those on low incomes. Infrequent or unreliable transport limits access to secure employment for these groups and therefore compounds existing social and economic inequalities.

Transport emerged as a major challenge in the focus groups. Limited, infrequent, or costly transport restricted access to employment, and low incomes often made travel unaffordable. Participants reported having to decline job opportunities due to these combined barriers, creating a cycle in which short-term, survival-driven work fails to generate sufficient income to improve mobility or access better employment options.

Poor transport, coupled with high housing costs in Cotswold, act as a significant barrier to employment in caring professions here, which are characterised by irregular hours, low pay and rural location. In the context of an ageing population in Cotswold, the existing high and unfilled demand for carers in Cotswold and the Forest of Dean is of concern, and the county council is doing significant work around social care to address recruitment challenges into this sector.

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<sup>10</sup> Get Britain Working White Paper, Analytical Annex, Table 9

<sup>11</sup> GCC Journey Time Accessibility Matrix

<sup>12</sup> Census 2021

## Structural - Skills mismatch

Gloucestershire has a high proportion of vacancies classified as hard-to-fill, with 64% of total vacancies characterised as such, compared to 57% nationally. 34% of vacancies in Gloucestershire were classed as skill shortage vacancies. This was in line with the national average (36%). This suggests that while hard to fill vacancies are more of an issue within the county, skill shortage vacancies are in line with elsewhere. The key sectors of health and care, and education have the greatest proportion of skills shortage vacancies.

Overall, Gloucestershire has a highly qualified workforce, with 35.6% of residents holding a Level 4 or higher qualification. However, there are clusters of lower skills the DWP cluster analysis identified Forest of Dean and Gloucester in particular as having lower skill levels. In conclusion it is not the overall skill level that limits employment, but rather the specific types of skills available.

Stakeholders highlighted a disconnect between employer needs and the skills of the workforce, reflecting a wider structural issue of limited coordination between employers, training institutions and employment support services. Addressing this gap will require systematic engagement with employers so that training provision is aligned with labour market demand. The 2024–2034 Economic Strategy similarly identifies the need for stronger integration between further and higher education providers and the local labour market.<sup>13</sup> In parallel, the ongoing refresh of the Gloucestershire LSIP is actively embedding this alignment: for example, in Stage 2, the LSIP has supported over 300 employer engagements, informed curriculum redesign and steered investments in new training facilities (e.g. the £5 million Sustainable Construction Skills Centre at Gloucestershire College) to ensure provision better matches evolving sectoral needs.<sup>14</sup>

## Structural, social and financial - Welfare support issues

Welfare-related barriers to employment in Gloucestershire stem from a combination of structural, financial and social factors. Many people, particularly those with complex needs or in supported living, believing that engaging in employment support could lead to removal of benefits or increased rent. This perception is compounded by the prevalence of low-paid and insecure jobs, making employment seem financially risky. A pilot scheme in Moreton-on-Marsh found that this fear prevents people from engaging with DWP and therefore from accessing employment support.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside this, stigma associated with claiming benefits is a powerful social barrier to accessing employment support. Many individuals feel judged or marginalised, a perception often rooted in an education system seen as overly academic, which can leave some young people feeling excluded and lacking confidence. This contributes to a cycle where engaging with employment support is seen as a personal failure. The bureaucracy associated with employment support contributes to this sense of exclusion. This dovetails with stakeholders' argument for a "no wrong door" approach to employment support, closely embedded with other points of contact with frontline. Such an approach would reduce the administrative burden for users and re-position employment support as a form of state support along the lines of health or social care, thus reducing stigma and improving the perception of the benefits system.

There is a clear synergy between stigma and the skills gap, such that broadening educational pathways and ensuring parity between academic and practical routes could better align skills provision with employment and reduce feelings of failure among non-academic pupils.

Together, these barriers underline the need for a more coordinated approach to welfare and

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/d0glpm5n/gloucestershires-economic-strategy-2024-2034-strategy.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.businesswest.co.uk/sites/default/files/gloucestershire\\_lsip\\_progress\\_report\\_2025.pdf](https://www.businesswest.co.uk/sites/default/files/gloucestershire_lsip_progress_report_2025.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bromford.co.uk/news/new-pilot-brings-place-based-working-to-rural-gloucestershire/>

employment support, one that simplifies access, reduces stigma and ensures that individuals can transition into work without the fear of financial loss or social marginalisation.

## Health related - Poor health and disability

Those with self-described bad or very bad health are three times less likely to be in employment than those with self-described good or very good health in Gloucestershire. Those with bad or very bad health are also far less likely to be registered as seeking employment, meaning that most of this cohort (more than 70%) are economically inactive. 18.5% of people who are economically inactive in Gloucestershire specified this was due to poor health or disability, marginally less than regionally or nationally. However, poor health acting as a barrier to work is unevenly spread across the county, with the Forest of Dean and Gloucester having a high proportion of people who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability. Proportions here substantially exceed regional and national levels.<sup>16</sup> Certain cohorts of those with poor health experience particular disadvantage:

- **Mental health:** poor mental health is persistently identified as a particular barrier to employment, exacerbated by long waiting lists for mental health support. Meaningful employment is associated with improved mental health, pointing to the need for an integrated pathway where mental health support and employment support are brought together. This was reflected in the lived experience engagement, where participants described the impact of repeated rejections from jobs and being continuously overlooked, which contributed to depression, low confidence and reduced motivation.
- **Disability:** those with physical or learning disabilities face particular challenges in accessing high-quality work. In Gloucestershire, the employment gap between residents with or without a disability is 31.3 percentage points,<sup>17</sup> underscoring the need for accessible workplaces and application processes, and employment support pathways tailored to the needs of users.
- **SEND:** Children with special educational needs (SEN) face a high risk of becoming NEET post-16. The number of 16-25-year-olds with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) rose by almost 50% between 2021 and 2025 to 6,414.<sup>18</sup> The rapid growth of this cohort, combined with the well-documented challenges in supporting them into employment, presents a significant concern, and highlights the need for a preventative system of employment support.

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<sup>16</sup> Census 2021

<sup>17</sup> Fingertips, OHID

<sup>18</sup> DAIT, GCC

## System - One-size-fits-all employment schemes

Previous employment schemes which have not engaged with those seeking support on a personal level and have placed them into employment with little to no consultation on their needs and preferences were identified as a strong barrier to people remaining in good employment. These schemes may place people in work which is inappropriate for them, and which may not be well-adapted to their needs. This can lead to initial negative experiences of employment which dissuades people from seeking further employment and therefore increases their risk of economic inactivity. In addition, such approaches fail maximally to utilise the assets of employees, leading to productivity loss.

On the other hand, personalised support schemes which work closely with people to place them in appropriate employment have seen much more successful outcomes. The Going the Extra Mile (GEM) programme is often referenced as a particularly successful example of a flexible, person-centred scheme.<sup>19</sup> It should also be acknowledged that getting into employment is not the end of the journey, and that people face significant hurdles progressing or remaining in employment, and that these difficulties are likely to be greater for those already suffering disadvantage. Models such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and the Connect to Work programme successfully extends support to individuals, including those who are economically inactive and less likely to engage with traditional employment services. Such models emphasise ongoing support post-placement, recognising that securing a job is only the first step, and continuing assistance is crucial for sustaining and progressing in employment.

These approaches highlight the importance of employment support which is co-designed with users, accessible, flexible and person-centred, and which continues after users have entered employment. Engagements with local residents further emphasised the need for holistic and personalised. Participants highlighted that effective support must consider the whole individual, including mental health, financial pressures, caring responsibilities, health limitations and pace of learning. There is a clear demand for flexible, ongoing support, rather than one-off interventions, to ensure individuals are not left in a vulnerable position once initial programmes conclude.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://gloucestershiregatewaytrust.org.uk/the-gem-project/>

## 2.3.2 Demand-side drivers

### Structural - Competition for roles

There are a high number of vacancies in Gloucestershire, with 1.4 per unemployment claimant as of June 2025.<sup>20</sup> In addition, certain areas, such as the Cotswolds, have extremely high job density, leading to persistent recruitment challenges, and a significant proportion of vacancies are hard-to-fill, particularly in health and social care. Stakeholders also report a pronounced tightening in entry-level and apprenticeship roles, with around 100 applicants per apprenticeship in health and social care, creating intense competition and barriers to entry. This context underscores the need for robust employment support pathways and proactive employer engagement, ensuring that individuals, particularly those entering the workforce or pursuing apprenticeships, can navigate the labour market effectively and connect with suitable opportunities.

### Structural - Low-quality, poorly paid work

Low-quality, poorly paid work is an impediment to the plan but also damages people's future employment prospects. Stakeholders identified that low wages contribute to stress, which is associated with negative health outcomes, therefore further impairing ability to pursue employment. Low wages may also discourage people taking up employment. Additionally, the long hours needed to financially balance a household with low wages may prevent people from taking up training and therefore restrict progression to higher quality roles. In-work poverty is therefore preventing optimal employment outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

It is well-established that low-quality work is associated with poor health.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, persistent low-quality employment damages the health of employees, pushing them into economic inactivity. So, while low-quality, poorly paid work is something this plan should target, it is also a significant barrier to those who wish to enter or remain in employment. This also widens inequalities, as low-quality employment is disproportionately concentrated amongst marginalised groups. Cheltenham and Cotswold have particularly high proportions of professional and managerial employment, whereas Gloucester and the Forest of Dean have lower proportions of professional and managerial jobs and a greater concentration of low skilled work.<sup>23</sup> The high levels of low skilled work in the Forest of Dean can also be seen in the fact that an estimated 25% of employees earn less than the Real Living Wage.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, August 2025

<sup>21</sup> Institute for Employment Studies 2024, Working for the Future Final Report

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Marmot *et al.* 1991 "Health inequalities among British civil servants: the Whitehall II study"

<sup>23</sup> Census 2021

<sup>24</sup> Number and proportion of UK employees earning below the living wage as defined by the Living Wage Foundation, by country, region and local authority, ONS

## Structural - Low-quality, poorly paid work

A lack of adjustments in the workplace or job roles was consistently identified as a barrier to people entering or remaining in employment, particularly for certain cohorts. Employers are often overly rigid in their offerings, limiting opportunities for roles with home or hybrid working or flexible hours. Recruitment processes can also be off-putting, with overly complex job descriptions, application procedures, or unrealistic requirements.

These challenges are compounded by broader economic pressures, such as rising taxes, and structural limitations, including many SMEs lacking dedicated HR functions, which reduces their capacity or willingness to implement reasonable adjustments. To address these barriers, engaging proactively with employers to promote inclusive practices and educate them on the benefits and practicalities of adjustments is critical. This can help create more flexible, accessible workplaces that enable a wider range of individuals to access and sustain employment.

## 2.4 Drivers of economic inactivity among specific cohorts

Certain groups face disproportionate barriers to entering or remaining in the labour market. While the drivers of economic inactivity for these cohorts are influenced by both supply-side and demand-side factors, it is important to explore the specific circumstances and challenges affecting each group in more detail. Many of these groups overlap, with individuals often belonging to multiple groups simultaneously. This intersectionality can compound challenges, creating a complex set of needs and priorities, and increasing the risk of negative employment outcomes.

### Young people

Young people were identified by almost all stakeholders as a cohort particularly affected by economic inactivity. A growing number of young people are becoming NEET,<sup>25</sup> suggesting issues entering the labour market. Through focus groups, young people leaving education consistently reported uncertainty about their next steps and limited understanding of available career pathways. Poor mental health was identified as a significant barrier, with participants describing low motivation and reduced confidence resulting from repeated rejections and receiving little or no feedback from employers, making it difficult to learn and improve. The lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing prevalence of neurodiversity were also highlighted as factors that can affect young people's ability to access and sustain employment.

Across this cohort, stakeholders identified a low confidence and a lack of "soft" workplace skills, such as speaking on the phone, as a barrier to employment. This was often attributed to the legacy of the COVID pandemic, as well as increased reliance on technology among young people. This demonstrates the importance of employment support not focussing exclusively on work but also developing inter-personal and "soft" skills.

Several stakeholders also suggested attitudes towards work among young people, combined with a limited understanding of available career options, contributed to higher levels of economic inactivity in this cohort. These stakeholders proposed that embedding employment support and information earlier in the education system, as well as expanding provision for non-academic pathways within schools, would improve work-readiness among young people. This is particularly important, as stakeholders noted that young people are easier to engage while they remain within the education system. Those who leave education without qualifications or experience are much harder to support into employment, highlighting the need for a more preventive approach.

It was also consistently argued that there is a lack of entry-level, apprenticeship or early career opportunities, alongside a perception that employers often overstate the requirements in job advertisements. This negatively affects young people's employment prospects as it reduces their chances of getting a job, but the highly competitive and overly complicated application process may also contribute to a negative perception of employment.

### Older people

Some older people (50+) have left the workforce early, particularly in key sectors such as construction, education, and health and social care. Early retirement is driven by poor health, particularly in manual work, where frailty presents a significant difficulty. Another driver was a re-assessment of their relationship to work following COVID, with some 50+ year-olds reportedly deciding to spend more time looking after family or pursuing personal interests. There may be significant barriers to re-entry into the workforce for this cohort. Through the lived experience focus groups, participants identified perceived ageism as the main barrier

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<sup>25</sup> GCC Youth Support Team

preventing them from re-entering the workforce. Many felt that employers were reluctant to invest in older workers due to assumptions about age and capability. Another significant barrier was the shift to online recruitment and application systems. Limited digital skills left some older adults feeling excluded or alienated from opportunities, as they often struggled to navigate digital platforms and had to rely on support from friends, family, or professionals to complete applications.

This perspective was echoed by frontline workers and other professionals, who observed that many older adults lack confidence in job searching and completing applications. Limited digital skills and low confidence in using technology were highlighted as key barriers to returning to work after a period of absence. Stakeholders also noted that older individuals already in employment may struggle to progress due to insufficient digital skills, which can contribute to frustration,

## Long-term health conditions

As explained above, long-term health conditions significantly shape economic inactivity in Gloucestershire, with people with long-term physical or mental health conditions disproportionately represented among the inactive. Those with severe or complex conditions face the greatest barriers, but even less severe conditions including common mental health disorders or fatigue-related illnesses, can affect confidence, motivation and the ability to engage with employment support. Certain groups, such as older adults, are more likely to experience long-term health conditions, compounding the effect of age-related labour market challenges. Rural populations are also disproportionately affected when poor transport limits access to jobs or health services that could enable them to participate in work.

The engagements with local people highlighted perceived prejudice against individuals with long-term health conditions, with assumptions about their capability and ability to work leaving them feeling alienated from employment opportunities. Participants also reported that some employers were unwilling to implement reasonable adjustments to support them into work. This lack of accommodation affected their confidence, making it more challenging for those willing and eager to work to engage fully with employment opportunities.

Long-term illness is socially patterned and therefore failure to get those with long-term health conditions into work exacerbates existing inequities. Stakeholders emphasise that flexible roles, adapted hours, and additional workplace support are often necessary. Without these accommodations, individuals may be unable to sustain employment, creating a cycle of economic inactivity that reinforces existing social and economic inequalities.

## Disability

As shown above, disabled people have much lower rates of employment and significantly higher rates of economic inactivity than those without disabilities. Those with learning disabilities may face barriers due to lacking certain skills such as reading or writing which are seen as foundational, and their assets may not be utilised because of their disabilities. In addition, it was identified that autistic individuals may face barriers around interpersonal skills in the workplace, which present difficulties in gaining and remaining in employment. For these groups of individuals, it was argued that there was often a mismatch between the skills they possess, and the skills demanded in certain jobs, and that better alignment of employment offering with ability would better allow them to use their skillset.

Similarly to people with long-term health conditions, participants in the lived experience focus groups reported facing assumptions about their ability to work, which left them feeling excluded from employment opportunities with similar impacts to confidence.

Specific barriers were identified for those with physical disabilities, though this cohort has the

highest employment rate of any disabled cohort.<sup>26</sup> Poor transport provision or practical difficulties in performing certain tasks may impact this cohort's ability to work. Across both physical and learning disabilities, persistent barriers were identified. These included implicit or explicit discrimination and prejudice towards those with disabilities, as well as poor provision or adaptation in education or the workplace, including inaccessible application and recruitment processes. This includes physical adaptations such as ramps or BSL provision, and adaptation in what roles and working patterns are offered. People with disabilities may also be unaware of what reasonable adjustments they can legally request, and employers unaware of their responsibilities or powers to make those adjustments.

## Refugees, and asylum seekers with permission to work

Refugees make up 0.4% of the population in Gloucestershire. The majority is Ukrainian refugees, except in the city of Gloucester, where the majority is supported asylum seekers. Refugees and asylum seekers face additional barriers, often preventing them from entering appropriate training or from converting qualifications from their home countries to qualifications which are recognised in the UK. Many of these barriers are around language, with refugees and asylum seekers sometimes excluded from skills training or education because of low levels of English. Additionally, those with no or poor English have difficulty entering employment. This cohort has the lowest levels of employment, with 57% of those who cannot speak English in Gloucestershire economically inactive.<sup>27</sup> ESOL provision is oversubscribed locally, meaning that refugees and asylum seekers are persistently unable to access ESOL training which would help facilitate their entry into employment.

In the focus groups, asylum seekers with the permission to work reported that the main barrier to employment was the lack of a share code. Without this, employers did not recognise or understand that they had the permission to work, which prevented them from being hired. For refugees, the primary challenge was the benefit cap, particularly those with families. The cap frequently leaves households struggling to cover essential costs such as rent, food transport and childcare. This financial pressure forces many to prioritise immediate survival over long-term employment preparation, limiting their ability to attend ESOL classes or pay for training courses; a "cycle of survival" that undermines employability. Across both groups, participants also reported perceived prejudice from employers due to their status as asylum seekers or refugees.

## Care leavers

Those leaving care were consistently identified as a cohort which faces particular barriers to employment. Care leavers aged 19-21 are more likely than non-care leavers to be NEET, with 60% of this group being in Education, Employment or Training in 2024 in Gloucestershire.<sup>28</sup> Stakeholders argued that there may be a lack of aspiration in care services, meaning that care leavers are not encouraged to take up further and higher education, or employment. Additionally, it was noted that this cohort have many other demands on their time, for instance entering independent living, and that seeking employment or education is not always seen as paramount.

In addition, members of this cohort may have experienced trauma, and that the emotional demands of certain types of work, for instance in health and social care, prevent care leavers from entering these professions. It was argued that trauma-informed, flexible and bespoke employment support is needed to account for the complex needs of this cohort.

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<sup>26</sup> DWP, Employment of Disabled People 2022

<sup>27</sup> Census 2021

<sup>28</sup> Department for Education, Local Authority Interactive Tool

## Care givers

Those who have caring responsibilities or who are lone parents face obvious barriers to employment. They may have difficulties working full-time or during regular working hours, and a lack of flexibility or agility in the employment offering was identified as a barrier to this cohort entering or remaining in employment. In addition, caring responsibilities take up a lot of time, so there may simply be a lack of time to pursue employment or training among this cohort. This can be clearly seen among those who provide 50 hours or more unpaid care per week, less than half of whom are in employment.<sup>29</sup>

## People with low skills

Individuals with low skills often face limited access to stable, well-paid employment and opportunities for career progression. Without foundational qualifications or work-related skills, they are more likely to be unemployed or employed in insecure, low-paid roles with little scope for progression and little time for further training, leaving them stuck in poor-quality work. Tailored training, upskilling and targeted employment support are therefore critical to improving job prospects, helping individuals develop the skills required to secure higher-quality employment, progress within the labour market and achieve financial stability.

## Complex needs

These key cohorts cannot neatly be separated, and many individuals belong to multiple groups simultaneously. This group includes, but is not limited to, people who are homeless, substance or alcohol users and prison leavers. Disadvantages often intersect and compound, widening inequalities. For example, individuals with caring responsibilities may also experience poor mental health, making it harder to maintain high-quality work, while someone who uses substances may struggle to find suitable accommodation and secure employment. Failing to account for this complexity can result in fragmented approaches that do not address the root causes of economic inactivity. Furthermore, where services and organisations are not aligned, limited funding cannot support those with complex needs effectively.

In the lived experience engagement, prison leavers highlighted that many face housing insecurity and financial precarity, which often forces them to prioritise immediate survival needs, such as shelter and food, over seeking employment. For those able to pursue work, having a criminal record and the requirement for DBS checks can create additional barriers. Participants reported feeling alienated from the job market, as some employers are unwilling to hire individuals with a criminal record, even when they are motivated and capable. Additionally, stakeholders identified that those with complex needs are often over-supplied with services, interacting with many diverse service providers. This can lead to duplication of interactions, which can be off-putting for those seeking support, especially if they are already vulnerable and lacking time or mental bandwidth. It was proposed that more streamlined support, minimising the number of interactions between individuals and frontline services, might be more effective. In addition, it was argued that support which fails to account for an individual's unique situation, for instance economic disadvantage or housing difficulties, is likely to fail in supporting them into appropriate employment.

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<sup>29</sup> Census 2021

### 3. Existing employment and skills support landscape

This section provides an overview of the current employment and skills provision in Gloucestershire, an assessment of these services and the perspective of the current landscape for users. The methodology to devise the overview involved interviews and workshops with stakeholders (including Gloucestershire County Council employment and skills leads, representatives from VCSE organisations, representatives from local employers including Chambers of Commerce and DWP employment officers such as Work Coaches). A survey to key stakeholders was also deployed, reaching a total of 40 stakeholders.<sup>30</sup> In addition, this paper has been informed by residents to accurately understand what the system looks like for the users.

#### 3.1 Overview of current provision

Across Gloucestershire, there is a broad and evolving system of skills provision and employment support targeted at diverse cohort groups and geographies. Services include training, careers advice, education pathways, work readiness support, job search assistance and in-work support. Many initiatives are coordinated through the Gloucestershire Employment and Skills Hub, which acts as a central access point for residents seeking tailored support.

Together, these different services make up the county's "employment and skills system". Although this is not unique to Gloucestershire, the system is highly complex and multifaceted, and in some areas fragmented. This fragmentation arises from differences in funding mechanisms, programme durations and accountability structures. Bringing the system together to drive change will improve outcomes for local communities.

The former GFirst LEP Gloucestershire Skills Strategy 2022-2027 highlighted the need for better coordination across this landscape,<sup>31</sup> calling for a "decluttering" of services and a "One Front Door" approach to improve accessibility for individuals and employers. Building on this, there is potential to ensure design and funding of services are more closely aligned with the wider vision for a cohesive employment and skills system. This would help reduce duplication, improve coordination across programmes, and make it easier for residents and employers to navigate the support available.

At the time of writing this plan, Gloucestershire is a non-devolved area and therefore does not have local control over funding streams such as the Adult Skills Fund (ASF). In contrast, devolved areas are able to use this funding more flexibly to tailor and coordinate provision to better meet their local and wider skills needs.

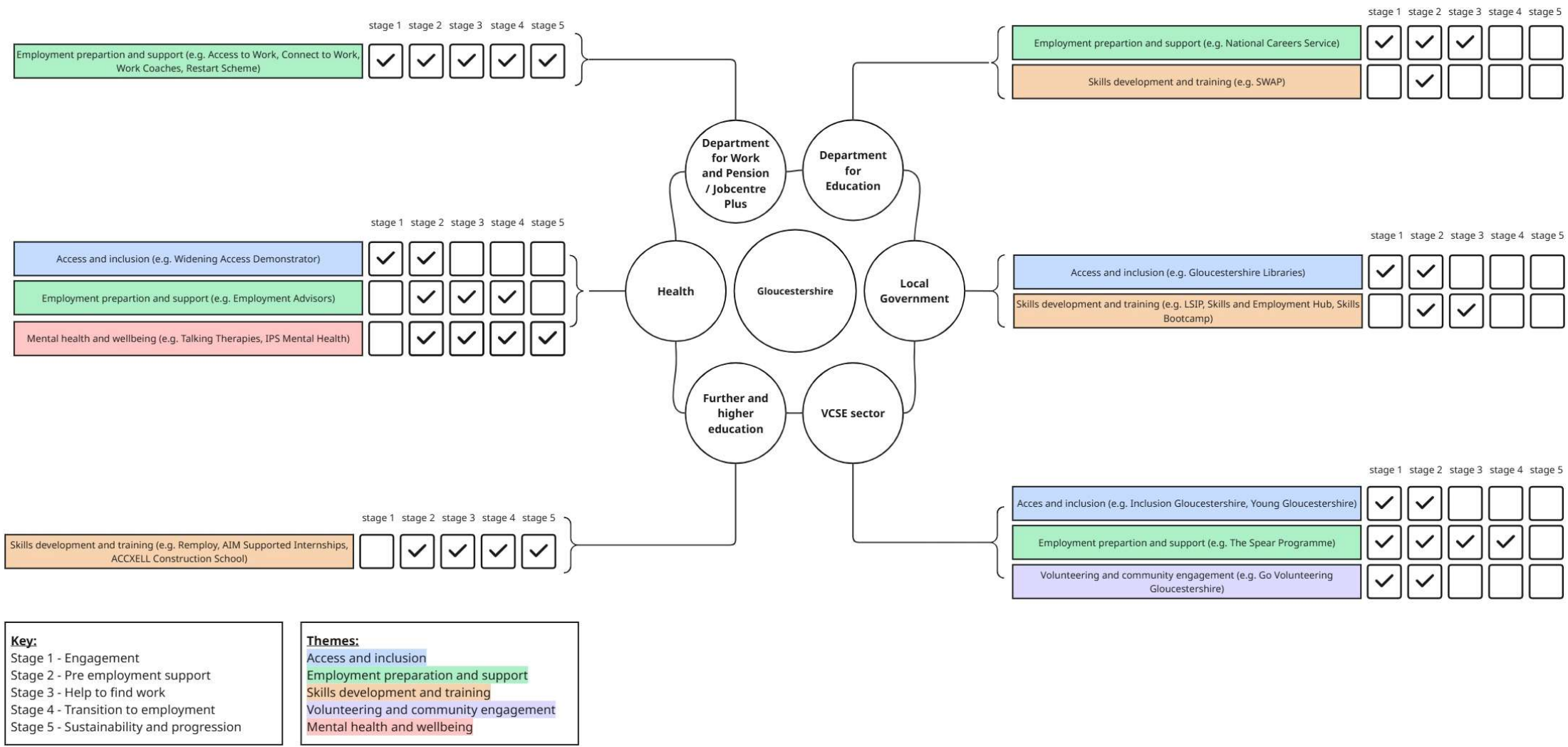
The diagram below maps existing employment and skills provision and seeks to represent the complexity of the current system in a clear and accessible format. It is organised by the type of organisation delivering support, such as voluntary and community organisations, local government, health services, and national government, and grouped by thematic areas, including skills development and inclusivity and individualised employment support. The diagram also highlights the range of provision available across the five stages of the employment journey.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This included representatives from the health (10), social care (8), community development (5), skills and training (4), public sector (3), education (3) and private sector (3).

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gfirstlep.com/downloads/2022/gfirst-lep-gloucestershire-skills-strategy-2022-27.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> The five stages of support refer to the stages in the Supported Employment model across a beneficiary journey.



**Figure 10: Diagram of the employment and skills system in Gloucestershire**

## 3.2 Partnership working

There are several existing partnerships in Gloucestershire that focus on skills, health and work. These networks will be essential in their contribution to the delivery of the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan. These partnerships work in combination or in singularity with the three Get Britain Working areas (health, work and skills).

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- **Employment and Skills Hub:** Established by Gloucestershire County Council, the Hub is consistently referred to as the front door for residents and employers for queries relating to work and skills. More than 15 separate funding streams have been convened in this hub, streamlining a complex system and creating expert knowledge of support. For residents seeking support, it has meant efficient signposting to the most relevant support. A case study has been developed, see case study (1), which draws out the aims and achievements.
- **Gloucestershire Employment Alliance:** Brings together health, care, supported employment providers and VCSE to jointly work on the core mission of supporting people who at risk of developing health ailments due to long-term unemployment or economic inactivity. The work includes focus on promoting clear pathways to support partners and teaching of inclusive employment. Recently, the alliance has set up powerful data sharing hub containing information and evidence on local employment support available for residents.
- **Gloucestershire LSIP:** Led by Business West (the Employer Representative Body), the LSIP aligns post-16 education with the needs of local employers. The LSIP has engaged with 300 employers as well as engaging with colleges and training providers and the result has been identifying priority sectors including: Digital Industries, Agriculture, Agri tech and Land Management, Construction and the Built Environment and Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering. The LSIP has created initiatives to support employment and skills, for instance has led to the creation of the skills centre in Cheltenham teaching sustainable construction.
- **Gloucestershire Cornerstone Employers:** This is a group of “champion” employers who provide guidance to schools, colleges and career hubs. Guidance includes information regarding employment pathways, education pathways and work experience. The outreach work to institutions helps young people to understand the opportunities and work available to them. The championing group involves many employer partnerships – from across sectors such as NHS, food and drinks and construction sector – all aiming to achieve more knowledge of their respective sector.
- **Integrated Care Board (NHS Gloucestershire):** Gloucestershire’s Integrated Care Board plans and commissions local NHS services, delivers the county’s integrated care strategy, and works with partners to improve population health outcomes. In doing so, it aims to reduce inequalities, enhance value for money, and support wider social and economic development. The Integrated Care Board also coordinates system-wide governance, resources and collaborative priorities across health and care.
- **Integrated Locality Partnerships (ILPs):** Brings together NHS (including Primary Care Networks), VCSE, the housing department, residents and wider partners including police and education to create a localised and tailored approach for tackling health issues across areas. There are 6 ILPs across the county in: Gloucestershire; Cheltenham, Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud and Berkeley Vale and Tewkesbury.

- **One Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Partnership:** A joint statutory committee of the County Council and the ICB, the Partnership brings together key partners from across the health and care system. The Partnership oversees the local Integrated Care System Strategy which includes employment as one of its three exemplar themes.
- **The Local Health and Wellbeing Board.** The Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board oversees the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the county. The Board's vision is for Gloucestershire to be a place where everyone can live, be healthy and thrive. The strategy has a focus on addressing health inequalities, and a recognition of the importance of the social, environmental and economic factors which impact on our health, including access to education, skills and employment.

### 3.3 Wider policy context (as of October 2025)

The Get Gloucestershire Working plan is being developed at a time when there are significant national policy developments. The plan must work across these changes to directly influence the reduction of economic inactivity. This section outlines national policy changes and how they will impact key cohorts and the current employment system in Gloucestershire.

**Pathways to Work Green paper:** This proposal sets out ways to reduce economic inactivity using support employment programmes such as Connect to Work. A key feature of the policy is the introduction of a “right to try”, allowing people receiving health- or disability-related benefits to test whether they can work without the immediate risk of losing their financial support or triggering a reassessment. If this policy is adopted, there will be an influx of potential participants requiring specialised employment support.

**Welfare benefit reforms:** Changes to Universal Credit include halving the Limited Capability for Work- and Work-Related Activity element for new claimants from April 2026. This will reduce the amount for beneficiaries, leading them to seek paid work and therefore the plan anticipates a rise in demand for employment services.

**Locally led Jobcentre support, Pathfinder pilot:** Currently is being piloted in Wakefield with intent to scale across England, with the primary aim to move away from a standardised, centrally driven model and introduce services that are tailored to local needs. This is achieved by developing new partnerships with employers and community-based employment support services. In addition, to support the locality approach, Jobcentre’s will host career events on key growth sectors and introduce a Coaching Academy. For residents this creates tailored and personalised employment opportunities, boosting employment in areas with issues of persistent economic inactivity rates.

**NHS 10-year Plan:** The NHS 10-year plan sets out a long-term vision for a more preventative, integrated and place-based health system. Of particular relevance to the Get Gloucestershire Working (GBW) plan is the focus on developing neighbourhood health centres that bring together health, wellbeing and wider public services in community settings. The plan highlights the opportunity to co-locate employment support alongside health services, recognising the role that joined-up provision can play in addressing the wider determinants of health. It also explicitly acknowledges that good-quality work is beneficial for health and wellbeing, reinforcing the importance of employment as a preventative intervention.

**Local government reorganisation:** Local government reorganisation remains an emerging policy context for Gloucestershire. Future changes to local governance structures could have significant implications for employment, skills and economic inactivity policy. Local government reorganisation could offer opportunities to align employment, skills, health and economic development more closely, simplify delivery across institutional boundaries, and increase local flexibility in designing place-based responses to economic inactivity.

**Youth Guarantee:** Young people aged 18 to 21 who have been claiming Universal Credit for 18 months will be offered guaranteed paid work, training or apprenticeships. This intervention aims to build work experience, reduce the risk of long-term unemployment and create pathways into permanent employment. It also seeks to extend support to a broader group of economically inactive individuals, ensuring that opportunities reach those that are NEET, or at risk of becoming NEET.

**Growth and Skills levy:** Replacing the Apprenticeship Levy, this levy focuses on delivering greater lower level-training and provides employers a 50 per cent subsidy on non-apprenticeship training. For the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan this offers greater flexibility in how the levy is used with a greater ability to provide support for employers, support in-work progression and deliver varied training.

**Adult Skills Fund:** Local government reorganisation has not yet taken place in Gloucestershire. Devolution would present opportunities to create a strategic authority, with more flexibility to tailor employment and skills provision to meet local need.

**V levels, and the Occupational and Further Study Pathways:** A recent policy development is the government's reform of post-16 education, designed to create additional pathways into vocational and technical roles. From 2027, new V levels will be introduced as Level 3 vocational qualifications, providing a clear, high-quality route for students alongside A levels (academic) and T Levels (technical). At Level 2, two new pathways (the Occupational Pathway and the Further Study Pathway) will support 16–18-year-olds into work, apprenticeships, or higher-level study, with additional tailored support for English and maths where needed. These reforms aim to ensure young people are equipped with the skills, knowledge and confidence to access employment or further education, while giving employers a better-prepared workforce.

## Case study (1)

### **Employment and Skills Hub**

The Employment and Skills Hub provide a strong and successful infrastructure, which has improved visibility of programmes. The Hub convenes more than 15 separate funding streams into one place including funding directly from Gloucestershire County Council, the Integrated Care Board, DWP, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and Homes for Ukraine funding. And as of July 2025, Connect to Work is also being delivered in the Hub (see case-study on Connect to Work for more detail). For residents this means a single offer, managed in a complex funding system.

The Hub's cohort and support focus is parallel to the GBW paper focal areas - the Hub focuses on residents with complex needs such as long-term disabilities, caring responsibilities or young people not in education, employment or training. Impact figures show that it has secured 230 people into paid work, 120 into work experience placements and 94 young people into supported internships. The Hub also supports getting people into and sustaining work with outcome data showing there has been an 84 per cent sustainability rate measuring customers moving into or remaining in work for up to 52 weeks.

### 3.4 Assessment of current services

#### **Strong landscape of provision but limited reach due to limited communication:**

Gloucestershire has a strong landscape of programmes addressing the structural barriers to employment. However, the impact of these initiatives is often limited by inconsistent communication between delivery partners. In a system characterised by short-term and constantly changing funding, organisations that are unaware of each other's support offers risk duplicating efforts, leaving some cohorts under-supported and creating suboptimal referral pathways. Strengthening coordination and information sharing would maximise the reach and effectiveness of existing programmes.

**Short-term funding:** Another key issue is the short-term and inconsistent nature of funding, which can lead to the sudden interruption of otherwise successful programmes. Changes to funding levels or conditions can force services to alter how they operate, and when a programme ends, individuals may struggle to re-engage with alternative support. Short-term funding can also impact the system, as losing key organisation may mean a loss of knowledge of an individual and their unique barriers. The Linking Employment and Health programme (LEAH) was continuously cited as a strong programme addressing long-term unemployment however is not being funded going forward.<sup>33</sup>

#### Case study (2)

##### **Inclusive employment**

Officially recognised as having a strong commitment to inclusive hiring and work, Emma Willis London, a clothes manufacturer actively demonstrates inclusive practices. The organisation engages with various VCSE employment support initiatives and as a result of these interactions has employed two Syrian refugees, reviewing their strong, professional background in tailoring. This has offered the chance to secure employment, which traditional recruitment methods would not have enabled. As well as offering employment, the organisation is dedicated to personal development and since employment both individuals have progressed in ranks, with one individual now leading a production line.

**Young people and outreach:** As outlined in the section above, young people were consistently identified as a cohort requiring targeted support to navigate employment pathways. Stakeholders highlighted that career guidance is often introduced too late in the education journey, limiting students' ability to proactively plan for their future. Early intervention can foster ambition and improve awareness of diverse career options. This aligns closely with the One Plan for Children and Young People in Gloucestershire 2024–2030, which emphasises early help, aspiration-building and improved transitions from education into employment, training or further learning.<sup>34</sup>

Young people who leave education at 18 without continuing to further study, often lose access to the careers guidance and support networks provided by schools. This transition gap is particularly challenging for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with SEN. While adult employment services assume responsibility for these individuals, schools face practical difficulties in tracking them after they leave. Inconsistent recording and sharing of data on

<sup>33</sup> LEAH is a collaborative initiative in Gloucestershire aimed at supporting individuals facing barriers to employment due to health conditions or disabilities. The programme is a partnership between Gloucestershire County Council's Employment and Skills Hub and NHS Gloucestershire, with involvement from health, care, and voluntary organisations. It provides tailored employment support to help residents find, return to, or remain in work, recognising the interdependence between good employment and good health.

<sup>34</sup> One Plan for Children and Young People in Gloucestershire 2024–2030

NEET young people further limit the ability to provide timely outreach and targeted interventions, highlighting the importance of sustained career guidance and early support during this critical period.

### Case study (3)

#### **Inclusion Gloucestershire**

Inclusion Gloucestershire is an example of a programme which actively and routinely co-produces with service users. From strategies being led by residents to beneficiaries sitting on the board of trustees, Inclusion Gloucestershire model focuses on the user at its centre. The work also encompasses outreach work such as running speaking groups, helping individuals to find and understand relevant employment information and providing mental health advice and support. There are four community hubs across Gloucestershire in: Gloucester, Cheltenham and the Forest of Dean.

**Employers:** A contributing factor of failing to sustain work is due to employers inadequately or not at all providing reasonable adjustments to employees, such as flexibility in timings of shifts. A survey by Inclusion Gloucestershire of 114 labour market participants reinforces this – a key theme from the survey revealing employers hold negative perceptions towards those with disabilities resulting in discrimination in recruitment and in the workplace.

### 3.5 Navigating the employment and skills support landscape

Through the research and engagements, residents in Gloucestershire described uncertainty and fragmentation in their employment journey. Support was often delivered through discrete, time-limited programmes, making it difficult to build a continuous pathway toward employment. Many were unaware of available opportunities or unclear on how to access services, particularly those facing multiple or intersecting vulnerabilities.

For young people leaving education, uncertainty about next steps, limited understanding of career pathways, and a lack of structured guidance (e.g., CV writing or interview preparation) made it difficult to navigate employment and support. Similar experiences were reported by those over 50, who felt that opportunities available to them were unclear and that employers made assumptions about their capabilities, and by disabled people, who struggled to identify roles suited to their needs.

There was a strong request for holistic and person-centred that considers mental health, financial pressures, caring responsibilities, and health limitations. Participants valued tailored and compassionate programmes, such as those delivered by Inclusion Gloucestershire, Young Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS), which built trust and confidence by adapting support to individual needs.

#### Case study (4)

##### **Transport**

Since 2019 Gloucestershire County Council has piloted the Robin Shuttle Bus to better connect rural areas and improve consistency of public transport. This initiative has been successful, measured through its extension of timeline and increased funding. Currently the bus operates in five areas: the South of Forest of Dean, north Cotswolds, south Cotswolds Tewkesbury district and Berkley Vale.

Participants across all groups reported that fragmented, inconsistent and impersonal support undermined progress. Some described experiences with the JCP and other employment schemes as a “tick box” exercises or impersonal, with individuals being passed between work coaches and service providers and receiving variable levels of understanding. Asylum seekers with the permission to work and refugees highlighted a reliance on overstretched voluntary organisations, which often act as intermediaries but are not as well connected to statutory bodies as they could be.

Linked to this, is the critical role of community and voluntary organisations in bridging gaps between individuals and formal systems. These organisations were often described as trusted sources of support that provide personalised guidance, advocacy and practical assistance. However, these organisations often face challenges such as short-term funding, staff turnover and limited capacity, which can affect the sustainability and continuity of support.

More detailed information from the lived experience engagement undertaken as part of the development of this Plan is provided in a separate Lived Experience Report.

## 4. Collaboration and system-level changes

This section sets out the system-level changes needed to make the employment and skills system more effective, coherent, and responsive. Co-design across the system is central, providing a way of working that improves customer referrals, enhances data sharing, and supports a “test and learn” approach to rapidly trial and refine new solutions. The section also highlights the levers available to local partners to drive these changes, addressing the underlying drivers of economic inactivity as well as the gaps and weaknesses identified in the previous sections.

### 4.1 Engaging with stakeholders

As outlined in section 3, Gloucestershire benefits from a diverse range of important stakeholders and strong, well-established partnerships across the county that align closely with the aims of the GBW White Paper. These partnerships have enabled extensive stakeholder engagement, with a high level of enthusiasm and willingness to participate from across the system: including the county council, all six district and borough councils, education and skills providers, public sector organisations, voluntary and community groups, employers and employer representative bodies.

Organisations we engaged with outside of statutory bodies included employers, Employer Representative Organisations, voluntary and community sector and skills and training providers. These stakeholders were engaged through a combination of seven workshops, more than 20 interviews and a detailed survey. Several organisations that could not be engaged with directly, contributed to this work by sharing useful documents, providing valuable context, data, and insights that informed the findings throughout this plan. This broad and active engagement provides a strong foundation for continued collaboration as the actions and future iterations of the plan are developed and implemented.

Equally important to the development of this plan has been the direct engagement with people who have lived experience of the local employment, health and skills systems. This work was made possible through the invaluable support of Young Gloucestershire, GARAS and Jobcentre Plus. The full findings from these engagements have been compiled into a separate Lived Experience Report.

The collaboration and coordination of these organisations were crucial in reaching individuals whose experiences offer unique insight into how the system operates in practice. These engagements facilitated a greater understanding of the customer journey, including what works well, where people encounter barriers and where gaps exist in the support available. These voices have provided essential evidence to ensure the plan reflects the real experiences and needs of those it aims to support.

Overall, the engagement facilitated the capture of insights across the health, employment and skills landscape, ensuring that the plan reflects both system-level priorities and the lived experiences of service providers, employers and local residents.

#### Case study (5)

##### **Connect to Work**

Gloucestershire is one of the first areas across England and Wales to launch Connect to Work and is being delivered through the Employment and Skills Hub. Delivering through the Hub is beneficial given Connect to Work’s caseload of 2,893 people to 2030. Not all participants will be eligible for support but being embedded in the hub ensures those that do not qualify can immediately be directed to other available support. In addition, progress is already being observed with job outcomes achieved in the first 3-months of its operation.

## 4.2 System-level changes and levers that stakeholders can apply to drive action

As Gloucestershire is not a devolved area, this limits local control over key funding streams such as Adult Skills Fund (ASF), and access to devolved growth or transport investment, which could otherwise help expand employment opportunities. Most employment and skills provision is programme-based, follows centrally set targets and is time-limited, making it challenging to establish permanent, locally led infrastructure.

Despite this fragmentation, local partners are committed to maximising existing assets and using the levers available to address the drivers of economic inactivity and the gaps in the system. With this in mind, this plan has highlighted that Gloucestershire will need to implement several system-level changes in order to achieve the government's key ambitions of reaching an 80%, and fairer, employment rate.

The following section outlines the system-level changes required to meet these goals, along with levers that stakeholders can apply to drive action.

## 4.3 System-level changes

This plan identifies six key system-level changes, alongside a cross-cutting change that underpins and enables successful delivery. Together they provide a strategic framework for strengthening the employment and skills system and addressing the challenges and gaps highlighted throughout this plan.

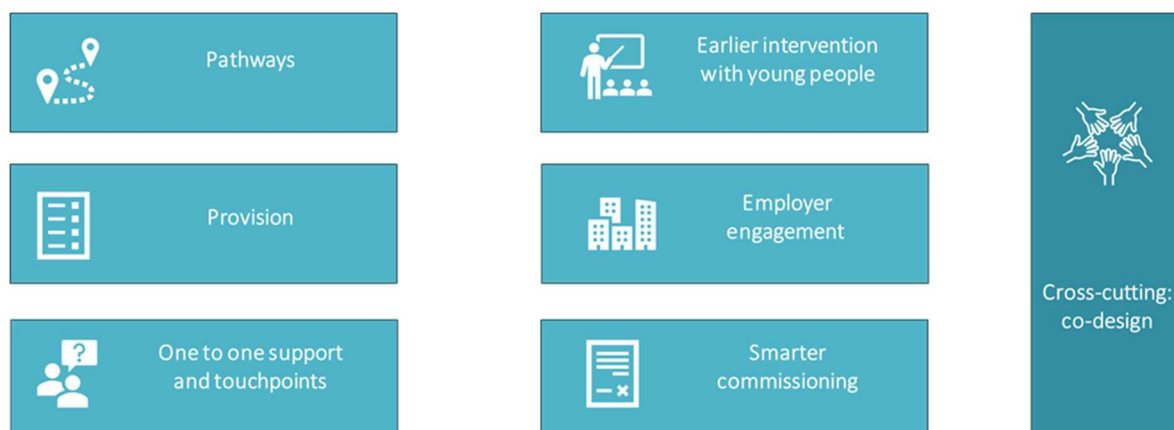


Figure 10: The system-level changes







System change	Ambition	Outcome
<b>Pathways</b> 	To establish clear, comprehensive pathways that enable users to move smoothly through available services and progress into sustainable employment.	1) People with complex needs experience a more streamlined and coordinated employment and skills support system, reducing barriers and making it easier for them to access appropriate pathways into work. 2) Employment and health pathways are more closely connected, ensuring that individuals receive coordinated support that addresses both health and work needs.
<b>Provision</b> 	To ensure that available skills and training provision both matches local demand and is widely understood by those who need it.	1) The needs and demand of target groups are better understood, enabling more effective outreach and wider engagement with employment and skills support. 2) Employment and skills provision is better tailored to the needs of target cohorts, ensuring that support is relevant, accessible, and effective. 3) Stakeholders and residents have a clear understanding of available employment and skills provision and how to access it, supporting more informed planning and decision-making.
<b>One-to-one support and touchpoints</b> 	To extend support to a larger cohort of economically inactive individuals who are less likely to present themselves to employment services.	1) Individuals who are persistently disengaged are more effectively reached and supported, increasing their participation in employment and skills opportunities. 2) Targeted outreach is expanded, enabling personalised employment support to reach local communities more effectively.
<b>Earlier intervention with young people</b> 	To ensure that young people are both inspired by, and have access to, a broad range of career pathways.	1) Young people gain greater awareness of diverse sectors and career opportunities, supported by coordinated engagement and collaboration between key partners. 2) Young people are better informed about career opportunities, increasing their motivation, confidence, and resilience to pursue career pathways. 3) Employment provision is better aligned with the needs of young people, offering a locally tailored model that effectively supports their entry into work.
<b>Systematic employer engagement</b> 	To streamline employer engagement, ensuring that local businesses actively contribute to both into-work and in-work support, and that training pathways align with genuine employment opportunities.	1) Employer engagement is more coordinated and effective, with businesses actively contributing to the goals of the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan.
<b>Smarter commissioning</b> 	To ensure that commissioning reflects the broader vision for a coordinated and cohesive employment and skills system.	1) Commissioned youth support and frontline services are better aligned with local employment needs, improving access to employment support and ensuring expertise is effectively shared across the system.

Figure 11: Summary of system-level changes

Intervention in any complex system is not linear and discrete, but impacts all elements of the system, often in unpredictable ways. The diagram above shows how the proposed system changes interact, working as brakes or accelerators of each other. The fundamental relationship which links a system user to a practitioner to an employer is shown in the green boxes. The blue boxes indicate system changes. Where there is a green arrow between boxes, there is an “influence” relationship. For instance, systematic engagement with employers influences what skills provision looks like, because employer demand is integrated by training those skills most needed by employers. A red arrow denotes an “access” relationship. For instance, practitioners have access to a clear pathway for directing users to the right support. The black arrows indicate that co-design is a cross-cutting principle, where all system changes must have co-design built into them, to ensure that they are appropriate and meet the needs of all.

This model is a simplification of a complex system. It does not capture all the subtle links and influences present in the skills and employment system in Gloucestershire, but it does show how system changes must be seen as iterative interventions in a complex web of relationships.

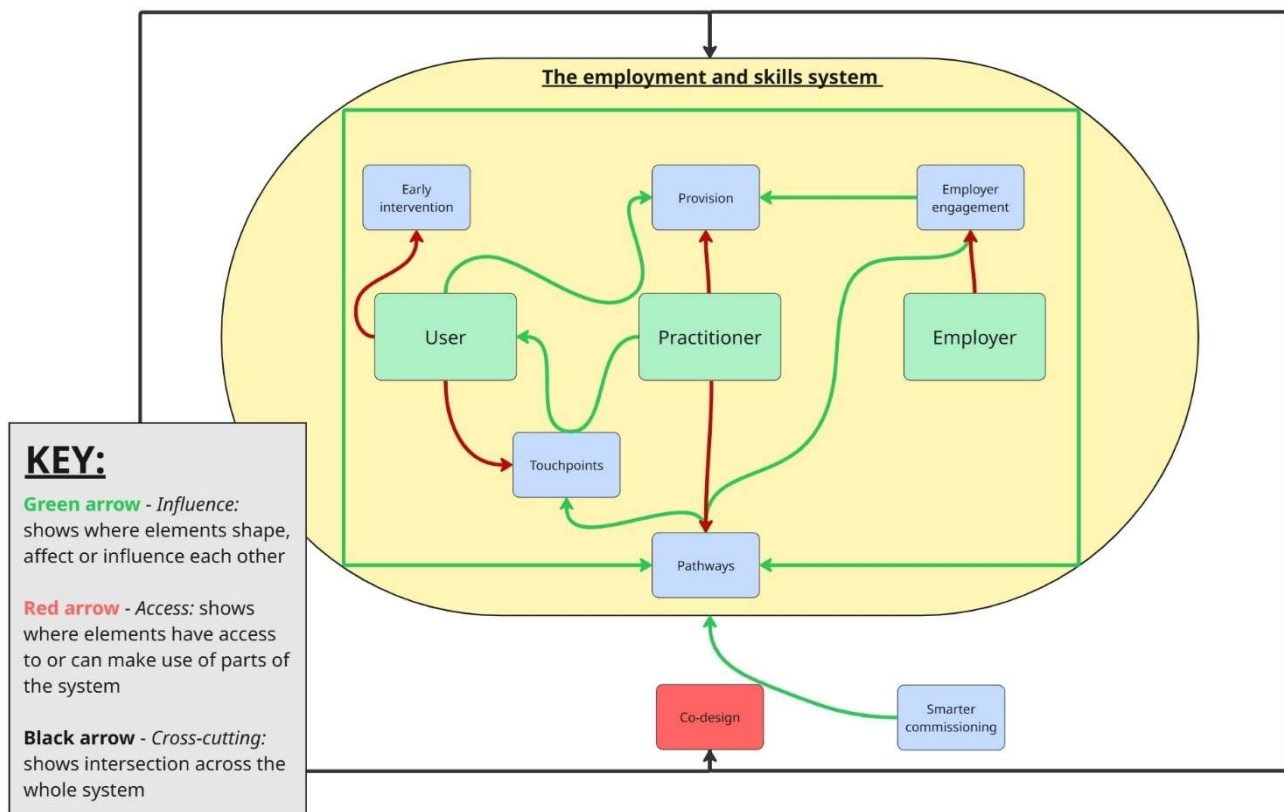


Figure 12: Diagram showing the intersectionality of the system-level changes



## System-level change (1): Pathways

As established throughout this plan, people with complex needs often face a fragmented system with limited clarity around available support, making it difficult to navigate their way into work. The ambition for this system-level change is to establish clear, comprehensive pathways that enable users to move smoothly through available services and progress into sustainable employment.

To achieve this, several key actions are required. First, clearer pathways to work must be created specifically for individuals with complex needs. The Gloucestershire Employment Alliance has begun facilitating the cross-sector conversations necessary to join up existing services and provide more coherent support. Second, employment pathways must be better linked with health services to address the interdependencies between wellbeing and work. Initiatives such as Project LEAH and Connect to Work offer levers to support these improved connections.

The infographic below illustrates the current state of pathways, the process required to enhance them, and the intended outcome of a more navigable, user-focused system that supports people with complex needs in achieving sustained employment.

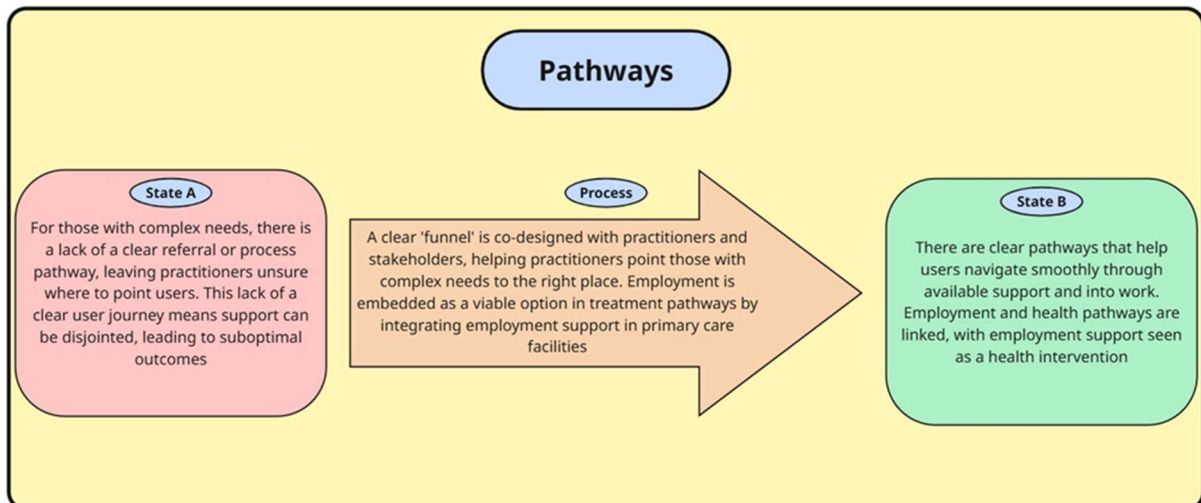


Figure 13: Pathways system-level change



## System level change (2): Provision

Throughout this plan, it has been highlighted that the current provision of skills and training opportunities, along with the support needed to access them, does not consistently align with the needs of local sectors or residents. The ambition for this system-level change is to ensure that available skills and training provision both matches local demand and is widely understood by those who need it.

Achieving this requires several key actions. First, demand must be better understood to inform the development of targeted provision. Levers to support this include the next iterations of the LSIP and engagement with Skills England. Second, provision must be both suitable and accessible to meet local needs. Initiatives such as the Gloucestershire Employment Alliance and Heart of the Hub offer levers to help achieve this. Finally, clarity around what provision is available and how to access it is essential. Tools such as the Gloucestershire Careers and Skills Portal, Beebot AI,<sup>35</sup> family hubs and mapping undertaken by the Gloucestershire Employment Alliance will help to improve transparency and navigability.

The infographic below illustrates the current situation, the process required to enhance provision, and the intended outcome of a more responsive, accessible, and clearly communicated system of skills and training opportunities

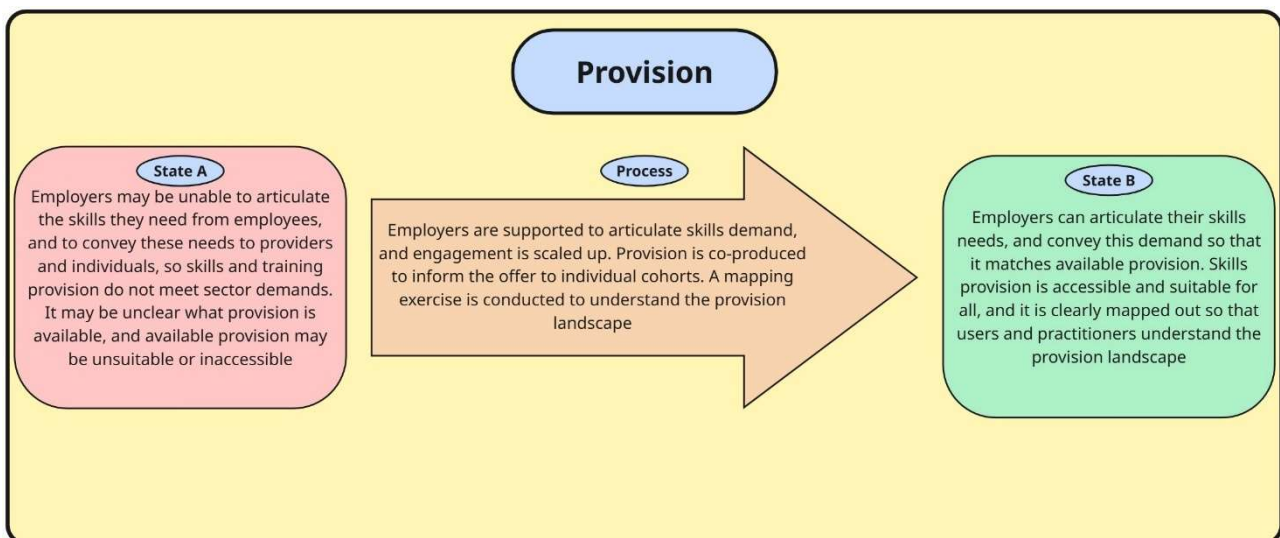


Figure 14: Provision system-level change

<sup>35</sup> Beebot AI is an AI-driven platform designed for local councils and public sector organisations to streamline service delivery, enhance citizen engagement and improve operational efficiency.



### System-level change (3): One-to-one support and touchpoints with other frontline services

As highlighted throughout this plan, current employment support is not consistently reaching the groups who need it most. The ambition for this system-level change is to extend support to a larger cohort of economically inactive individuals who are less likely to present themselves to employment services. To achieve this, several actions are required. First, the system must better engage individuals who are persistently disengaged, such as single parents, homeless individuals and young people. Levers to support this include making use of other frontline services, such as family hubs, housing associations and health settings, to introduce employment-related conversations, and building on initiatives like Project LEAH. Second, greater outreach is needed to bring personalised employment support directly into local communities. For example, JCP Work Coaches could spend time in other public service frontline locations or run sessions in community venues to provide more accessible, tailored support. enhance one-to-one support and frontline touchpoints, and the intended outcome of a system that effectively reaches and supports those who are currently more difficult to engage.

The infographic below illustrates the current situation, the process required to

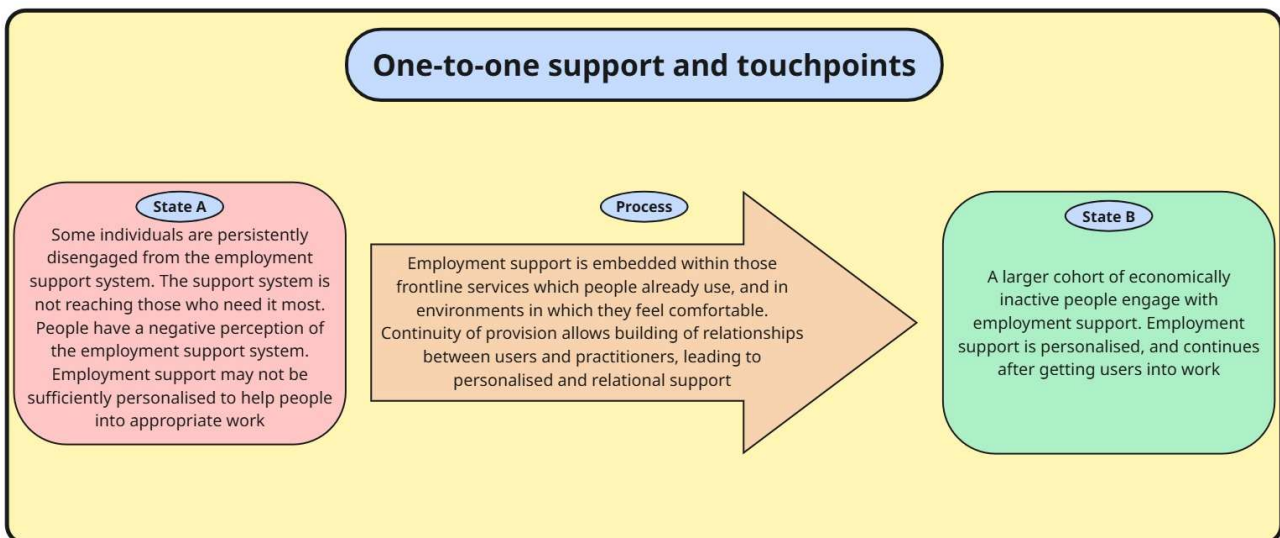


Figure 15: One-to-one support and touchpoints system-level change





## System-level change (4): Earlier intervention with young people

A persistent theme throughout this plan is the need to engage young people earlier in their education and career journeys. Currently, an increasing number of young people are leaving education unmotivated or unaware of the opportunities available to them, limiting their ability to embark on meaningful career pathways. Therefore, support should be embedded not only within the education system but also through other touchpoints such as sport, leisure, and community activities. The ambition for this system-level change is to ensure that young people are both inspired by, and have access to, a broad range of career pathways. To achieve this, several key actions are required. First, young people need to be made aware of the wide variety of sectors and roles open to them. Levers to support this include learning from initiatives such as the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Youth Guarantee Trailblazer and promoting emerging local sectors, including green and cyber industries, which may appeal to young people. Second, young people need the motivation, confidence and resilience to pursue these pathways. Existing initiatives such as GRCC A Hundred Futures, Digital Volunteering, and GCC's Refresh Fair offer approaches to building these personal skills. Finally, provision must meet the diverse needs of young people, ensuring accessible and relevant opportunities. Levers to support this include Heart of the Hub and lessons learned from the Kickstart programme. The infographic below illustrates the current situation, the process required to improve engagement with young people, and the intended outcome of earlier, more effective support that enables young people to explore and pursue meaningful career pathways

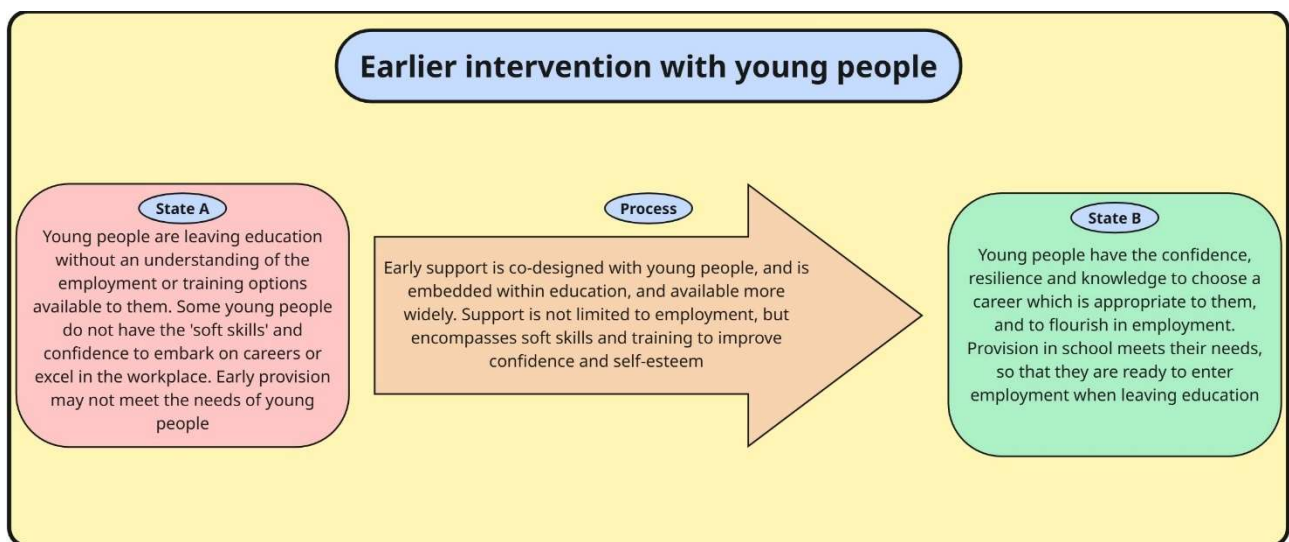


Figure 16: Earlier intervention with young people system-level change



## System-level change (5): Systematic employer engagement

Employer input is vital to the design and delivery of an effective employment and skills system. In Gloucestershire, however, this input is not consistently coordinated, which limits the impact of training and employment initiatives. The ambition for this system-level change is to streamline employer engagement, ensuring that local businesses actively contribute to both into-work and in-work support, and that training pathways align with genuine employment opportunities. To achieve this, a more streamlined and coordinated approach to engaging employers is needed, enabling them to play a central role in delivering the ambitions of the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan. Employer involvement is critical to ensure that skills development and training translate into tangible job opportunities at the end of a pathway. Levers to support this include the LSIP process, which has already begun opening dialogue with employers and involving employer boards. They also include building on the experience of former GFirst LEP business groups and local examples of successful employer engagement that have led to things such as more inclusive workplace practices.

The infographic below illustrates the current situation, the steps required to improve employer engagement, and the intended outcome of a more coordinated, responsive system that actively involves employers in shaping training and employment pathways

The infographic below illustrates the current situation, the steps required to improve .

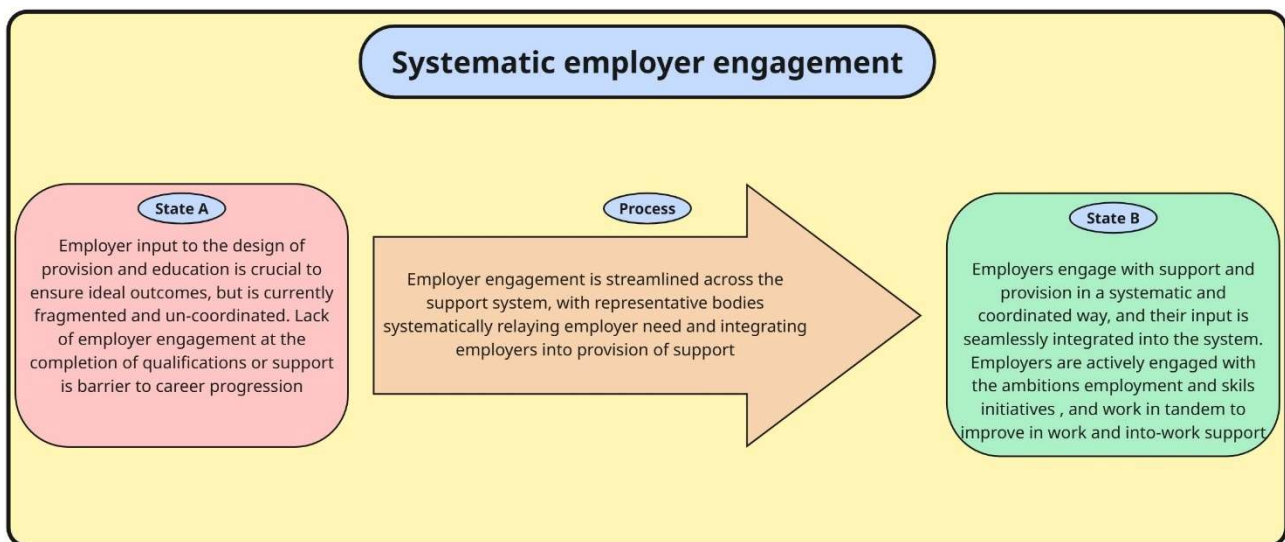


Figure 17: Systematic employer engagement system-level change



## System-level change (6): Smarter commissioning

The commissioning of employment-related services in Gloucestershire often results in parallel rather than fully connected provision. The ambition for this system-level change is to ensure that commissioning reflects the broader vision for a coordinated and cohesive employment and skills system.

Achieving this requires embedding employment support needs into commissioning decisions, so that services are joined up and aligned with local priorities. The long-standing ambition of the Gloucestershire Employment Alliance to influence commissioning is central to this approach. Levers to support smarter commissioning include leveraging existing contracts, such as those for youth support, which engage cohorts in need of employment assistance, and making use of the Social Value initiative within the county council – though further work is needed to better integrate its various strands.

The infographic below illustrates the current commissioning landscape, the process required to improve coordination and the intended outcome of a system in which employment-related support is strategically commissioned to work together seamlessly and effectively.

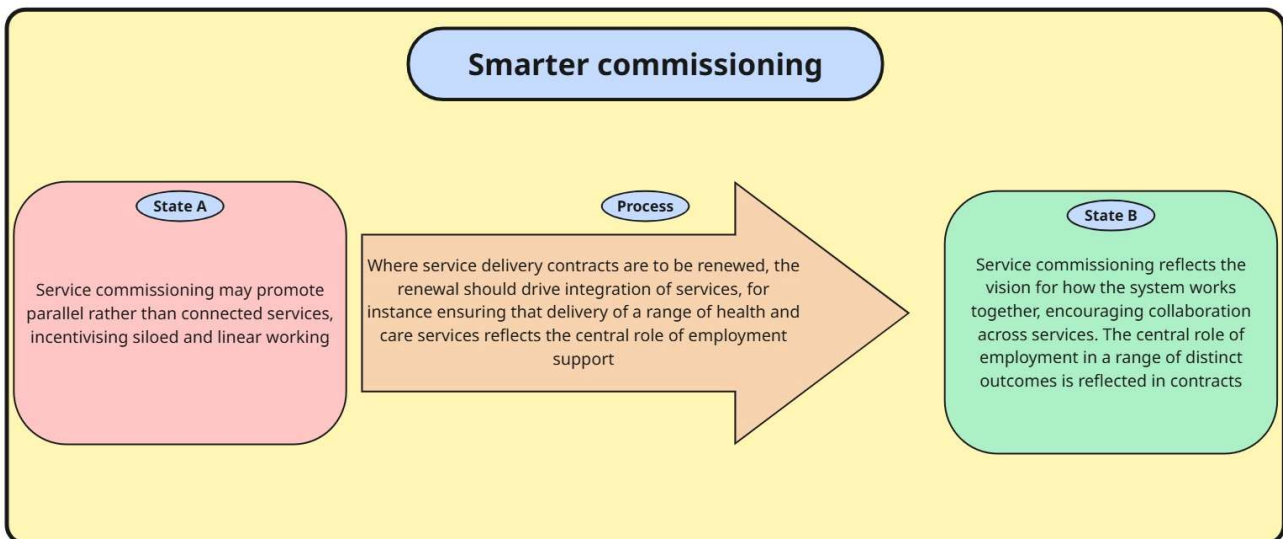


Figure 18 Smarter commissioning system-level change



## Cross cutting system-level change: Co-design

Across all six system-level changes, a clear theme emerges: co-design is crucial to the success of this plan. For pathways, partners must collaborate to create a coherent funnel that allows individuals to navigate seamlessly through available support into sustainable employment whilst working within the provision and support landscape. For provision, co-design ensures that skills and training opportunities reflect local sector demand, are accessible to residents, and are clearly communicated. By involving partners in shaping provision, the system can better match training to employment opportunities and increase uptake among those who need it most.

One-to-one support and touchpoints also rely on co-design to reach groups who are currently disengaged, such as young people, single parents or individuals experiencing homelessness. Coordinating with family hubs, health settings, housing associations and other frontline services ensures personalised support is delivered in locations where it is most accessible.

Earlier engagement with young people benefits from co-design. Involving schools, youth organisations and local initiatives in the design of career pathways ensures that young people are aware of opportunities and are motivated to pursue them because they fit with their interests.

For employer engagement, co-design provides a systematic way to involve businesses in shaping the skills and training system. Employers can help ensure that training pathways lead to real employment opportunities and that local provision aligns with labour market needs. Initiatives such as the LSIP process and local employer boards demonstrate how structured employer input can inform system design.

Finally, smarter commissioning benefits from a co-designed approach by ensuring services work together rather than in parallel. Embedding co-design into commissioning allows stakeholders to align contracts, integrate social value objectives and coordinate service delivery to create a connected, coherent system. By embedding co-design across all six system-level changes, Gloucestershire can build a more joined-up, responsive and user-focused employment and skills system that effectively meets the needs of residents and local employers.

## 5. Priority actions and longer-term goals

System change (1-6)	What is the action?	What driver does it address? What will the outcome be?	Who is responsible for the action?	Additional partners contributing or leading aspects of the action delivery (internal and external)	Funding/ resources (currently available, funding required, etc)	Year 0-10	Ask of government
<b>1. Pathways</b>	Develop and implement clear, coherent pathways that enable users to navigate available support effectively and progress into sustainable employment.		GCC, DWP and ICB.	JCP. VCSE sector. Anchor Network. Local employers. Training and skills providers. Employers Representative Organisations.			
1.1 Create clearer pathways to work for people with complex needs.	JCP and the Employment and Skills Hub to jointly design and implement a coordinated “one stream” approach to deliver seamless employment and skills support.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> One-size-fits all employment schemes Poor health and disability Welfare support issues  <b>The outcome:</b> People with complex needs experience a more streamlined and coordinated employment and skills support system, reducing barriers and making it easier for them to access appropriate pathways into work.	GCC.	Gloucestershire Employment Alliance.	No dedicated funding allocation; will be delivered through existing resources and coordination of current services.	Year 1	Signposting to pathways work that has been completed elsewhere and which could be adopted/adapted for use in Gloucestershire . Combining areas working on similar outcomes to enable economies of scale.
1.2 Better linkage of employment and health pathways.	Establish a joint GCC–ICB–JCP task group to identify and implement ways to sustain and build on the achievements of projects, for	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Welfare support issues Poor health and disability  <b>The outcome:</b> Employment and health	GCC, DWP and ICB.	GCC, DWP and ICB.	No dedicated funding allocation; will be delivered through existing resources and coordination of current services and	Year 1-2	

	example, Project LEAH.	pathways are more closely connected, ensuring that individuals receive coordinated support that addresses both health and work needs.			through the identification of funding opportunities, for example, ICB cluster resources, the successor to UKSPF.		
<b>2. Provision</b>	Ensure that skills training provision aligns with local demand and that information about available training is actively communicated to all relevant stakeholders.		GCC, DWP and ICB.	VCSE sector. Training and skills providers. Employers Representative Organisations.			
2.1 Demand needs to be understood better.	Work with employers to identify effective routes for outreach and expand both the scale and impact of engagement activities.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Competition Skills mismatch  <b>The outcome:</b> The needs and demand of target groups are better understood, enabling more effective outreach and wider engagement with employment and skills support.	Business West LSIP team.	GCC business-facing teams. Gloucestershire Employment and Skills Hub. DWP. Training providers and Further Education that have employer engagement teams.	LSIP 2026-27 funding (secured). Gloucestershire Careers and Skills Portal (already available and will need updating by providers as new provision is developed).	Year 1-2	Identification and signposting to good practice elsewhere for adoption/adaptation in Gloucestershire.
2.2 Suitable and available provision.	Pilot a co-production approach with target cohorts to shape and refine the support offer based	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> One-size-fits-all employment schemes Welfare support issues  <b>The outcome:</b>	Business West LSIP team.	GCC business-facing teams. Gloucestershire Employment and Skills Hub. DWP.	Bid to DfE and DWP for Skills Bootcamp funding submitted Summer 2025. Awaiting decision to enable	0-6 months	

	on their needs and insights.	Employment and skills provision is better tailored to the needs of target cohorts, ensuring that support is relevant, accessible, and effective.		Training providers and Further Education that have employer engagement teams.	commissioning to be resourced and launched by GCC in 2026-27.		
2.3 Clarity around available provision and how to access it.	Continue to build upon and integrate the employment and skills system diagram with the mapping conducted by the Gloucestershire Employment Alliance to inform planning and priorities for future summits. Pilot a central portal where new provision is flagged.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Welfare support issues Transport and rurality  <b>The outcome:</b> Stakeholders and residents have a clear understanding of available employment and skills provision and how to access it, supporting more informed planning and decision-making.	GCC Task Group.	GEA. Employment, training and support providers.	DWP funding to develop business case for a central portal for new provision to be flagged.	0-6 months	
<b>3. One-to-one support and touchpoints</b>	<b>Develop and deliver targeted outreach initiatives to engage economically inactive individuals who are less likely to access traditional employment support.</b>		<b>GCC, DWP and ICB.</b>	<b>JCP. VCSE sector. Training and skills providers. Employers Representative Organisations.</b>			
3.1 Address issue of	Work with the VCS and other public	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Welfare support issues	GCC, DWP and ICB	Other GCC teams, including the Financial	No dedicated funding allocation;	Year 1-2	

individuals who are persistently disengaged.	services to identify routes to engagement, touchpoints and scale up offer and engagement.	Poor health and disability  <b>The outcome:</b> Individuals who are persistently disengaged are more effectively reached and supported, increasing their participation in employment and skills opportunities.		Assessment and Benefits team, the Holiday Activities and Food Programme team, the Education team and Early Help. VCSE sector.	will be delivered through existing resources and coordination of current services.		
3.2 Greater outreach to find ways to bring personalised employment support to local areas.	Gloucestershire County Council, JCP and the Integrated Care Board to explore and agree options for establishing a dedicated budget to fund outreach activities.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Inflexibility of employment Transport and rurality  <b>The outcome:</b> Targeted outreach is expanded, enabling personalised employment support to reach local communities more effectively.			Widening Access Demonstrator List of suitable venues under development to maximise use of premises owned/operated by GCC, DWP, VCSE organisations.	0-6 months	
<b>4. Earlier intervention with young people</b>	Provide accessible career pathways and initiatives that actively inspire and		GCC, DWP and ICB.	VCSE sector. Local employers. Training and skills providers.			

	engage young people in exploring future career opportunities.			Employers Representative Organisations.			
4.1 Young people are aware of the wealth of sectors and roles they could work in.	Collaborate with existing careers events in the county to enhance outreach and ensure young people, schools, and colleges are effectively signposted to available opportunities and resources.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Competition for roles Skills mismatch  <b>The outcome:</b> Young people gain greater awareness of diverse sectors and career opportunities, supported by coordinated engagement and collaboration between key partners.	GCC.	GCC teams working with young people. Young Gloucestershire Gloucestershire Youth Support Team. DWP.	Application to City Region Board for funding for green skills pathway – decision in November 2025.  Widening Access Demonstrator.	Year 1-2	Increase investment in early intervention for young people, with a strong national drive to improve access to high-quality careers advice and guidance from an earlier age.
4.2 Young people have the motivation, confidence and resilience to embark on career pathways.	Identify examples of good practice, both within and outside the county, in approaches to non-employment-related engagement that foster skills and resilience, with the aim of reaching the broadest possible audience.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Welfare support issues  <b>The outcome:</b> Young people are better informed about career opportunities, increasing their motivation, confidence, and resilience to pursue career pathways.			Widening Access Demonstrator.	0-6 months	
4.3 Provision meets the needs of young people.	Design and implement a pilot programme that adapts lessons from Kickstart to create a locally tailored employment model.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Low quality, poorly paid work One-size-fits-all employment schemes  <b>The outcome:</b>	Schools, Further Education and alternative provision schools.		Ensure that it leverages social value that is pointed towards those most in need.	1-3 years	

		Employment provision is better aligned with the needs of young people, offering a locally tailored model that effectively supports their entry into work.					
5. Systematic employer engagement	Simplify and coordinate employer engagement across the employment and skills system to strengthen both recruitment pathways and in-work support.		GCC, DWP and ICB.	JCP. VCSE sector. Anchor Network. Local employers. Training and skills providers. Employers Representative Organisations.			
5.1 Develop a more co-ordinated approach to engagement of employers so that they actively contribute to the ambitions of the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan.	Evaluate the feasibility of Business West acting as the LSIP employer representative to coordinate employer engagement, serving as a “broker” that aligns support with employer needs.	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Inflexibility of employment Low quality, poorly paid work Skills mismatch <b>The outcome:</b> Employer engagement is more coordinated and effective, with businesses actively contributing to the goals of the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan.	GCC.	GCC business facing teams. Training providers.		Year 1-2	
5.2 Build on the co-design that has commenced through this plan.	Embed co-design as a core principle across all six system-level changes, ensuring stakeholders,	<b>Driver it addresses:</b> Competition for roles Inflexibility of employment Low-quality, poorly paid work	GCC, DWP and ICB.	System-wide.		Year 1-2	

	including employers, providers, and service users, are actively involved in shaping and implementing each change.	One-size-fits-all employment schemes Welfare support issues Poor health and disability Skills mismatch Transport and rurality					
<b>6. Smarter commissioning</b>	Align the commissioning of employment-related support with the shared vision for an integrated and collaborative employment and skills system.		GCC, DWP and ICB.	GCC, DWP and ICB.			
6.1 Long-standing ambition of Gloucestershire Employment Alliance to influence commissioning to reflect employment support needs.	Work to influence the delivery of the youth support contract by advocating for the reallocation of funding to better support employment outcomes. Train frontline staff, such as family hub workers, to provide employment-related signposting. Build the capacity of the Employment and Skills Hub to share expertise and best practice across the wider system.	Driver it addresses: One-size-fits-all employment schemes Skills shortage Welfare support issues  The outcome: Commissioned youth support and frontline services are better aligned with local employment needs, improving access to employment support and ensuring expertise is effectively shared across the system.	System-wide commitment.	System-wide.	Implement a place-based social value framework to enhance outcomes and ensure that investment in the employment and skills system delivers wider community benefits.	Year 1-3	

## 6. Governance, local engagement and future iterations

This section outlines how the plan will be governed, monitored, and periodically updated. It describes how partners will be involved in implementing and refining the plan, and how future iterations will respond to changes in national policy, funding, and local priorities.

### Governance

The Get Gloucestershire Working Plan implementation will be co-ordinated, driven and monitored by a steering group consisting of representatives from Gloucestershire County Council, DWP and the Integrated Care Board, together with additional representatives co-opted on to this group to bring appropriate insight and expertise. Examples of suitable organisations are those that were represented in the working group that developed the plan (education and skills providers, employer and business representative groups and VCSE organisations). The steering group will receive reports from and have some representatives who serve on the Gloucestershire Connect to Work programme governance group. This is to ensure that the DWP-funded Connect to Work programme is fully connected with and a key aspect of the Get Gloucestershire Working Plan.

At the time of writing the plan, changes to Gloucestershire local government structures and the Integrated Care Board cluster are underway. Therefore, it is not possible to be definitive about the overall governance of the implementation of the plan. It is envisaged that the Get Gloucestershire Working Steering Group will report into the Gloucestershire City Region Board/successor body, which contains all seven local authorities, and annually report into Leadership Gloucestershire/successor body, which includes the ICB/health representation as well as the police and all seven local authorities.

This approach has been taken to ensure:

Buy-in and ownership from the key public sector bodies involved in the scope of the work of the Plan.

Governance arrangements are 'future-proofed' at a time of significant change with both local government and the Integrated Care Board in the County.

The Plan's implementation can be driven, monitored and reported on by key stakeholders whilst structural changes are taking place.

## Local engagement

Engagement involved all six district and borough councils and various local partners. Partners, including education providers, public sector bodies, community groups, employers and their representatives, were consulted via surveys, workshops and interviews.

Some organisations unable to engage directly contributed by providing literature, data and information, strengthening the plan.

Direct engagement with those with lived experience of local employment, health and skills systems was equally vital. This was enabled by the support of Young Gloucestershire, GARAS and Jobcentre Plus.

Their collaboration was crucial in reaching individuals whose experiences provide unique insights into the system. These engagements improved understanding of the customer journey, highlighting successes, barriers and support gaps. These voices ensured the plan reflects the real experiences and needs of its target audience.

## Future iterations

The Get Gloucestershire Working Plan will be treated as a live document, reviewed and updated every six months to ensure it remains responsive to emerging needs, policy developments and local priorities. These biannual reviews will be led by the Steering Group, drawing on insights from delivery partners, lived experience feedback and data from the Gloucestershire Connect to Work programme. This approach ensures the plan remains dynamic, evidence-informed and aligned with the evolving governance landscape and strategic ambitions of the county.

# Appendix I

## Get Britain Working outcome metrics<sup>36</sup>

### Key outcome metrics

Employment rate – the number of people aged 18 to 66 in employment divided by the population aged 18 to 66.

Real earnings amongst non-retired households (all ages) – a component of real household disposable income (RHDI). We look at wages and salaries, imputed income from benefits-in-kind and self-employment income in households of non-retired individuals. Additional focus will be on households in the bottom half/lower 50% of the income distribution.

### Intermediate outcome metrics

Local variation in employment rates – employment rates (i.e. the number of people aged 18 to 66 in local authorities, defined as unitary local authorities/local authorities counties in the UK, their distribution and gap between the bottom 10% and median.

Health related economic inactivity rate – number of people aged 18 to 66 who are economically inactive due to being long-term sick divided by the 18 to 66 population.

Disability employment rate gap – the difference in the employment rate of people, aged 18 to 66, who report they are disabled as defined by the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonised Standard and those who do not.

Proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds not in education, employment or training, supported by an increase in the proportion of 16 to 21 year olds in education or a job with training.

The employment rate gap between lone parents and parents in a couple - the difference in the employment rate of lone parents and parents in a couple. The employment rate of lone parents is calculated as the number of lone parents in employment divided by the number of all lone parents. The employment rate for parents in a couple is calculated as the sum of fathers employed in couple and mothers employed in a couple divided by all parents in a couple. Both are relevant for families with people aged 18 to 66.

The percentage of coupled families where at least one parent is out of work – the number of families with parents in a couple, where one or more of the parents are out of work divided by the number of families with coupled parents. Relevant for people aged 18 to 66.

Increase female employment rate – the number of women aged 18-66 in employment divided by the number of women in the population, aged 18-66.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-outcomes/get-britain-working-outcomes>

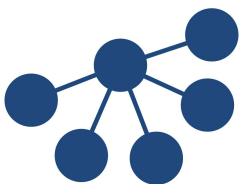
## Appendix II

### Economic evidence base

The evidence underpinning this plan is drawn from a substantial body of research. The key chapters of the Economic Evidence Base are listed below:

[Get Gloucestershire Working Evidence Base](#)

- Section 1: Economic activity (Page 24)
- Section 2: Employment (Page 29)
- Section 3: Unemployment (Page 35)
- Section 4: Economic inactivity (Page 44)
- Section 5: Not in employment (Page 60)
- Section 6: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (Page 70)
- Section 7: Inequalities (Page 76)
- Section 8: Broader context (Page 192)



Shared Intelligence



**Gloucestershire**  
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