

Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan

AUTUMN 2025

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FOREWORD

**COUNCILLOR MILLIE EARL,
LEADER OF BCP COUNCIL**



**COUNCILLOR NICK IRELAND,
LEADER OF DORSET COUNCIL**



“We are delighted to lead this work together. We invite our communities, businesses, stakeholders, and partners to join us.

Together, we will turn aspiration into action—so that every person who wants to work in Dorset or BCP can find their path to employment and fulfilment.”

We are proud to introduce the first joint Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan, a collaborative employment, health, and skills strategy. Created in partnership between Dorset Council, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board, Dorset Chamber, and our many partners, this plan reflects our combined resolve to connect more local people to meaningful work.

Our county faces a multifaceted challenge—an ageing population, fewer young residents, and an evolving labour market. At the same time, job vacancies outpace supply, and nearly 30,000 local residents want to work but do not currently have the opportunity. We recognise that work is more than just income - it is a source of purpose, confidence, and belonging. Importantly, we know that supporting and inspiring young people into the workforce is vital - not only for individual fulfilment, but for the economic and social resilience of our entire region.

Our councils share a vision: to ensure that every working-age resident can access the right support to begin, sustain, or return to fulfilling employment. By working in partnership, we believe we can tackle economic inactivity, address health-related barriers, elevate job quality, and foster inclusive growth across our region.

This plan aligns directly with our respective council strategies and priorities. Our councils recognise that responding effectively to regional economic inequality demands strategic partnership and shared resources.

Dorset Council's 2024–29 Council Plan champions ambition, economic growth, and shared prosperity across the county. Additionally, Dorset Council's Economic Growth Strategy, launched in May 2025, underscores the importance of collaboration to drive employment, investment, and innovation across Dorset.

Within BCP, the recently created Business Growth Board will help to drive forward the areas local economic priorities and growth agenda. Development of BCP Council's Local Growth Plan, due April 2026, will focus on local challenges like skills gaps, affordable housing shortage, and persistent inequality and seek to address through coordinated action. We also face resourcing and fiscal challenges. In Dorset Council, we are advancing bold ambitions—for example, accelerating our net zero target and affirming long term transformation investments. In BCP Council, we are carefully balancing the need to support vulnerable groups and

services—including SEND provision—amidst national funding constraints, while also investing in our future through innovation and transformation.

Despite these pressures, our councils remain resolute: realising the ambitions of the Get Dorset & BCP Working Plan will strengthen families, support employers, and build resilient communities. This plan is not just a strategy—it is a call to action. It envisions a future where:

- Every resident of working age has access to tailored employment support.
- Services across health, skills, and employment are aligned and responsive.
- Employers can tap into a motivated workforce.
- Communities flourish with renewed confidence, purpose, and economic opportunity.

We are delighted to lead this work together. We invite our communities, businesses, stakeholders, and partners to join us. Together, we will turn aspiration into action—so that every person who wants to work in our county can find their path to employment and fulfilment.



“

"Our councils share a vision: to ensure that every working-age resident can access the right support to begin, sustain, or return to fulfilling employment."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all our partners across Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole who helped shape the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan.

Your collaboration, insight and commitment have been essential in creating a shared plan that supports local people, businesses and communities to thrive.

Together, we're building a stronger, more inclusive future for everyone who lives and works here.



Active Dorset
Arts University Bournemouth
Bournemouth and Poole College
Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council
Bournemouth University
Business Growth Dorset
Citizens Advice
Coastland College
Community Action Network
Department for Work and Pensions
Digital Skills Partnership
Dorset Armed Forces Community Business Support Network Group
Dorset & Somerset Training Provider Network
Dorset Careers Hub
Dorset Council

Dorset Chamber
Dorset Skills and Workforce Board
Hampshire County Council
Health Innovation Wessex
Health Sciences University
Local Skills Improvement Team
National Careers Service
NHS ICB
Royal Foundation Homewards BCP
Skills and Learning Adult Community Education
Somerset Council
Wiltshire County Council
Yeovil College

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are pleased to present the first joint Get Dorset Working Plan. This plan brings together Dorset and BCP Councils, the Department for Work and Pensions, the NHS, Dorset Chamber and many other partners, united in a shared commitment to help more people move into work. We know that too many people who want to work feel unable to do so for a range of reasons. There is no single solution, but proven approaches are available, and by working together we can make a difference.

Dorset county faces a unique challenge: an ageing population alongside a decline in younger residents, which means our workforce is shrinking at a time when we need it to grow. While there are more vacancies than people to fill them, around 30,000 people locally want to work but are not currently in employment. We also recognise that work offers more than financial security – it provides purpose, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

This plan sets out our joint commitment to ensuring every resident of working age has access to the right support to begin, sustain, or return to a fulfilling career. By enabling more people across the county to thrive in work, we can strengthen families, communities, and the local economy.

GET DORSET AND BCP WORKING PLAN

The Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan is a joint regional employment, health, and skills strategy, developed in response to the UK Government's Get Britain Working White Paper. The plan sets out how partners will work together to increase employment, reduce economic inactivity, address health-related barriers to work, and improve the quality of jobs across Dorset and the BCP area.

Developed collaboratively with Dorset Council, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Dorset Skills and Workforce Board the plan covers both Dorset Council and BCP Council areas. It provides an overview of current employment support activity, alongside an analysis of the local labour market, and highlights where new approaches are needed to respond to emerging challenges.

The plan also explains how local partners will align with and contribute to national, regional, and local priorities for inclusive growth, resilience, and prosperity. It supports the Government's ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate while ensuring that local residents and employers benefit from healthier, more sustainable, and more prosperous communities.

LOCAL LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT

The Dorset and BCP labour market reflects both opportunities and challenges. The economically active population (aged 16+) has steadily increased since 2004, reaching 383,900. This is driven by population growth, higher participation among older people (aged 65+), and increased participation by women. Growth has been stronger in the BCP area particularly in young people, than in the Dorset Council area.

The workforce has an older profile than the national average: 38% of the economically active population are over 50, compared with 32% nationally. This trend creates implications for replacement demand in the coming years.

Employment rates across Dorset and BCP have remained consistently above the national average. Levels of self-employment are higher than the national average, with men more likely than women to be self-employed. Similarly, part-time or zero hours working is more common than reported nationally, particularly among women.

Occupational profiles are broadly in line with national patterns, although Dorset and BCP have fewer people working in professional and associate professional roles, and more in sales, customer service, and caring, leisure, and service occupations. Within this, BCP has a higher share of people in management and professional occupations compared with the wider Dorset Council area.

Despite these strengths, pay levels for full-time workers in the pan-Dorset area remain below the national average, with the gap more pronounced in the Dorset Council area. Around 39,000 jobs locally pay below the 'Real Living Wage', disproportionately affecting part-time workers and women.

Unemployment in Dorset and BCP has historically been below the national average. However, post-pandemic trends saw unemployment rise above national levels in the BCP area. Rates have since fallen, reaching 2.8% in December 2023. Current claimant data shows higher unemployment among men, people under 40, and those in BCP.

Economic inactivity has traditionally been below the national average, but since the pandemic inactivity rates have risen more sharply. By March 2025, 94,300 people aged 16–64 (21%) were economically inactive. The reasons vary across the two areas: in Dorset Council, early retirement and ill health are key factors, while in BCP the main drivers are long-term sickness and study. Across the county, young people are noted as struggling to find employment, therefore increasing the number of economically inactive people.

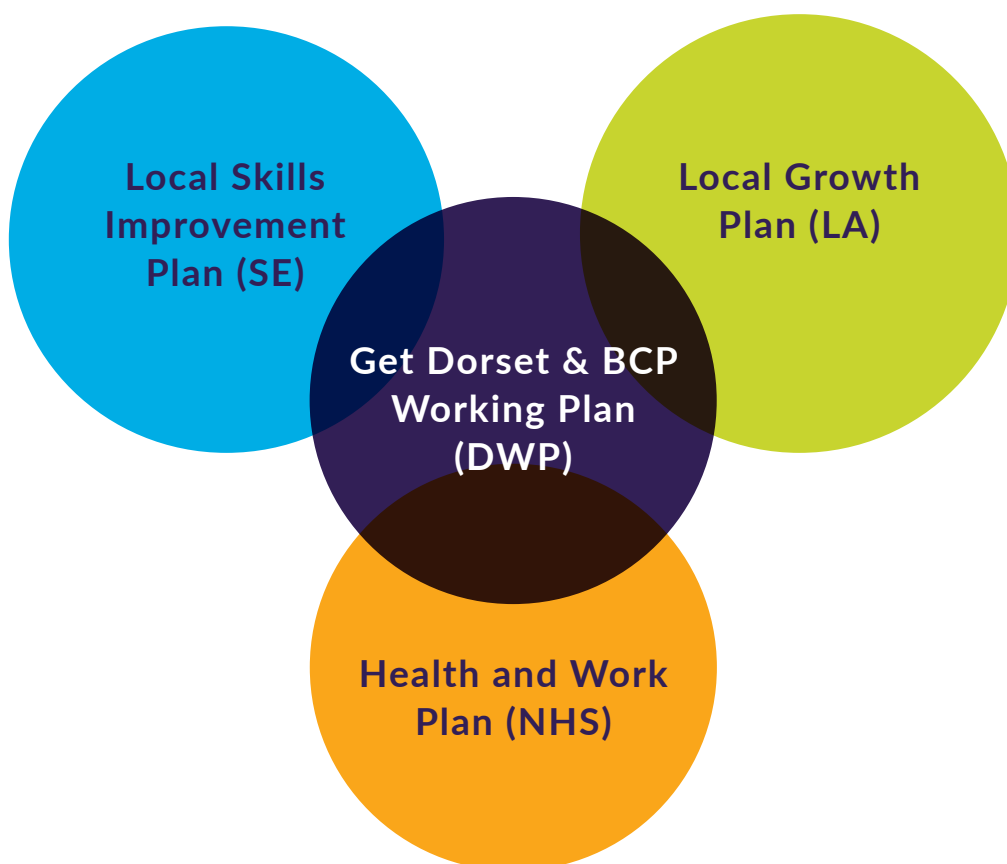
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan has been developed with funding from the Department for Work and Pensions, with Dorset Council as the accountable body. Dorset Council, BCP Council, DWP and NHS Dorset are the lead partners.

This Government initiative brings local partners together to focus on reducing economic inactivity and supporting residents into sustainable employment. The plan seeks to maximise the impact of existing resources while responding to the distinct needs of local communities and employers.

Behind the data are real people. For example, young people waiting for mental health support or lacking the qualifications to start their careers; residents in their 50s and 60s managing long-term health conditions or caring responsibilities, with valuable skills but limited opportunities; and school-leavers in need of tailored employment support.

We know that when people cannot access the support they need, it limits their life chances, constrains employers' ability to recruit, and affects the resilience of our local economy. This Plan will help address those challenges by ensuring that local services and resources are better aligned to the needs of residents and businesses.



"Our goal for our county, is for a thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity for good work and to be able to get on in work."



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) has a combined population of c.780,000, making it the third largest Get Britain Working (GBW) area in the South West, behind Devon, Torbay and Plymouth (c.1,232,660), and the West of England Combined Authority including North Somerset (c.1,188,552).

According to the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) Guidance on Developing local Get Britain Working Plans, the employment rate in Dorset and BCP between October 2023 and September 2024 was 76.6% (+/-2.4% pts), placing the area sixth out of the seven GBW areas in the South West, just below Devon, Torbay and Plymouth (76.9% (+/-2% pts)) and above Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (76.4% (+/-3.7% pts)).

Wiltshire and Swindon had the highest employment rate in the South West at that time (81.9%). For comparative purposes, the highest employment rate in England was Oxfordshire (83.9%) and the lowest was the West Midlands (69.5%).

According to the DWP's Get Britain Working Outcome Measures, the national employment rate of people aged 18 to 66 in the period October – December 2024 was 75.8%. This was 0.3%pts up on the year and 1.1%pts down on pre covid-19 pandemic.

The Government's goal, which we share for the pan Dorset area (comprising Dorset Council and BCP Council), is for a thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity for good work and to be able to get on in work, and where the ambition of an 80% employment rate is achieved.

For Dorset and BCP this would involve having an additional c.18,540 people in work. This would make a total of 360,240 economically active people across the area (using 2024-25 numbers – see below) and reduce the number of economically inactive people across the area by 20% (from 94,300). According to the Dorset Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), 26.4% (c. 24,890) of those who are economically inactive want to work (compared with 18% nationally), which indicates that from a resident perspective, there is motivation to achieve an 80% employment rate across the area.

In addition, there are 39,000 people in the area earning less than the Living Wage (c. 11% of the economically active population). Securing better quality work and higher rates of pay for this group is equally important for the wellbeing and prosperity of the area.

Dorset's population is ageing, with significant social and economic implications for the area. In 2024-25, there were 341,700 economically active people in Dorset, out of a working age population of 450,300. Just 59% of the population in Dorset is currently of working age, compared with 63% for England, and by 2043, only 53% of people in the pan-Dorset area will be aged 16-64, compared with 59% for England. Meanwhile 25% are 65+ compared with 18% for England, largely due to the Dorset Council area demographic profile where already 30% of people are 65+. Dorset Council has the oldest age profile of all upper tier authorities in England and

With lower than average population growth expected (5.6% between 2018 and 2043 compared with 14.1% for the South West and 10.3% for England), the over 50s projected to dominate in-migration, and a higher proportion of economically active people aged over 50 (38% of all economically active people are already aged over 50 compared with 32% for the UK), there are important considerations for the labour market and the local approach to securing an 80% employment rate.

Our plan to get Dorset and BCP working therefore focuses not only the volume, but also the quality and diversity of work needed to drive prosperity, wellbeing and inclusion across the area. It raises a range of significant questions, including:

- Is filling current vacancies sufficient or do we need to generate more jobs as well?
- Do we have enough working age people with capability for work to undertake current and future jobs?
- What do we need to do to support those with capability for work into jobs?
- How do we increase employers who are Disability Confident and offer flexible and inclusive recruitment practices?
- What are the implications of our ageing population for the volume, quality and nature of future work?
- What balance might we aim for between more, better and different, jobs? How might this help to address Dorset and BCP's productivity challenge?
- How do we articulate the relationship between growth and foundational economic sectors to make visible the need, and value opportunities, for skills and work at different levels in the pan Dorset labour market?
- How do we scale the role modelling of inclusive employment opportunities within the foundational economy including health?
- How will significant changes in digital and AI change the shape of the future work force and what we do?
- What systemic priorities do we need to address for the long-term effective functioning of the pan Dorset economy and labour market?
- How does this help us understand the respective and collective roles of the Dorset & BCP Councils and NHS Dorset, key partners (ICB, JCP, DS&WFB, and LSIP) and stakeholders (including Skills and Learning ACE, FE colleges and providers, HEIs, employers, the Chamber, council services, voluntary and community sector bodies and organisations)

Dorset and BCP are ahead of the national curve in terms of the economic activity of the 50+ workforce. There is scope for the area to become a testbed for exploring new approaches to securing work-life balance, flexible recruitment and employment practices, and intergenerational co-operation. This should include how to maximise the value of project and fractional work, and how to harness the disruptive power of AI to become a force for good in promoting human and machine learning between younger and older working generations as part of newly imagined approaches to improving productivity and growth.



DORSET AND BCP COUNCIL LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS

DORSET AND BCP COUNCIL LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS

The demographic, geographical and economic complexity of Dorset and BCP presents challenges to growth. Addressing these challenges requires a shared focus on high-value employment, skills and innovation, good health outcomes and place-based regeneration – ensuring that Dorset’s unique assets deliver long-term, inclusive prosperity.

ECONOMIC PRIORITIES FOR DORSET AND BCP

The Dorset and BCP area benefits from a unique blend of urban, coastal and rural opportunities. BCP is the largest conurbation on the South Coast, the second largest urban area in the South West and the 10th largest local authority in England. With three universities a premier league football club, an international renowned orchestra, and the home of the RNLI, it offers a vibrant urban and coastal way of life and potential springboard for growth.

This is complemented by a wide range of opportunities in the Dorset Council area. The outstanding natural environment across the pan Dorset area provides the foundation for the whole economy and offers exciting potential for nationally significant low carbon energy projects in the Weymouth/Portland area, paving the way for clean growth.

The area also occupies a prime location for growth at the crossroads wider economic partnership areas such as the ‘Great South West’, ‘Western Gateway’ and ‘Central South’ regions. With plans to develop hydrogen storage capability and wind infrastructure in South Dorset, together with the development of new nuclear energy capability at Hinkley Point, Somerset and Dorset offer the potential to power green energy production for the south of England, including London. Furthermore, the growing ports and airport provide important passenger and freight services to the continent and beyond.

There is clear evidence of economic momentum across the area. In the year to Dec 2024, more than 8,565 new businesses were established in Dorset, while over £30 million has already been invested in growth-enabling projects.

At the same time, the challenge remains clear: local productivity is around 13% below the UK average, workplace pay is approximately 90% of national levels, and the workforce continues to age.

The Productivity Institute has identified that both the BCP and Dorset Council areas, along with Somerset, fall into the ‘falling behind’ group with lower-than-average productivity and lower than average growth in productivity compared with the South West and England as a whole.

Poor infrastructure and transport links restrict opportunities to capitalise on spillover effects from the West of England Combined Authority, and the absence of a strategic authority for the area

is limiting strategic oversight on major issues such as net zero plans (eg Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure), sharing skills and capacity to reduce barriers to affordable housing, and the adoption of new technologies.

Sectors for clean, secure, creative and healthy growth

Pan-Dorset holds a strong comparative advantage in globally competitive, high-growth sectors that also create better-paid opportunities for local residents. Key strengths align to sectors highlighted in The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025 enabling the area to deliver government priorities, including advanced engineering and manufacturing – particularly in marine, maritime, and aerospace, defence, and clean energy industries that build on Dorset's natural assets. Financial services, including fintech, are also significant contributors. In addition, Dorset's fast-growing digital and creative industries benefit from strong cultural heritage, smart technology investment, and university-led research, positioning them as a major growth opportunity.

The area is equally well placed to lead in health innovation. Dorset's integrated care system, world-class health science facilities, and unique demographic profile provide both a platform and a testbed for solutions to the opportunities and challenges of an ageing society. Increasingly, growth is also emerging at the intersection of sectors – for example, where creative and digital industries converge with defence.

Combined quantitative and qualitative analysis suggests that the following sectors provide opportunities to create high value clusters and supply chains, which have the potential to drive inward investment and exporting, as well as supporting the application of technology across and between sectors:

- Advanced manufacturing (in particular aerospace and marine and maritime)
- Defence
- Clean energy industries
- Financial services (including Fintech)
- Digital and creative
- Health and life sciences



The area also has a greater proportion of businesses in the construction sector than the UK average, albeit a smaller proportion of business in the professional, scientific and technical activities sector. Within the area, the most significant difference between the local authority areas is the number of agricultural businesses in the Dorset Council area.

Employers continue to report skills shortages vacancies in construction and advanced engineering/manufacturing, making skills development in these areas a priority for the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Skills development to provide for the economic opportunities, the changing businesses in the area and the development of digital and AI processes, is key to ensure workforce development.

Both Dorset and BCP Councils are setting an ambitious and coordinated course for growth. Dorset Council's new Economic Growth Strategy (2025–2040) places clean energy, innovation, and the regeneration of Weymouth and Portland at its heart, building on the strengths of Dorset Innovation Park and the development of a clean-energy super-cluster, which aims to deliver 2000 new jobs.

In parallel, BCP Corporate Strategy aims to continually develop skills, enable employment for everyone providing support when and where it's needed and support communities to be inclusive, vibrant and sustainable. BCP Council's recently established Business Growth Board will support creation of a BCP Growth Plan to help and drive forward local economic priorities and the growth agenda for the area.

HEALTH AND INNOVATION

Talbot Quarter is Bournemouth's £350 million innovation district delivering a next-generation, mixed-use development. Backed by a long-term charitable landowner, Talbot Village Trust, Talbot Quarter offers a prime investment opportunity in a high-growth, high-demand location.

Anchored by world-class universities, the Talbot Quarter creates a dynamic ecosystem for digital, creative, and health-tech industries.

The Innovation Hub will deliver 35,000 sq ft of workspace for startups and SMEs, fostering collaboration between academia, business, and industry, while the Innovation Park provides 150,000 sq ft of offices, labs, and co-working spaces, designed to meet the needs of next-generation businesses with ESG, Prop Tech, and Smart City principles embedded from the outset.

The Nuffield Health Hospital & Orthopaedic Research Institute will be a 125,000 sq ft world-leading facility driving medical science innovation.

CLEAN ENERGY

A green growth revolution is underway which positions Dorset as a new UK destination for international investment in clean energy. Bringing together private sector organisations, the Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster is on a mission to unlock investment and align processes to ensure the UK Industrial Strategy can be delivered in Dorset and the English Channel.

Dorset presents multiple opportunities to advance nationally significant infrastructure projects by harnessing its unique geography and geology, whilst leveraging the exceptional deepwater at Portland Port and Weymouth for hydrogen storage. With an estimated investment level of £28 billion across all projects, this will accelerate delivery of government ambitions set out in the Industrial Strategy, including clean power by 2030 and Net Zero by 2050.

These future looking industries and environmentally sustainable new technologies are attractive to younger people, providing secure, skilled and well-paid jobs. The goal is to generate over 2000 jobs and over £500m of private sector investment in renewable energy projects by 2029.

INNOVATION

Dorset Innovation Park is an important employment site in Dorset as a high security business park and Dorset's Enterprise Zone based at Winfrith's former nuclear site. The park offers opportunity for expansion for high-tech and cyber secure businesses, creating a high-quality network of defence related businesses. With sector specialisms and secure 5G network the park is well placed to make more of our natural advantages in clean energy and defence, whilst offering high-paid, skilled work.



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"We know that when people cannot access the support they need, it limits their life chances, constrains employers' ability to recruit, and affects the resilience of our local economy."

THE FOUNDATION ECONOMY

These growth-potential sectors are underpinned by a 'foundation economy' which provides a range of local services such as health, education, leisure and public services. These sectors are essential to the effective functioning of all economies, and account for a high volume of employment. Therefore, improving productivity, opportunities and wages in these sectors is important to tackling the area's productivity challenge.

than the second largest employer, Dorset Council. By sector, health and social care has the most postings, followed by food and services and retail. The number of vacancies recorded in the pan Dorset area has increased by 114% since 2019. This increase has varied by occupational group, with the largest increase observed in medium and lower skilled jobs. This is likely a reflection of higher turnover, declining supply and possible changes in the way employers recruit for these roles in recent years.

Despite the increase in the number of advertised vacancies in medium and lower skilled occupations, the proportion of employment in each broad occupational group has changed very little between 2019 and 2023 and employment in higher skilled jobs continues to dominate, accounting for 43% of all employment.

Looking to the future, forecasts indicate that the number of jobs in the area will grow from c400,000 jobs in 2020 to 439,000 in 2035. The majority of new jobs created are expected to be in high skilled roles. However, 84% of projected employment change (204,000 jobs) will be driven by replacement demand, that is replacing workers already in the workforce who are projected to leave. The remaining 39,000 jobs are projected to be new roles associated with economic growth.

CAPACITY

A wide range of infrastructure and economic factors currently limits the growth of capacity for good work in Dorset and BCP. These include:

- Housing affordability, with both BCP and Dorset Council ranked among the least affordable areas in the South West, which makes it difficult for employers to attract and retain staff. For example, the Dorset ICB reports high house prices make it difficult to attract people to health and care jobs
- The outmigration of younger, skilled workers, is creating labour shortages in sectors such as health, construction, and hospitality.
- Transport congestion and underinvestment in infrastructure constrain connectivity.
- Both BCP and wider Dorset's small business base, though entrepreneurial, often struggles to access finance, innovation support, and export markets, leaving the local economy vulnerable to external shocks and slower to adapt to emerging industries such as the green and digital sectors.
- Nearly nine in ten Dorset businesses are micro-enterprises with fewer than ten staff. While the area has pockets of innovation—particularly in BCP—funding levels are low and the number of scale-ups is below the national median. Barriers include talent shortages, transport congestion, lack of suitable premises, and slow broadband in rural areas.
- Despite a 40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions since 2005, Dorset remains exposed to coastal flooding and climate change impacts. Environmental degradation—from biodiversity loss to declining water quality—poses further risks to long-term economic resilience.

- The ICB reports that coastal areas have fewer consultants, medical trainees and nurses compared to inland areas, despite having older populations with greater needs

CAPABILITY

In terms of skills supply, Dorset and BCP has a good supply of intermediate skills, but a slightly lower proportion of people with Level 4 or higher qualifications than the national average. This is exacerbating skills shortages in key sectors. Data shows that females are more highly qualified than males in the county.

The percentage of under 25s with a Higher Education qualification is two thirds that of the national average (13% vs 22%). The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) reports progress in this area with Bournemouth University's Civic University project that aligns place-based offers, and successful bids for funding to develop new degree apprenticeship courses at Bournemouth University and Health Sciences University (HSU) in the LSIP-identified skill priority areas. All Further Education (FE) colleges now have University Centres to support upskilling throughout the workforce.

The two FE colleges enjoy good inspection ratings, both with reasonable or strong performance in supporting the skills agenda. The provision of vocational and technical programmes of learning aligned to local skills priorities is growing significantly, with recent capital investment in health and green skills provision.

Nevertheless, in both council areas the number of apprenticeships is not growing in line with regional and national rates. In particular Health and Social Care Apprenticeship starts are falling despite employer demand remaining strong and provision available. There are also very limited apprenticeships available in agriculture, despite the foundational nature of the sector, both locally and nationally.

The ageing workforce across the area signals an important role for continuing skill development and re-skilling opportunities. Skills Bootcamps are playing a significant part in this and there is scope for further innovation in AI and green skills through the Adult Skills Fund.

GROWING CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY FOR GOOD WORK IN DORSET AND BCP

A focus on work-life balance is an emerging common thread across working age generations. It is as much a priority for many 'Gen Zs', as it is for those 'Gen X' and later 'Baby Boomers' who re-locate to Dorset in their 50s. Equally, millennials in their 30s and 40s who are more likely to be raising and supporting families value flexibility in their work whilst needing to earn sufficient income to afford to live in Dorset and BCP.

There is scope for Dorset and BCP to be at the forefront of a collective reimagining of how work can be organised to secure both prosperity and balance. This would include valuing the contribution of people in medium and lower skilled roles, all those working in the foundation economy, and the often invisible care and support that family, friends, neighbours and communities offer one another alongside more formal volunteering, such as at food banks, with the NHS, in community sport, and looking after our precious natural resources. Such an approach would contribute to building a diverse and vibrant economy and a more equitable society, to everyone's benefit.





DRIVERS AND CAUSES OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND SIDE LABOUR MARKET ISSUES

DRIVERS AND CAUSES OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND SIDE LABOUR MARKET ISSUES

This is the functional economic area encompassing the two unitary authorities of Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. In this report, the combined geography and related data is referred to as 'pan-Dorset'.



"Dorset faces a multifaceted challenge—an ageing population, fewer young residents, and an evolving labour market. At the same time, job vacancies outpace supply, and nearly 30,000 local residents want to work but do not currently have the opportunity."

LABOUR MARKET

- 75.9% of 16-64 year olds were in employment (March 2025)
- Female employment rate is 73.8% (March 2025)
- 15.7% of people in employment were self-employed vs 12.3% for the UK
- Employment rate for people with disabilities is 60.3% (Mar 2025)
- 39,000 people earning less than the Living Wage
- 94,300 (21%) economically inactive people (March 2025) driven by early retirement, long term sickness and studying
- 38% of economically active people are aged over 50, vs 32% for the UK, with implications for replacement demand
- 66% of unpaid carers are economically active

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

- £19.5bn economic output (2019 prices), but slower than average growth
- £4.63 per hour productivity gap, equivalent to £2.68bn a year and falling behind rest of UK
- 33,225 businesses, of which 89.4% are micros
- Approx 500 scale-up businesses with 43,000 employees and £4.2bn turnover
- £792m trade surplus in 2021, driven by services in BCP
- Downward trend in FDI flows with more investment leaving the region than coming in
- 343 innovation projects funded in the area since 2004, less than expected
- Underpinned by the foundation economy

SKILLS SUPPLY AND DEMAND

- 16% of establishments have at least one hard to fill vacancy vs 15% in England
- 42% of people aged 16-64 have a level 4 qualification vs 47% in the UK
- 3.4% of 16-17 year olds in BCP and 3.8% in DC were NEET compared to 5.2% for England
- After KS5, more young people went into employment and less into HE than nationally
- Lower than average participation rate in adult education
- 22,720 students enrolled in the area's three universities, but low graduate retention
- Graduates in the area were less likely to be employed in high skilled jobs

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- Largely rural area, but 78% of people live in urban areas
- Five main Travel to Work areas
- Issues with North/South connectivity
- Congestion on the A31,35,351
- Poor rail connectivity bot to and within the area
- Inadequate infrastructure for walking and cycling and EV use
- Unlikely to meet net zero targets for transport on current trajectory
- 98.8% of premises in BCP and 95.8% in DC have access to superfast broadband compared to 97% for the UK

POPULATION AND MIGRATION

- 779,779 residents in 2021, of which 59% were working age, compared to 63% for England
- Lower than average population growth expected and by 2043 only 53% of people will be aged 16-64
- Life expectancy at birth is higher than the national average, although areas with higher levels of deprivation have a lower life expectancy

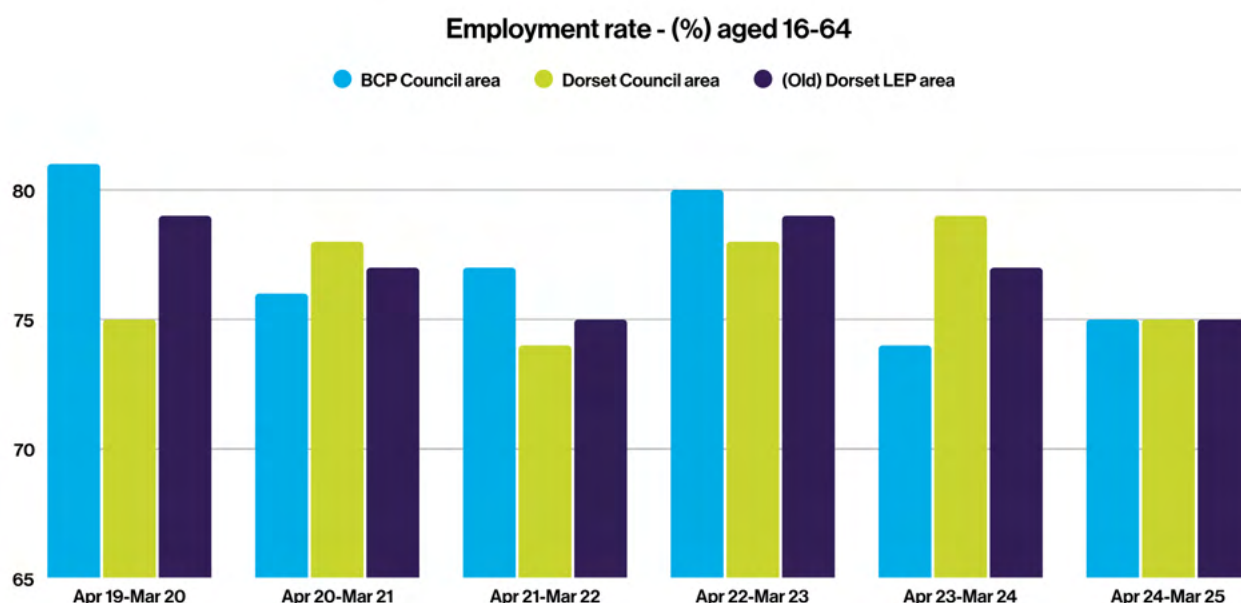
HOUSING

- Median house prices were £340,000 in BCP and £353,000 in DC vs £290,000 for England
- Prices 10.23 times median earnings in BCP and 11.03 times more in DC, vs 8.26 for England
- 40.5% of homes in DC were under-occupied and 29.9% in BCP vs 34.6% for England
- 58,000 homes do not meet the decent homes standard

EMPLOYMENT RATE

According to the DWP’s Guidance on Developing local Get Britain Working Plans, the employment rate in Dorset and BCP between October 2023 and September 2024 was 76.6% (+/-2.4% pts), placing the area sixth out of the seven GBW areas in the South West, just below Devon, Torbay and Plymouth (76.9% (+/-2% pts)) and above Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (76.4% (+/-3.7% pts)).

Based on local data to March 2025, the employment rate for the pan Dorset area (75.9%) is down on pre-pandemic levels (79%) and appears to have stabilised following post-pandemic labour market turbulence, particularly in 2022-23 when the employment rate reached 79.2%.



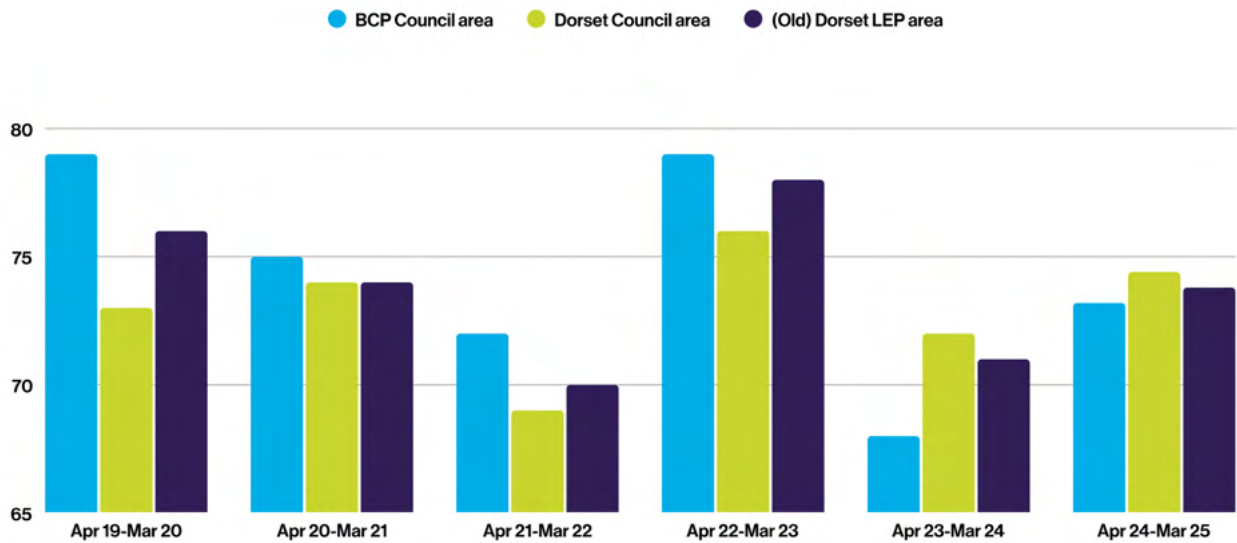
Whilst the employment rate in the pan Dorset area has consistently exceeded the national rate over the long-term, post pandemic employment rates have been lower than the national average within the BCP area. Sectors that have been particularly hit post-pandemic include hospitality, tourism and retail, reflecting national trends, and with these sectors overrepresented in both BCP and Dorset Council areas, the effect has been significant for the local area.

Most recently, the labour market in Dorset and BCP has tightened during the last few months with more competition for the roles that are available, though this overview disguises the geographic and sectoral complexity of the area described previously.

FEMALE EMPLOYMENT RATE

The female employment rate in the pan Dorset area between April 2024 and March 2025 was 73.8%, a gap of 2.1% pts with the overall employment rate for the area. This compares favourably with the national employment rate of women aged 18 to 66, which was 72.3% in December 2024, however the local female employment rate has fluctuated during the post-pandemic years. The national rate is 7.1% pts lower than the employment rate of men at 79.4%.

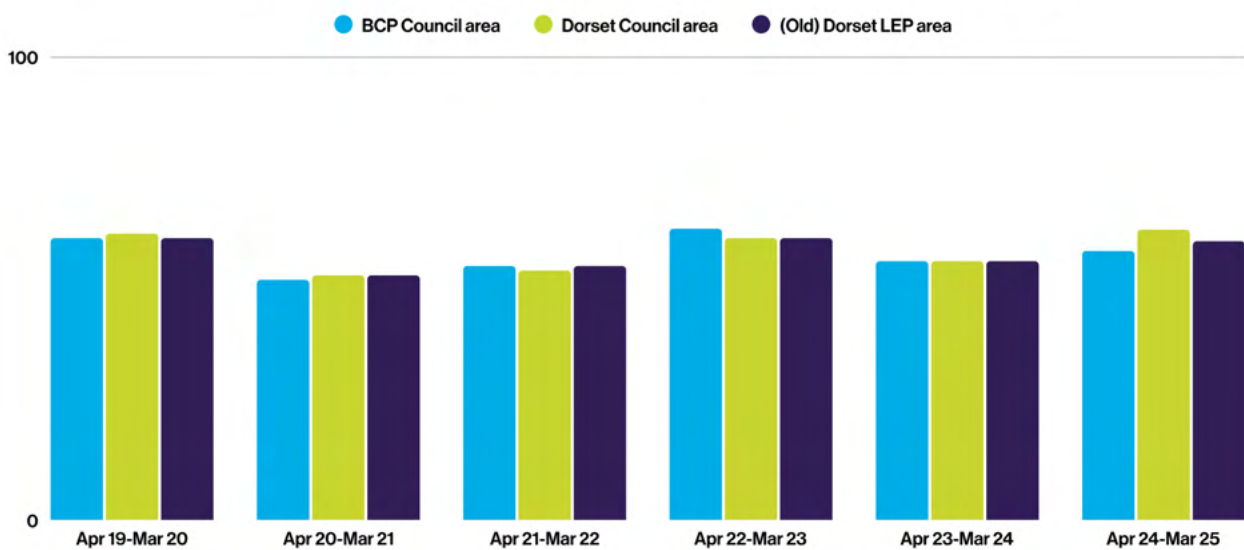
Employment rate - females (%) aged 16-64



DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RATE

The employment rate for people of working age (16-64) with disabilities in Dorset, calculated with reference to the Equality Act core or work-limiting disabled statistics indicates a rate of 60.3% across the pan Dorset area, a gap of 15.6% pts with the overall employment rate for the area.

Employment rate - EA core or work-limiting disabled - (%) aged 16-64



EMPLOYMENT RATE GAPS AMONGST PARENTS

As part of its Get Britain Working programme, DWP will be measuring (a) the difference in employment rate between lone parents and parents in a couple, and (b) the proportion of coupled families where at least one parent is out of work.

Nationally, the employment rate of lone parents has been consistently lower than for that of coupled parents. Although the gap had been reducing since 2006, recent data suggest it is rising again.

National data also indicates that in July-September 2024, 24.1% of all coupled families had at least one parent out of work, and that there has been a gradual decline in this figure since 2016.

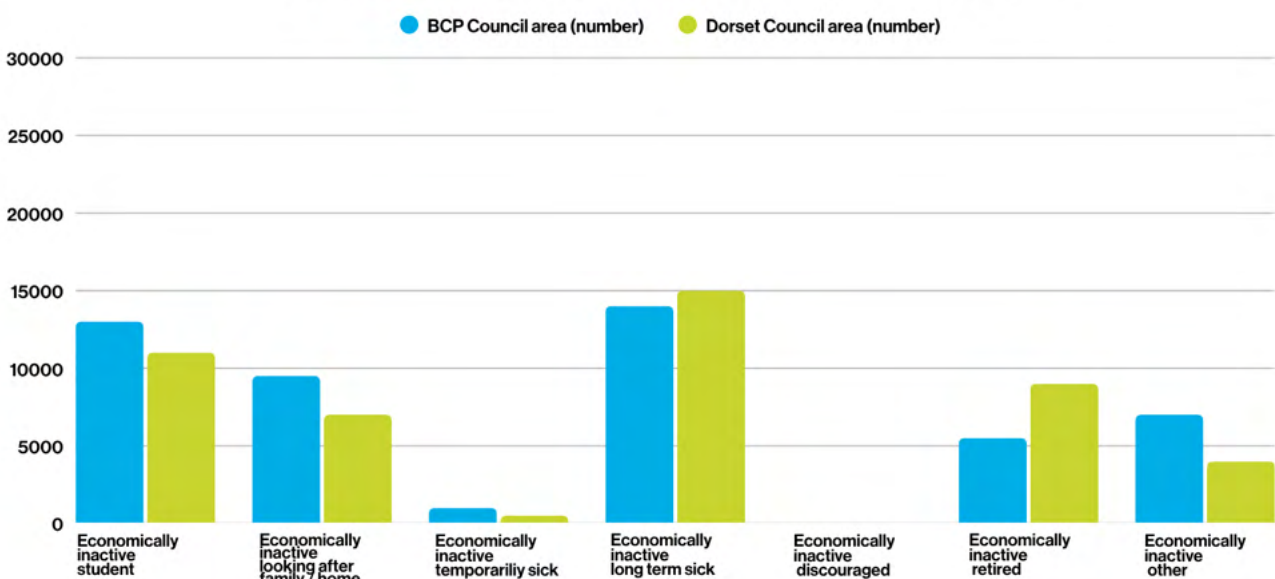
Whilst local comparative data is not yet available, an important factor in enabling parents to work is ensuring there is good availability of childcare. The Dorset LSIP has highlighted a lack of childcare options and high costs. In the Dorset area, availability of care is sufficient, but there is an ongoing challenge to recruit staff locally and nationally.

ECONOMIC INACTIVITY

Economic inactivity rates have been consistently lower than the national average in the long term, but post pandemic the pan Dorset area appears to have had a steeper rise in inactivity rates. These rose to 21% in 2021-22, before dropping slightly to 19% and then returning to 21% in 2024-25. In March 2025, there were 94,300 economically inactive people in the pan Dorset area.

The reasons why people are inactive differ across the two local authority areas. In the Dorset Council (DC) area, (early) retirement is the most significant reason, whereas in the BCP area, long term sickness or being a student are the most significant reasons.

Proportion (%) of economically inactive by reason - Apr 24-Mar 25



ECONOMIC INACTIVITY DUE TO HEALTH CONDITIONS

In 2024-25 there were 30,100 people across the pan Dorset area who were economically inactive due to being either temporarily or long-term sick:

	BCP	DC	Pan-Dorset
Temporary sick	1,000	800	1,800
Long term sick	14,600	13,700	28,300
Total	15,600	14,500	30,100

Of those who are long term sick, over two-thirds have been considered as having limited capability for work (LCW) or limited capability for work and work-related activity (LCWRA):

	BCP	DC	Pan-Dorset
LCW	165	129	294
LCWRA	10,890	8,019	18,909
Total	11,055	8,148	19,203

There were, therefore, c.10,000 people across BCP and Dorset Council who, at the end of March 2025, were economically inactive and considered capable for work. Supporting this group into work would take Dorset and BCP over halfway towards achieving an 80% employment rate.

This group are a priority for the Integrated Care Board/Partnership for Dorset and BCP and for the Dorset and BCP Councils' Get Britain Working Plan. With limited additional resources available, partners are committed to working collaboratively to co-ordinate support services to facilitate access for residents, support employers looking to recruit, and secure the maximum value from the time, energy and funding invested.



"Our councils share a vision: to ensure that every working-age resident can access the right support to begin, sustain, or return to fulfilling employment."

Universal Credit data indicates that across the pan-Dorset area those aged between 30 and 50 who are out of work, working (including self-employed or part-time) but on low income, or unable to work, for example because of a health condition are most likely to be claiming benefits to help with living costs:

Benefits - Universal Credit

Source: Department for Work and Pensions (Stat-Xplore)

Note: Counts under 5 for lower breakdowns of the data are excluded, so the total of these counts may be lower than the actual total count of Universal Credit recipients in Dorset.

Select Date

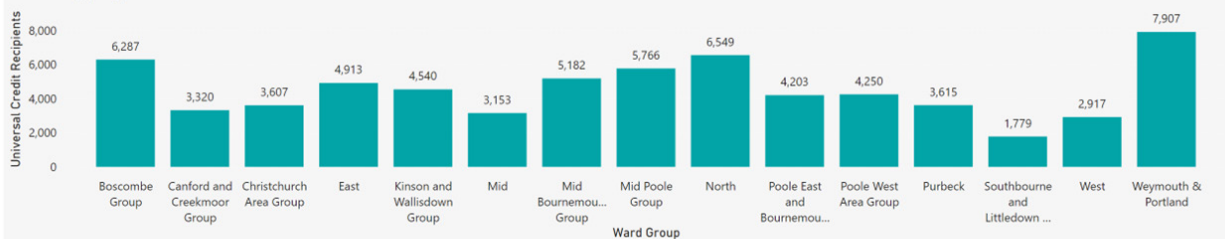
01 October 2024

Click here to show rates per 1000

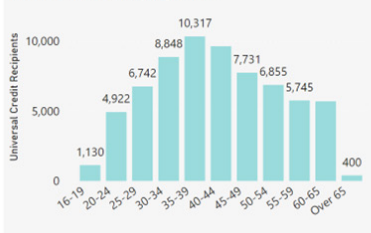


Last updated: 01/06/2025

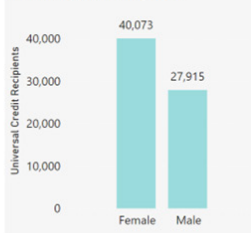
How many people receive Universal Credit?



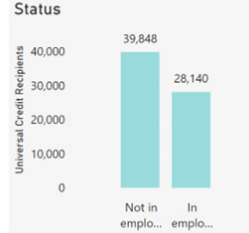
Universal Credit by Age Band



Universal Credit by Sex



Universal Credit by Employment Status



What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a payment to help with living costs for those who are out of work, working (including self-employed or part time) or unable to work, for example because of a health condition. For more information, go to <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

To see metadata for this data, please click here: https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/metadata/UC_Monthly/UC_Monthly.html

A targeted approach to the co-location of employment, health and employability skills services in priority neighbourhoods is being explored, informed by analysis of the ward groups in the pan-Dorset area with high levels of economic inactivity is due to long-term sickness, reflecting the impact of coastal, urban and rural deprivation on health outcomes:

Economically Inactive Population

Source: Census 2021

Note: for more information, go to <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021s066#>

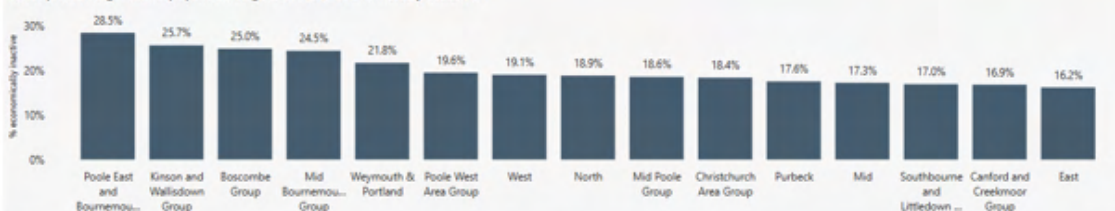
Exclude retired population on this page

Include retired population on this page



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What percentage of the population aged 16+ are economically inactive?

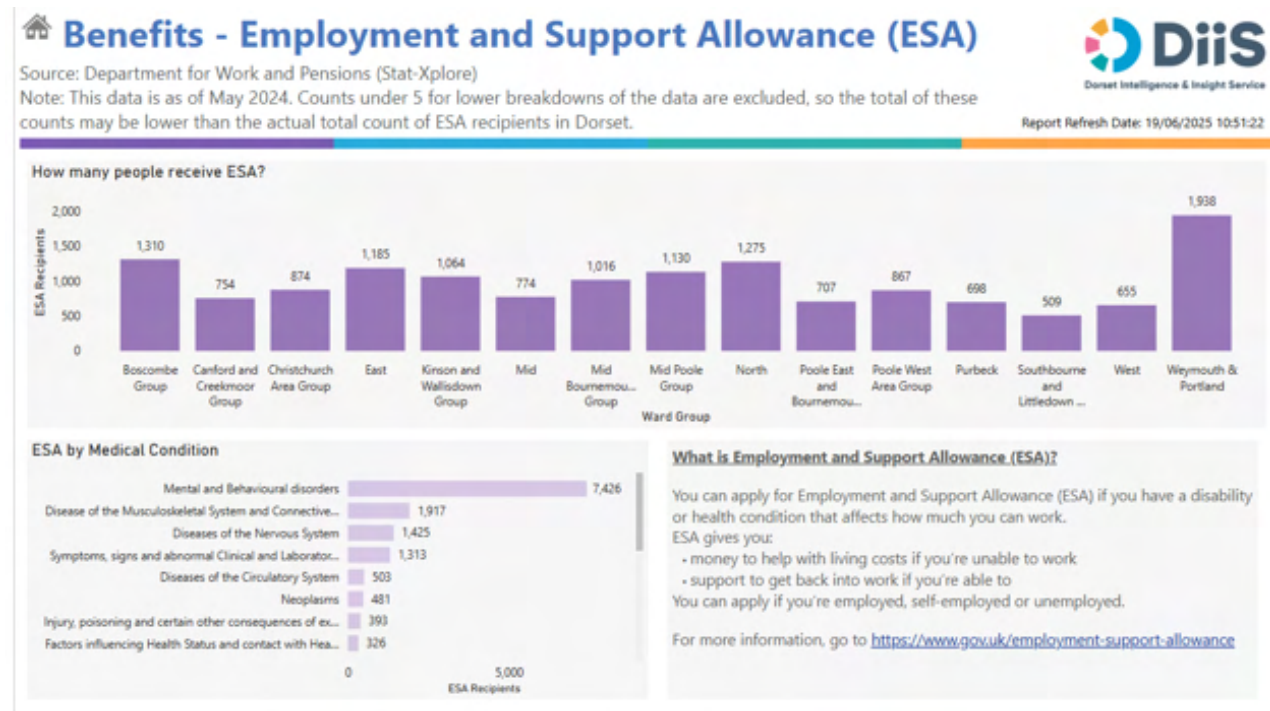


What is the breakdown of economic inactivity across ward groups - select reason here:

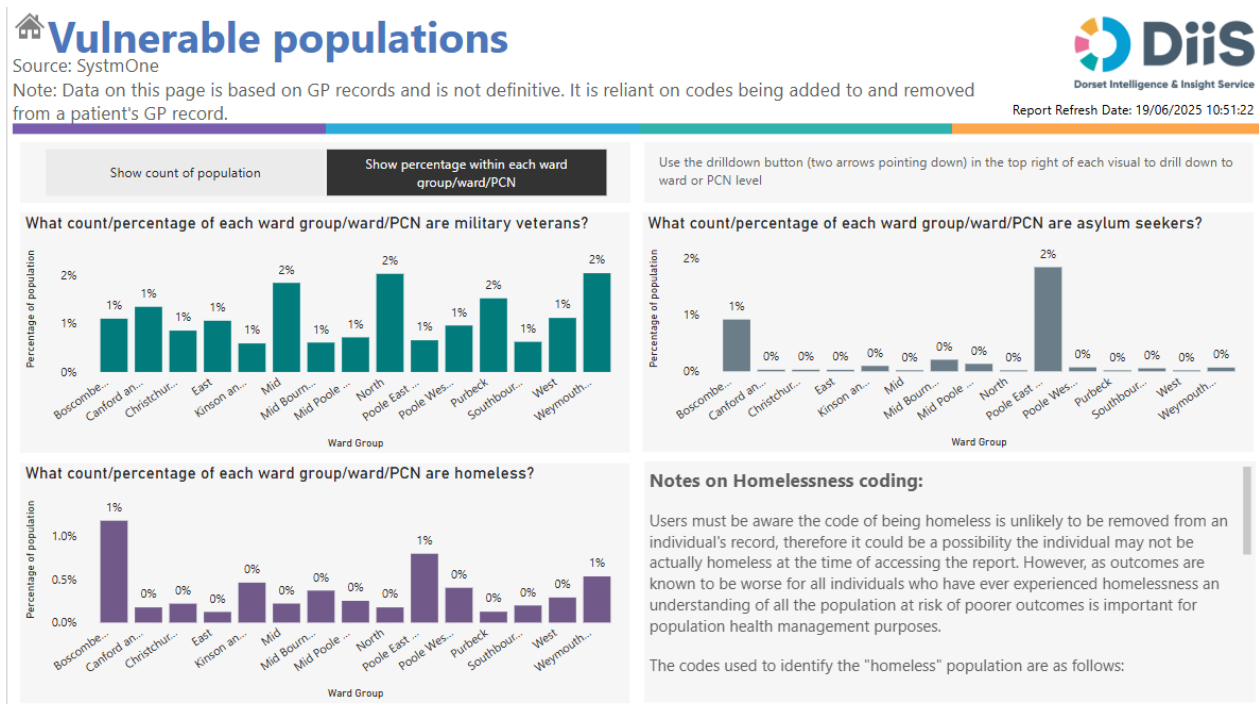


Click here to show as a table

A priority for the development of co-located neighbourhood services is a focus on mental health. For those in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance in Dorset and BCP, mental and behavioural disorders represent the largest medical condition, followed by diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue, and diseases of the nervous system:



Analysis of where vulnerable groups are living is also informing the location and co-ordination of health, skills and employment-related services:



YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

In 2024, there were 832 16- and 17-year-olds in the pan-Dorset area who were either NEET or their destinations were unknown:

	BCP	DC	Pan Dorset
NEET	340	327	667
Not Known	137	28	165
NEET and Not Known	477	355	832

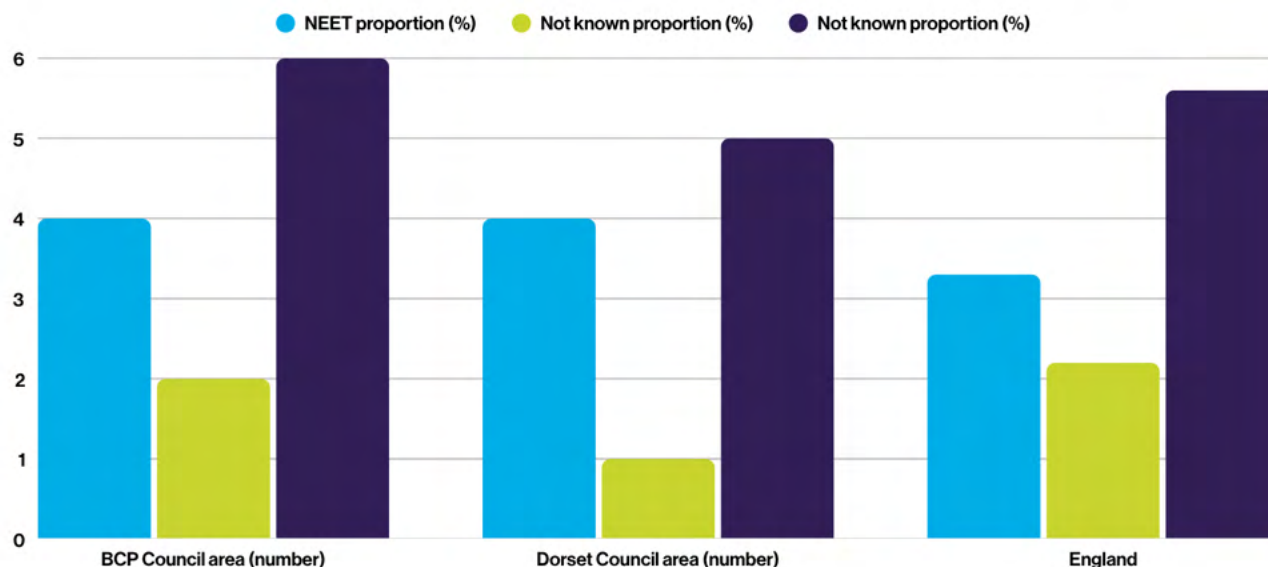
4.1% of 16- and 17-year-olds in Dorset were NEET, and 3.9% in BCP. These figures are a little higher than for England as a whole, albeit there are fewer young people locally whose destinations are unknown, particularly in Dorset.

After Key Stage 4 (ie 16-19), a greater proportion of young people go into employment destinations than the national average and a lower proportion go into further and higher education. A greater proportion of young people in BCP go into apprenticeships than the national average, but in Dorset a lower proportion do so.

The number of 16-18 year olds in jobs without training is monitored in particular in the Dorset Council area, as a feature of the rural economy.

Dorset Council area in particular is experiencing a population bulge in this age group which will place additional pressures on the services available to support young people aged 16-24 not in education, employment and training over the next ten years.

16-17 Year Old NEET and Not Known



DWP's Get Britain Working measures focus on 18-24 year olds not in education, employment or training. Whilst the statistics for this group in the Dorset and BCP Council areas are not yet available, analysis of the national data for 16-24 and 18-24 NEETs highlights some of the key issues these young people are experiencing.

The NEET rate of 16–24-year-olds in England in 2024 was 13.6% (up 1.3% pts on 2023), and the rate for 18–24-year-olds was 16.2% (up 1.7% pts on 2023), compared with 4.6% for 16–17-year-olds. (If these rates were applied to the populations in Dorset and BCP that would mean that c. 10,740 16-24-year-olds and c. 9,890 18-24-year-olds would be NEET locally.) We know that in October 2024, there were 6,052 young people aged 16-24 claiming Universal Credit in the pan-Dorset area.

Of the national 16-24 NEET population, estimates show that young men are more likely than young women to be NEET. 14.5% of all male 16-24-year-olds were NEET, compared with 12.6% of females, both increasing in 2024. The increase in young people who are NEET has been driven by less employment. Both the proportions unemployed (5.5%) and inactive (8.1%) have increased since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and are the highest in the period.

Analysis from the Annual Population Survey suggests that over half of those NEET had a health condition in 2024 with over 1 in 6 of those NEET currently report having a mental health condition.

Many of the 18-24 age group are no longer in education and are instead in the labour market. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the NEET rate has fluctuated however, and there has been a notable increase in the latest year, up 1.7 percentage points. Again, this was driven by falls in proportions in employment with proportions in education and training remaining relatively stable.

In addition to these nationally identified issues, young people in Dorset face particular challenges with travel to learn and travel to work. The Accountability Statements for Weymouth and Kingston Maurward College highlight the significant investment that the College makes in subsidising bus routes, for example to enable students to travel in excess of 1.5 hours on a daily basis. The Weymouth campus is reported as the 3rd most isolated GFE College in the country.

DEPRIVATION AND INEQUALITY

Across the area, levels of deprivation vary significantly. While many neighbourhoods are among the least deprived in England, a number experience deep and persistent disadvantage. Evidence is clear that many of our social issues derive from the very fact of inequality. Almost everyone loses from living in a very unequal society – even those at or near the top, since it produces worse health outcomes, higher levels of violence and crime, and lower trust and mutual confidence.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

In Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, around 45,400 residents live in neighbourhoods within the 20% most deprived nationally, with concentrations in Boscombe West, Kinson, Alderney and Bourne Valley, West Howe, Somerford and parts of East Cliff and Springbourne.

Within Dorset Council, deprivation is most evident in Weymouth and Portland and parts of Bridport, where 11 of 219 neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived 20%, and areas such as Melcombe Regis, Littlemoor West and Fortuneswell North rank within the most deprived 10%.

Rurality presents additional challenges: almost half of Dorset Council residents live in rural areas, and 66 neighbourhoods are among the most deprived nationally for barriers to housing and services, reflecting both distance to essential provision and affordability pressures. These inequalities contribute to significant health gaps, with life expectancy around 6–7 years lower in the most deprived communities compared to the least.

Coastal deprivation is a significant issue nationally and in Dorset and BCP, in particular in the Weymouth / Portland and Boscombe areas. The Chief Medical Officer's second annual report in 2021 drew attention to the impact of Covid-19 on coastal employment (with its reliance on tourism and hospitality), and the migration of vulnerable people to coastal areas, often with multiple and complex needs. Economic inactivity in coastal areas outstrips non-coastal areas, much of which is due to long term sickness.

According to the Dorset Integrated Care Board:

- Dorset's coastal communities have much poorer health outcomes than other areas.
- Health inequality affects health and wellbeing from early years to later in life in both BCP and Dorset council areas.
- Coastal areas in Dorset have high levels of unemployment with seasonal work common and zero hours contracts.

COASTAL NAVIGATORS NETWORK: PORTLAND AND BOSCOMBE

The Integrated Care Board for Dorset and BCP is pleased to be a member of the Coastal Navigators Network, delivering one of six transformation projects designed to scale up scholarship programmes to reduce Dorset's high social care employment turnover rates. Currently over 50% of under 25s leave jobs in the sector within a year. The project is also helping to meet the growing care needs of one of the UK's oldest populations.

INSECURE, POOR QUALITY AND LOW PAYING WORK

The labour market in Dorset and BCP is characterised by lower than average pay, particularly for women and part-time workers, and in 2024, 39,000 people were earning less than the Living Wage. They were employed in 16.5% of employee jobs in the Dorset Council area, and 14.2% of employee jobs in BCP, compared with the South West and England averages of 15.7% and 15.9% respectively.

The area has a higher proportion of people working part-time than the UK average, and women are much more likely to be working part-time than men. According to the Living Wage Foundation, in 2024, part-time employees were over three times more likely to be low paid than full-time employees (32.2% of part time jobs being paid below the real Living Wage, vs 9.7% of full-time jobs.)

The top five highest paid sectors across the pan Dorset area are in relatively small sectors and account for 7% of employment. Conversely, the bottom five lowest paid sectors account for 36% of employment. Overall, 58% of employment in Dorset and BCP in 2022 was in five sectors: health and social care, retail, accommodation and food, education and manufacturing. The distribution of employment across sectors is broadly similar to the UK, though there is some over representation locally in human health and social work, administrative and support services, and accommodation and food services.

These high employment sectors reflect the ageing demographic profile of the population (particularly in Dorset), the popularity of the whole area as a tourist destination, and BCP's administrative and support services sector, and all have reputations for lower paid work. According to the Living Wage Foundation, in 2024, hospitality remained the industry with the highest proportion of low pay (53.6%).



"According to the Living Wage Foundation, in 2024, part-time employees were over three times more likely to be low paid than full-time employees (32.2% of part time jobs being paid below the real Living Wage, vs 9.7% of full-time jobs)."



HEALTH OF THE WORKFORCE

HEALTH OF THE WORKFORCE IN DORSET

The role of the Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS) is pivotal through the health and care services it provides and through the community of people it employs. The ICS understands its dual role in not only ensuring access to well-paid, good work, which is a determining factor in enabling people to live well, as well as ensuring access to mental and physical health services.

THE HEALTH OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN DORSET

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment sets out a number of important factors in relation to the health of the labour market in Dorset, including:

- mental health and wellbeing
- children's health
- workforce and the ability to help support people into work with complex needs
- integrated mental and physical health service provision.

In terms of mental health and wellbeing, service provision in Dorset is confusing, to know where to go to seek help and services are under pressure to support the volume of demand that they experience. Delay in access to service provision can impact on individual's ability to remain in or find work. People living in the Dorset Council area appear to have higher rates of personal wellbeing than the national average, but people in BCP have rates that are similar to the national average. Dorset's natural environment (including coast) is thought to be a significant contributor to its quality of life and both Dorset and BCP Councils have cultural strategies in place.

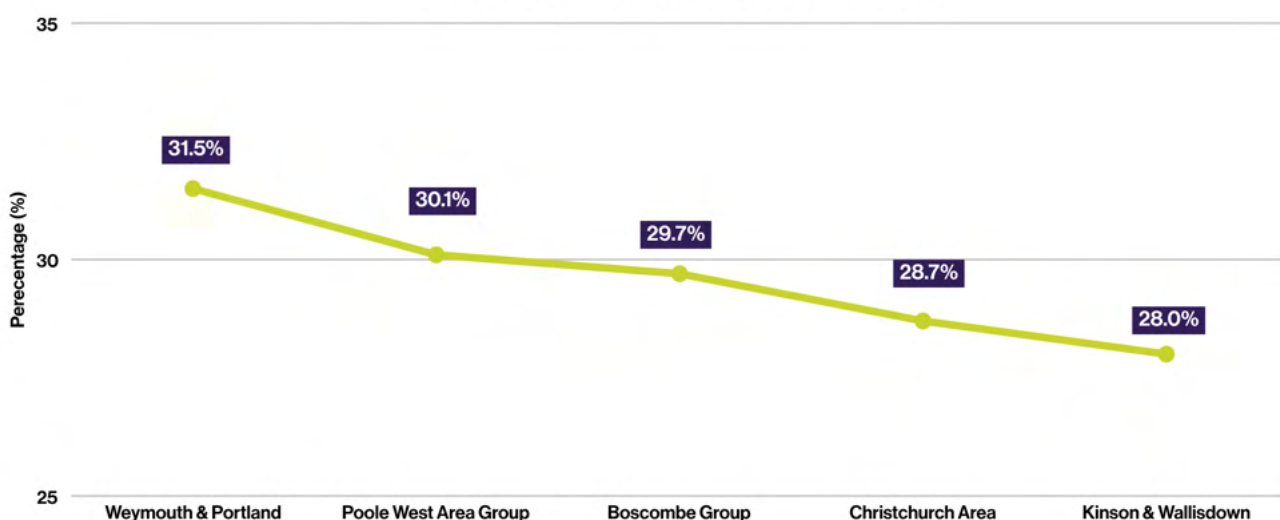
Life expectancy at birth for people born between 2020 and 2022 is higher than the national average in the area for both males and females. However, there are inequalities in life expectancy between the most and least deprived parts of the area.

There are many people in Dorset living with long-term health conditions including high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Service provision including medication is important, as well as preventive measures such as lifestyle and self-care. For young people, challenges include access to transport which impacts how the access services, education and employment.

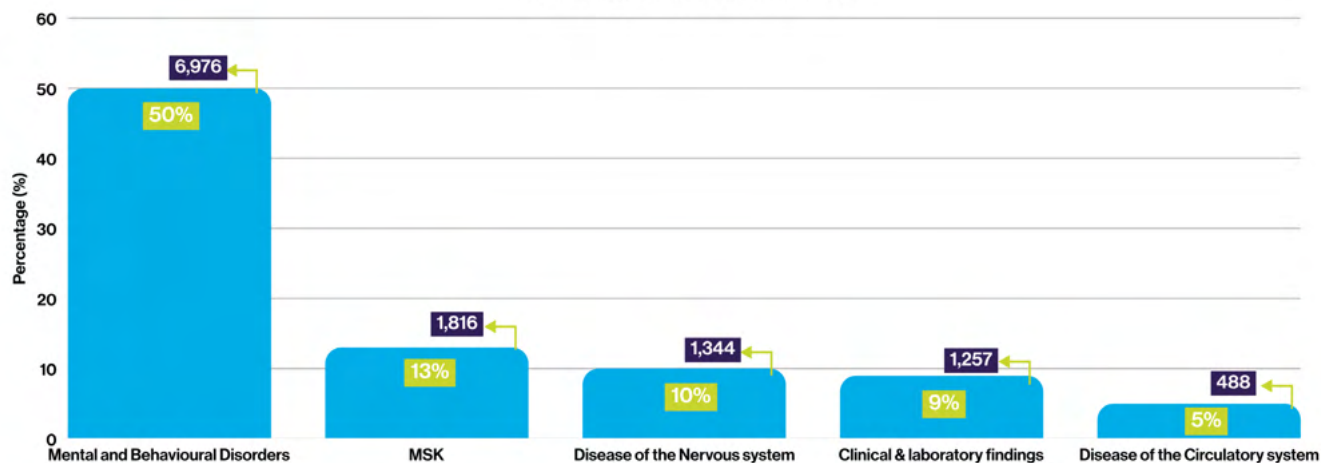
HEALTH CHALLENGES DATA FOR DORSET

Of those who are currently economically inactive, 23,736 people have a long-term illness or are disabled. The top 5 prevalent ward groups contributing to this are shown above with Weymouth & Portland being most impacted. Data relating to Employment Support Allowance benefit shows that 50% of the benefit claimed related to Mental and Behavioural Disorders, with MSK following at 13%. Again, the data shows that the area with most recipients in Weymouth and Portland, followed by Boscombe.

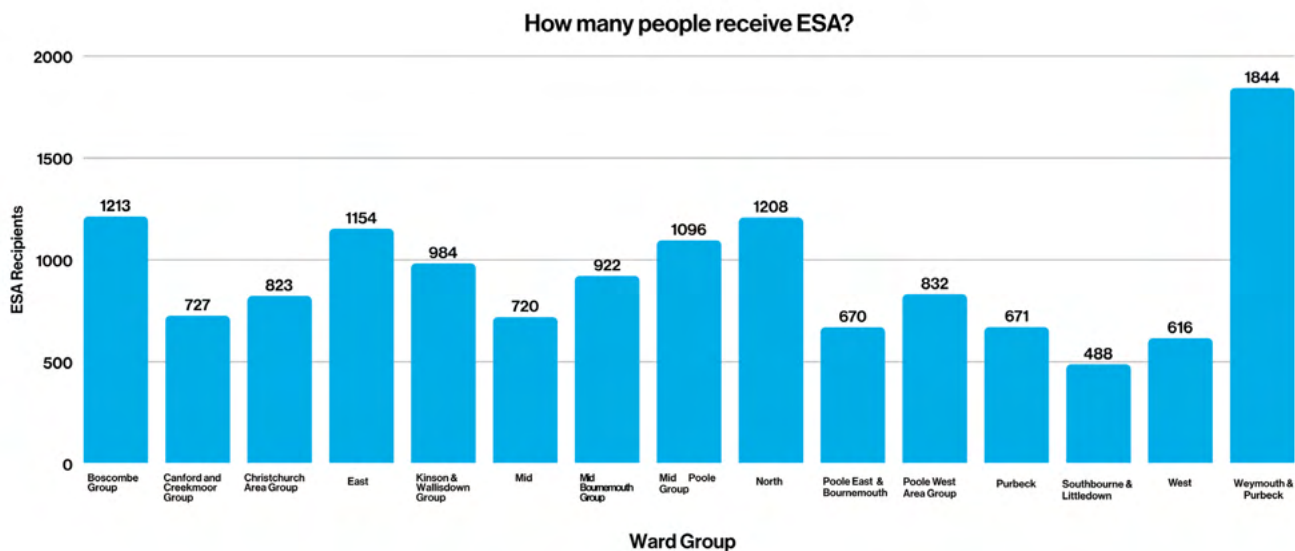
Breakdown of EI - Long term sick/disabled



ESA by Top 5 Medical Condition



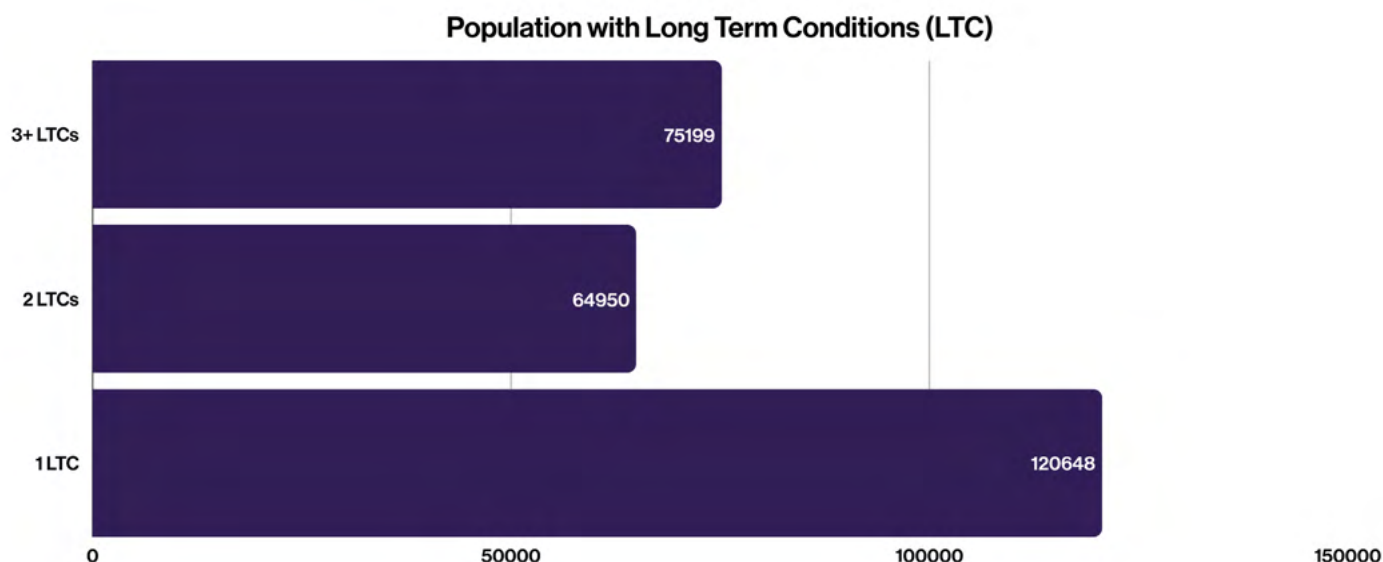
INSECURE, POOR QUALITY AND LOW PAYING WORK



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"Behind the data are real people – from young people waiting for support to older residents managing health or caring responsibilities – all deserving the opportunity to work, contribute, and belong."

LONG TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS



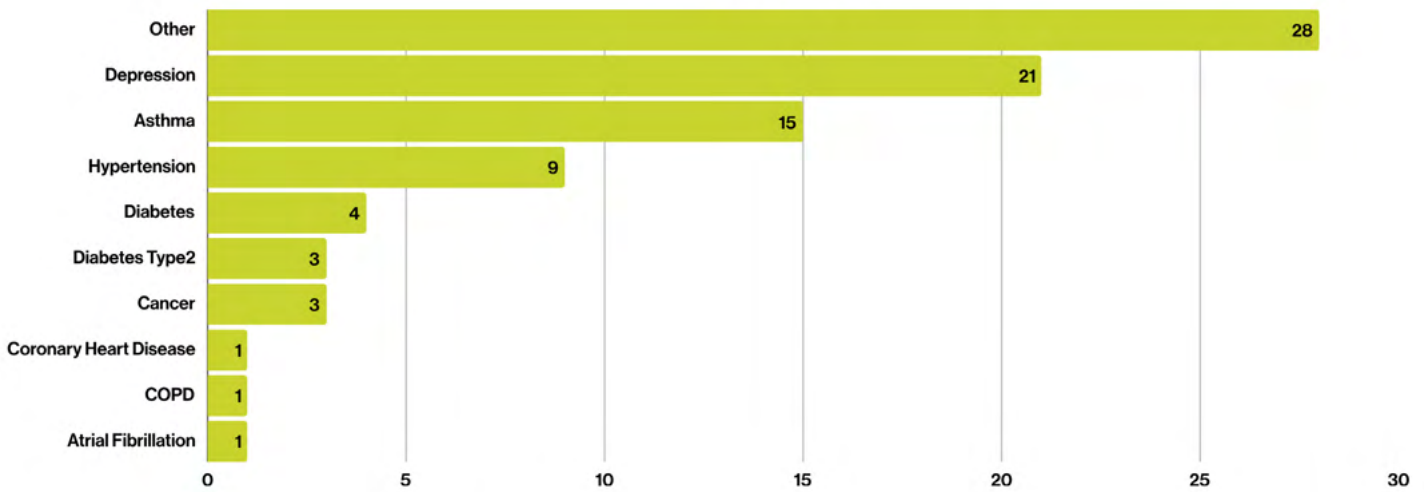
Over half the population—260,797 people (51.7%)—are living with one or more long-term conditions (LTCs), indicating a significant public health challenge. Among these, the largest group consists of 120,648 individuals (23.9%) who have a single LTC, while 64,950 people (12.9%) are managing two conditions, reflecting a growing burden of multimorbidity. Notably, 75,199 individuals (14.9%) are living with three or more LTCs, representing a considerable segment of working-age adults facing complex health needs.

This data highlights that although nearly half the population remains healthy, a substantial proportion requires ongoing care and support. Those with three or more LTCs are likely to place the greatest demand on healthcare services due to the complexity and intensity of their needs. Therefore, preventative strategies and early interventions for individuals with one or two LTCs could be crucial in reducing progression to multimorbidity and alleviating pressure on healthcare systems.

With 28% of individuals falling into the “Other” category, this group represents a larger share than any single listed condition. It includes a diverse range of long-term conditions (LTCs) such as neurological and mental health disorders, chronic and systemic diseases, vestibular disorders, sleep conditions, prediabetes, and musculoskeletal and spine issues. This diversity highlights the complexity of healthcare needs and the importance of flexible, inclusive service provision. Depression, affecting 21% of the population (105,410 people), is the most common specifically listed condition, underscoring the scale of mental health challenges and its role as a major contributor to long-term ill health.

Population with Long Term Conditions (LTC)

● Percentage (%)



The data presents a dual challenge for healthcare systems: widespread conditions like depression, asthma, and hypertension require broad preventative and early-intervention strategies, while less common but complex conditions such as COPD, coronary heart disease, and atrial fibrillation demand targeted, specialist care. The high prevalence of mental health conditions, particularly depression, suggests that increased investment in psychological services could help alleviate pressure on other parts of the healthcare system.

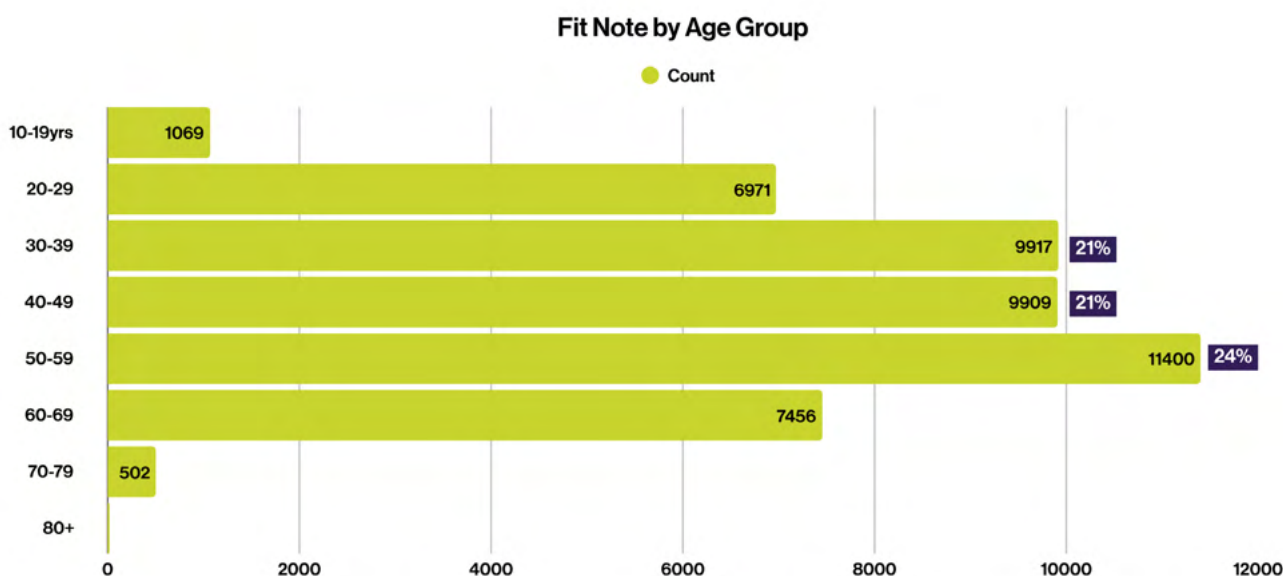


FIT NOTE DATA

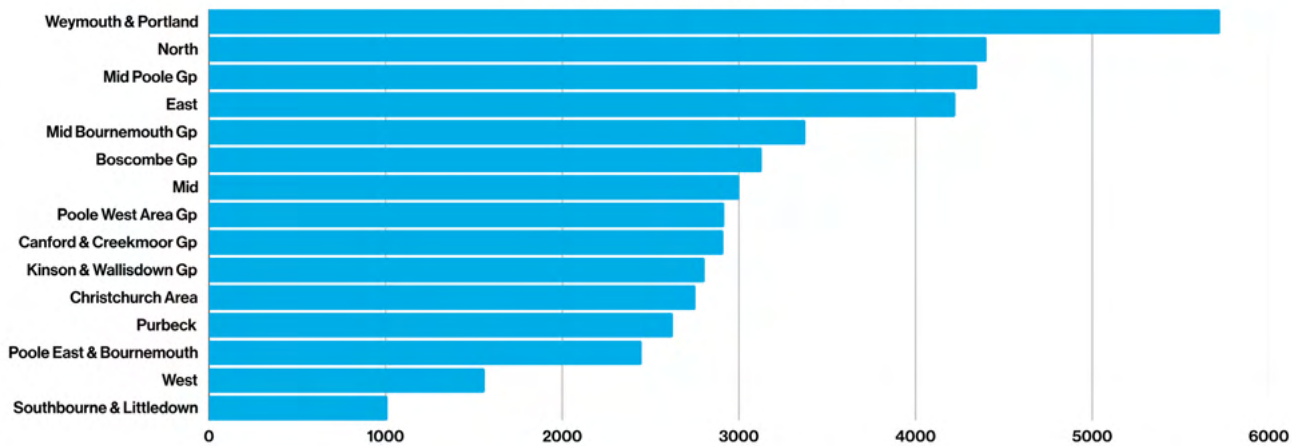
Individuals aged 30 to 59 years account for 65% (47,243) of all fit notes, highlighting that the majority of health-related work absences occur within the prime working-age population. This suggests that people are most affected by medical conditions during the peak of their careers and responsibilities. This age group is also more likely to experience chronic or long-term health conditions, which may contribute to higher levels of absence. Notably, both the 30–39 and 40–49 age brackets each represent 21% of fit notes, indicating that health-related absences are not limited to older adults.

This points to the influence of work-related stress, mental health challenges, and lifestyle-related issues among younger to mid-career individuals. Additionally, the younger population aged 20–29 is significantly impacted, with 6,971 patients receiving fit notes due to medical conditions.

These findings imply that employers may need to implement targeted health and wellbeing support for middle-aged and older workers, particularly in physically demanding or high-stress sectors. Preventative measures such as occupational health services, flexible working arrangements, and mental health support could help reduce the reliance on fit notes within these age groups.



Count of Patients who Received Fit Notes



“

"We recognise that work is more than just income - it is a source of purpose, confidence, and belonging."



CURRENT SYSTEM AND OFFER

CURRENT SYSTEM AND OFFER

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT IN DORSET AND BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH & POOLE COUNCIL AREAS

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Council and Dorset Council work together to provide residents with clear, joined-up pathways into employment. Our approach brings together targeted supported employment, joint adult learning provision, college programmes, Jobcentre Plus services, and NHS Dorset's One Dorset offer. By aligning these strands, we ensure that residents—whether seeking their first job, returning to work, or overcoming health-related barriers—can access the right support at the right time.

In BCP, commissioned support is delivered through the Community Outreach and Support Team (COAST), operated by Tricuro. This service provides vocational profiling, job search guidance, interview preparation, travel training and in-work coaching. It is designed to help residents with assessed needs prepare for, secure and sustain employment, working closely with Jobcentre Plus and local employers to build long-term opportunities. Dorset Council has moved to a commissioned model, with the Dorset Supported Employment Service delivered by Pluss (part of the Seetec Group). This service focuses particularly on residents with learning disabilities and autism, offering one-to-one support, work trials, job matching and in-work coaching. Both councils see supported employment as a vital element of promoting independence, inclusion and better lives.

NHS Dorset contributes to this employment landscape through its One Dorset approach, which recognises that health and work are closely linked. Employment Advisors are available through the Steps to Wellbeing service, offering short-term, targeted support for individuals experiencing workplace stress, difficulties communicating with managers, or challenges related to returning to work. These advisors provide up to six sessions of goal-focused guidance, coping strategies and onward referrals. In addition, the Dorset Work Matters programme, run jointly by Dorset HealthCare and the Dorset Mental Health Forum, supports people who are accessing community mental health services. It provides personalised help with CVs, interviews, vocational profiling, benefit advice and workplace adjustments, ensuring that mental ill-health is not a barrier to meaningful employment.

Adult learning sits at the heart of our system. Skills & Learning Adult Community Education (ACE), funded by Department for Education serving both councils, provides a comprehensive programme of English, maths, ESOL, digital skills, sector tasters and employability courses. It also offers free, impartial careers advice and guidance. Local colleges complement this offer: Bournemouth & Poole College runs "Job-Ready" and employability programmes as well as upskilling opportunities in core subjects and vocational areas; Weymouth and Kingston Maurward College delivers employability training, functional skills, job clubs and sector-specific courses, alongside land-based qualifications; and Yeovil College, accessible to Dorset residents, delivers Skills Bootcamps with guaranteed interviews.

Jobcentre Plus remains a key gateway for many residents. Work coaches provide one-to-one advice and support, helping people navigate job searches and access “Find a Job” and other national back-to-work programmes. Jobcentre Plus also acts as a connector, signposting individuals to local colleges, Skills & Learning ACE, and the councils’ commissioned services. Importantly, it provides access to Skills Bootcamps, short and intensive training opportunities aligned with local employer demand.

Taken together, these services form a coordinated and person-centred employment support system across Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and Dorset. Residents with social care needs can access supported employment through COAST in BCP or Pluss in Dorset. Those experiencing health-related barriers benefit from One Dorset’s Employment Advisors or Dorset Work Matters. Jobseekers and career changers can develop skills through Skills & Learning ACE or local colleges, while Jobcentre Plus ensures that national programmes are available locally and connected into the wider system.

BCP Council, Dorset Council and NHS Dorset are committed to building a resilient, inclusive and health-informed workforce. By bringing together social care, education, health and employment support, we are strengthening the local skills base, supporting vulnerable residents into sustainable jobs, and driving inclusive economic growth across our communities.



"This plan brings together councils, the NHS, employers, and community partners, united in a shared commitment to help more people move into work."

JOBCENTRE PLUS SERVICES

Jobcentre Plus helps with preparation for work, finding work and staying in work, including:

Job Search and training	Work Experience and job trialling schemes
Help to start your own business	Help combining work with caring responsibilities
Extra help for specific problems	Help for young people

JOBCENTRE IN HOUSE OFFER

Additional Work Coach support provides people with health conditions or disabilities with increased one-to-one personalised support from their work coach to help them move towards, and into, work.	Family Community Work Coaches working in partnership with the Department for Education and local authorities to empower families through employment.
Disability Employment Advisor offers specialist advisors in all Jobcentres dedicated to helping people with health conditions or disabilities to secure and stay in work.	Armed Forces Champion Specialist support for service leavers and veterans to enhance their employability and enable the individual to move towards lasting employment or progress in work.
Youth Employability Coach offers specialist support for young claimants with multiple barriers to work and complex needs to develop the skills to look for, obtain and keep employment.	Vulnerable Customer Lead offers specialist advisors in all Jobcentres dedicated to helping vulnerable job seekers
Employment Advisors in IAPT provide specialist support service for service learners and veterans to enhance their employability prospects by providing intensive personal support from a dedicated key worker.	The Flexible Support Fund is a locally managed budget to supplement existing services and tailor support to the needs of individuals in the local area.
Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders work with Senior Leadership Teams across DWP to focus on DWP's responsibilities to our customers most at risk.	The Health Adjustment Passport can support people with health conditions or disabilities to move into work or stay in a job.
Prison Work Coaches have a specialist role supporting people leaving prison and helps to reduce re offending.	School Advisor assists schools in England to provide high quality, independent and impartial careers advice to pupils aged between 11 and 18.

NATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

RESTART

Enhanced employment support for claimants who have been out of work for a minimum of 6 months.

ACCESS TO WORK

Access to work provides support to get into or stay in work if you have a physical or mental health condition or disability. This can include a grant to pay for practical support, support with managing your mental health at work or to pay for communication support at job interviews.

NATIONAL CAREERS SERVICE

This service supports people with careers advice and guidance, supporting job searching and application or CV writing. The service will change to an in-house DWP provision delivered as part of the refocused JCP service with skills and careers services, prioritising personalised employment support over benefit administration.

CONNECT TO WORK

The Connect to Work programme is a key component of the government's wider "Get Britain Working" initiative, designed to improve employment outcomes by offering personalised, intensive support to jobseekers who face barriers to entering the workforce. In Dorset the programme will be rolled out by Skills and Learning Community Education, the shared adult learning service for the county, working in partnership with council programmes, community organisations, and employers.

Eligible participants will receive tailored coaching, skills training, and direct links to local job opportunities, with a strong focus on digital inclusion and transport support to address rural access challenges. The programme in Dorset will prioritise long-term unemployed individuals and those who are economically inactive with health conditions, caring responsibilities or specific disadvantage, ensuring that the local workforce is better equipped, work-ready and supported to engage with sustainable employment.

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND PROGRAMME

Both councils deliver support for new and existing businesses, start up programmes and community delivery that supports pathways to work. Alongside specific programmes, there are grants for new businesses, net zero assessments and grants for specific skills delivery. It should be noted this funding is at risk of ending in March 2026, despite it making a considerable impact for businesses in the area over the last 4 years.

NHS DORSET EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Dorset ICS People Plan 2023-2028 sets out a vision to create a One Dorset workforce delivering the best possible improvements in health and wellbeing through a workforce that is looked after, feels valued and respected, and is reflective of our communities.

The People Plan proposes harnessing the collective powers and influence of the ICS 'to build a productive labour market, creating roles and fulfilling careers for the people already living in our communities and attracting new people to Dorset'

It sets out the need for a workforce that:

- Responds to the future needs of communities, informed through new models of care, population health management and digital innovations
- Works closer with our wider population and acknowledge and embrace the role they play in helping us to achieve these aims, including volunteers and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and wider community support organisations.
- Where everyone has a part to play in prevention, so we must equip our people and communities with the skills and confidence to do this.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

As part of the design of this plan, the stakeholder group was engaged to enable mapping of Dorset's employment support provision for those over 18yrs. A comprehensive directory of local employment support programmes across the Dorset and BCP Council areas, and specialist provision in local geographies is provided in Appendix 2.

The types of programmes that are offered in the county include:

- Employment and Skills Training - Skills Bootcamps, Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), Apprenticeships, Adult Skills Fund employability provision, Digital Skills Hubs, Connect to Work
- Specialist Support programmes - for veterans, people with disabilities, mental health conditions, ex-offenders, asylum seekers
- Youth-Focused Programmes – Kings Trust
- Financial and Welfare Advice – Citizens Advice
- Community and Voluntary Sector employment pathway work- Community Action Networks in BCP and Dorset council areas, VCSE, Active Partnership, commissioned services to support and signpost
- Health-Linked Employment Services - NHS Talking Therapies, Integrated Mental Health Employment Service, Integrated Neighbourhood team, social prescribing.

Many programmes are funded through public sector commissioning or charitable funding. Some provide ongoing support, some have time limited funding often through public sector commissioning or charitable funding.

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Further and higher education providers across Dorset play a crucial role in equipping learners with the skills, knowledge, and qualifications needed to drive the county's economic development. In particular, our FE and HE providers are the backbone for young peoples development, employability and skills. Dorset's colleges and universities offer a rich blend of vocational, technical, and academic pathways, serving a diverse population that includes school leavers, adult learners, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These institutions are deeply rooted in the place and act as key anchors for social mobility and regional growth.

A notable strength of Dorset's education landscape lies in its close alignment with local and regional priorities, with provision focused on key sectors such as health and social care, engineering, land-based industries, construction, tourism, and digital technologies. Bournemouth & Poole College and Coastland College with higher education institutions. Arts University Bournemouth, Bournemouth University and Health Sciences University collaborate with employers and training providers to co-develop curricula that meet workforce needs. This includes offering apprenticeships at all levels, T Levels, higher technical qualifications, degree qualifications and industry placements, ensuring learners gain real-world experience and employers benefit from a pipeline of skilled talent.

Dorset's colleges and universities are also leading the way in enhancing digital infrastructure and flexible learning models, expanding access through online and blended learning options. Looking to the future, the post-16 education sector in Dorset is working to further support the county's ambitions with focus on green growth, digital innovation, and health services. By continuing to prioritise inclusive and employment-focused education, Dorset's institutions will help ensure the local workforce remains adaptable, resilient, and competitive in an evolving economy.

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"Further and higher education providers across Dorset play a crucial role in equipping learners with the skills, knowledge, and qualifications needed to drive the county's economic development."



INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Across the Dorset Council and BCP Council areas there is further education strength in independent training providers—represented locally through the Dorset & Somerset Training Provider Network (DSTPN)—delivering employability support, apprenticeships and Skills Bootcamps aligned to Dorset's priority sectors (health & social care; advanced manufacturing & engineering including aerospace/defence/marine; construction; digital/creative; and agri-tech/aquaculture).

Training providers delivery strongly for apprenticeships in care, childcare, accountancy, business administration, leadership & management, automotive, early years and education, social care, education and business, electrical and plumbing/heating and animal care, veterinary nursing and functional skills. Training providers are also an important resource for employability skills, with providers offering free courses and progression routes, from wellbeing and budgeting to City & Guilds-accredited horticulture, aimed at moving residents into work, while linked up to providers who deliver job search, training and in-work support across the area.

Skills Bootcamps are supported locally through DSTPN with employer co-investment and offers spanning digital, engineering, construction, leadership/management, transport & logistics and more. NHS partners are also joining in—Dorset County Hospital launched a Health & Social Care Bootcamp in August 2025 to fast-track local talent into the sector. BCP Council signposts the ecosystem linking DSTPN, Skills Bootcamps and JCP's sector-based work academies so employers and residents can find the right pathway across the area.

SPECIALIST SEND SUPPORT

All young people have to stay in education or training until their eighteenth birthday. There is a range of education and training providers including specialist provision that supports young people aged 16–24 with SEND and those with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) to progress into education, training, employment and community activity pathways.

Support including travel assistance and bursaries to aid participation are available.



SYSTEMIC CHANGES

SYSTEMIC CHANGES

From the system mapping information, it is clear that within Dorset and BCP Council areas there is a comprehensive offer of services supporting residents into employment. However, the challenge lies in fragmentation. Services are numerous but not always coordinated, meaning residents, employers and partners can experience duplication, confusion and missed opportunities.

To create systemic change, we need interventions that alter how the system is designed, coordinated and incentivised. This requires close collaboration with Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions, the Integrated Care Board and NHS local services, as well as alignment with Department for Education priorities through the Local Skills Improvement Plan and Adult Education funding.

The following interventions begin the journey of systemic change. They are designed to move Dorset from a fragmented, silo-based set of programmes to an integrated ecosystem built on shared purpose. This means a single front door, strong joint governance, integration of health and employment pathways, unified employer engagement, a stronger local presence in high-need communities, and the flexibility to respond to practical barriers. Together, these shifts will benefit local people and help realise the growth ambitions of both Dorset and BCP Councils.

SINGLE FRONT DOOR & SHARED TRIAGE

Across Dorset, residents seeking support to enter or progress in work currently face a fragmented landscape. People may come into contact with Jobcentre Plus, Skills and Learning, Access Wellbeing, Family Hubs, Dorset Work Matters, Restart and other programmes, but too often this results in duplication, delays, or people disengaging. By creating a single front door, supported by a shared triage and assessment process, we can ensure that every resident is connected quickly to the right service, no matter where they first make contact. This “no wrong door” approach would replace siloed, eligibility-driven referral routes with a simpler, more consistent pathway into support.

JOINT GOVERNANCE & OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

Delivering this shift requires robust governance. At present, different commissioners and agencies – including the Department for Work and Pensions, NHS Dorset and local councils – each operate with their own performance frameworks. This fragments accountability and makes partnership optional rather than integral. Establishing a pan-Dorset Work and Health Board, with representation from statutory bodies and employer organisations, would provide a single structure for leadership and oversight. By adopting a shared outcomes framework, focused on measures such as job entry, sustainment, in-work progression and wellbeing, all partners can be held collectively accountable for what matters most to residents and to the local economy.

EMBED WORK IN HEALTH & CARE PATHWAYS

Employment must also become a routine part of health and care pathways. While targeted provision exists – such as Dorset Work Matters and employment advisers within Talking Therapies – work is not consistently embedded in GP or primary care practice. Expanding Work Well-type approaches locally would enable employment conversations to take place at the earliest point of contact, with clear routes into specialist support and close integration with Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. This positions work as a determinant of health and wellbeing, shifting it from the margins of the welfare system into the mainstream of clinical and community care.

EMBEDDING EMPLOYMENT AS A PRIORITY NEED

Local authorities have a critical role in driving inclusive growth and long-term prosperity, and this requires embedding clear work pathways into all commissioned activity across every service area. To deliver on the ambitions of this plan, the council will embed pathways into employment across all commissioned activity, making “supporting people into work” a core requirement of every directorate. This systemic shift ensures that housing, health, social care, education, regeneration and community services align commissioning with the priority of reducing economic inactivity. By placing employment outcomes at the centre of local delivery, the council will drive inclusive growth, improve wellbeing, and strengthen long-term prosperity for its communities.

UNIFIED EMPLOYER GATEWAY

Employers, too, need a simpler and more effective relationship with the system. Currently, they may be approached separately by Jobcentre Plus, the Careers Hub, Business Growth Dorset, councils and even NHS programmes. This risks confusion and reduces impact. By positioning a government funded single employer-facing gateway, underpinned by behind-the-scenes coordination across agencies, we can reduce duplication and make engagement easier. This unified approach will strengthen employer buy-in, encourage wider participation in initiatives such as Disability Confident, and create clearer pipelines into key sectors, helping to align employment support with the wider growth of Dorset’s economy.

PLACE-BASED INTEGRATION IN HIGH-NEED AREAS

It is equally important that services are rooted in the communities where need is greatest. While many operate county-wide, they are not always visible or trusted in places such as Boscombe or Weymouth. By co-locating Jobcentre Plus coaches, NHS employment advisers and Skills and

Learning provision within Family Hubs and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, we can create accessible and trusted spaces where employment support is embedded in local community infrastructure. This place-based approach ensures that help is both hyper-local and integrated, building stronger relationships and tackling inequalities more effectively.

BUILD SECTOR PIPELINES ALIGNED TO PRIORITIES

Develop integrated sector pipelines, aligned with LSIP priorities and underpinned by Sector-based Work Academy Programme, Skills Bootcamps and education providers to create sustained, co-branded skills pathways in priority sectors—linking employer demand to tailored training, guaranteed interviews, and long-term in-work progression.

USE FLEXIBLE FUNDS AS GLUE

Finally, the system must be equipped with the flexibility to respond to the everyday barriers that can derail progress. For many residents, the cost of a bus fare, work clothing, or a short training course is enough to prevent engagement. Current funding streams are too rigid to address these challenges. By creating small, flexible funds – held by councils and accessible across agencies – we can provide practical, timely help to smooth progression into work. Drawing on resources such as the Shared Prosperity Fund, Connect to Work and Adult Education budgets, these pots of support act as the “glue” that holds the wider system together, making sustained employment achievable, particularly for those facing the greatest disadvantage.

Together, these changes represent a systemic shift. They move Dorset from a fragmented, programme-led environment to a joined-up, outcome-focused system where residents experience seamless support, employers engage with ease, and employment is recognised as a cornerstone of health and wellbeing. The result will be faster job starts, more sustained progression, stronger local economies, and healthier communities.

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"By working in partnership, we believe we can tackle economic inactivity, address health-related barriers, elevate job quality, and foster inclusive growth across our region."



Photo: Loop



WORKING WITH PARTNERS



WORKING WITH PARTNERS

PARTNERSHIP THROUGH THE CREATION OF THE PLAN

As part of the development of the Get Dorset & BCP Working plan a number of stakeholders were engaged. The main focus of the engagement was around three questions:

What can we do more of to give people the confidence and opportunity to work?	What can we do differently to give people the confidence and opportunity to work?	What are we not doing to give people the confidence and opportunity to work?
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The approach has allowed us to create a system map of the current provision as well as hear the views and opinions of stakeholders to enable the shaping of the plan.

The following stakeholders and collaborative groups have had opportunity to input to the plan:

Dorset Skills and Workforce Board	Dorset Council
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council	Department for Work and Pensions
Jobcentre Plus	Dorset Integrated Care Board and Service
Community Action Network and its members	Employment support providers
Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations	Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network

Discussions on the creation of local plans have been had with Somerset Council and Wiltshire Council. Draft and final plans have been shared between the councils, recognising the plan to work together in the future.

Going forward the plan depends on national and regional partners for success, local partners and their delivery plans, government partners and in particular their commissioned services and support mechanisms within local delivery of councils, NHS, JCP and wider. It is also acknowledged that others need to be part of this plan, and wider engagement relating to the plan should continue.

PARTNERSHIP THROUGHOUT THE DELIVERY OF THE PLAN

DORSET COUNCIL

As Dorset Council, we are pleased to partner closely with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) in the delivery of the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan, with Dorset Council serving as the accountable body for its implementation. Building on the ambitions outlined in our Economic Growth Prospectus, we will lead collaboration across sectors by aligning our strategic economic growth priorities—including clean energy, innovation, tourism, market town regeneration, and skills development—with the plan’s objectives. As the accountable body, Dorset Council will coordinate funding, governance, and oversight to ensure that interventions are well targeted, evidence based, and delivered across the county.

We will bring together public, private, and community stakeholders, working with existing groups such as the Dorset Growth Board, to drive forward systemic change that enables creation of high quality jobs, efficient employment support systems, sustainable investment, and enhances economic resilience across the pan Dorset area. Through this leadership role, Dorset Council ensures robust coordination, transparent accountability, and alignment with Health and Work plans, Jobcentre Plus/ DWP, Connect to Work and Local Skills Improvement Plans, helping to secure a thriving, inclusive, and prosperous future for all residents.

BCP COUNCIL

As BCP Council, our work within the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan demonstrates our commitment to strengthening local employment, fostering inclusive economic growth, and supporting every member of our community to lead a fulfilled life. Grounded in our shared vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, where ‘employment is available for everyone’ and ‘skills are continually developed’, we will leverage our Business Growth Board, Skills Plan and emerging Local Growth Plan (April 2026) to target labour market challenges and create opportunities for all.

In alignment with the Get Britain Working guidance, our partnership will review local labour market data, collaborate with Jobcentre Plus, the Integrated Care Board, employers, education providers, and community organisations, and co design interventions that support those facing barriers to work with a focus on those with health conditions, caring responsibilities and our young people. By integrating our local skills strategies and leveraging funded programmes such as Dorset Careers Hub, we will connect young people to businesses and emerging sectors, build personalised pathways into sustainable, quality jobs. Through this collaborative approach, we will align with the national goal of raising employment rates towards 80%, support economic resilience across our county, and empower our residents to thrive in an innovative, inclusive, and prosperous local labour market.

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

DWP will work with the partnership behind the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan by aligning local delivery with national Get Britain Working guidance—co-designing a whole-system plan with councils, NHS/ICB partners and employers; integrating Jobcentre Plus (and the emerging Jobs & Careers Service) into local pathways; and jointly setting outcome measures (e.g., employment rate) with regular progress reviews. In practice this means using Jobcentre Plus networks to convene stakeholders around shared labour-market priorities, coordinating provision and future commissioning, and ensuring local insights feed into national policy design.

The plan will dovetail with national reforms in the Back to Work Plan—including the overhaul of jobcentres and a stronger “make work pay/skills” offer—so Dorset and BCP partners can sequence local activity with upcoming service changes. Where health is a barrier to work, the partnership can draw on the WorkWell model by creating an integrated work-and-health offer with the local ICB, backed by DWP guidance and evaluation learning from the pilots. Delivery should also anticipate published DWP/JCP changes signalled in the Pathways to Work / Get Britain Working programme—such as the transition towards a jobs-and-skills public employment service and the Youth Guarantee—while aligning local support for Universal Credit claimants and managed migration with current DWP guidance and grants.

DWP and Jobcentre Plus representatives will be key stakeholders for the plan, and will be engaged through Dorset Skills and Workforce Board, both for governance, delivery and shaping future iterations.

INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

The Dorset Integrated Care Board, in collaboration with Dorset and BCP Councils, will serve as a key strategic partner in developing and delivering the Get Dorset and BCP Working plan. This partnership will involve joint governance arrangements—where the ICB, Jobcentre Plus (or the Jobs and Careers Service), and the local authorities jointly agree and oversee the plan’s objectives, actions, and monitoring mechanisms. Drawing on its existing integrated care partnership frameworks and community engagement networks, the ICB will help identify local labour market challenges—particularly health related economic inactivity—and support the mapping of existing services, identifying gaps, duplications, and opportunities for comprehensive interventions.

Through this partnership, the ICB will facilitate the co design of targeted support—such as embedding employment advisers in health and care pathways, especially for mental health and musculoskeletal recovery—ensuring integration between employment support and health services. Moreover, the ICB can engage its established place based and community infrastructure to involve individuals and communities in shaping, reviewing, and sustaining the plan—ensuring that priorities reflect lived experience and build on existing strengths.

SKILLS AND LEARNING COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The Connect to Work programme will be delivered by Skills and Learning Community Education for all residents in Dorset Council and BCP Council area. The programme will work in close partnership with Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan to strengthen employment opportunities and community resilience. Connect to Work will focus on equipping individuals with tailored support, training and employer connections, aligning priorities with local needs, ensuring that job seekers gain the right skills and confidence to enter or re-enter the workforce. Employers benefit from a more diverse and prepared talent pool. This programme will address immediate unemployment challenges and contribute to long-term economic growth and social inclusion across the county. Alongside Connect to Work, Adult Skills and Learning are key deliverers of work based skills offering both face to face delivery and online.

DORSET SKILLS AND WORKFORCE BOARD

The Dorset Skills and Workforce Board will provide strategic governance and stakeholder engagement for the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan, acting as the key forum for oversight and collaborative decision-making. Bringing together representatives from employers, skills and training providers, local authorities, DWP, health and community organisations, the Board will ensure that the Plan is shaped by a range of perspectives and meets local economic need. It will coordinate stakeholder input, review reported progress against agreed outcomes, and provide challenge and guidance to keep delivery on track. By enabling strong partnerships and maintaining transparent communication channels, the Boards membership will be a key part of the success of the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan.



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“Dorset faces a unique challenge – a shrinking workforce at a time when we need it to grow – but by working together we can unlock the potential of every person who wants to work.”



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND OUTCOME METRICS

PRIORITY ACTIONS AND OUTCOME METRICS

The Get Britain Working Local Plan sets out a clear framework for how we will support residents into sustainable employment, improve skills, and strengthen local economic resilience. With ongoing economic challenges and changes in the labour market, it is vital that we take a proactive, coordinated approach to reducing unemployment, supporting workers in the workforce and creating new opportunities for growth.

This action plan outlines the priorities, partnerships, and practical steps that will ensure individuals have access to the right training, guidance, and support to move into work. It also highlights the role of local employers, voluntary organisations, and public services in creating a more inclusive and dynamic labour market.

Our vision is to build a community where everyone who wants to work can access the pathways, support, skills, and opportunities they need. By investing in people, supporting businesses, and fostering collaboration, the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan aims not only to reduce worklessness but also to promote long-term prosperity and wellbeing for all.

OUTCOME METRICS

For each of the DWP intermediate outcome metrics outlined below, a programme of actions has been developed to respond to the challenges identified in Dorset and BCP Council area. A particular emphasis has been placed on young people, as stakeholders consistently highlighted this group as a priority for focused support and intervention.

Key outcome priorities for Dorset & BCP:

- Reduce local variations in employment rates (people aged 18–66)
- Reduce health-related economic inactivity (people aged 18–66)
- Narrow the disability employment gap (people aged 18–66)
- Reduce the proportion of young people (18–24) not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Reduce the employment rate gap between lone parents and parents in couples (people aged 18–66)
- Reduce the percentage of couple households where at least one parent is out of work (people aged 18–66)
- Increase the employment rate of women (people aged 18–66)

An initial action plan is included at Appendix 2. This plan will be developed further with partners and stakeholders throughout 2025, including the agreement of shared targets and measures of success. Progress will be reviewed and the plan updated on a quarterly basis until June 2027.



GOVERNANCE, MONITORING AND FUTURE ITERATIONS

GOVERNANCE, MONITORING AND FUTURE INTERACTIONS

GOVERNANCE

Dorset Skills and Workforce Board (DSWB)			
National, regional, and local government policies influencing strategic provider and employer activity in Wessex and pan-Dorset	Local Skills Improvement Plan (SE)	Get Dorset Working Plan (DWP)	Connect to Work Programme (DWP)

The Dorset Skills and Workforce Board is appropriately structured to provide governance for the Get Dorset & BCP Working Plan. Its stakeholder membership offers a strong platform for collaboration, ensuring alignment across key partners and initiatives. The Board provides pan-Dorset governance for the Local Skills Improvement Plan and the Connect to Work programme, reinforcing its strategic role in working with local authorities to shape and support the local workforce agenda.

While this arrangement represents the most appropriate governance structure at present, it may be reviewed in future, particularly in relation to devolution plans for the Wessex area.

MONITORING

Dorset Council as accountable body for this plan will oversee the implementation of these actions, using the Get Britain Working Outcome Indicators as the primary framework for both internal and external performance monitoring. Monitoring will be conducted on a quarterly basis (31 Mar, 30 Jun, 30 Sept, 31 Dec) for the first 24 months following the plans publication. The frequency of monitoring will be reviewed and adjusted as appropriate. The monitoring report will be shared with the stakeholders via Dorset Skills and Workforce Board.

Where relevant data sets exist, and to align with local authority insight teams and other stakeholders, this data may be included.

It should be noted that many of the statistics that will be used for monitoring and evaluation are for people up to the age of 16-64, but the Get Britain Working Outcome metrics are up to the age of 18-66. As standardised data changes, the reports may be updated.

REPORTING

Annual progress reports will be shared with the Integrated Care Board, BCP Cabinet and Dorset Council Cabinet. The final version will be shared with DWP, as required and published on council websites.

FUTURE ITERATIONS

This plan has been written at a time when a number of factors are changing in the health, work and geography of organisations relevant to the delivery. It is proposed that a second iteration of this plan is published alongside the publication of the Wessex Joint Local Growth Plan, the Wessex area Integrated Care Board Work and Health Plan and other strategies aligned to changing geography.

Somerset Council, Wiltshire Council, BCP Council and Dorset Council have collaborated during the writing of this plan, and understand that local area plans will need to be reviewed and potentially merged when devolution is agreed.

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"Together, we're building a stronger, more inclusive future for everyone who lives and works here."





REFERENCES AND APPENDICES

REFERENCES FOR DATA

As part of the development of the Get Dorset & BCP Working plan a number of stakeholders were engaged. The main focus of the engagement was around three questions:

BCP Research and Consultation	BCP Council
Coastal Navigators Network	Breaking Barriers Innovations
Press release on retail jobs	British Retail Consortium
StatExplor	Department for Work and Pensions
Guidance for Developing local Get Britain Working Plans (England)	Department for Work and Pensions
DWP Outcome Measures	Department for Work and Pensions
Get Britain Working white paper	Department for Work and Pensions
Dorset Local Skills Improvement Plan	Dorset Chamber
Dorset LSIP Progress Report, June 2025	Dorset Chamber
Data and Insight for Dorset	Dorset Council
Economic Evidence Based 2024	Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership
Dorset LEP (2024) Draft Socio-Economic Evidence Base	Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership
13th Annual report on scale of low pay in the UK	Living Wage Foundation
Dorset Intelligence and Insight Service	NHS Dorset
Widening Participation Plan	NHS Dorset
Integrated Care Partnership strategy	NHS Dorset
Integrated Care System People Plan	NHS Dorset
Official Census and Labour Market Statistics	NOMIS
Population Survey and mid-year estimates 2024	Office for National Statistics
Tourism Statistics and Policy (2025)	UK Parliament
The Spirit Level	Wilkinson and Pickett (2009)

APPENDIX 1 CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS BY LOCAL AUTHORITY

DORSET COUNCIL CHALLENGES

Dorset faces a complex mix of economic and employment challenges shaped by its geography, demographics, and industry profile. The county's economy is heavily reliant on tourism, agriculture, and a relatively small number of advanced manufacturing and marine sectors, which can make it vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations and wider economic downturns. Many rural areas experience limited access to well-paid, year-round employment, contributing to lower average wages compared to the national average. A growing, older population adds further pressure, with a shrinking proportion of working-age residents available to support local services and businesses. Transport links, especially in more isolated parts of the county, remain a barrier to accessing jobs, training, and investment opportunities. Together, these factors create a need for targeted strategies that both diversify the economy and improve access to skills, infrastructure, and sustainable employment.

DORSET COUNCIL OPPORTUNITIES

In the Dorset Council area, the economy benefits from a rich mix of traditional strengths and emerging opportunities. Tourism remains a key driver, with the UNESCO World Heritage Jurassic Coast, historic market towns, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty attracting visitors and supporting local businesses. Investment in digital connectivity and transport links is creating opportunities for higher-value jobs and enabling more small and medium enterprises to thrive, particularly in the creative, professional, and technical sectors. Advanced engineering and manufacturing—often linked to marine, defence, and precision industries—provide high-skill employment, while the area's strong agricultural base is diversifying into local food production, renewable energy, and agri-tourism. Combined with a commitment to sustainability and innovation, these factors position the Dorset Council area for a resilient and more self-sufficient economic future.

BCP COUNCIL CHALLENGES

The BCP Council area faces several interconnected weaknesses that constrain its economic potential and quality of life. Ageing transport infrastructure, chronic congestion on key routes such as the A338 and A35, and limited park-and-ride provision hinder connectivity, reduce agglomeration benefits, and deter inward investment. The local economy is marked by seasonality, with high visitor numbers in peak months but sharp drops in winter, creating instability in employment. Productivity remains below the South West average, driven partly by a leisure-heavy sector mix, while housing affordability—sustained at around a 9:1 price-to-earnings ratio—limits recruitment, particularly for key workers. Social issues such as anti-social behaviour, homelessness, and weak town centre branding persist, compounded by an ageing demographic in areas like Christchurch and Poole, which also face limited public transport and land constraints. Environmental risks, including floodplain exposure and coastal storm surges, threaten key assets and require costly adaptation. Wider structural challenges include underfunded adult and vocational education, low awareness of post-16 career pathways, and a shortage of workers in high-demand sectors.

BCP COUNCIL OPPORTUNITIES

BCP Council benefits from a uniquely diverse economic and lifestyle offer that blends natural assets, sectoral strengths, and strong infrastructure. Bournemouth's award-winning seven-mile Blue Flag coastline, Premier League football club, and vibrant cultural scene attract young professionals, remote workers, and visitors alike, while its university ranks among the world's top 100 young institutions, supplying skilled graduates to the region's thriving digital and FinTech sectors. Christchurch is home to a nationally recognised aerospace and defence cluster, supported by excellent digital connectivity and Bournemouth Airport's growth past one million passengers in 2024.

Poole leverages the scale of the world's second-largest natural harbour to anchor a world-class marine manufacturing and defence hub, with Sunseeker, the RNLI, and advanced composites expertise driving innovation and exports. Across the conurbation, the visitor economy is robust and year-round, supported by major events, high-profile attractions, and a strong hospitality base. Investment in housing, regeneration, and education—combined with above-average apprenticeship participation and collaborative skills partnerships—ensures that BCP offers both a high quality of life and the economic scale, diversity, and talent pipeline needed for sustained growth.

APPENDIX 2 PROVIDER MAPPING

PROVIDER	TYPE	DELIVERY
Active Dorset	Active Partnership	Movement is the foundation of good health, wellbeing and thriving sustainable communities
Arts University Bournemouth	Specialist HE provider	Specialist delivery of creative and arts L4-L7
Autism Unlimited	Futures - Autism Unlimited	For all people an EHCP (education and Healthcare) plan
BCP / DC	Skills and Learning	
BCP Council	Day Opportunities Strategy 2024-29	Day opportunities suitable for individuals, supported employment 'Place and Train',
BCP Council	Digital Skills Hub	Courses, support drop ins, business accelerator, CPD sessions, tech courses
BCP Council	BCP NEET Strategy and Education Employment and Training (EET) Plan	Detailed understanding and action plan to support EET to age 18
BCP Council / private sector	Dorset Engineering Manufacturing Cluster	Collaborative group supporting and promoting sectors in Dorset
BCP Council Business Board	LA	Delivering Local Growth Plans
Bournemouth and Poole College	FE College	16-18 delivery, apprenticeships, university college, Sunseeker apprenticeship college, health apprenticeships
Bournemouth University	University	Delivery of L4-L7 including apprenticeships, KTPs, Help to Grow,
Brockenhurst College	FE College	16-18 delivery, apprenticeships, higher education, adult professional, Access to HE, workforce support
Civic University Consortia	Place agenda	Community based work to bring skills and community partners together for the benefit of the place

PROVIDER	TYPE	DELIVERY
Coastland College	FE College	16-18 delivery, apprenticeships, university college, rural based courses, adult and employer facing devlivery
Community Action Network	Voluntary sector delivery	Support for local people through volunteering into work. Early Help Partnership with BCP to support families and young people.
CRUMBS Project, The	CRUMBS Project, The	Helping people with a learning disability or mental health condition or acquired brain injury through hospitality based training for independence
Dorset Abilities Group	Tuck by Truck - Dorset Abilities Group	Supporting development of skills, confidence and independence through real work experience
Dorset and BCP Councils	Dorset Business Growth	Programmes to support business growth, sustainability, leadership and supply chain.
Dorset Chamber	Employer Representative Body / Membership body	Enabling growth through networking, government lobbying and support services
Dorset Chamber	Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)	Collaborative plan to deliver skills for business needs in Dorset, identifying issues and removing barriers
Dorset Community Action	Voluntary sector delivery, empowering communities	Supporting people with training and skills development
Dorset Community Hospital (DCH) & Dorset Mental Health Forum (DMHF)	Dorset Work Matters	Helping people who are accessing mental health services to find paid employment
Dorset Council	Dorset Family Information Directory	Comprehensive directory of support for young people - local and national delivery
Dorset Council	Education, Employment, Training and re-engagement support team	Support for all aspects of challenge for young people.
Dorset Council	Birth to Settled Adulthood	Strategy to support families, children and young people

PROVIDER	TYPE	DELIVERY
Dorset Council (funded by CEC)	Dorset Careers Hub	Raise awareness and aspiration for all young people. Remove barriers to work and careers for all.
Dorset Council / private sector	Clean Energy Cluster	Working with clean energy businesses and Portland Port for delivery of clean energy projects
Dorset Council Business Board	Local Authority Place directorate	Accelerating and delivering Local Growth Plans
Dorset Health Care	Employment Advisors	Helps residents on Steps2Wellbeing with low/medium mental health challenges find work
Dorset Health Care	Steps to Wellbeing	Offers a range of talking therapies including counselling, online courses, CBT and guided self-help.
Down's Syndrome Association	National WorkFit programme	Employment programme that brings together employers and job-seekers with Downs Syndrome
DSTPN	Training Provider Network	Strengthen the delivery of skills in the county, particularly via apprenticeships and other vocational routes
DWP / Disability Confident	Government department	Supporting businesses with process and culture change aligned to EDI
DWP / Get Britain Working	Get Britian Working	Reduce economically inactive population. Raise opportunity for those on lowest incomes. Grow the workforce and jobs.
DWP/JCP+	JCP+	Pre-employment training, work experience, guaranteed job interview
Employ My Ability	Employ My Ability	Provider of onsite hospitality, catering, and horticultural facilities that help students with SEND gather vital skills, expertise and confidence.
Exeter College	FE College	General College delivering full curriculum delivery including Skills Bootcamps

PROVIDER	TYPE	DELIVERY
Great South West	Pan-regional partnership	Delivering major projects, developing a testbed for new ideas and ensuring GSW opportunities are understood by government
Health Sciences University	Specialist University	Delivery of specialist allied health L4-7 including apprenticeships, CPD
Help and Care	Charity empowering people and communities	Empowering individuals with physical and mental health conditions to build the lives they want.
Help and Kindness	Support and signpost service	Listings of support option for all residents.
Independent	Dorset Skills and Workforce Board	To enable a collaborative skills system that meets the needs of Dorset
Kings Trust	Programme delivery for young people	Helping young people into work and businesses
Linwood School	Classroom in the Heart of Industry (CHI)	On-the-job training opportunities supporting young people who have an EHCP
Minstead Trust	Empowering Employment programme - Minstead Trust	Supporting people with learning disabilities and autism to build skills towards meaningful employment.
One Dorset / ICB	ICB Joint Forward Plan	Better health and wellbeing outcomes for all
One Dorset / ICP	Working Better Together	Inequality in access and outcomes / WP agenda / children's health / use of population data to drive delivery
Pluss CIC	Dorset Supported Employment Service	Supporting people with a learning disability or autism get ready for, and find, paid work

PROVIDER	TYPE	DELIVERY
Seeability	Ready, Willing and Able supported employment programme	Helps people with learning disabilities, autism or sight loss find the right job and get support to stay in work.
Seetec	Supported Employment Service	Includes personal development, job search, training, work trials and benefits advice
Seetec Pluss	National Careers Service	Support for all workers and potential workers with careers advice.
Seetec Pluss	Restart Scheme	Programme for people who are Long Term unemployed for 6 months or more
SEND 4	SEND4 Supported Employment Programme	Job coaching, travel training and supported employment provision
Sheltered Work Opportunities Project	Cherry Tree Nursery and Chestnut Nursery	Using therapeutic horticulture to provide meaningful occupation in a supportive environment for people with mental illness
Silicon South	Network for Digital, Creative and Tech Sectors in Dorset	Programme delivery, mentoring, access to expert, career development
Somerset Council/ DSTPN/skills providers	Skills Boot Camps	Free flexible courses up to 16 weeks for 19+ aligned to in demand skills in the county.
Stable Family Home Trust	Gifted Garden Cwentre – Highcliffe	Learning disabilities, Mental Health
Support And Mentoring Enabling Entrepreneurship (SAMEE)	Charity enabling exploration of self-employment	Self-employment internship programme and Steps into Self-employment programme
The Royal Foundation - Homewards	BCP Homewards	Relevant - NEET prevention work for under 25yrs. Clearing the path to employment and training.
Tricuro	COAST - Tricuro	Work based training for adults with learning disabilities
Yeovil College	FE College	16-18 delivery, apprenticeships, university college, University Centre, health apprenticeships

APPENDIX 3 DORSET SKILLS AND WORKFORCE BOARD

Independent Chair	Nicola Newman
Employer representative	Hugh Joseph
Employer representative	David Matthews
Arts University Bournemouth	Lisa Mann
Bournemouth & Poole College	Phil Sayles
Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council	Ruth Spencer
Bournemouth University	Phil Sewell
Coastland College	Tom Hallam
Department of Work and Pensions	Karen Taylor
Digital Skills Partnership	Penny Syddall
Dorset & Somerset Training Provider Network	Rod Davis
Dorset Careers Hub	Simon Fraiz-Brown
Dorset Chamber	Rosie Knapper
Dorset Council	Jon Bird
Health Sciences University	Lesley Haig
National Careers Service	Cheryl Cole
NHS ICB	Eleanor Parson
Skills and Learning Adult Community Education	Sarah Rice
Yeovil College	Alex Clancy

APPENDIX 4 ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE: OVERARCHING	
Key Actions	Owner
Agree key stakeholder roles and responsibilities for Get Dorset & BCP Working Plan	Accountable Body
Monitor and report the delivery of Get Dorset & BCP Working Plan (quarterly)	Accountable Body
Deliver data to support delivery and monitoring of the Get Dorset & BCP Working plan	Accountable Body
Deliver economic change through new Local Growth Plan (Mar 2026)	BCP Council
Deliver economic change to drive new, highly paid jobs for Dorset	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy
Agree shared goals to support employment growth around community, economic development and post-16.	Dorset and BCP Councils
Consider GD&BCPW Plan measures in the development of the Local Growth Plan for the Wessex devolved area	Dorset and BCP Councils
Delivery of strategic Work and Health Plan	ICB
Explore options for co-location of employment, health and employability skills services	LSIP
Look at examples of good practice for employment for all	LSIP

OBJECTIVE: INCREASE EMPLOYMENT RATE	
Key Actions	Owner
Develop evidence base of employer skills needs to develop understanding of the local skills story	LSIP
Increase apprenticeship and technical education starts	LSIP
Increase work experience and placement opportunities	LSIP
Increase Leadership and management skills including: Project Management and Line management	LSIP
Meet employers skills needs as expressed in skills priorities	LSIP
Review training offer to support Unemployed and Economically Inactive	LSIP
Investigate developing a work readiness short course (AEB) with guaranteed interview	LSIP
Provide opportunities to learn more about occupations and working environment during courses including Health & Social Care.	LSIP
Increase availability of IAG during course.	LSIP
Launch Connect to Work in BCP and Dorset	Skills and Learning
Develop evidence base of employer skills needs to develop understanding of the local skills story	DWP
Implement approved new models of delivery to increase affordable housing supply making best use of council assets	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy 2025-2030
Create 300 jobs at Dorset Innovation Park by 2029	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy 2025-2030
Generate over 2000 jobs and over £500m of private sector investment in renewable energy projects by 2029	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy 2025-2030
Support those with disadvantage to be work ready, secure work and be resilient in work.	Connect to Work

OBJECTIVE: INCREASE EARNINGS	
Key Actions	Owner
Influence curriculum and course design and delivery to meet employers skills needs	LSIP
Develop a Dorset Skills Advice Hub to improve employer understanding of training offer	LSIP
Improve Digital and IT Skills	LSIP
Increase Leadership and management skills including: Project Management and Line management	LSIP
Increase English and Maths Skills	LSIP
Deliver economic change to drive new, highly paid jobs for Dorset	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy 2025-2030

OBJECTIVE: REDUCE HEALTH RELATED ECONOMIC INACTIVITY	
Key Actions	Owner
Disability Confident	DWP
Work as a positive to health and wellbeing	ICB
Reduce waiting times	ICB
Active Dorset actions aligned to work and health	Active Dorset
Reducing unpaid care requirements	ICB
Align actions to the creation of the local Work and Health 10 year Plan	ICB
Re-skill to enable work in a new sector/role.	Connect to Work
Maintaining mental health whilst dealing with a physical condition	ICB
Confidence building for those who have been out of the workplace	Connect to Work
Induction for new starters that supports return to work - educate employers via Access to Work	DWP
Funded reasonable adjustments to be promoted to employers	DWP

OBJECTIVE : REDUCE DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RATE GAP	
Key Actions	Owner
Building awareness and understanding of training options amongst learners	LSIP
Mental health and well-being awareness courses available	LSIP
Develop/offer accessible courses, for whole workforce, to improve employer awareness and ability to make informed plans	LSIP
Support young people and adults with SEND into workplace	LSIP
Drive support for self-employment work for disabled	SAMEE
LA to drive diversity and inclusion in volunteers to include disability, gender and age.	Councils
Support for those with disabilities both into and within the workplace	Connect to Work
Supported Living commissioned service including pathway to work support	BCP Council

OBJECTIVE: REDUCE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT	
Key Actions	Owner
Building awareness and understanding of training options amongst learners	LSIP
Improve work readiness for 16-19 including communication and problem solving	LSIP
Improve work readiness for those over 18	LSIP
Increase work experience and placement opportunities	LSIP
Support young people and adults with SEND into workplace	LSIP
Mental health and well-being awareness courses available	LSIP
Schools and Colleges working towards achieving all 8 Gatsby benchmarks of good career guidance	LSIP
Make apprenticeship levy available to increase the number of apprenticeships offered by local businesses	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy 2025-2030
Encourage young people into entrepreneurship creating 1000 business start-up courses for 16-34 yrs by 2029	DC - Economic Prospectus - Growth Strategy 2025-2030
Increase volunteering opportunities as a specific pathway to work	Councils
Support work pathways for those at risk of homelessness	Homewards BCP
Children's services commissioning for employability pathway skills for NEET prevention, looked after children, care leavers, electively home educated and travelling/services communities	Councils
Migrant families support for education and employment pathways	Connect to Work

OBJECTIVE: REDUCE EMPLOYMENT GAP BETWEEN PARENTS	
Key Actions	Owner
Building awareness and understanding of training options amongst learners	LSIP
Increase availability of childcare	Councils
Support for childcare before and after school, and in school holidays	Councils
Enabling choice to support families	Councils
Support to return to the workforce	DWP
Family friendly work policies including flexibility around term time, school hours	Councils
Role modelling within LA to support parents to work flexibly to jointly share childcare	Councils
Whole family approach to support for childcare through flexible work	Employers
Look at ensuring career progression remains even with time out/flexible/part time due to family needs	Employers

OBJECTIVE : INCREASE FEMALE EMPLOYMENT RATE	
Key Actions	Owner
Building awareness and understanding of training options amongst learners	LSIP
Whole family approach to support for childcare through flexible work	Employers
Increase availability of childcare	Councils
Support for childcare before and after school, and in school holidays	Councils
Support for females returning to the workforce in securing and remaining in work	Connect to Work
LA to drive diversity and inclusion in volunteers to include disability, gender and age.	Councils
Support for those with disabilities both into and within the workplace	Connect to Work
Supported Living commissioned service including pathway to work support	BCP Council



Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan

DELIVERED FOR DORSET COUNCIL BY DORSET CHAMBER
