Item 4b – Get Worcestershire Working

WLEP BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Note the publishing of Get Worcestershire Working review final version in November 2025, discuss next steps and how the LEP is supporting.

Background

1. The UK Government published The Get Britain Working White Paper in November 2024 to set out its comprehensive Plan to tackle economic inactivity and boost employment. (See supporting information)

2. The White Paper focuses on addressing the root causes of economic inactivity such as long-term sickness, lack of skills and caring responsibilities. It sets out the significant investment to support a range of initiatives and programmes including Connect to Work, Workwell Vanguard Pilot and specific 12-month pilots across Combined authority geographies around young people, inactivity and health and work. This includes the new Youth Guarantee designed to ensure that all young people (18-21 years old) have access to education, employment, or training.

3. The White Paper also proposes radical reforms to health and welfare systems, both through reforms to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) services and benefits designed to improve access to healthcare and support for those out of work to return into employment. The goal is to create an inclusive labour market where everyone can participate and progress in work, with the overall aim to create a thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity for good work.

4. The overall aim is to reduce economic inactivity, support people into good work, and enhance productivity across the UK and in doing so, the White Paper, places emphasis on local partnerships to find solutions to specific regional challenges and makes significance reference to the role of devolution in this agenda.

5. Central government have allocated £240million to support various initiatives aimed at reducing economic inactivity and improving employment rates. In addition, they have launched the £1billion welfare reforms which is the largest welfare reform package in a generation, this investment is designed to help sick and disabled people who can work, providing tailored support to break down barriers to employment.

Get Worcestershire Working Plan

6. As part of the implementation of the national Get Britain Working ambition, every area in the country is expected to develop and implement a local version that has maximum impact for their geography. Worcestershire County Council received funding to develop a tailored plan addressing the county's employment and inactivity challenges, developing a collective approach to improving employment rates and lowering inactivity across the county. The plan brings a partnership approach from Worcestershire County Council, the local Department for Work and Pensions team and the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board and wider NHS partners to collectively bring solutions to raise employment levels and productivity within the county. Whilst there is no set format

for local plans there are some core elements which are expected to be included. These are: -

Labour Market Analysis
- Assess employment, unemployment, and inactivity trends.
- Identify disadvantaged groups (e.g., disabled people, carers, ex-offenders).
- Highlight geographic and sector-specific challenges.
- Use both data and frontline insights.
- Analyse job demand and supply, including part-time/flexible roles and skills shortages with employers.

Causes of Labour Market Issues
- Explore root causes of inactivity: education, skills, health, transport, housing, childcare, and job accessibility.
- Understand both supply (workers) and demand (employers) side barriers.

Current System and Support
- Map existing services across Jobcentre Plus, health, local government, etc.
- Identify service gaps and user experience issues.
- Evaluate how clear and coherent the support journey is for individuals.

Partnership Working
- Define roles of local stakeholders and how they'll collaborate.
- Set up mechanisms for joint working and aligning services.
- Consider how to use or adapt funding streams to support collaboration.

Systemic Changes
- Identify structural or capacity issues in local systems.
- Propose changes needed to improve outcomes and prepare for future investment.

Priority Actions & Long-Term Goals
- Set 12–24-month priorities aligned with local and national strategies to make support system improvements.
- Define outcome indicators and monitoring plans.
- Ensure alignment with Local Growth Plans, Local Skills Improvement Plans, and health and work strategies.

Governance and Future Planning
- Outline governance structures for oversight and alignment.
- Describe stakeholder engagement before and after plan development.
- Set a schedule and process for updating the plan.

7. The Get Worcestershire Working Plan (see supporting information for full document) follows the format outlined above, going into detail around the strengths, challenges and areas for development across Worcestershire. It has been developed through discussion and engagement with Worcestershire's key stakeholders, such as Further and Higher Education, Housing providers, Businesses, the Worcestershire Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Alliance (VCSE), Employability Providers, the local Department for Work and Pensions and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Integrated Care Board.

8. The Plan, once approved by Cabinet, must also receive endorsement from the regional Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) before its final submission to central

government. This multi-agency approval demonstrates a shared commitment to improving Worcestershire's employment outcomes through a collective response.

9. The DWP, through its local Jobcentre Plus teams, plays a pivotal role in the success of the Plan. It ensures that national government priorities are effectively localised for Worcestershire, aligning welfare-to-work reforms with the broader local offer. Crucially, DWP also acts as a key delivery partner, helping residents access the support they need to move into employment, complementing Jobcentre services.

10. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB, along with wider NHS organisations in the county, holds a strategic position in shaping the employment and skills landscape. Their contribution includes embedding inclusive recruitment practices, supporting workforce development, and integrating health and employment services into core strategies. Additionally, they help build a deeper understanding of how the healthcare system and its clinical effectiveness, impacts individuals' ability to gain and sustain employment.

11. In summary, since 2015, Worcestershire as a county has added over £2billion to its economy, created 34,000 jobs, and delivered 17,000 new homes which is clear evidence of a county investing in its future.

12. Worcestershire's working age population is around 350,700 people, which equates to 59.6% of the overall population. At the time of publishing the Get Britain Working guidance, around 80.3% were in some form of employment, albeit that 3.1% are claiming benefits of some kind. Alongside this Worcestershire has an inactivity rate of 18.8% compared to West Midlands at 22.5% and England at 21.1%. The remaining 0.9% is subject to data variances at time of recording caused by individuals status of employment who are waiting to start employment.

13. While Worcestershire's overall economic inactivity may appear less challenging compared to other regions, a closer look reveals a more complex picture. One of the most significant contributing factors is long-term sickness, defined as health conditions lasting more than six months, which accounts for 34% of all economic inactivity. This equates to approximately 22,600 residents and highlights a key challenge that Worcestershire must address to improve employment outcomes.

14. Alongside the growing inactivity due to long term sickness, is a pattern of increasing employment benefits being claimed related to disabilities or health conditions, which in Worcestershire has increased since the pandemic to 28,000 which is almost 10'000 more individuals than prior to 2020 and is continuing to grow at unsustainable levels.

15. One of the primary identified reasons for health conditions and disabilities seen through claimants is that of Mental and Behavioural conditions which equates to around 46.5% of all Employment Support Allowance claims in the county, currently around 5000 residents.

16. Within the remaining 66% of inactive residents , reasons for economic inactivity vary, and may include students (around 14400), retirement from the labour market (11'000), and caring responsibilities for children or adults, whether influenced by personal choice, financial circumstances, or the high cost of alternative care as well as other reasons.

17. Prevention is just as critical as intervention in the employment support landscape, particularly as Worcestershire is experiencing a rise in the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). NEET individuals aged 16–18

should typically be engaged in education (equivalent to Years 12 and 13) or in employment with training, such as apprenticeships.

18. The causes of being NEET like unemployment are often complex and multifaceted, including health challenges, limited access to education or transport, socio-economic disadvantage, personal vulnerabilities, and previous experiences with careers guidance and education. Without targeted and coordinated action, this growing trend risks developing into long-term youth unemployment.

19. . Currently, over 600 young people aged 16–18 in Worcestershire are NEET. Worcestershire County Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure these young people receive the support they need to re-engage with education, training, or employment and whilst this work is being carried out systemic barriers and other challenges continue to need focus.

20. Employer investment in apprenticeships has changed since the introduction of the Levy, there has been a 20% decline in young people entering apprenticeships with employers choosing to direct the focus of the levy and apprenticeships to support existing workforce upskilling, limiting the opportunities for young people.

21. Worcestershire however presents a resilient and high-performing labour market, with employment rates consistently surpassing both regional and national averages. The county benefits from a well-qualified population, strong representation in professional and managerial roles, and a diverse sectoral base. However, beneath these positive headline figures lies a complex landscape of disadvantage, inequality, and structural barriers. A significant proportion of employment remains concentrated in low-wage, low-skilled roles, which can constrain economic growth. Addressing these challenges through targeted and inclusive interventions will be critical to ensuring sustainable development and equitable access to opportunities across the county.

22. Worcestershire is already making visible progress in developing a collaborative and integrated approach to employment support, working closely with the DWP and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS. The approach has been designed to address complex barriers to employment through joined-up services, joint commissioning conversations and person-centred delivery. To further this integrated approach Worcestershire's County Council leading this collaboration, the partnership has implemented as follows :-

- Connecting Worcestershire's Employability Partners Network. The network focused on improving employment outcomes through collaboration and shared learning across Worcestershire, including Prime contractors and local delivery bodies.
- Leveraging of existing forums to deliver joint messaging – Since 2014, Worcestershire County Council has collaborated with the Training Providers Association to advance the skills and apprenticeship agenda, working together to boost apprenticeship numbers across the county and has started introducing the conversations of employment support and apprenticeship pathways.
- Integrated posts across partners - Since 2024, Worcestershire County Council and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire NHS Integrated Care Board have established a strategic secondment for the Head of Service for Employability and Skills. This initiative has strengthened alignment between health and employment priorities, resulting in the development of a joint Health and Work Strategy for both counties. It has also facilitated the successful integration of the Workwell Vanguard programme and fit note pilot across the region. In parallel, the DWP has seconded an Employment Support Adviser to Worcestershire County Council to enhance service integration between the two organisations. This collaboration is supporting the rollout of Connect to Work and driving improvements in the number of Disability Confident

employers, with a focus on increasing the recruitment from employability providers into local businesses.

- Annual DWP Local Office Roadshows. Worcestershire has hosted an event bringing together all Jobcentre Plus managers to discuss local needs, share updates on current programmes, and outline delivery plans for the year ahead from all partners.
- Introducing the new Connecting Worcestershire - Health and Disability Employability Network – Evolving from the Supported Internship Forum, this newly focused network launched in September 2025, aligns more closely with the outcomes of the Health and Work strategy whilst incorporating key initiatives such as the DWP Connect to Work programme and the Workwell Vanguard in Worcestershire.

23. The Get Worcestershire Working Plan highlights current employability provision in the region , which can be summarised in this table below:

Programme	**25/26 Expected participant numbers**	**Age Groups**	**Approximate Cohort sizes at any point in time**	**Employment Status**	**Target Groups**
DfE National Careers Service – Delivered by Serco/Seetec	1500	16- 65 year olds	365000	Unemployed and Employed	Any resident of working age
DWP Restart – Delivered by Seetec	2751	19-65 year olds	11145	Unemployed	Any resident
IPS Mental Health – Delivered by H&W NHS	683	19-65 year olds	5285	Unemployed/Employed	Those in secondary health services
IPS Drugs and Alcohol – Delivered by WCC Public Health via Cranstoun	40	19-65 year olds	400	Unemployed/Employed	In Secondary Mental Health Services
DWP Work Well – Delivered by H&W NHS	1650	19- 65 year olds	10000	Unemployed/Employed	Health conditions affecting work
DWP Connect to Work – Delivered by WCC	75	18-65 year olds	22600	Unemployed/Employed	Health Conditions and Disabilities
DWP Youth Hubs (Worcester/Redditch) - Delivered by WCC	600	16-24 year olds	35000	Unemployed/In Education	Young People
Careers Worcestershire - Delivered by WCC – Funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund (District Councils)	600	16-24 year olds	35000	Unemployed/In Education	Young People

24. Current provision is a mix of National and Local Funding streams brought together to collaborate to respond to the needs of residents, alongside this Worcestershire County Council, collaborating with DWP also successfully runs the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership contract from the Department for Education for Skills Bootcamps.

25. Skills Bootcamps are flexible, employer-led training programmes designed to help adults aged 19 and over gain in-demand skills that lead to employment or career progression. Delivered flexibly in up to 16 weeks, they are free to unemployed learners and at small cost to those in employment. Bootcamps are tailored to meet local labour

market needs. Developed in partnership with employers, Skills Bootcamps in Worcestershire focus on priority sectors such as digital, construction, engineering, green skills, health and social care, leadership and most recently based on employer feedback Early years work. In the last year Worcestershire delivered 365 residents and is on track in 2025/26 to deliver to 500 residents.

26. Within the Get Worcestershire Working Plan, it sets out the gaps in provision. Whilst Worcestershire has a good mix of provision and providers with the capability of deliver, there are still gaps in support for residents, businesses and education and, if filled, would improve the employment rates in Worcestershire. These are:

Support for Residents :-

- Re engagement Provision for Young people aged 16-19 - A key challenge in Worcestershire is the limited provision available for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This is caused by lack of viable funding to support this agenda since the withdrawal of European Social Funds, a picture being seen across the country and being reflected in growing NEET rates.
- More Localised and Contextualised Support – Evidence shows that Worcestershire has pockets of disadvantage challenges, inactivity and unemployment across different local areas that require a personalised tailored approach that is currently not available.
- Adult Skills at Level 2 and 3 – There is a clear need to address the skills levels of residents with low or no formal qualifications. There are many reasons for this not least personal confidence but also availability of adult skills funding to support in the county.
- Self-Employment Support – Many residents in Worcestershire aspire to start small scale businesses but often lack the confidence and feel that traditional business support programmes aren't designed with their needs in mind, particularly those with inclusive or additional support requirements.
- Support for Young People (16–24) – Worcestershire currently benefits from UK Shared Prosperity funding, which helps match DWP's contribution to the Youth Hub initiative. However, this support is at risk beyond April 2026 due to the absence of confirmed future funding. Given the positive impact Youth Hubs are already having in the districts where they are active, Worcestershire aims to expand this model to every district.
- All-Age Careers Services – Worcestershire currently offers a varied careers support landscape across different age groups. Early careers support, typically delivered through education settings, can be inconsistent often limited in scope or delivered in group formats that fail to meet the individual needs of all students. In addition, the National Careers Service regularly falls short of its delivery targets within the county, hindered by minimal marketing efforts and difficulties in reaching residents across Worcestershire's rural areas. These challenges contribute to significant gaps in provision, especially when compared to more comprehensive support available in other regions.
- Work Experience and Volunteering Placement Schemes – Individuals who have never worked especially those facing disadvantage or with health challenges and disabilities can gain significant value from work experience and volunteering placements. These opportunities help build confidence, skills, and pathways into employment, but these opportunities are limited in a landscape of SMEs where capacity falls short of need.
- Community Support – Social Prescribing Focused on Employment – In Worcestershire, employment support tends to work well for individuals who are proactive and motivated. However, those who are less confident or unaware of available services often fall through the gaps. More needs to be done to proactively

identify and engage these residents, ensuring they can access the support needed to move forward through a social prescribing style model.

Support for Business :-

- Boosting Skills in Worcestershire – Over the past two years, Worcestershire has partnered with its district councils to deliver a highly successful skills initiative using UK Shared Prosperity Funding. This programme offered 50% grant contributions to businesses investing in workforce training. In 2024/25 alone, it supported over £1.2 million worth of training, benefitting 1,500 residents and around 400 businesses, making it one of the most impactful business interventions the county has seen over a 12-month period. However, with UKSPF funding at risk, the future of this programme is uncertain. Worcestershire urges Government to consider alternatives including using the Growth and Skills Levy to bridge this gap. By allowing similar flexibility on the skills side, businesses could invest in training that directly aligns with their workforce plans.
- Business Support for Enhancing People Practices - Worcestershire recognises that many SMEs lack the capacity to focus on improving employment practices, which in turn affects the success of employment programmes and overall economic productivity. A lack of understanding and implementation of inclusive recruitment, effective induction, and strong management practices is holding back progress and Worcestershire needs to seek solutions to engage these employers and enable them to improve people practices.

Support for Education:-

- Addressing Gaps in Vocational Education in Worcestershire - One of the most significant challenges in Worcestershire is the ability to respond to the evolving vocational education landscape, whether through capital investment in facilities and equipment or through curriculum development aligned with employer needs. While national programmes, such as the recent Construction Excellence Colleges, are well-defined, areas like Worcestershire often struggle to compete as lead bidders. This is largely due to programme expectations around scale and volume, which are difficult to meet in a geography like Worcestershire. As a result, Worcestershire is frequently overlooked, despite having clear and pressing local demand and more flexibility is required.

27. In summary, many gaps in service are systemic in nature that impact the ability of Worcestershire to deliver better outcomes from the current programme mix but the most prevalent is funding levels.

28. Worcestershire faces a significant challenge in the scale of employment support provision available. For example, while the Connect to Work programme will support around 2,000 residents, current estimates suggest that over 50,000 people in the county could meet the eligibility criteria. This gap highlights the need for greater investment in high-intensity, personalised support. Additionally, funding formulas often result in a lower per resident allocation for Worcestershire, without fully accounting for the county's unique mix of rural and urban communities and the concentrated pockets of unemployment that require more resource-intensive interventions. National programmes also come with complex rules and compliance requirements, such as quality assurance frameworks, that demand specialist roles. These roles are essential regardless of whether a programme supports 50 or 1,000 participants, creating challenges in achieving economies of scale and placing further strain on local delivery capacity.

29. The Get Worcestershire Working Plan also outlines several systemic changes that need to be addressed to help Worcestershire transition towards a more effective employment and skills system. These are:-

- Gaining an improved understanding of the needs of employers within the county and the effective communication of these to the wider system.
- Improved visibility of entry points to services and need for triage to ensure that residents access the service that will be best value for money for the system and deliver the right outcome for the individual.
- Addressing the impact of funding cuts to adult skills budget in Worcestershire.
- Challenging the short-term nature of funding and impact this has on sustainability and impact of programmes.
- Creating greater flexibility in the use of funding to tailor programmes to meet local need.
- Funding calculations that mask significant challenges, including high levels of economic inactivity driven by health-related issues, which require targeted attention.
- Addressing the Apprenticeship Levy and Standards in Worcestershire which has unintentionally diverted attention from broader adult education provision
- Asking Government to consider momentum of change, providers are increasingly frustrated by unclear, poorly timed changes that create confusion, administrative burdens, and reputational risk.
- Improving the flow of insights and information across partners would enable better service integration and a clearer understanding of local needs but requires HM Government intervention to support.
- Reforming the government-led Access to work scheme which needs to be streamlined and more responsive to need to enable effective transition for individuals with health conditions and disabilities into work.
- Keeping the employment and skills agenda at the forefront of reforms to DWP, ICBs and Local Government

The Short-Term Priorities for Worcestershire

30. The Short-Term Priorities for Worcestershire , where current programmes or initiatives are in place across the partnership are as follows :-

- Youth Employment and Transitions - Worcestershire aims to support young people aged 16–24 in transitioning from education to employment, especially those facing additional barriers. Key initiatives include the UKSPF-funded Careers Worcestershire and the DWP Youth Hubs, enhanced post-16 and post-18 transition support, and the Modern Work Experience programme. The strategy focuses on improving career readiness, reducing NEET levels, and increasing equity for SEND and care-experienced youth. Risks include funding gaps post-2026 and inconsistent employer engagement.
- Employer and System Integration - Efforts are underway to embed employment services within existing structures. Improving access and coordination. Enhancements including improvements to the skills and employment messaging from the Growth Hub, enhancements to the Worcestershire Jobs site, joint planning across agencies, and a shared performance framework. The goal is to streamline services, improve job matching, and boost employment outcomes. Risks involve funding uncertainty, limited digital platform visibility, and data system challenges.
- Inclusive Employment and Health Integration - This priority supports individuals with health conditions and disabilities by integrating health and employment services. Programmes like the Workwell Vanguard and DWP Connect to Work aim to reduce reliance on fit notes and increase employer recruitment of

individuals with health conditions and disabilities. The strategy aligns with the NHS 10-Year Plan and promotes inclusive workforce practices. Risks include funding limitations, fragmented service delivery, and data-sharing challenges.

- Skills Development and Adult Learning - Worcestershire seeks to upskill adults through initiatives like “Think Skills Worcestershire,” Skills Bootcamps, and Sector Based Work Academy Programmes. The Local Skills Improvement Plan guides provision to meet employer needs, while the Talent and Skills Pledge encourages employer involvement in training and reskilling. Outcomes include improved career progression and economic resilience. Risks include low employer engagement, funding constraints, and limited awareness among residents.
- Strategic Infrastructure, Reform and Accessibility - This priority addresses some of the wider systemic barriers to employment, such as transport and fragmented services. Key actions include the Bus Service Improvement Plan integration across Worcestershire, the Fit Note Pilot, and a countywide volunteer portal. The strategy also supports national reforms and seeks sustainable funding post-2026. Risks involve inconsistent reform implementation, limited uptake of new services, and resistance to structural changes.

The Long-Term Priorities for Worcestershire

31. The Get Worcestershire Working plan also recognises the aspiration long-term priorities that the county has to deliver to change the current landscape and picture. However, while Worcestershire is committed to delivering on its strategic priorities, its capacity to do so is currently constrained by a challenging funding landscape which should be recognised in the understanding of cabinet members when acknowledging the report.

- Holistic and Integrated Support Systems - Worcestershire aims to create accessible, joined-up employment support by developing central access points for residents and employers. This includes building a holistic understanding of individual needs through integrated data and service coordination, reducing duplication, and improving value for money via devolved funding.
- Operational Efficiency and System Standardisation - Efforts will focus on streamlining processes across employment programmes by standardising triage and using shared data to inform service design. Expanding collaborative forums like Connecting Worcestershire will help improve employer engagement, careers support, and integration with health and family services.
- Employer Engagement and Workforce Development - The county will deepen employer involvement in skills programmes, improve workforce planning, and align training with local needs through the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Initiatives include an Employer Skills Hub, a Fair Work charter, and maximising the Growth and Skills Levy to boost productivity and apprenticeship growth.
- Youth Employment and Careers Support - Reducing NEETs and youth unemployment remains a priority, with a focus on enhancing careers advice and continuing delivery of the Careers and Enterprise Company programme. The aim is to ensure young people are better prepared for the world of work through high-quality, locally relevant support.
- Inclusive Economy and Tailored Support - Worcestershire seeks to build a more inclusive economy by addressing locality-specific challenges and supporting disadvantaged groups such as refugees, lone parents, and ex-offenders. A “no wrong door” approach will ensure residents can access the right support regardless of entry point.
- Adult Skills Development - Reskilling the adult population, particularly those over 50 is a key priority. The county will enhance its adult skills offer by working with colleges and providers, and lobbying for devolved capital funding to meet local workforce needs and support lifelong learning.

- Funding Opportunities - To sustain and grow its employment and skills offer, Worcestershire will actively seek funding, working with Skills England, National DWP and other partners to develop key sectors. The county also aims to maximise the use of the Growth and Skills Levy to support strategic priorities.
- Employment and Health Integration - Recognising the link between good employment and health, Worcestershire will promote health-aware workplaces and collaborate with health stakeholders to address how health impacts economic activity. Campaigns and workplace initiatives will support residents with health conditions and disabilities.
- Advocacy and System Reform - Worcestershire will lobby for national reforms to improve local delivery, including changes to Access to Work, fairer funding allocations, and greater flexibility in national programmes. The goal is to empower non-devolved areas to tailor employment and skills support to local needs.

32. Oversight of the Get Worcestershire Working Plan will be provided by the Worcestershire Employment and Skills Board, part of the Worcestershire LEP governance structure This Board will maintain strategic oversight, ensure alignment with future initiatives and monitor outcomes and progress against shared evaluation and monitoring frameworks.

33. For the full Get Worcestershire Working document – please go to this link: Get Worcestershire Working | Worcestershire County Council

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