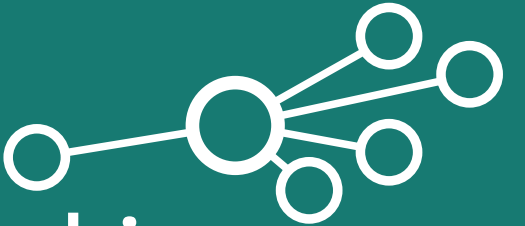


Get 
Berkshire
Working



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Get **Berkshire** Working: Shaping a Thriving, Inclusive Berkshire

This **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) is more than a local response to the UK Government's *Get Britain Working* White Paper, it is a shared call to action for inclusive, sustainable growth across Berkshire. Bringing together the six Berkshire local authorities, this plan aligns local ambition with national priorities to create a fairer, healthier, and more resilient labour market for all.

We face six pressing challenges:

- Labour market exclusion
- Youth unemployment
- Insecure and low-quality work
- Gender inequality
- Skills mismatches
- Deep-rooted regional disparities

These are not just numbers on a page, they reflect the lived experiences of our residents, families, and communities. Yet Berkshire has the skills, creativity, and determination to meet these challenges head-on.

Our region is a place of opportunity and innovation, home to leading global employers, thriving town centres, and world-class education providers. But we also recognise the inequalities that persist, in access to work, skills, and good health. The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) seeks to close these gaps through targeted, place-based initiatives such as the **Connect to Work** and **WorkWell** programmes and closer alignment between health, wellbeing, and employment support. We know that good work underpins good health and strong communities.

At its core, this plan is about inclusive growth, ensuring that opportunity reaches those too often left behind: women, carers, disabled people, and those with fewer qualifications or limited access to opportunity. It builds on strong partnerships across local authorities, the NHS, employers, education providers, and the Department for Work and Pensions, underpinned by a clear framework for accountability and measurable impact.

This is only the beginning. To achieve our shared goal of an 80% employment rate, we need sustained investment, cross-sector collaboration, and a relentless focus on outcomes that make a difference in people's lives. The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) is our blueprint for change, and it needs your support.

Now is the time to act. Let's unlock potential, tackle inequality, and build a Berkshire where everyone, regardless of background, postcode, or circumstance, can thrive.

Together we make change happen. Be part of what's next.

Get Berkshire Working!



In partnership with



Get Berkshire Working: Executive Summary

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) is a regional employment, health, and skills strategy developed in response to the UK Government's *Get Britain Working* White Paper. The national White Paper sets out a vision to increase employment, reduce economic inactivity, address health-related barriers to work, and improve the quality and security of jobs.

This Berkshire plan brings together the six local authorities of Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham, working in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), and the Frimley Integrated Care Board (ICB).

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) provides:

- A summary of current employment and skills support activity across the region.
- An analysis of Berkshire's labour market and its unique challenges.
- A framework for how partners will work differently and more collaboratively to deliver change; and
- A clear alignment with national, regional, and local ambitions for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The plan supports the UK Government's overarching goal of achieving an 80% employment rate and building healthier, more prosperous communities through better integration of employment, skills, and health services.

Top 10 Things to Know about Berkshire

- 1** A Response to National Reform – The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) delivers the ambitions of the UK Government's Get Britain Working White Paper at a local, place-based level.
- 2** County-Wide Collaboration – All six Berkshire local authorities are working together with DWP, BOB ICB, Frimley ICB, employers, colleges, and the voluntary sector.
- 3** Ambitious National Goal – The plan supports the Government's target of achieving an 80% employment rate.
- 4** Strong but Unequal Economy – Berkshire is one of the UK's most productive regions, yet significant inequalities and pockets of deprivation remain.
- 5** Rising Economic Inactivity – Ill health and caring responsibilities are key drivers of increasing inactivity across the county.
- 6** Health and Work Are Interlinked – Mental health, musculoskeletal conditions, and long-term illness are major barriers to employment, requiring integrated health and employment support.
- 7** Skills Gaps Persist – Employers report shortages in care, construction, digital, green technologies, and other growth sectors.
- 8** Cost of Living & Housing Pressures – High housing costs and transport barriers impact workforce retention, particularly younger residents.
- 9** Aligned with Key Strategies – The plan integrates economic, skills, health, and industrial strategies at national and local levels to maximise impact.
- 10** Clear Governance & Accountability – Delivery is overseen by the **Get Berkshire Working** Partnership Board, with quarterly monitoring and independent evaluation in 2028.

Region

Berkshire is one of the UK's most dynamic and productive economies, home to over 950,000 residents and a diverse mix of thriving towns and rural communities. It sits at the heart of the UK's "Silicon Corridor" between London and the Thames Valley, with strong connections to Heathrow Airport and the wider Southeast economy.

The region benefits from six higher and further education institutions, a highly skilled workforce, and world-leading employers across digital technology, life sciences, financial services, logistics, and advanced manufacturing. Yet beneath this success lie significant challenges - including pockets of deprivation, skills shortages, housing affordability pressures, and health-related economic inactivity.

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) responds directly to these challenges. It focuses on harnessing the strengths of Berkshire's local economy while ensuring that opportunity is shared more equitably across all communities, from Slough's vibrant urban centres to the rural west of the county.

Labour Market

Berkshire's employment rate remains above the national average, yet economic inactivity is rising, particularly due to ill health and caring responsibilities.

- **Slough and Reading** face higher levels of economic inequality and cost-of-living pressures, alongside large, diverse workforces.
- **Bracknell Forest, Wokingham, and Windsor & Maidenhead** have strong labour markets but face skills gaps in key sectors such as care, construction, and green technologies.
- **West Berkshire** has an ageing workforce and challenges in retaining younger workers due to housing costs and transport barriers.

Health remains a key determinant of employment outcomes. Across Berkshire, **mental health conditions, musculoskeletal issues, and long-term illnesses** are among the most common causes of economic inactivity. Addressing these barriers through integrated employment and health support will be central to the plan's success.

Strategic Alignment

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) aligns with a wide range of national and regional strategies, including:

- **Invest 2035**, the UK's industrial strategy for innovation and productivity.
- **Berkshire Economic Strategy**, which supports sustainable, high-value growth.
- **Berkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)**, which aligns training provision with employer demand.
- **BOB and Frimley Integrated Care Strategies**, focusing on health equity, prevention, and wellbeing.
- **Get Britain Working**, the national reform programme to reduce economic inactivity through integrated employment, health, and skills support; and
- **Keep Britain Working**, the government's initiative to tackle economic inactivity caused by ill health and disability.

By integrating economic, social, and health priorities, the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) provides a model for **place-based transformation**, one that not only drives job creation but also fosters a more inclusive, resilient, and connected local economy.

The plan complements and amplifies the economic and skills strategies of all six Berkshire local authorities, supporting local priorities while promoting collective impact across the county.

Delivery and Monitoring

Delivery of the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) will be overseen by the **Get Berkshire Working Partnership Board**, working collaboratively with the **DWP, BOB ICB, Frimley ICB**, and other key stakeholders including Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, employers, colleges, the voluntary sector, and community organisations.

Progress will be monitored **quarterly for the first 24 months**, using metrics aligned with DWP and local economic monitoring frameworks. A **formal independent evaluation** will be undertaken in **2028** to assess outcomes, impact, and future opportunities for scaling up successful initiatives.

In Summary

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) is a collective commitment by Berkshire's six local authorities and their partners to unlock potential, tackle inequality, and ensure that every resident, regardless of background or circumstance, can access good work, good health, and the opportunity to thrive.



Maidenhead

Slough

Windsor

Bracknell

Reading

Wokingham

1

Introduction



1.1 Get Britain Working

The *Get Britain Working* White Paper, is the UK Government's proposal to reform employment, health, and skills support to tackle economic inactivity and support people into good work.

The Plan recognises that good work is one of the most significant determinants of health and wellbeing. Evidence consistently shows that secure, fair employment improves mental and physical health, reduces health inequalities, and supports longer, healthier lives. In addition, good health and a healthy workforce are important for prosperity. Embedding health within the employment agenda is therefore central to achieving sustainable economic participation.

The focus of the paper is to build a thriving labour market achieving an 80% employment rate for working age adults, improving access to quality employment and lower unemployment rates, whilst raising earnings. This will be achieved by focussing on six key labour market issues:

- Exclusion of those with health conditions, caregiving duties, or lower skills.
- Limited support for the young to gain skills and secure career opportunities.
- Widespread insecure, low-paid jobs undermining economic stability and wellbeing.
- Barriers for women with family responsibilities to stay and progress in work.
- Labour and skills shortages slowing economic growth and increasing reliance on overseas labour.
- Unequal employment outcomes across regions and demographic groups.

1.2 Local Area Plans – Berkshire

In line with the White Paper, local areas have been asked to address labour market issues related to participation, progression, earnings, and job quality. Each area is expected to set ambitious outcome indicators aligned with the National *Get Britain Working* outcome metrics.

For Berkshire, the local *Get Britain Working* plan is central to delivering the Government's ambition of a thriving labour market where everyone has access to good work, opportunities to progress, and where, collectively, we work towards the national goal of achieving an 80% employment rate.

Plans are being delivered at the level of functioning economic geographies. In Berkshire, this means a coordinated approach across the six unitary authorities (Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham) under the Berkshire Prosperity Board framework, where Slough Borough Council acts as the accountable body for ensuring delivery, collaboration, and alignment with both national priorities and local strategies.

Stakeholder engagement is central to this plan. While some stakeholders operate across the whole Region - such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, Employers, skills and training providers, housing providers, and employment services - other elements are more locally specific, including Jobcentre Plus, Public Health teams, and individual Health and Wellbeing Boards. The plan also recognises the importance of joint working with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, and Frimley Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) given the overlap and interdependencies with Berkshire's population health priorities.

This Berkshire plan has been developed in close partnership with the DWP and The Frimley and BOB Integrated Care Boards. Key partners include NHS Trusts operating in Berkshire, VCSE sector and Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce. The ICB's play a key role in supporting population health and reducing health-related economic inactivity. This plan aligns closely with the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies of Berkshire's six local authorities, ensuring that improving workforce health, supporting recovery, and enabling people with long-term conditions to work are embedded throughout.

By working as a genuine partnership across the Region, this plan aims to integrate economic, social, and health priorities to deliver a stronger collective impact. The ***Get Berkshire Working*** (Plan) will act as a model for place-based transformation by:

- Driving inclusive economic growth that reflects both national ambitions and Berkshire's distinct local needs.
- Strengthening public-private partnerships, ensuring that investment and innovation deliver social as well as economic value.
- Inclusive Employment pathways through effective employer engagement developing routes into good work.
- Empowering communities, giving residents a stronger voice in shaping the future of their Region.
- Reducing health inequalities and improving population health outcomes.

We should also acknowledge the Government's pledge to reduce child poverty and the links to the wider welfare reforms that may also contribute to this plan as it evolves.

Ultimately, this plan seeks not only to ***Get Berkshire working*** in the sense of creating more jobs, but also to foster a cohesive, thriving, and resilient Region. By aligning with and amplifying the strategies of Berkshire's six unitary authorities, ***Get Berkshire Working*** will significantly enhance local economic development and skills priorities.

For full details of the governance structure for ***Get Berkshire Working*** please see section 10: Governance, Local Engagement and Future iterations.

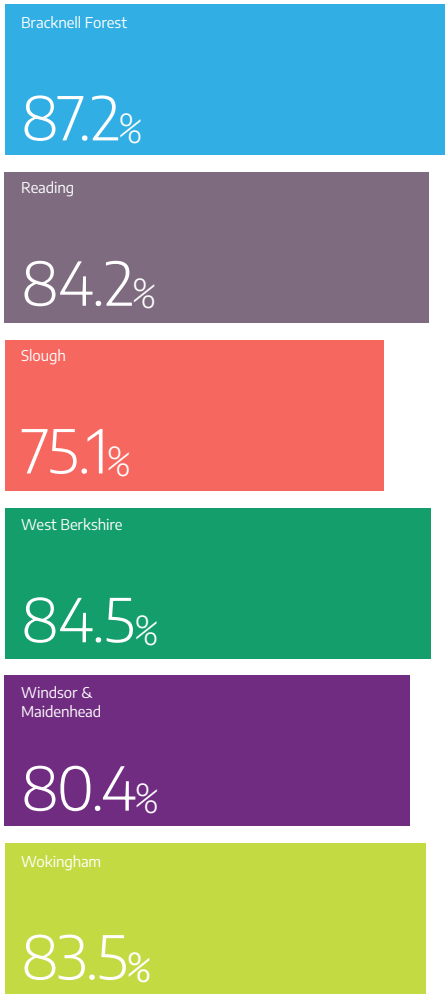
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Labour Market Analysis



2.1
Overview

This is the socio-economic region encompassing Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham. Referred to in this report as the Berkshire region, it has employment rates of:



2.2
Growth

Looking ahead, Berkshire is expected to experience steady economic change, driven by local catalysts for growth such as technology and life sciences, its proximity to London and Heathrow, and wider regional, national, and global factors. Reading is forecast to lead national GVA growth at 2.3% annually, (EY 2024) Other forecasts suggest:

- **Jobs:** Total employment in Berkshire is projected to grow by around 50,000 by 2050.
- **Working-age population:** Growth is forecast at around 5%, below the Southeast average (6%) and well below the UK average (8%).
- **Employment growth:** Around 20%, broadly in line with national trends.
- **GVA growth:** Around 50%, slightly lower than the Southeast average but comparable to national forecasts.

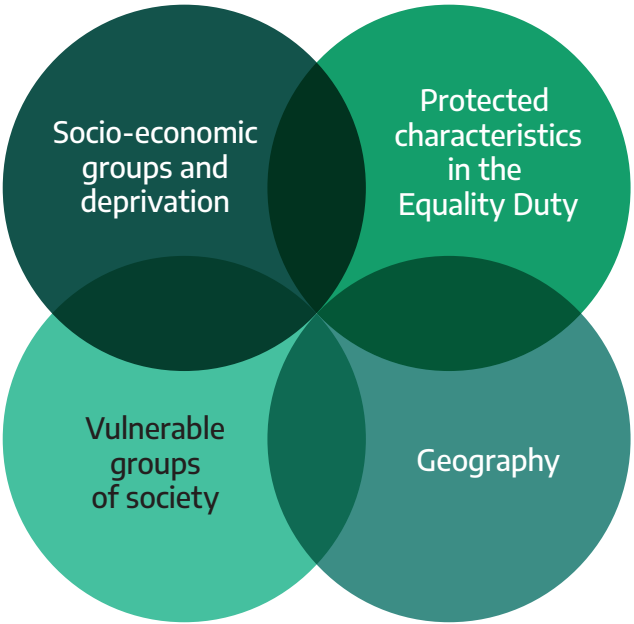
Variation within Berkshire is significant. Slough and Reading are projected to see strong employment growth due to their concentration of high-value sectors and connectivity advantages, while West Berkshire and Wokingham face slower growth linked to ageing demographics and pressures on housing affordability.

2.3
Deprivation, for uniformity with ‘socio-economic’

Many areas of Berkshire are affluent, but wide inequalities exist within the region, and within each of the six local authorities. Slough is the most deprived local authority overall in Berkshire, with the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) placing it in the most deprived 25% of local authorities in England. In contrast, Wokingham is ranked among the least deprived areas, overall. However, pockets of socio-economic deprivation exist in all local authorities, sometimes in close proximity to very affluent areas, resulting in stark relative deprivation and inequalities in health, housing, income and educational outcomes. These pockets are sometimes too small a geographic area to identify through measures such as IMD, and local knowledge in each of the authorities is therefore important.

Health inequalities mirror patterns of deprivation across Berkshire. In the most deprived areas of Slough and Reading, life expectancy is up to 7 years lower than in the least deprived parts of Wokingham. Rates of long-term conditions, poor mental health, and disability are significantly higher. Tackling these health disparities is integral to inclusive employment and productivity.

Furthermore, socio-economic deprivation is not the only driver of inequalities. The unfair and avoidable differences that exist in outcomes and opportunities between people and communities fall across different and often intersecting dimensions, as shown in the diagram below:



Reference:
Place-based approaches for reducing health inequalities:
main report - GOV.UK

Berkshire Economic Snapshot

Academia & Research	Housing Landscape	Strategic Transport Connectivity
4 Universities, including the University of Reading and satellite campuses of Royal Holloway University London, University of West London, and BPP	65% of residents own their homes vs. 61% in England	28 railway stations with ~20 million entries/exits (2022/23), connecting Berkshire to London, Heathrow, Oxford, and beyond.
30,000+ university students contributing to the region’s knowledge economy	35% own outright vs. 33% in England	M4 motorway connects Reading, Slough, and Bracknell Forest to London, Bristol, and Heathrow
51,000 jobs in education and research including life sciences, IT, and business services	House price-to-earnings ratio ranges from 9.2 (Reading) to 13.5 (Windsor & Maidenhead), well above national average	Heathrow Airport directly accessible via the M4 and Elizabeth Line, Berkshire’s global gateway

Notes (data sources & reasoning):
Universities: University of Reading is the primary full-campus university; others have satellite campuses (e.g., University of West London in Reading, BPP in Reading, Royal Holloway university nearby, and Surrey university is directly accessible by train from Reading and Wokingham.)
Home ownership: Estimated from ONS and Census 2021 data for the Berkshire unitary authorities.
Rail usage: Combining entries/exits from Reading (~13.7M), Slough (~4M), Maidenhead, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, Newbury, and others to estimate total footfall.
M4: The defining motorway corridor for Berkshire,
House price ratios: Based on ONS house price to earnings data (2023) for local authorities.
Jobs in education/research: Estimate drawn from ONS job sectors.

Berkshire Business Snapshot

Berkshire Gross Value Added (GVA) was £41.2 billion in 2022	£35.8 billion in goods and services exported globally by Berkshire firms (2022)	Over 30,000 Berkshire businesses registered in 2023
£2.3 billion GVA generated by the University of Reading and affiliated R&D activity (2018 estimate) Boosted by the opening of the Thames Valley Science Park including Shinfield Studios the new Natural History Museum Science Centre	Slough Trading Estate is the largest industrial estate in single private ownership in Europe	21,000 micro businesses employing fewer than 10 people (~70% of all firms)
GVA driven by output in ICT, professional services, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing	Heathrow connectivity supports logistics, tech, and global HQ operations	17% of businesses are in professional, scientific, and technical services, above national average
51,000 jobs in education and research including life sciences, IT, and business services	House price-to-earnings ratio ranges from 9.2 (Reading) to 13.5 (Windsor & Maidenhead), well above national average	Heathrow Airport directly accessible via the M4 and Elizabeth Line, Berkshire’s global gateway

Notes (data sources & reasoning):
GVA (£41.2bn): Based on ONS 2022 figures for the six Berkshire unitary authorities combined.
Exports: Source: HMRC Regional Trade in Goods Statistics, Berkshire area, 2022.
University GVA: Based on historic impact reports from the University of Reading and associated R&D.
Microbusinesses: Derived from Berkshire LEP/ONS UK Business Count data.
Slough Trading Estate: Noted as Europe’s largest estate in single ownership (SEGRO).
Sectoral strengths: ICT, professional services, and life sciences are major drivers in the Thames Valley Berkshire economy.

2.4 Key Distinctions

Although part of the wider Southeast region, Berkshire's economic profile is distinct. Its challenges and opportunities differ both from nearby counties with more rural economies and those with flourishing visitor economies. Berkshire's strengths lie in its global connectivity, knowledge economy, and diverse business base, but it also faces constraints around housing and transport. Reading is leading the nation with projected GVA growth of 2.3% per annum for the next 3 years (EY 2024).

Key points:

- **Global Business Hub:** Berkshire is home to the UK headquarters of many multinational corporations in sectors such as IT, Defence, Bio-pharmaceuticals, and financial services. The concentration of global firms is both a strength and a risk, given exposure to international market fluctuations.
- **Rural/Urban Balance:** West Berkshire and Windsor & Maidenhead bring challenges typical of more rural areas, limited public transport, dependence on cars, and affordability pressures for younger workers, while Reading and Slough face urban issues such as deprivation, housing demand, and infrastructure pressure.
- **Connectivity:** Berkshire benefits from exceptional links to London, Heathrow Airport, and the M4 corridor, making it a strategic location for international business. However, congestion on the M4 and local road networks, coupled with rail capacity pressures, create challenges for growth. The Elizabeth line creates links across Berkshire and into London, which takes between 25 and 50 minutes.
- **Employment and Business:** While Berkshire has some of the highest employment rates in the UK, overall, inequalities persist both between and within local authorities. The Region's business base is strong in technology, life sciences, and professional services, but there are concerns over the availability of affordable, modern workspace.



2.5 Priority Sectors

Berkshire's growth strategy prioritises the following sectors:

- **Research, Technology and Digital:** IT, AI, data science, and cybersecurity, defence, building on Berkshire's status as the UK's "Silicon Valley" along the M4 corridor.
- **Life Sciences and Health:** Pharmaceutical research, biotech, and MedTech, supported by assets such as Thames Valley Science Park.
- **Green Economy:** Renewable energy, decarbonisation, retrofitting, and sustainable construction.
- **Logistics and Distribution:** Linked to Heathrow and major transport routes, particularly around Slough and Reading.
- **Professional and Financial Services:** A strong base of global headquarters, legal, accountancy, and consultancy firms.
- **Creative and Visitor Economy:** Film and screen, culture, heritage, and tourism, including Windsor Castle, Reading Festival, and other cultural assets.
- **Foundational Economy:** Health and social care, education, retail, and other locally essential services.
- **Health and social care** are pivotal to both economic resilience and community wellbeing. Building a sustainable local health and care workforce through apprenticeships, clinical skills pathways, and local recruitment will not only address sectoral shortages but also improve access to care and strengthen community health outcomes.

These sectors combine existing strengths with growth opportunities that align closely with the UK Government's Industrial Strategy and the *Invest 2035* priorities.

2.6 Strategic Importance

Berkshire occupies a strategically important position within the UK economy:

- It is the gateway to Heathrow, Europe's busiest international airport, making it one of the UK's most connected regions for global trade and investment.
- Slough and Reading feature as 2 of the top 10 performing cities out of 63 monitored by Centre for Cities. (C4C Jan 2025) Slough and Reading (including Wokingham) rank first and third for levels of productivity and Reading (including Wokingham) and Slough rank 1st and 2nd for levels of business startup per 10,000 population. Reading ranks 4th out of 50 cities in the Good Growth 2025 index report (PWC Sept 2025).
- It lies on the M4 knowledge corridor, linking London to Oxford, Bristol, and Cardiff, with concentrations of research, technology, and high-value industries.
- Berkshire contributes disproportionately to the UK economy in terms of productivity and GVA, but faces pressures linked to international competition, the cost-of-living crisis, and Brexit-related impacts on trade and workforce supply.

2.7 Challenges

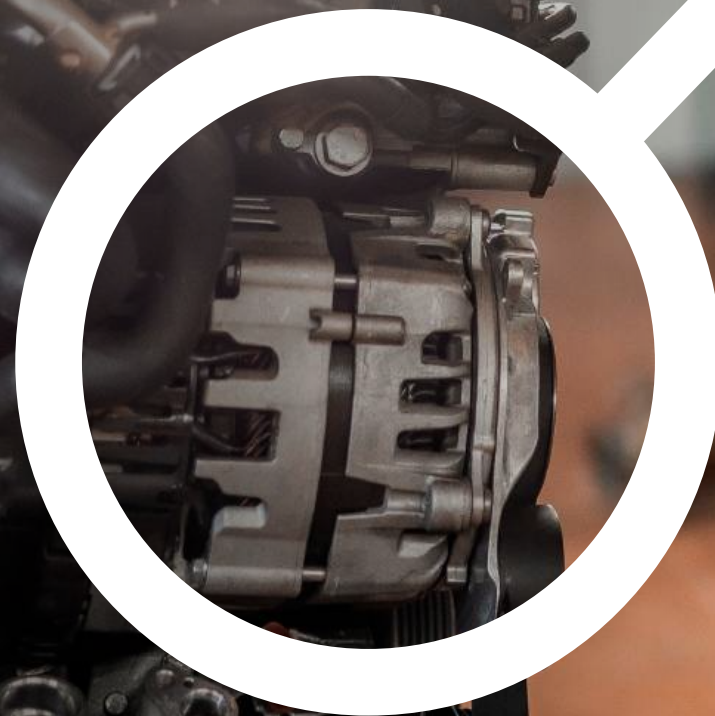
Despite its strengths, Berkshire faces several key challenges that must be addressed to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth:

- **Housing affordability and supply:** Berkshire is among the least affordable housing markets in England, particularly in Reading, Wokingham, and Windsor & Maidenhead, creating barriers to workforce retention and social mobility.
- **Health inequality and deprivation:** Inequalities exist not only between the Berkshire local authority areas but also within each of them. Working at a Berkshire-wide level offers the advantage of identifying shared drivers of inequality and understanding which groups are most disadvantaged. This broader perspective would allow us to design support and remove barriers for a larger population across the county - particularly where individual boroughs may only have small numbers of residents within a specific group/community. A growing proportion of economic inactivity is now driven by long-term physical and mental health conditions, including musculoskeletal disorders and stress, anxiety or depression. Addressing health-related worklessness through prevention, rehabilitation, and flexible employment models is therefore a strategic priority for the region.

- **Workforce demographics:** An ageing population in parts of Berkshire, alongside a reliance on inward migration for key sectors, could create labour supply challenges.
- **Commercial space:** Limited supply of affordable, high-quality office and industrial space risks constraining growth, especially for SMEs and start-ups. Reading is the exception with recent new investment and over a million sqft of grade A* office space now available (REDA Jan 2025).
- **Transport and congestion:** M4 congestion, limited east-west rail connectivity, and public transport challenges in rural areas create barriers to productivity and inclusivity.
- **Skills and retention:** While Berkshire has high levels of graduate employment, many young people leave the area after studying, and there are shortages in key technical and vocational skills.
- **Exposure to global markets:** With many multinational headquarters, Berkshire's economy is sensitive to international economic shocks.

3

Drivers and Causes
of Supply and Demand:
Side Labour Market Issues



3.1
Overview

Berkshire at a glance number/percentage

		Population 16 - 64				
Region	Population (number)	Number	%	Economically Active (%)	No Qualification (%)	Earnings (£pw)
England	56,490,048	35,605,658	63%	78.8%	18.1%	£732
Southeast	9,278,063	5,750,324	62%	81.1%	15%	£779.20
Berkshire	992,327	609,901	64%	82.4%	14.4%	£821.80
Bracknell Forest	130,806	81,058	65%	87.2%	13.2%	£809.60
Reading	182,907	120,381	69%	84.2%	15.8%	£775.90
Slough	167,359	103,613	65%	75.1%	20.2%	£761.30
West Berkshire	165,112	99,225	61%	84.5%	14.1%	£813.40
Windsor and Maidenhead	158,943	95,353	60%	80.4%	12.6%	£874.50
Wokingham	187,200	110,271	62%	83.5%	10.4%	£896.20

Source: ONS 2021 Census and NOMIS

3.2
Population

Population (all ages) number

Region	Population number
England	56,490,048
Southeast	9,278,063
Berkshire	992,327
Bracknell Forest	130,806
Reading	182,907
Slough	167,359
West Berkshire	165,112
Windsor and Maidenhead	158,943
Wokingham	187,200

Source: ONS 2021 Census

Population Growth & Distribution

Berkshire recorded steady growth during the 2011–2021 period, increasing its population by approximately 6.7%, primarily driven by urban areas like Reading and Slough. As of 2022, the Region’s population stood around 961,000, having grown nearly 20% since 2002, outpacing national trends; the average age rose by 2.1 years during the same period. Reading grew from around 218,700 (2011) to approximately 300,800 (2021), an extraordinary surge. Readings population in its town centre is projected to growth to over 30,000 (currently est. at 6,000) by 2050 due to the huge investment in new high-rise flats.

- Other major growth centres include Slough, Bracknell Forest, Maidenhead, Wokingham, and Newbury with robust population increases over the decade.
- In contrast, West Berkshire, a more rural area, saw a more modest rise, from ~153,800 to ~161,400, representing about 5.0% growth, below the Southeast average of 7.5%.

Source: How life has changed in West Berkshire: Census 2021.

Ageing Population

- In West Berkshire, the median age climbed from 40 to 43 years, surpassing both the Southeast (41) and England (40).
- Notably, residents aged 65–74 grew by 31.7%, while those aged 35–49 declined by 11.2%

Source: How life has changed in West Berkshire: Census 2021.

3.3
Young People & NEET
(Not in Education,
Employment, or Training)

When looking at the workforce of the future, the **Youth Opportunity Index** provides a relative measure of education and employment opportunities for young people across England's local and combined authorities. Each area's score reflects its performance compared with the best-performing part of the country: the higher the score, the stronger the outcomes.

The Index combines data on key milestones, including educational achievement at age 16 (Key Stage 4), attainment of Level 3 qualifications by age 19, access to higher education, apprenticeship uptake, employment rates, quality of work (measured through underemployment), and the proportion of 16–17-year-olds not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

Within Berkshire, the results show a mixed picture, with performance varying between and also within each local authority area, and inequalities between different population groups in all local authorities. Some districts score significantly above the national average, while others sit closer to the lower quartile, highlighting the differences in education and employment opportunities available to young people across the Region. (31% of children in Whitley and Church Wards are at risk of living in poverty, compared to 18.7% across Reading.)

Youth Opportunity Index
score out of 100, higher is better

Region	Score
Berkshire	36
Bracknell Forest	77
Reading	48
Slough	13
West Berkshire	26
Windsor and Maidenhead	24
Wokingham	29

Source: learning and work institute (2025)

Berkshire at a glance number/percentage

Region	Academic age 16 - 17						Quintile
	NEET	NEET % NEET / (cohort - 710)	Not known	% not known NK / (cohort - 710)	NEET and NK	% NEET and NK (NEET + NK) / (cohort - 710)	
England	49,328	3.7%	23,894	1.8%	73,222	5.5%	
Southeast	7,969	3.7%	6,448	3.0%	14,417	6.7%	
Bracknell Forest	104	3.4%	88	2.9%	192	6.3%	4
Reading	145	3.7%	-	0.0%	145	3.7%	2
Slough	227	4.4%	81	1.6%	305	6.0%	4
West Berkshire	114	3.0%	10	0.3%	124	3.2%	1
Windsor and Maidenhead	71	2.1%	79	2.3%	150	4.4%	3
Wokingham	100	2.3%	83	1.9%	183	4.3%	3

The most reliable source that we have for reporting NEET activity across the Region is the National Client Caseload Information System [NCCIS], the national system to which all Local Authorities submit data monthly. The most accurate report currently, is taken from May 2025, as between June and September there are fluctuations to the data with Young People leaving or moving from participation settings.

Bracknell Forest data for the period indicates a NEET rate of 3.4%, however, if we include the ‘*not known*’ data, where there is no participation record of the young people, this almost doubles to 6.3%. This is above the national average of 5.5% and just below the Southeast average of 6.7%.

Wokingham reports one of the lowest NEET rates in the region at around **2.3%**, outperforming both the Southeast average (**6.7%**) and the national average (**5.5%**). But again, considering the ‘*not known*’ this once more doubles to **4.3%**. Whilst this NEET data in isolation suggests that strong education pathways and targeted youth support services are working effectively, there is arguably an issue around and tracking and supporting a significant cohort of young people.

Conversely, **Reading** reports a NEET rate of **3.7%**, well below the national and Southeast averages, and with the addition of the ‘*not known*’ element, this remains at **3.7%**: indicating that they have robust systems of tracking and supporting **young people and** demonstrating a steady performance with opportunities for more targeted intervention to support young people at risk of disengagement. However, Reading has a growing issue among young people disadvantaged in education and entry to work because of mental health problems stemming from the COVID era.

Slough, has a higher NEET rate of around **4.4%**, rising to **6.0%** with the addition of the ‘*not known*’ This is above the national average, but still falling below the average for the Southeast. This could point to potential challenges in supporting young people into education, employment, or training - possibly linked to socio-economic pressures, access to local opportunities, or gaps in tailored services.

Windsor & Maidenhead is identified among areas in the Southeast with **some of the lowest NEET rates nationwide reporting 2.1%. However, this more than doubles when including the ‘not known’ to 4.4%. The low NEET %** signals consistently positive outcomes for youth across multiple indicators, but significant issues with tracking young people moving from participation settings.

West Berkshire also falls in this low NEET cluster at 3.0%, suggesting a youth environment that supports education and employment transitions at better-than-average rates within the region. This figure increases only marginally to 3.2% when including the ‘not know’ data.

3.4

Changing Demographics in Berkshire

Berkshire at a glance number/percentage

	Aged 16 - 64					
Region	All people	All people (%)	Males	Males (%)	Females	Females (%)
England	35,605,658	63%	17,526,417	63%	18,079,241	63%
Southeast	5,750,324	62%	2,834,082	62%	2,916,242	62%
Berkshire	609,901	64%	302,513	64%	307,388	64%
Bracknell Forest	81,058	65%	40,091	65%	40,967	65%
Reading	120,381	69%	60,479	70%	59,902	69%
Slough	103,613	65%	51,208	65%	52,405	66%
West Berkshire	99,225	61%	49,353	62%	49,872	61%
Windsor and Maidenhead	95,353	60%	47,112	62%	48,241	62%
Wokingham	110,271	62%	54,270	62%	56,001	62%

Notes: % is a proportion of total population
Source: ONS Population estimates – local authority based by five-year age band

Alongside overall population growth, Berkshire has experienced a significant demographic shift, marked by a growing proportion of older residents and changing age distributions across its six local authorities.

According to the **2021 Census**:

- The population aged 65 and over in Berkshire grew markedly between 2011 and 2021, reflecting broader national trends of ageing. While England saw a 20.1% increase in this age group, several Berkshire districts exceeded this growth rate.
- For example, Wokingham saw a 36.1% increase in residents aged 65 and over, the highest in the Region, while Bracknell Forest and Windsor & Maidenhead also reported rises of over 30%, significantly outpacing the national average.
- At the same time, working-age populations (15–64 years) remained relatively stable in some areas but declined in others. For instance, West Berkshire and Windsor & Maidenhead both saw modest decreases in this age group, while Reading and Slough maintained stronger growth, likely due to higher levels of inward migration and a younger age profile.
- The under-15 population has either stagnated or declined in most parts of Berkshire. West Berkshire saw a 4.7% drop in the number of children under 15, and Windsor & Maidenhead experienced a 3.8% decline, reflecting both falling birth rates and an ageing population structure.

Meanwhile, the birth rate in parts of Berkshire has also been in gradual decline. Areas like Wokingham and West Berkshire have recorded consistent reductions in births over the past decade. For example, Wokingham’s crude birth rate fell from 12.3 per 1,000 population in 2014 to around 9.7 in 2022, in line with national trends of fewer births and delayed parenthood.

In contrast, Slough and Reading continue to have higher-than-average birth rates, driven in part by younger and more diverse populations. These areas buck the countywide trend, contributing to more stable or growing numbers of children and young people.

Interpretation

These demographic changes highlight the divergent futures facing Berkshire’s communities. Areas like Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, and West Berkshire are ageing rapidly, with shrinking child populations and lower birth rates, potentially increasing demand for older adult services while creating challenges for school capacity planning and workforce renewal.

Meanwhile, Slough and Reading maintain younger populations with higher birth rates, suggesting different priorities, such as early years provision, education infrastructure, and youth services.

Get Berkshire Working: Summary of Key Trends (2011–2021)

Population (all ages) number

Local Authority	% Change in 65+ Pop.	Trend in 15–64 Pop.	Trend in Under-15s	Birth Rate Trend
Wokingham	+36.1%	Slight growth	Declining	Declining (but still moderate)
Bracknell Forest	+30%+	Slight growth	Flat or slight decline	Moderate decline
Windsor & Maidenhead	+30%+	Slight decline	-3.8%	Gradual decline
West Berkshire	+27.6%	Slight decline	-4.7%	Declining
Reading	+20.3%	Growing	Stable or rising	Relatively high and stable
Slough	+17.5%	Growing	Growing	Higher than national average

3.5 Ethnic Diversity Across Berkshire

Berkshire is home to a diverse and evolving population, with marked variation in ethnic composition across its six local authorities. According to the 2021 Census, the Region reflects both long-standing demographic patterns and ongoing trends toward increased diversity, particularly in urban centres like Slough and Reading.

- Slough is among the most ethnically diverse areas in the country. In 2021, just 34.5% of residents identified as White British, a sharp contrast to the national average of 74.4%. The largest ethnic groups outside of White British were Pakistani (18.3%), Indian (15.4%), and Black African (5.9%). This diversity has shaped the borough’s cultural identity, language profile, and service needs.
- In Reading, 53.3% of residents identified as White British, compared with 65.3% in 2011, showing a significant shift in population composition. Notable increases were seen in residents of Asian (particularly Pakistani and Indian) and Black African backgrounds, reflecting Reading’s status as a regional employment and education hub.
- Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham remain less diverse but are also seeing change. In Windsor & Maidenhead, 74.1% of the population identified as White British, compared to 81.5% in 2011. Wokingham reported a similar change, from 83.5% to 76.3% over the same period. Growth in Asian communities, particularly Indian and Chinese populations, has been notable in both areas.

- West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest have experienced more modest demographic shifts, but the trend is still evident. In West Berkshire, 86.9% identified as White British in 2021, compared with 91.5% in 2011. Bracknell Forest showed a slightly sharper change, from 84.9% to 77.2%, with increased representation from Asian and Black communities.

Migration and Population Change

Berkshire has seen strong inward migration, both from within the UK and internationally. According to Census data:

- Between 2011 and 2021, Berkshire’s population grew by 7.4%, outpacing the national growth rate of 6.6%. This increase is largely due to migration, particularly into Slough, Reading, and Wokingham, where economic opportunities and proximity to London make the area attractive to young professionals and families.
- Net migration levels in Berkshire exceed national averages and align with patterns seen in other high-growth areas of the Southeast. Wokingham and Reading, in particular, reported net inflows of working-age adults, reinforcing their roles as employment centres.
- In contrast, West Berkshire and Windsor & Maidenhead experienced slower population growth, influenced by housing constraints and older population structures. Out-migration of young people for education and employment remains a concern in more rural districts.

Gender Balance

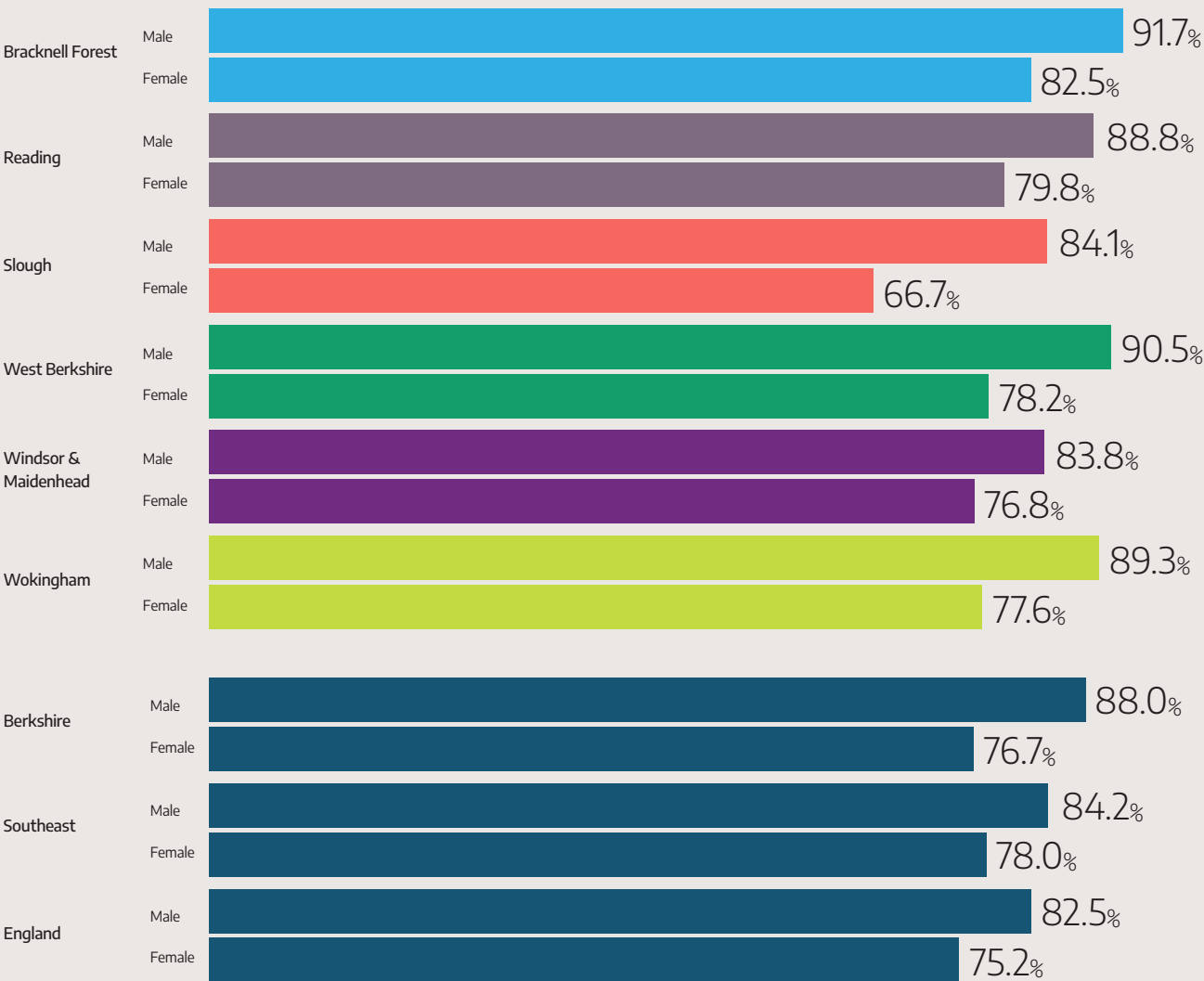
Berkshire’s population shows a relatively balanced gender split, consistent with regional and national trends. In 2021:

- Females slightly outnumbered males in most boroughs, particularly in areas with older populations like West Berkshire and Windsor & Maidenhead, due to women’s longer life expectancy.
- Reading and Slough, with younger and more urban populations, reported near-equal gender distribution. In these boroughs, the working-age population (20–44) is particularly well balanced, reflecting dynamic labour market conditions and international migration patterns.

Population aged (2021) Numbers and percentage

Region	All People	Males	Males (%)	Females	Females (%)
England	56,490,050	27,656,338	49%	28,833,712	51%
Southeast	9,278,075	4,539,235	48.9%	4,738,840	51.1%
Berkshire	949,774	469,115	49.4%	480,659	50.6%
Bracknell Forest	124,608	61,444	49.3%	63,164	50.7%
Reading	174,225	86,841	49.8%	87,384	50.2%
Slough	158,498	78,494	49.5%	80,004	50.5%
West Berkshire	161,447	79,702	49.4%	81,745	50.6%
Windsor and Maidenhead	153,496	75,415	49.1%	78,081	50.9%
Wokingham	177,500	87,219	49.1%	90,281	50.9%

Source: ONS Population estimates – local authority based by five-year age band



3.6 Labour Market Participation Across Berkshire

Berkshire’s labour market shows consistently strong economic performance across its six local authorities, with economic activity and employment rates generally higher than national averages. However, disparities between male and female participation persist, and gender-specific data is not always consistently reported across districts.

In Reading, the overall economic activity rate is approximately 84.2%, with 83.0% of residents in employment. Of this, 88.8% of men are in employment, whilst for women this is lower at 79.80%. The overall figures exceed both regional and national benchmarks, reflecting the area’s role as a major employment hub in the Southeast.

In Wokingham, gender-specific data highlights a clear difference: male economic activity is around 89.0%, while female activity stands at 77.6%. Employment follows a similar trend, with 85.7% of men and 76.1% of women in work. While Wokingham boasts high overall employment levels, the figures suggest that traditional gender imbalances in labour market participation remain.

West Berkshire the economic activity rate for females is 78.2%, compared to 90.5% for males. This gap is also reflected in employment rates with 76.2% for women and 90.1% for men, indicating an imbalance in the labour market.

In Slough, ONS records the total economic activity rate as below the national benchmark at 75.1%, with 70.6% of residents in employment. Men account for 84.1% of the overall economic

activity whilst women account for just 66.7%. Economic inactivity is high at 24.9% and of this 29.7% are reported as ‘looking after family/home’ and 10.9% as long-term sick, which probably accounts for the disparity in the data between males and females.

Bracknell Forest also reports strong participation, with an overall economic activity rate of 87.2% and employment at 83.7%. Gender-disaggregated data reveals that male activity and employment rates are higher than women (88.1% and 79.1% respectively), but the gap is similar to that in Wokingham. This may reflect the presence of large tech and professional services employers, which offer a broader range of roles accessible across genders.

Windsor & Maidenhead records an overall economic activity rate of 80.4%, with employment at 76.8%. The gender gap in labour force participation here is moderate: male economic activity is slightly higher than female, but the differences are less pronounced than in Wokingham. The area’s strong hospitality, education, and public sector presence likely support greater female workforce participation.

3.7
Economic Inactivity
in Berkshire: Reasons
and Regional Variation

Across Berkshire, patterns of economic inactivity vary significantly by local authority, reflecting differences in demographics, local economies, and access to education and healthcare.

In Reading, the highest proportion of economically inactive individuals are students, making up approximately 35.1% of the inactive population. This reflects Reading’s role as a major higher education centre, with a large student population attending the University of Reading and associated institutions. This is echoed in Slough where a staggering 38.9% of economically inactive people are Students. Of the six Berkshire authorities, Bracknell Forest reports the lowest student-related inactivity in the Region, at around 24.1%, which falls just below the Southeast average; this could be indicative of its older working-age population and stronger employment focus.

In terms of people looking after family or the home, Slough and Bracknell Forest report high proportions, around 31.0% and 32.5%, respectively, surpassing both the Southeast average (18.1%) and the England average (18.5%). These figures suggest ongoing gendered patterns of unpaid care work, particularly in younger, more urban populations. By contrast, Windsor & Maidenhead shows lower levels of home-related inactivity, around 13%, aligning more closely with regional averages.

Long-term ill health or disability is a growing concern nationally and in the Berkshire region. Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead and Reading all report high proportion of economically inactive residents due to long-term health conditions, between 15%-22%, just short of the average

for the Southeast (23.6%). Across Berkshire, long-term sickness is a significant driver of inactivity, with many residents managing chronic pain, mental ill-health, or fatigue-related conditions. Collaborative programmes between Jobcentre Plus, ICB prevention teams, and NHS rehabilitation services will be critical to supporting people back into sustainable work.

When it comes to retirement, Wokingham and Bracknell Forest stand out with the highest proportion of retired economically inactive individuals (22.1% and 22.4%), well above the Southeast average of 14.6% and national average of 12.9%. This aligns with West Berkshire’s older age profile and more rural character. In contrast, Slough and Reading, with younger populations, show retirement-related inactivity closer to 17%.

Source: Nomis, official census and labour market statistics.

Interpretation

These figures reflect Berkshire’s diverse socio-economic landscape. Urban centres like Reading and Slough show higher levels of inactivity due to education, caregiving, and long-term illness, typical of younger and more diverse populations. Meanwhile, areas like West Berkshire and Windsor & Maidenhead exhibit patterns more consistent with older, more affluent populations, particularly in terms of retirement and lower sickness-related inactivity.

Understanding these localised trends and inequalities is essential for tailoring employment support, health services, and family-friendly policies across Berkshire, and working across the six local authorities means that learning can be shared and support provided even where there may be small numbers of a group affected in any one authority.

Get Berkshire Working:
Summary Table

Economic Inactivity by Primary Reason (Selected Berkshire Authorities)

Reasons for Inactivity	Highest in Berkshire	Lowest in Berkshire	Regional/National comparison
Students	Slough (38.9%)	Bracknell Forest (24.1%)	SE 29.4% National 26.5%
Looking after family/home	Slough (32.5%),	Windsor & Maidenhead (13.2%)	SE 18.1% National. 18.5%
Long-term sickness	Slough (22.0%)	Wokingham 12.3%	SE 23.6% National 28.1%
Retired	Bracknell Forest (22.1%)	Slough/Reading 17.0%)	SE. 14.6%, England. 12.9%

Source: ONS annual population survey, Economic activity rate 2025 (all) sourced from Nomis

3.8

Welfare Dependency and Unpaid Care in Berkshire

Universal Credit Claimants percentage

Region	Universal Credit Claimants (UC)
England	18.8%
Southeast	14.7%
Berkshire	13.2%
Bracknell Forest	11.6%
Reading	16.9%
Slough	21.6%
West Berkshire	11.4%
Windsor and Maidenhead	9.8%
Wokingham	8.1%

Source: Berkshire Data Observatory

While Berkshire overall performs well economically, pockets of reliance on government support remain, particularly in more urban and deprived areas. Unpaid carers provide essential support but often experience poorer physical and mental health and reduced employment opportunities. The Plan will promote carer-friendly workplaces and flexible employment models to improve carers’ wellbeing and enable sustained participation in work

Slough reports the highest proportion of Universal Credit (UC) claimants in Berkshire, with approximately 21.6% of the working-age population receiving UC – over the national average of 18.8%. This reflects the area’s complex socio-economic profile, including higher housing costs, lower median earnings, and a younger, more transient population.

Reading follows closely, with around 16.9% of residents claiming UC, again pointing to underlying affordability pressures and a more volatile labour market. These rates are notably higher than in the rest of the Region and suggest that certain groups, particularly younger workers, single parents, and those in insecure employment, are more exposed to income shocks.

In contrast, Wokingham and Windsor & Maidenhead have the lowest UC claimant rates in Berkshire, at approximately 8.1% and 9.8% respectively. These figures are well below national and regional averages, reflecting higher household incomes, lower unemployment, and greater housing stability. West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest sit in the middle range, with claimant rates just over 11.0%, pointing to more moderate levels of income support dependency.

Regional Disparity in UC Claimant Rates

The data highlights a clear socio-economic divide within Berkshire. While most areas maintain UC claimant rates well below the national average, Slough and Reading emerge as outliers, indicating concentrated need for targeted employment, housing, and income support interventions.

Unpaid Carers and Carer’s Allowance in Berkshire

Region	Carers Allowance
England	18.8%
Southeast	14.7%
Berkshire	6940
Bracknell Forest	870
Reading	1610
Slough	1590
West Berkshire	1110
Windsor and Maidenhead	870
Wokingham	890

Source: Nomis

In addition to UC data, Carer’s Allowance claimant numbers in Berkshire reflect the unseen but significant role of unpaid care. As of the most recent data, there are over 11,000 Carer’s Allowance claimants across Berkshire, with the largest numbers in Reading, Slough, and West Berkshire. These figures align with the 2021 Census, which found that:

- Women aged 55–59 and men aged 60–64 are the most likely to provide unpaid care.
- Across all Berkshire districts, females are consistently more likely than males to take on caring responsibilities, both formally (via Carer’s Allowance) and informally (unpaid care in the home).

This gendered pattern of caregiving contributes to reduced female labour market participation, particularly in middle age, and adds to the structural challenges around economic inactivity and workforce re-entry.

Conclusion

While Berkshire remains more economically resilient than many other regions, it has pockets of dependency on Universal Credit and receipt of a PIP and rising levels of mental health illness among young people, particularly in Slough and Reading, underscore the need for targeted economic support. Simultaneously, the gendered burden of unpaid care, particularly among women aged 50+, continues to shape patterns of economic inactivity and requires a coordinated response in employment policy, carer support services, and workplace flexibility.

3.9

Occupational Profile of Berkshire’s Workforce

Employment percentage

Region	Managers, directors and senior officials	Professional occupations	Associate professional occupations	Administrative and secretarial occupations	Skilled trades occupations	Caring, leisure and other service occupations	Sales and customer service
England	11.4%	26.9%	15.2%	9.1%	8.4%	8.5%	5.7%
Southeast	13.1%	27.8%	15%	9.8%	8.9%	8.4%	5.3%
Berkshire	12.20%	31.13%	16.53%	9.47%	6.67%	6.47%	4.83%
Bracknell Forest	12.6%	26.9%	18.6%	8.6%	9.6%	5.8%	4.6%
Reading	7.7%	37.1%	14.1%	11.3%	5.3%	9.3%	3.9%
Slough	12.6%	22.2%	11.7%	9.5%	7.6%	8.3%	5.9%
West Berkshire	10.8%	28.7%	21.3%	10.2%	7.4%	5%	5.3%
Windsor and Maidenhead	14.3%	34.7%	15.4%	8.5%	4.8%	5.4%	6%
Wokingham	15.2%	37.2%	18.1%	8.7%	5.3%	5%	3.3%

Notes: Numbers and % are for those of 16+. % is a proportion of all persons in employment
Source: ONS annual population survey

Berkshire stands out in the Southeast for its strong representation in professional and managerial occupations, reflecting the Region’s proximity to London, high levels of educational attainment, and the presence of global employers, particularly in tech, pharmaceuticals, finance, and professional services.

In 2023:

- Professional occupations made up around 31.13% of the workforce in Berkshire, higher than the Southeast average (27.8%) and England (26.9%).
- Managerial and senior roles accounted for approximately 12.2%, again exceeding the regional (13.1%) and national (11.4%) averages.

These figures point to a concentration of high-skill, high-wage employment, particularly in boroughs like Wokingham, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Bracknell Forest, which have strong links to the tech corridor along the M4.

Variation Across the Berkshire Cluster

Despite the Region’s overall strength, there are notable variations across Berkshire:

- Slough has a lower proportion of residents in professional and managerial roles compared to neighbouring authorities. While it benefits from a strong logistics and service sector, only around 22.2% of its workforce is in professional occupations, and just 12.6% in managerial positions. This suggests a less knowledge-intensive employment base, with more roles concentrated in transport, warehousing, and customer service.

- In Reading, professional employment is high (above 37.1%), driven by the presence of major employers in IT, finance, and consultancy. However, this is balanced by above-average levels of employment in sales, administration, and customer service roles, reflecting the town’s dual economy.

West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest show relatively balanced occupational profiles, with above-average employment in professional and technical roles as well as skilled trades, due to the presence of manufacturing, defence, and technology sectors.

Service and Vocational Roles

Across Berkshire, some sectors show consistently higher-than-average employment in vocational and service-oriented roles:

- Caring, leisure, and other service occupations represent 5-9.3% of employment in areas such as Slough, West Berkshire, and Reading, reflecting the ongoing demand for health and social care workers, particularly in areas with ageing populations.
- Skilled trades remain important in Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire, where they account for up to 9.6% of local employment-above the regional average.
- Administrative and secretarial roles remain prevalent in urban centres like Reading and Slough.

Economic Implications and Strategic Needs

The occupational profile across Berkshire reflects a diverse but spatially uneven economy, with strong professional employment overall, but concentrated vocational and lower-wage service sector roles in some localities. These differences have implications for:

- Earnings and living standards, particularly in areas with fewer high-skill roles
- Social mobility and career progression, especially for younger workers in Slough and Reading

Economic resilience, as areas dependent on customer-facing and low-margin sectors may be more vulnerable to economic shocks.

Policy Priorities for Inclusive Growth in Berkshire

To address occupational imbalances and ensure equitable growth across the Region, economic development strategies should focus on:

- Attracting and expanding higher-value industries in underrepresented areas
- Increasing access to professional and managerial roles through employer engagement, recruitment pipelines, and flexible working
- Upskilling the workforce through targeted education, digital skills training, and sector-based programmes - particularly for those in low-wage or insecure employment

3.10 Educational Attainment in Berkshire: Patterns and Policy Implications

Berkshire exhibits high overall levels of educational attainment, with several local authorities significantly outperforming both regional and national benchmarks for higher-level qualifications.

Wokingham leads across Berkshire, as NOMIS reports 46.2% of its adult population hold a Level 4 qualification or above, followed closely by Windsor & Maidenhead (45.0%), then Reading (40.4%). There is a slight decline before West Berkshire (37.0%) and Bracknell Forest (35.6%). The average for the Southeast is 36.0%. This highlights the presence of a highly skilled and well-educated population, particularly in the more affluent and commuter-linked parts of the Region.

In contrast, Slough has a lower proportion of residents with Level 4+ qualifications, at approximately 34.8%, while still respectable, this reflects a more vocationally focused local economy, and possibly barriers to higher education access, particularly among its younger and more ethnically diverse population.

Lower-Level Qualifications and Skills Polarisation

	Level				
Region	4	3	2	1	No qualifications
England	11.4%	26.9%	15.2%	9.1%	8.4%
Southeast	13.1%	27.8%	15%	9.8%	8.9%
Berkshire	12.20%	31.13%	16.53%	9.47%	6.67%
Bracknell Forest	35.6%	17.9%	14.9%	10.6%	13.2%
Reading	40.4%	16.8%	10.7%	9.1%	15.8%
Slough	34.8%	13.6%	12.1%	10.7%	20.2%
West Berkshire	37%	16.9%	14.5%	9.9%	14.1%
Windsor and Maidenhead	45%	14.8%	12.9%	8.1%	12.6%
Wokingham	46.2%	16.3%	12.6%	8.1%	10.4%
Berkshire	39.83%	16.05%	12.95%	9.42%	14.38%
Southeast	36%	17%	14%	10%	15%
England	33.9%	16.9%	13.3%	9.7%	18.1%

Notes: Numbers and % are for those of 16+. % is a proportion of all persons in employment
Source: ONS annual population survey

Despite strong performance at the top end, several parts of Berkshire display educational polarisation:

- Slough also has the highest percentage of adults with no formal qualifications, at around 20.2%, compared to between 10-15% across the other five Local Authorities, with Wokingham reporting the lowest at 10.4%.
- Reading reports 15.8% of its adult population with no qualifications, alongside nearly 40.4% holding Level 4+, indicating a dual educational profile where some residents achieve strong academic success while others may face significant educational or socio-economic barriers.

Wokingham and Windsor & Maidenhead show a more balanced distribution, with relatively low proportions of residents with no qualifications (~10-12%) and strong representation across Level 3 and Level 4+ qualifications, reflecting well-developed school and FE college pathways.

Intermediate and Vocational Qualifications

When examining Level 3 qualifications (e.g. A-levels, BTECs, advanced apprenticeships), Bracknell Forest and Reading show strong representation at 16.8-17.9%, suggesting a robust presence of post-16 vocational and technical education.

At Level 2 (e.g. GCSEs at grades previously A*-C now 9-4), Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire, lead reporting over 14.0%. The average for Southeast of 14%. This indicates a concentration of residents completing secondary education without necessarily progressing to higher levels.

Level 1 attainment is high across Berkshire and Entry Level qualifications are more prominent in Slough and Reading, typically associated with adult learners, ESOL learners, or those re-engaging with education later in life.

Conclusion and Considerations

Berkshire's educational landscape is characterised by high levels of attainment in many areas, particularly in Reading, Wokingham, Windsor & Maidenhead, and West Berkshire, where access to higher education and professional careers is strong. However, Slough and parts Berkshire show signs of educational polarisation, with both highly qualified residents and a significant proportion of individuals with no formal qualifications.

This uneven distribution has implications for:

- Skills gaps in high-growth industries
- Social mobility and education access, especially for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups
- Workforce planning and local FE provision

To address these challenges, strategies should focus on:

- Expanding vocational pathways and flexible routes into higher-level learning
- Improving adult education and re-skilling opportunities
- Targeted outreach and support for communities with lower baseline attainment

3.11 Earnings and Gender Pay Gap in Berkshire

Berkshire's workforce generally enjoys higher-than-average earnings compared to national figures, particularly in local authorities with strong knowledge economies and proximity to London. However, wage disparities persist across the Region, both geographically and between genders.

According to the most recent data: Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics

- Full-time workers in Wokingham earn an average of £905.40 per week, significantly exceeding both the Southeast average (£779.20) and the national average (£729.80). Similarly high wages are found in Windsor & Maidenhead (£883.45) and Bracknell Forest (£830.70), reflecting the presence of high-value industries such as tech, life sciences, and finance.
- Reading and Slough, despite their status as key employment centres, have lower average full-time earnings (~£750.00), closer to national levels. This may reflect their occupational structure, with a higher concentration of roles in logistics, retail, and manufacturing, which tend to be less well-paid than knowledge-intensive sectors.
- West Berkshire sits in the middle range, with average weekly earnings of around £812.70, supported by a mix of professional services, education, and service industries.

Gender Pay Gap in Berkshire

Pay – full time workers £ per week			
	Full Time Workers		
Region	All people	Males	Females
England	£732	£783.8	£671.6
Southeast	£779.20	£850	£696.3
Berkshire	£821.80	£929.9	£715.3
Bracknell Forest	£809.60	£927.7	£733.7
Reading	£775.90	£894.8	£625.7
Slough	£761.30	£808.6	£677.3
West Berkshire	£813.40	£930.6	£813.4
Windsor and Maidenhead	£874.50	£956.8	£810.1
Wokingham	£896.20	£1060.6	£750.2

Source: ONS accessed via Nomis

- In Wokingham, male full-time workers earn approximately £1060 per week, while females earn around £750, a gap of over £300 weekly, despite both figures being above national averages, men £850.00 and women £696.00 respectively. This represents a pay gap of over 41%.
- In Slough, the gap is narrower, but still present: men earn ~£808, while women earn ~£677, with both figures below Berkshire’s highest earners and a pay gap of ~19%.
- Interestingly, in Windsor & Maidenhead, female earnings are relatively strong (~£810) compared to other areas, however, the gender gap remains at around £146/week (~18%) but overall suggesting better access to mid- and high-skill roles for women, possibly due to the presence of employers with inclusive pay policies.
- The gender pay-gap remains high across Reading, West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest ranging from 26% in Bracknell Forest and 43% in Reading, and West Berkshire in between at 33%.

Despite these nuances, it is evident that women across Berkshire continue to earn less than men in full-time roles, reflecting both occupational segregation (e.g., underrepresentation in STEM and leadership) and broader structural issues such as part-time work penalties and unpaid care responsibilities.

Implications for Economic Development

While Berkshire outperforms most of the UK in terms of wage levels, there remain important areas for policy attention:

- Wage disparities between towns reflect differences in industrial base and access to higher-paid roles.
- The gender pay gap, although narrower in some areas, continues to limit income equality and workforce potential.
- In places like Slough and parts of West Berkshire, lower earnings may indicate underutilised skills or limited access to higher-value sectors.

To address these challenges, local economic strategies should focus on:

- Broadening access to high-paying sectors, especially for women and underrepresented groups.
- Promoting flexible and inclusive employment practices across public and private sectors.
- Investing in career progression pathways in lower-paid industries, including training and employer engagement.

Get Berkshire Working: Summary Table

Area / Theme	Key Insights
Population Growth	Reading, Slough, Bracknell Forest see strong gains; West Berkshire grows modestly (~5%).
Age Demographics	Median age rising; 65–74 age segment growing rapidly, especially in rural parts.
NEET Status	NEET Status needs to consider NEET & NOT KNOWN for accurate picture
Migration Patterns	West Berkshire sees net domestic inflow; young adults migrate outward.
Strategic Implications	Aging population and youth outflow call for targeted economic, social, and service responses.

Source: ONS accessed via Nomis



4

Health of the Berkshire Labour Market



4.1

Overview – Work, Health and Skills Integration in Berkshire

The Berkshire sub-region is not currently designated as a place-based trailblazer area for the integration of work, health, and skills. As such, it does not yet have a formal, integrated plan. However, consistent with the ambitions of the *Get Britain Working* (GBW) strategy, local partners are progressing with the introduction of employment support as a therapeutic intervention within primary and community healthcare settings. However, these individual-level interventions need to be underpinned by a preventive approach to strengthening the building blocks of health to address the root causes of ill health - and the systemic barriers to employment for people with physical and / or mental health conditions.

This work aligns with both the Public Health Outcomes Framework and NHS England's "Core20PLUS5" approach to reducing health inequalities. Core20PLUS5 identifies the most deprived 20% of the population using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Of the seven IMD domains, four directly relate to the GBW agenda:

- Income deprivation
- Employment deprivation
- Education, skills and training deprivation
- Health deprivation and disability

These domains have informed the prioritisation of primary care networks (PCNs) and GP practices in Berkshire with the highest proportions of Core20 populations. The focus is initially on those PCNs where over 20% of the patient population falls within the Core20.

The integration of work and health will begin through the rollout of Connect to Work, with employment specialists embedded in GP practices. These specialists will operate as part of multidisciplinary clinical teams, offering employment advice and support as a therapeutic pathway, particularly in areas of high deprivation and poor health outcomes.

In community settings, two main clinical drivers of unemployment, mental health conditions and musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders, are the focus for employment support integration:

- Community mental health services in parts of Berkshire already include Individual Placement and Support (IPS) provision, helping people with severe mental illness find and sustain employment.
- MSK community services are being prioritised for expansion of embedded employment support through Connect to Work.

This approach supports wider system ambitions to reduce health inequalities, increase economic participation, and contribute to inclusive growth by improving health, addressing deprivation, and enhancing local productivity.

4.2

Health Challenges in Berkshire

Though often perceived as relatively affluent, Berkshire contains deep pockets of deprivation, which are hidden in overall data for an area, but inequalities exist in all six local authorities, particularly in areas of Slough, Reading, and parts of West Berkshire, but also in all local authority areas, which are associated with significantly poorer health outcomes and economic inactivity.

Key challenges identified through Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) across Berkshire include:

Slough

- High levels of deprivation, with several areas among the 20% most deprived in England
- One of the highest rates of child poverty in the Southeast
- Lower healthy life expectancy, particularly for women
- High prevalence of long-term conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease
- Elevated rates of mental health issues, particularly among young people
- High levels of economic inactivity due to long-term sickness

Reading

- Male life expectancy is over 9 years lower in the most deprived areas compared to the least.
- A third of adults are physically inactive.
- High rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions
- Ethnic inequalities in access to health and employment services
- Mental health issues, especially among young adults and BAME communities, are a significant concern.

West Berkshire

- Hidden rural deprivation exists despite overall affluence.
- Rising rates of mental health need, particularly in adolescents
- High rates of loneliness and social isolation among older adults
- Rural barriers to accessing employment support and healthcare services.

Wokingham & Bracknell Forest

- Lower levels of deprivation overall, but with 'hidden' pockets of deprivation and ill health and growing numbers of working-age adults out of work due to mental health and MSK conditions
- Workforce health is a concern, with sedentary jobs contributing to obesity and related health issues.
- Increasing numbers of older residents with complex health needs and limited access to employment opportunities



Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

- Socio-economic inequalities between affluent areas and deprived wards (e.g., Clewer and Dedworth)
- Health challenges, including obesity and smoking in certain sub-populations.
- Emerging need for targeted mental health and employment interventions for young adults

Regional Trends Across Berkshire

- MSK disorders and mental health conditions remain the leading causes of long-term disability and worklessness.
- Economic inactivity due to ill health is rising, particularly among adults aged 50+
- Health outcomes in deprived areas are significantly worse than those in more affluent parts of the Region, but inequalities exist in all six local authority areas.
- High housing costs and in-work poverty affect people's ability to stay well and sustain employment.

Certain ethnic minority populations face barriers to accessing health and employment services, contributing to entrenched inequalities.

Conclusion

Berkshire's approach to integrating work, health and skills is evolving in response to local need, with an emphasis on place-based targeting, clinical integration, and community engagement. As the region develops its **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan), these health inequalities and workforce challenges must remain central to delivery planning, ensuring that all communities benefit from economic recovery and inclusive employment opportunities, and that improving health and reducing inequalities across the region are central to long term planning for a healthy and resilient workforce.

4.3
Health Conditions –
Berkshire Context

Long-Term Health Conditions

Region	People with a physical or mental health long-term conditions in employment
England	65.3%
Southeast	68.6%
Berkshire	74.5%
Bracknell Forest	70.3%
Reading	72%
Slough	70.1%
West Berkshire	76%
Windsor and Maidenhead	78.7%
Wokingham	80.1%

Source: OHID Public Health Profiles

Across Berkshire, employment rates for people with long-term health conditions vary significantly by locality. While areas like Wokingham and West Berkshire generally report higher employment rates among residents with health conditions, more urban areas such as Slough and Reading experience notably lower rates, often linked to higher levels of deprivation and long-term illness.

While national employment rates for people with long-term health conditions sit at around 65.3%, rates in some Berkshire districts, especially in areas of higher deprivation, are well below this. Contributing factors include:

- Health inequalities linked to deprivation.
- Limited access to specialist employment support
- Gaps in employer confidence and inclusivity

These disparities point to a clear need for targeted interventions, including:

- Integrated vocational support embedded within healthcare.
- Tailored health-to-work transition programmes
- Employer engagement initiatives to promote inclusive hiring practices.



Disability

Learning disabilities in receipt of support percentage

Region	People with learning disability in receipt long-term support
England	70.9%
Southeast	71.4%
Berkshire	70%
Bracknell Forest	72%
Reading	77.6%
Slough	69.5%
West Berkshire	76.1%
Windsor and Maidenhead	62.6%
Wokingham	60.7%

Source: OHID Public Health Profiles

In Berkshire, the employment gap for people with a learning disability receiving long-term support remains significant, especially in urban centres such as Slough and Reading, where demand for supported employment pathways is high.

While the national employment gap for this group is around 70.9%, local authority data suggests even greater gaps in employment for individuals with learning disabilities in Berkshire’s more deprived communities. Despite this, some areas, such as Bracknell Forest and Wokingham, have developed promising models of integrated learning disability support. Working across Berkshire provides the opportunity to share learning and spread examples of good practice.

People with Learning

Disability in Employment

Region	People with a learning disability (in receipt of support) and in paid employment (18–64)
England	4.8%
Southeast	6.6%
Berkshire	10%
Bracknell Forest	6%
Reading	4.5%
Slough	2.2%
West Berkshire	4.6%
Windsor and Maidenhead	19.4%
Wokingham	21.1%

Source: OHID Public Health Profiles

Some Berkshire localities report above-average rates of people with learning disabilities in paid employment, suggesting that localised support models, such as supported internships, supported employment, social enterprises, or employer partnerships, can be effective. Connect to Work will be a good test on how supported employment model can be scaled across the Region, other models should be reviewed, adapted, and scaled across too.

Disability and Economic Inactivity

Region	Economic Inactivity amongst disabled people
England	38.5%
Southeast	33.5%
Berkshire	28%
Bracknell Forest	25.5%
Reading	27.8%
Slough	29.9%
West Berkshire	22.9%
Windsor and Maidenhead	33.5%
Wokingham	28.3%

Source: ONS Economic Inactivity amongst disabled people (Apr 24 – Mar 25)

Levels of economic inactivity among disabled individuals remain high in Berkshire, particularly in Slough and Reading, due to:

- Inaccessible workplaces and transport
- Limited employer knowledge of workplace adjustments
- Gaps in referral pathways from health to employment support

While some parts of Berkshire are outperforming regional and national averages in certain areas, a consistent and targeted strategy is needed across the Region to reduce disparities and unlock employment opportunities for disabled people.

Further analysis will be undertaken in the next iteration of the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan), particularly around:

- Learning from successful local initiatives
- Expanding disability-inclusive employer practices

Strengthening data reporting to support workforce retention

Mental Health

Region	Depression: QOF incidence – new diagnosis (18+)	People in paid employment and in contact with secondary MH Services (18–69)
England	1.5%	6%
Southeast	1.6%	8%
Berkshire	1.5%	12%
Bracknell Forest	1.9%	14%
Reading	1.6%	11%
Slough	1.5%	8%
West Berkshire	1.4%	12%
Windsor and Maidenhead	1.4%	11%
Wokingham	1.3%	16%

Source: OHID public health profiles

Mental health is a significant factor in economic inactivity across Berkshire. Local data reveals that:

- New diagnoses of depression are lower than expected in some areas, which may reflect underdiagnosis or limited access to mental health services.
- Only a small proportion of working-age adults in contact with secondary mental health services are currently in paid employment, often below national averages (6.0%).

This indicates a dual challenge:

- Under-reporting of common mental health conditions in primary care
- Insufficient employment support for those with complex mental health needs
- Support pathways for people with mental health needs
- Employer confidence in hiring and retaining individuals with fluctuating mental health.

As with learning disabilities, further analysis will be included in the next phase of this plan to strengthen:

Workplace mental health interventions and awareness

Musculoskeletal (MSK) Conditions

MSK conditions, such as chronic back pain, arthritis, and mobility limitations, are one of the leading causes of worklessness across the UK, including in Berkshire.

However, a lack of robust working-age MSK data makes local comparison difficult. Addressing this gap is a priority for the next phase of the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan).

The Berkshire GBW partnership will work with local health systems, ICBs, and employers to:

- Collect more meaningful MSK data related to working age adults.
- Embed employment support specialists into community MSK services.
- Raise awareness of MSK-friendly workplace practices and adjustments
- And the role prioritising preventive approaches across the system.

4.4 Workforce Retention and Inclusive Employment

A central strand of the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) for Berkshire will be the development of employment sustainability strategies, aligned with national Keep Britain Working priorities.

This will include:

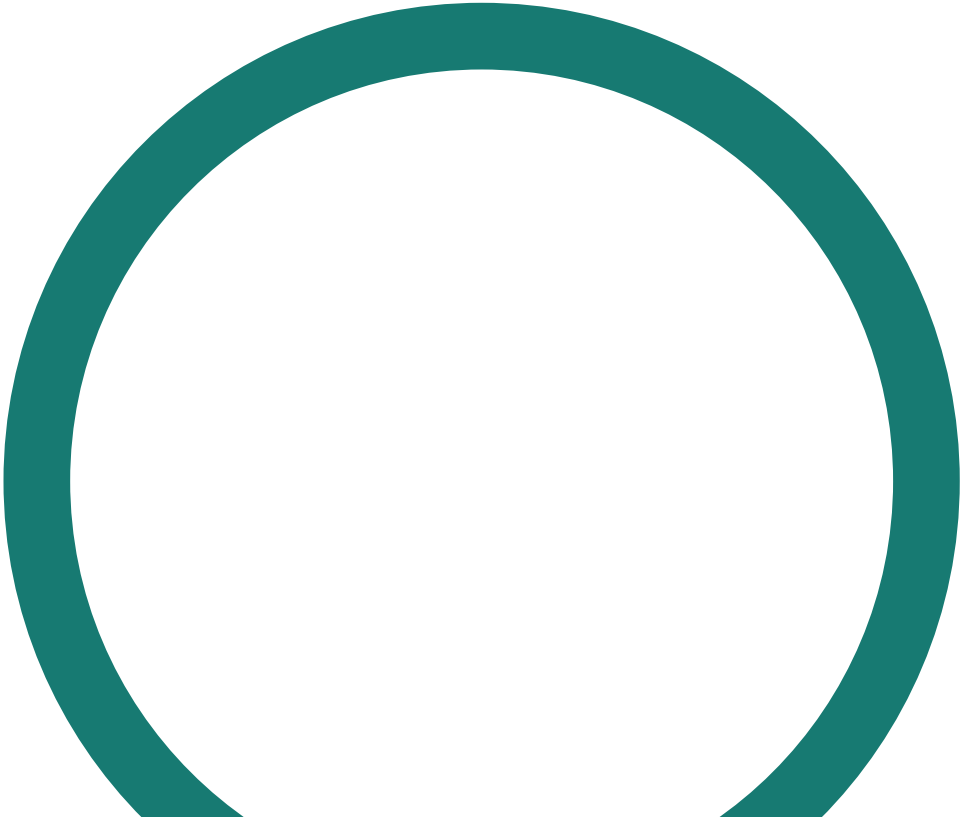
Key Focus Areas:

- Flexible working policies and job redesign
- Occupational health and mental wellbeing support
- Financial wellbeing initiatives for low-income employees
- Accessible childcare and return-to-work support for parents
- Career progression pathways for underrepresented groups
- Inclusive recruitment targeting people with disabilities, older workers, and carers.

System-Wide Collaboration

These strategies will be delivered using a system approach, collaborating with:

- Local authorities
- NHS organisations
- Anchor institutions (e.g. councils, hospitals, universities)
- Local employers and Chambers of Commerce
- Berkshire benefits from a range of anchor institutions that either directly employ large numbers or influence local supply chains. These institutions will play a key role in:
- Modelling inclusive practices





- Piloting new employment sustainability frameworks
- Promoting wellbeing and career support internally and externally

This work will also respond to the three key stages of Keep Britain Working, focusing on:

- 1. Tackling economic inactivity
- 2. Enabling work retention for those with health conditions
- 3. Supporting re-entry into the labour market through health-informed pathways

Addressing Health-Related Economic Inactivity

Given that mental health and MSK conditions are the two leading health-related causes of economic inactivity, strategies to address these conditions will be prioritised. This includes:

- Employer toolkits on prevention and early intervention
- Education and awareness campaigns targeting managers and HR.
- Tailored support for workplace-disadvantaged groups, including:
 - Women with specific health needs (e.g. menopause, pregnancy, chronic illness)
 - Unpaid carers, who remain underrepresented in the workforce.

Capturing and Scaling Best Practice

There are already examples of successful employment sustainability initiatives across Berkshire, led by both public and private sector employers. The GBW programme will establish a mechanism to:

- Identify and document best practices.
- Promote them to other local employers.
- Support peer learning and innovation through local employer networks
- Co-location of services Jobcentre Plus, health services, and VCSE organisations sharing physical or virtual spaces.

Creating multi-disciplinary teams including Employment advisors, mental health practitioners, social workers, and housing officers working together will support health and employment integration, the GBW Plan will not only help reduce pressure on the NHS, but also unlock economic growth, improve productivity, and create more resilient, inclusive local economies.

5

Strategies



5.1 National Strategy Get Britain Working

The **Get Berkshire Working** framework responds to the UK Government's *Get Britain Working* White Paper. It supports national aims to:

- Increase employment and productivity.
- Reduce economic inactivity.
- Remove health-related barriers to work.
- Improve job quality and security.

The initiative complements the government's ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate and to ensure people who are economically inactive have clear, supported routes into sustainable work.

Keep Britain Working

Get Berkshire Working will align with the emerging evidence and phased approach of the *Keep Britain Working* programme. This national review explores how employers can better support people with long-term health conditions or disabilities to access and remain in work, helping them benefit from the wider health and wellbeing gains associated with employment.

Supporting Invest 2035

The UK Government's **Invest 2035** industrial strategy aims to deliver sustainable growth through investment in high-potential sectors, innovation, and workforce development.

Get Berkshire Working contributes by:

- Strengthening growth sectors such as life sciences, digital technologies, advanced manufacturing, and green energy, areas where Berkshire holds significant competitive advantage.
- Supporting a stable investment climate through skills pipelines, employer incentives, and efficient local planning.
- Working with Berkshire's universities, colleges, and private training providers to build a future-ready workforce equipped with digital, scientific, and technical skills.

5.2 Regional Strategy

Berkshire Economic Strategy

The **Berkshire Economic Strategy** (2024–2030) sets out a shared vision for inclusive, sustainable growth, focusing on:

- Driving innovation in priority sectors (digital, health & life sciences, creative industries, space and satellite technologies).
- Tackling inequalities in access to skills, employment, and prosperity.
- Supporting decarbonisation and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Get Berkshire Working underpins these goals by reducing worklessness, strengthening workforce participation, and enabling residents to access opportunities created by business growth.

Berkshire Work & Health Alignment

Berkshire partners are developing integrated Work and Health approaches, building on the government's Work & Health Plan. **Get Berkshire Working** will:

- Embed health and wellbeing in employment interventions.
- Help people with long-term conditions, mental health needs, or disabilities to secure and sustain meaningful work.
- Support preventative approaches, recognising that good employment is a key determinant of physical and mental health.

Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The **Berkshire LSIP** (2023–2026) identifies cross-cutting priorities for workforce development, including:

- Improving employer engagement to shape training provision.
- Strengthening pathways into health, social care, green, and digital sectors.
- Boosting basic, technical, and higher-level skills to meet local business demand.

Get Berkshire Working supports delivery of the LSIP through co-ordinated employability, reskilling, and apprenticeship programmes.

5.3 Local Strategy

The six Berkshire unitary authorities, Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Wokingham, share common ambitions around skills, employment, and inclusive growth, as reflected in their local economic and wellbeing plans.

Get Berkshire Working will adapt delivery to local needs while maintaining consistency with the Berkshire Economic Strategy.

Additionally, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets a shared, partnership-led vision to improve population health and reduce inequalities. It prioritises prevention, early intervention, and integrated working between councils, NHS, and voluntary sectors, focusing on life-course themes such as “start well, live well, age well,” mental health, and supporting vulnerable groups.

Shared Opportunities Across the Six Authorities

- Localised employment support: Councils will co-design services with partners to reflect local labour markets and community needs.
- Cross-sector collaboration: The initiative will bring together health, education, housing, and employment partners to tackle economic inactivity and health barriers holistically.

Boosting productivity and inclusion: By addressing both skills shortages and barriers to work, the programme helps create a fairer, more dynamic economy across Berkshire.

Local Focus Examples

- **Bracknell Forest:** Support residents with digital skills and access to high-value jobs in tech.
- **Reading:** Build on Reading's strength as a tech and business hub by helping disadvantaged communities access training and jobs in its fast-growing sectors.
- **Slough:** Tackle youth unemployment and skills gaps in logistics, construction, and creative sectors, supporting Slough's focus on regeneration and inclusion.
- **West Berkshire:** Provide targeted upskilling and return-to-work programmes, supporting rural communities and market towns.
- **Windsor & Maidenhead:** Develop bespoke employability pathways for hospitality, tourism, and green industries, aligned with local economic priorities.
- **Wokingham:** Expand apprenticeships and higher-level technical training to meet employer demand, supporting the borough's strong knowledge economy.

Cross-Cutting Alignment

Across Berkshire, **Get Berkshire Working** will:

- Support regeneration initiatives by improving access to employment and encouraging enterprise.
- Embed employment support within local health and wellbeing strategies, helping people overcome barriers linked to poor physical or mental health.
- Promote green and digital jobs to align with climate action plans and the Region's transition to a low-carbon economy.
- Strengthen youth employability through targeted programmes, apprenticeships, and partnerships with schools and colleges.



Bracknell Forest

Key Local Strategy References:

- *Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034* sets out a vision by 2034 of a growing, resilient economy that matches the best in Berkshire, promoting sustainable growth in **clean & green, knowledge-based industries**, and delivering **good, secure jobs**. Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024 to 2034 | Bracknell Forest Council
- The strategy prioritises **People, Work and Wellbeing**: addressing local skills gaps, encouraging well-paid and secure employment. Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024 to 2034 | Bracknell Forest Council
- Bracknell Forest is part of the wider *Berkshire Economic Strategy 2025-2035*, which identifies high growth sectors (digital, clean energy, life sciences etc.) and emphasises productivity, equity. BerkshireEconomicStrategy_Final_161224.pdf
- Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy which prioritises improving emotional and mental health, supporting people to remain physically healthy, creating opportunities for social connections.
- The Bracknell Forest Vision, a shared vision for our places that embraces transformative, long-term thinking. Bracknell Forest vision 2050 | Bracknell Forest Council

Alignment & Focus for

Get Berkshire Working in Bracknell Forest:

- Prioritise skills development in clean energy, digital, tech, and science-sectors to meet both local business growth and the high-growth sectors in the Region strategy.
- Target employability and progression programmes so that residents are supported into secure, well-paid roles, rather than just any job.
- Partner with further & higher education providers to plug skills gaps, especially for residents lacking higher qualifications.
- Embed health & wellbeing support (mental health, disability) in programmes, to reduce barriers to work – supporting both individual resilience and productivity.

Use local employment and skills plans, especially in major development sites, to ensure that new infrastructure/regeneration has employment & training components.

Reading

Key Local Strategy References:

- **Reading Economic Development Framework 2025- 2035:** In the context of *Get Britain Working* Policy, the Framework has one key aim:
 - Reducing the numbers of those who are suffering socially isolated and long-term unemployment.
- **Reading 2050 City Vision;** Reading's *2050 smart and sustainable City Vision* was launched in 2018 to help establish Reading as “an internationally recognised and economically successful city region. A city where low carbon living is the norm, and the built environment, technology and innovation have combined to create a dynamic, smart and sustainable city with a high quality of life and equal opportunities for all”. Currently being updated it promotes Reading, as **a city of culture and diversity**.
- *Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Reading, West Berkshire, Wokingham)* sets out priorities including reducing health inequalities, supporting those at high risk of poor health outcomes, promoting mental health and wellbeing in children, young people and adults. Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030 - West Berkshire Council
- Reading's “Working and employment” pages show local effort in working with service providers, employers to improve access to work for people with disabilities or health conditions. Working and employment - Reading Borough Council

- Berkshire Economic Strategy includes Reading as one of the dynamic economies, high rates of business creation, with challenges and opportunities around business closures, churn, and making sure growth is inclusive. Berkshire Economic Strategy 2025 to 2035_ December 2024.pdf

Key Challenges identified in the Reading Economic Development Framework 2025-35 include:

Addressing Labour Market Imbalances

Reading has the highest average weekly earnings by workplace of any municipal area in the Thames Valley yet amongst the lowest earnings by place of residence, indicating that many of the 47% of those working in the borough who commute in from other districts have been taking up the highest paid jobs. This is partially explained by skill shortages in some intermediate level occupations.

Addressing Labour Market Inequalities

In Reading, inequality is a major issue. Despite being the fourth largest urban area in the South East based on ONS population figures and having one of the highest concentrations of digital technologies and professional services in the UK, there is a clear mismatch between outstanding economic success and the level of benefits to local people as, according to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation, (IMD), Reading has had some of the most affluent and the most deprived neighbourhoods in the whole of the Thames Valley.

Across a number of social exclusion indicators, Reading has a number of lower super output areas (LSOAs) with indicators ranked in the worst 10% and in some cases the worst 5% nationally.

Alignment & Focus for Get Berkshire Working in Reading:

Reading Draft Economic Development Framework 2025-35 Interventions

- **A Levelled Up Skilled Workforce for Reading:** Increase in the number of Reading residents securing higher-paid jobs. Improve productivity within the local workforce. Reduce peak-time commuting by supporting more residents to work locally. Wider opportunities for young people, addressing inequalities and meeting SME skills demand.
- **Reduced Inequalities in Education, Skills and Employment Opportunities:** Wider and deeper connection with communities conducive to lasting measurable improvements health, income equality, education, employment access and social conditions.
- Strengthen pathways for people with health challenges or disabilities to access work, leveraging existing “Working & employment” interventions.
- Connecting local businesses to communities of unemployed and schools
- Focus on mental health in employment support (e.g. via employer engagement, supported employment) to reduce health-related inactivity.
- Support small business development, helping residents participate in business creation or gig/self-employment, given Reading’s entrepreneurial environment. Set out a three-year skills and productivity action programme
- Create a workforce Development Strategy and Action Plan
- Form a business skills board and a business network and survey their training needs to identify common skills needs and gaps in skills provision or support.
- Ensure training and apprenticeship offers align with business sectors growing locally (tech, professional services, etc.) but also cover “softer” and foundational skills.

Link wellbeing interventions (mental health, social support) with employment initiatives so that barriers outside of skills (health, caregiving, etc.) are addressed.

Slough

Key Local Strategy References:

- *Slough Inclusive Growth Strategy (2020-2025)* emphasises an economy which is inclusive, diverse, resilient; small businesses flourishing; large employers investing; residents being able to aspire and prosper. Inclusive Growth Strategy – Slough Borough Council
- Slough features high churn of businesses, high rates of self-employment, but also inequality in who benefits from growth. Berkshire Economic Strategy 2025 to 2035_ December 2024.pdf

Alignment & Focus for Get Berkshire Working in Slough:

- Provide employment support and skills interventions especially targeting groups under-represented in growth – for example, residents in parts of Slough where employment is low or qualification levels are lower.
- Support small businesses with workforce development, ensuring they can recruit and retain from local resident pools.
- Develop local apprenticeships and vocational training aligned with Slough’s growth sectors (wholesale, retail, ICT, professional services etc.).
- Partner with health and community services to address health barriers and mental wellbeing, particularly as it affects economically inactive populations.

West Berkshire

Key Local Strategy References:

- West Berkshire's *Skills and Employment* profile: high levels of NVQ4+; strong presence of professional/managers/technical roles. Skills and Employment | West Berkshire Business Hub
- Local strategies include embedding Employment & Skills Plans into development applications; improving digital skills; focus on those, hardest hit by COVID-19 – young people, women, ethnically diverse groups. ED_Delivery_Plan_A4_21.pdf
- Part of the shared *Berkshire West Health & Wellbeing Strategy* (with Reading & Wokingham) with priorities including reducing health inequalities and supporting those at high risk. Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030 - West Berkshire Council

Alignment & Focus for Get Berkshire Working in West Berkshire:

- Ensure that employment support is strong for residents in lower-skilled or technical roles, to match the high qualification levels but also to ensure no local gaps.
- Prioritise digital skills, upskilling, and opportunities for foundational skills to help those furthest from the job market.
- Use major developments and planning policy (e.g. ESPs in planning) to deliver employment & apprenticeship outcomes for local residents.
- Integrate health-based support into employability programmes, paying particular attention to mental health or long-term conditions.

Windsor & Maidenhead

Key Local Strategy References:

- The *Royal Borough Windsor & Maidenhead* has strong employment in knowledge-based sectors, financial & business services, plus tourism, public administration, education and health: but some recent concerns about decline in employment in key towns. Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead: Economy
- Employment land policy and spatial strategies show a commitment to securing employment and housing needs, leveraging proximity to London and good connectivity (e.g. Crossrail/Elizabeth Line). Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead: Spatial Strategy

Alignment & Focus for Get Berkshire Working in Windsor & Maidenhead:

- Support residents into high value, knowledge-intensive sectors locally, but also ensure opportunities for those with fewer qualifications or more distant from job markets.
- Enhancing local training/apprenticeships in financial, business, and tourism sectors.
- Ensure employment land and housing strategies are linked with skills/employment plans so residents can access local jobs, reducing commuting or exclusion.
- Partner with health & wellbeing services to address barriers such as transport, care responsibilities or health conditions that may limit ability to access work.

Wokingham

Key Local Strategy References:

- *Wokingham Economic Strategy 2025-2035* (“*Building a growing and greener economy for everyone*”) focuses on inclusive growth, resilience, shared prosperity; wants to address barriers to growth in key sectors; ensure everyone benefits. 59d. WBC Eco Dev Strat 2025-2035 - FINAL.pdf
- As part of the *Berkshire Economic Strategy*, Wokingham is aligned to regional priorities. Also, the **Berkshire West Health & Wellbeing Strategy** includes Wokingham, with priorities including reducing health inequalities, supporting high risk groups etc. Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030 - West Berkshire Council
- Paper 3_Strategy into action Final for WBB_Sept 21.pdf

Alignment & Focus for Get Berkshire Working in Wokingham:

- Focus employment support for workless households, and ensure opportunities reach those who are currently excluded. Wokingham Economic Strategy 2025-2035 V11 KY.pdf
- Work on greening economy: ensure green jobs and transitions are included in local training offers and apprenticeships.
- Emphasise inclusive economic growth and community wealth building: ensure smaller centres, local businesses, and all demographics have access to opportunities.

- Connect health & wellbeing interventions with employment support – to address health barriers to work.
- A commitment to building a borough where everyone can thrive, improving health equity and strengthening the building blocks of health and wellbeing, including work, as a ‘Marmot Place’

6

Current System
and Offer



High Level Summary



6.1

The Jobcentre Plus Offer – Berkshire

There are five Job Centres across Berkshire – Newbury, Reading, Bracknell, Maidenhead and Slough.

The **Jobcentre Plus Offer** provides a comprehensive package of personalised advice and support to help people in Berkshire find, secure, and sustain employment. It underpins the Government's strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction by offering timely, tailored support that helps individuals move into work as quickly as possible.

At the heart of this offer are **Work Coaches**, who deliver personalised, work-focused support to help claimants reconnect with, or enter the labour market. Wherever possible, the same Work Coach supports an individual throughout their journey, helping them to identify opportunities, build skills, and access employers, including those registered under the Disability confidence scheme.

Specialist Support in Berkshire

Berkshire Jobcentres provide targeted assistance through a range of **specialist roles and programmes** that address specific barriers to work:

- **Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs):** Experts offering one-to-one support for people with health conditions or disabilities to move towards and stay in work.
- **Youth Employability Coaches:** Supporting young claimants facing multiple barriers, helping them develop employability skills and gain sustainable work and delivering the Youth Offer – wrap around support programme for young people.
- **Subject Matter Experts/Leads** supporting those facing domestic violence, homelessness, addiction, care leavers and more
- **Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders:** Working with DWP leadership teams to ensure appropriate support for the most at-risk customers.
- **Prison Work Coaches:** Helping individuals leaving custody reintegrate into the community and find employment, reducing the risk of reoffending.
- **School Advisors:** Partnering with schools across Berkshire to deliver high-quality, impartial careers advice for students aged 11–18.
- **Family Community Work Coaches:** Working with the Department for Education and local authorities to support families into employment.
- **Armed Forces Champions:** Providing specialised support for veterans and service leavers to enhance their employability and secure lasting employment.

Locally Managed and National Support

Jobcentres across Berkshire also make use of **locally managed funds** and **national programmes** to further enhance support:

- **Flexible Support Fund (FSF):** A discretionary fund used to remove barriers to work, such as training, travel, or childcare costs.
- **Health Adjustment Passport:** Helps individuals with health conditions or disabilities identify and record the adjustments or support they need to move into, or remain in, employment.

National Programmes Available in Berkshire

- **Restart Scheme:** Provides enhanced, tailored employment support for claimants unemployed for six months or more, helping them find suitable local opportunities.
- **Access to Work:** Offers financial and practical support for individuals with health conditions or disabilities, covering specialist equipment, travel, and mental health support.
- **WorkWell:** The DWP and DHSC WorkWell programme across Frimley ICB aims to help people with health conditions return to work. The programme focuses on creating joined-up Work and Health services designed with input from the community, aiming to deliver what people truly need. The WorkWell pilot builds on previous projects and aims to help people manage their health, create self-care plans, and connect with peer support for ongoing recovery. Frimley is one of 15 pilot sites for Work well and has been a key piece of work working with local job centres and local authorities.

Youth and Community Support in Berkshire

Berkshire residents can also benefit from a range of **local and community-based initiatives**:

Youth Hubs:

- Bracknell – Co-located with Bracknell Forest Youth Hub (estimated launch January 2026)
- Plans to expand coverage across West Berkshire and Wokingham
- Neurodiverse Hub – Reading College – supports young people with neurodiverse needs (to February 2026)
- Maidenhead Youth Hub – Maidenhead Library (to March 2026)
- Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust – Youth Support Service - This service works with under-18s who have had contact with police or courts, helping with issues like employment/education, drugs/alcohol, behaviour, mental health.
- Get Berkshire Active – “Starting Life Well” Fund (and wider youth physical/activity programmes) - The “Starting Life Well Fund” supports organisations (sports- or physically-active programmes) which target young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those at risk of criminality, social isolation, NEET etc.

Community Outreach:

- Partnership working with **His Majesty’s Prison & Probation Service** to support ex-offenders in probation settings
- **Over 50’s Employment Support**, tailored for older jobseekers returning to work
- Local outreach delivered through GP surgeries, community centres, and voluntary sector partners across Berkshire
- In discussion with RBC and SBC to roll out a multi-agency hub and spoke model to offer access to services in family hubs across the towns and trying to target the most deprived areas. Employment and Skills will be one of the themes and Job Centre Plus will attend to promote training options and childcare availability to parents who will be looking for work when their child is old enough.

New Jobs and Careers Service

Building on existing Jobcentre Plus foundations, an enhanced **Jobs and Careers Service**, was acknowledged in the *Get Britain Working* White Paper, which delivers a more personalised, skills-focused support and deeper engagement with local employers (estimated roll-out April 2026).

As part of this approach, national pathfinders launched in 2025, such as the Wakefield and North Yorkshire pilot, are informing improvements to local service delivery in Berkshire. This includes enhanced, voluntary, intensive support for claimants with health-related benefits, helping them engage with employment programmes and move closer to the labour market.

In summary, Jobcentre Plus in Berkshire is committed to delivering a comprehensive, inclusive employment service, working in partnership with local employers, training providers, and community organisations to ensure everyone has the opportunity to access, sustain, and progress in work.

(a list of local provision has been created and can be found in annex II)

6.2 Employment Support

Provision in Berkshire – Health linked Employment Services

As part of the development of this plan, a comprehensive mapping exercise was undertaken across Berkshire to engage with the wider provider market and identify employment support programmes available to residents aged 18 and over.

The exercise created a detailed directory of employment and skills initiatives delivered across Berkshire, highlighting both universal and specialist support designed to meet the needs of a diverse workforce.

These integrated health and employment programmes will be evaluated not only for job outcomes but also through Health Impact Assessment [HIA] and Health Equity Assessment [HEAT]. Health data from ICBs will inform continuous improvement and demonstrate the wider population health value of employment interventions

Types of Support Available in Berkshire

Employment support provision across the county includes:

- **Employment and Skills Training:** Skills Bootcamps, Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), Apprenticeships, and adult learning opportunities offered through local colleges and training providers.
- **LA Commissioned and direct delivery of Adult Skills:** Adult Skills Fund and Tailored Learning, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and others

- **Specialist Support:** Tailored programmes for veterans, disabled people, those with long-term health conditions, and ex-offenders.
- **Youth-Focused Programmes:** Initiatives such as the King's Trust, Youth Hubs, RBWM Youth Council, and local employability schemes for 16–24-year-olds.
- **Financial and Welfare Advice:** Services delivered by Citizens Advice, housing associations, and community organisations to address barriers to employment.
- **Community and Voluntary Sector Support:** Involvement from local partners such as Berkshire Youth, involve Community Services, Slough CVS, Reading Voluntary Action, RBWM Community and Voluntary Sector Partnership, Wokingham Voluntary Centre and Wokingham Job Support Centre.
- **Health-Linked Employment Services:** Integration with NHS Talking Therapies, Community Mental Health Teams, and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) models: including IPS Serious Mental Health, IPS Drugs and alcohol, both pan Berkshire and IPS in Primary Care, being delivered across Slough.

Coverage Across Berkshire

Employment support provision varies across the six local authority areas:

- **Reading** – Strong provision of health and skills-linked employment support, especially for people with mental health conditions and disabilities.
- **Slough** – High concentration of generalist and employer-led programmes, reflecting its strong logistics, manufacturing, and service sectors.
- **West Berkshire** – Broad coverage through adult learning, rural employment initiatives, and community-based support.

- **Bracknell Forest** – Skills and apprenticeship-focused support, linked closely with the local technology and life sciences economy.
- **Wokingham** – Inclusive employment and volunteering opportunities, with strong partnership between the local authority, education sector, and voluntary organisations.
- **Windsor and Maidenhead** – A blend of generalist and specialist employment support, particularly in hospitality, health and social care, and green jobs.

Further Education

Berkshire's **Further Education (FE)** sector plays a central role in developing the skills and qualifications needed to meet the area's evolving economic needs, and Local Authority providers play a pivotal role in delivery of the same to residents.

Colleges and training providers such as **Activate Learning, Newbury College, and Windsor Forest Colleges Group** offer a wide range of vocational, technical, and academic pathways. Many of these institutions are embedded within local communities and work closely with employers to co-design curricula aligned to Berkshire's key growth sectors, including **digital, construction, health and social care, life sciences, and green technologies**.

Collaborations between FE colleges, universities, and employers ensure that learners gain both the technical and employability skills required to succeed. This approach supports Berkshire's businesses in accessing a skilled, adaptable workforce.

The FE sector is also investing in **digital learning infrastructure** and flexible delivery models to improve accessibility for adult learners and those balancing work or caring

responsibilities. Looking ahead, Berkshire's FE providers are well-positioned to support inclusive growth and local productivity, particularly by fostering digital inclusion and promoting lifelong learning opportunities.

Connect to Work

Connect to Work is a new, government-funded supported employment programme being introduced across Berkshire from 2026. It aims to help disabled people, those with health conditions, and individuals facing complex barriers to gain and sustain employment.

The programme uses a “**place, train, and maintain**” model, focusing on finding suitable roles, delivering tailored in-work training, and offering ongoing support to ensure job retention.

Connect to Work will be delivered through Berkshire's six local authorities in partnership with NHS providers and community employment services. The programme will provide:

- Vocational profiling and job matching
- Employer engagement and awareness training
- On-the-job coaching and sustained in-work support

It is expected that over **2,400 Berkshire residents** will benefit from Connect to Work by 2030, strengthening inclusive employment opportunities across the county.

NHS England Employment Support

NHS England is expanding its **Employment Support programme** across Berkshire, focusing on individuals from deprived or underrepresented communities who are interested in careers within health and social care.

Participants will be supported into employment within the NHS through **paid apprenticeships, skills training, and guaranteed job interviews**.

The scheme builds on existing success in other regions and will prioritise areas of high deprivation, such as parts of **Slough, Reading, and Newbury**, where access to entry-level health and care jobs can have the greatest local impact.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

All local authorities have also received funding to deliver skills support to residents and businesses across the region. How the funding has been deployed varies from each local area. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is due to end in March 2026, however, more needs to be done to understand that which replaces it and how a collaborative approach will serve to support more people.

6.3 Local Authority-Specific Provision

Across the six Berkshire local authorities, there is a broad and dynamic employment support system delivered through strong partnerships between councils, further education providers, the NHS, and the voluntary and community sector. Each area has developed targeted programmes that respond to local needs, offering tailored support for key groups such as young people, residents with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and those experiencing housing, financial, or other barriers to work.

Full details of notable programmes and provision available by local authority area can be found in Annex 4.

During the development of the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan), the following key risks and opportunities have been identified.

Key Risks

Risk	Description / Potential Impact
Fragmented system delivery	Variability between local authorities may lead to duplication, gaps in provision, and inconsistent outcomes for residents.
Uneven access to specialist support	Some areas may have stronger disability, youth, or health-related services than others, creating postcode disparities.
Sustainability of funding	Many initiatives rely on short-term or grant-based funding (e.g., Hubs, Bootcamps), risking service continuity beyond 2026.
Capacity and workforce constraints	Increased demand for employment and health-related support could exceed available staff and provider capacity.
Data and performance inconsistency	Limited shared measurement frameworks make it difficult to track outcomes across the county.
Economic shifts and reform pressures	Future benefit and employment support reforms may drive higher demand, adding pressure to existing services.

Key Opportunities

Opportunity	Potential Benefit
Develop a unified Berkshire Employment Framework	Creates consistency in service standards, data, and outcomes, reducing duplication and improving efficiency.
Strengthen cross-authority collaboration	Sharing intelligence, best practice, and employer networks can expand opportunities and raise overall employment outcomes.
Leverage Get Berkshire Working (Plan)	Acts as a shared platform for inclusive growth and coordinated delivery across all six local authorities.
Integrate health, skills, and employment pathways	Builds on strong NHS partnerships (e.g., Reading and RBWM pilots) to address health-related inactivity.
Focus on green and digital sectors	Expanding provision in growing sectors such as sustainability, IT, and life sciences can boost productivity and attract investment.
Employer engagement and social value	Aligning procurement and business partnerships with inclusive employment goals will strengthen the local labour market.
Scale up successful pilots (e.g., Ways into Work)	Proven local models could be standardised county-wide for greater impact and efficiency.

6.4 Conclusion

Berkshire’s local employment support landscape demonstrates innovation, inclusivity, and strong partnerships. However, to meet future challenges, including reform-driven demand, health-related inactivity, and skills shortages - the system must evolve into a **coordinated regional employment ecosystem**.

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) provides a timely opportunity to align efforts, share resources and learning, and deliver a consistent, high-impact employment and skills offer that benefits residents and employers, with targeted investment across all six authorities.

The development of the plan has already initiated these discussions, providing a shared vision for inclusive growth and coordinated employment delivery. Building on this momentum, Berkshire can move from individual collaboration to a fully integrated employment support ecosystem that maximises opportunities for residents and businesses alike, together with long term work to remove barriers to employment and support a healthy resilient workforce into the future.

7

Working with Partners



Get Berkshire Working:

As part of developing the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan), stakeholders from across sectors were engaged to shape priorities and future delivery. Discussions focused on four key questions: how stakeholders want to be involved, what priorities should be reflected in the plan, who else needs to be engaged, and what should be included in the provision map. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of existing support and enabled stakeholders to directly influence the content, direction, and implementation of the plan.

During the plan development the following stakeholders were engaged:

- Berkshire Prosperity Board (one of the plan's signatories)
- Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce
- DWP (one of the plan's signatories)
- ICB (one of the plan's signatories)
- ICP
- Local Authorities (sign off delegated to the Accountable Body)
- Public Health
- Housing Associations and Local Authority Housing Providers
- VCSE Umbrella Organisations
- Skills Providers
- Employment Support Providers.
- REDA – Reading's Economy and Destination Agency

Further engagement and consultations are planned to ensure that the plan is embedded into practice and is successful. A full list of stakeholders who were engaged can be found in the acknowledgement section.

Local Authorities

Leading on the plan for the six Local Authorities were the Skills & Economic Development leads for the Councils, and Reading's Economy and Destination Agency, with representatives from the BOB and Frimley ICB and Job Centre Plus, who formed a **Get Berkshire Working Partnership Group** (Operational Delivery Group - ODG). Slough Borough Council took the lead role in drafting the plan with key statistics and information supplied by the five boroughs, the ICB's and JCP.

It was agreed that the plan would draw on the strength of the region and look for collective action while at the same time noting local differences and demographic challenges.

As the plan was developed it was shared for feedback and input from wider colleagues, which was then incorporated. Local Authority Members were engaged via Health and Wellbeing Boards.

Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Although changes to the structure of the ICB in Berkshire are on the horizon, there are currently two ICBs representing East and West Berkshire; Frimley ICB covering the East, and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire (BOB) ICB in the West. These ICBs have entered into a clustering arrangement from 1 October 2025 to facilitate increasingly close working between the two boards. It is anticipated that a new Thames Valley ICB will be in place from 1 April 2026.

Both ICBs are currently represented at the Operational Delivery Group, have been involved in the development of the plan and were given the opportunity to share it during the development stages with wider health partners for feedback and input. The ODG will continue to work with the ICBs on the development of the action plan, both directly and through wider partnerships, and they have indicated support and endorsement for our plans.

The Frimley and BOB ICBs will use population health management data to identify communities most affected by long-term health conditions, deprivation, and economic inactivity. This intelligence will guide targeted interventions and ensure that resources reach those most in need.

Governance of Get Berkshire Working Group

Details of the **Get Berkshire Working** Governance structure can be found in section 10: **Governance, Local Engagement and Future iterations**

The Frimley and BOB Integrated Care Boards along with the six Berkshire local authorities and representatives from DWP/JCP explored how employment initiatives can be better aligned with health outcomes across the region.

It was recognised that there are strong links between poor health and unemployment, calling for coordinated, data-driven approaches that tackle both challenges simultaneously. Feedback focused on aligning local employment, education, and health initiatives to support shared priorities, reduce duplication, and maximise impact.

Key themes included recruitment in areas of higher deprivation, early intervention for young people, and greater use of apprenticeship levy gifting to strengthen local small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in health and social care roles.

The voluntary and community sector has been identified as a crucial bridge into employment for people facing barriers, such as long-term health conditions or disabilities. It has also been noted that there is both value to, and a need to formalise informal pathways, promoting volunteering as a route to work, and addressing stigma associated with unemployment or ill health.

It is widely recognised that the NHS and some local authorities have enjoyed success in apprenticeship programmes, peer support roles, and supported employment, highlighting the need to extend these models regionally. But there is a consensus on improving how outcomes are tracked, moving beyond traditional demographic metrics to include indicators such as long-term unemployment, health improvement, and sustained progression into work.

Also noted is the importance of integrating employment and health data to inform strategic planning and population health management. For example, programmes are in delivery across Berkshire, where we can see individuals moving into work after recovery from addiction or mental health challenges, underscoring the wider wellbeing benefits of employment beyond income or retention rates. This will be further intensified with the roll out of Connect to Work in early 2026.

It is acknowledged that there is a need for a strategic, person-centred approach, underpinned by consistent data sharing, shared success measures, and investment in infrastructure to support meaningful placements for young people and those with additional needs, including autism and learning disabilities.

Berkshire Prosperity Board

This Board is made up of the Leaders and Chief Executives of the six Berkshire Local Authorities. The emerging themes in the Summary Paper were presented to the Board in June and it was agreed in September during the development phase that the final draft could be signed off by the Accountable Body, representing the Berkshire Prosperity Board. An update on the plan and future development will be provided to the Board.

Berkshire Business Board

This Board is made up of Business representatives from across the Berkshire sub-region. The emerging themes in the draft paper were presented to the Board. A final draft was then shared.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

A draft of the plan was shared with DWP's Head of Employer & Strategic Partnership's (Southeast Group) for comment and feedback. The **Get Berkshire Working** team attended a number of DWP workshops on *Get Britain Working*. Going forward the DWP will meet regularly with the lead for **Get Berkshire Working** for the Councils, and will also be a member of the 'Oversight Committee' alongside other Senior representatives from the Local Authorities Public Health Teams, ICB's, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, VCSE representatives and HE/FE; the purpose of this group will be to ensure the continued momentum of the plan, drive the development of future iterations, focusing on the joint priorities for the Berkshire region. This group will then feed into the Health and Wellbeing Boards for each local authority.

Health and Wellbeing Boards

Each local authority has its own Health and Wellbeing Board. The draft **Get Berkshire Working** was shared with key representatives for feedback and comment during the drafting process. There is a commitment to discuss the details of actions post publication.

Stakeholder and Partner Questionnaire

Stakeholders and partners from housing associations, the VCSE sector, education and skills providers, ICBs, and supported employment services were invited to complete a questionnaire to highlight their key challenges and the priorities they would like addressed in the Regional Action Plan. The Operational Delivery Group will draw on existing networks to share insights, gather intelligence, and contribute to the plan's development. This approach will also serve as the primary channel for consultation throughout the ongoing planning process.

Others

It is acknowledged that engagement with other organisations needs to be developed on the action plan and the second iteration of this plan. This includes Trade Unions, JCPs, Disability and Mental Health organisations.

8

Systemic Changes



Aligning Health, Employment and Skills in Berkshire – A Collaborative Approach Linked to Get Britain Working

Building on the principles of the *Get Britain Working* White Paper, partners across Berkshire – including the six local authorities, the Frimley and BOB Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Jobcentre Plus, housing and skills providers, and the VCSE sector – are committed to strengthening integration between health, employment, and skills. To develop the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan).

This joined-up approach reflects the White Paper's focus at a local level – **Get Berkshire Working** on tackling inactivity, improving wellbeing, and ensuring that every individual has access to meaningful work, learning or training opportunities.

It is increasingly evident that health, employment, housing, and skills are closely interconnected, with socio-economic inequalities running through each. Addressing these challenges collectively offers the potential for more sustainable outcomes for individuals and communities across Berkshire. A holistic, place-based approach, where systems align their resources, priorities, and support, will better enable people to overcome barriers to work and improve both their health and long-term life chances.

Developing Integrated Service Delivery Models

A key enabler of this approach is the creation of integrated service delivery models, consistent with *Get Britain Working*'s emphasis on local coordination and person-centred support. By co-locating services, developing shared digital platforms, and improving referral pathways between employment, health, and social care, partners can reduce fragmentation and make it easier for people with complex needs – such as long-term conditions, mental health challenges or disabilities – to access support.

There is shared commitment across Berkshire to bring services and resources closer to communities, ensuring accessibility and responsiveness. Collaborative models are already emerging through local ICP partnerships and will continue to evolve to align with national direction across Berkshire.

Improving Health and Employment Outcomes

Joint programmes that support people with long-term health conditions, disabilities, or other barriers to work are central to this vision. These initiatives help people move closer to the labour market while improving wellbeing, financial stability, and independence – directly addressing the *Get Britain Working* goals of reducing inactivity and strengthening public health through work.

In turn, these outcomes help reduce pressure on NHS and social care services by addressing the social determinants of health – including unemployment, housing instability, and low skills.

Prevention, Skills Alignment and Early Intervention

Partners agree that early intervention and prevention are essential for sustainable impact. Working with local colleges, training providers, and employers, the aim is to align skills development with local labour market demand, particularly in health and social care, green industries, and digital sectors – mirroring the priorities outlined in the White Paper and Skills England's local sector focus. Berkshire will continue to work with Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce to support and align the activities and work relating to the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plans – version 2.

Through initiatives such as apprenticeship levy gifting, supported internships, and youth employment programmes, Berkshire partners can support young people and those furthest from the labour market to access skills pathways and sustainable employment.

Prevention and workplace wellbeing

Partners will champion workplace health as a shared priority embedding prevention, mental wellbeing, and inclusive recruitment and employment within all local workforce strategies. Initiatives such as Making Every Contact Count (MECC), workplace health champions, mental health first aid, and healthy workplace accreditation will be promoted across employers.

Housing as a Foundation for Health and Work

Stable housing remains a cornerstone for both health and employment. Berkshire's housing partners play a vital role in creating integrated pathways that connect supported housing with employment and health services. This joined-up approach supports vulnerable individuals – including those with mental health needs, histories of homelessness, or addiction recovery – to rebuild stability and progress into work.

Safe, warm, and affordable housing underpins both employment and good health. Working with housing partners, the plan will promote healthy homes initiatives addressing fuel poverty, damp, and overcrowding to support residents' physical and mental wellbeing as a foundation for work readiness.

System Leadership and Alignment of Priorities

The six Berkshire local authorities and the ICBs are well-placed to lead system-wide alignment through place-based strategies and joint commissioning, consistent with the *Get Britain Working* emphasis on local accountability and partnership. By pooling funding, aligning strategic priorities, collating data and sharing intelligence, local systems can foster innovation and tailor responses to community needs.

However, ongoing financial pressures and structural uncertainty across local government and health systems underscore the need for national investment and policy stability to enable long-term integration and impact.

The Role of the VCSE Sector

The VCSE sector is a critical partner in reaching underserved and marginalised groups. Its deep community connections and cultural competence make it invaluable in building trust, providing preventative and person-centred support, and engaging those who may not access statutory services. Formally embedding VCSE organisations in system design and delivery will strengthen engagement and complement statutory provision across Berkshire.

Data, Evaluation and Continuous Learning

Finally, effective data sharing and joint evaluation are essential foundations for integrated working. Shared data platforms allow partners to coordinate more effectively and track outcomes across systems – while joint evaluation frameworks demonstrate the impact and value for money of collaborative approaches.

A robust evidence base will support continuous improvement, help secure ongoing investment, and ensure alignment with the *Get Britain Working* vision of inclusive, data-driven, locally-led reform.

In summary, Berkshire partners are building on national direction by aligning local health, employment, skills, and housing systems to deliver a joined-up approach that supports residents into sustainable work and better health. Through collaboration, data-driven innovation, and community engagement, the region is well positioned and the *Get Berkshire Working* (Plan) will contribute to the ambitions of *Get Britain Working*.

9

Priority Actions and Longer-term Goals



Berkshire Employment and Inclusion Action Plan – Aligned to Get Britain Working

Our Berkshire-wide action plan builds on the core aims of the *Get Britain Working* White Paper, to achieve an 80% employment rate for working-age adults and to increase real earnings, particularly among lower-income households.

The plan reflects Berkshire's distinctive local economy, marked by strong overall employment, but persistent pockets of deprivation, skills gaps, and unequal access to good work across communities and demographic groups. It also recognises the role of the six local authorities, the Frimley and BOB Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Jobcentre Plus, skills providers, employers, and the VCSE sector in working together to achieve inclusive growth.

Underlying Issues and Local Priorities

The plan focuses on six key issues identified in the *Get Britain Working* framework, adapted to Berkshire's geography and labour market context:

Exclusion from the Labour Market:

Despite low unemployment, certain communities in Berkshire – particularly in parts of Reading, Slough, and West Berkshire – experience long-term worklessness linked to poor health, housing insecurity, or limited access to transport. Tackling health-related economic inactivity remains a core focus.

Youth Employment:

The Berkshire labour market offers high-skilled jobs but limited entry-level opportunities. Many young people, including care leavers and those with special educational needs or disabilities, struggle to transition into sustained employment. The Youth Guarantee provides a framework for targeted support, including apprenticeships, supported internships, and early intervention programmes, but funding is not yet clear.

Insecure and Low-Quality Work:

Across Berkshire, a growing number of residents are in low-paid or insecure work, particularly in hospitality, logistics, and care sectors. Improving job quality, supporting progression, and ensuring access to training are essential to raise living standards. Additionally, AI is impacting entry-level jobs by automating routine tasks, leading to a significant decline in entry-level hiring, particularly in fields like administrative, customer support, and software development.

Challenges for Women:

Women are more likely to work part-time, face pay gaps, and experience limited career progression due to caring responsibilities. Flexible work opportunities, childcare support, and career re-entry programmes are priorities for reducing gender inequalities.

Employer Vacancies and Skills Mismatch:

Employers across Berkshire report persistent vacancies in health and social care, digital, and technical sectors. Strengthening links between employers, skills providers, and employment services will help align training with local demand and improve recruitment pipelines. Creating pathways into jobs by mapping local offer to employer needs will help to ease this issue.

Disparities in Labour Market Outcomes:

Significant variations remain between and within Berkshire's localities. For example, Slough and parts of Reading have higher rates of economic inactivity, while rural areas face barriers related to transport and access to services. Addressing these disparities is central to achieving inclusive growth across all six local authorities.

Key Outcomes

- **Increase employment rate** for people aged 18–66, progressing toward the long-term 80% ambition across all groups. For Berkshire, this means reducing variation between local areas and ensuring that no community is left behind. We will undertake further work to understand the labour market experiences of specific groups, including disabled people, ethnic minorities, and those with long-term health conditions.

- **Increase real earnings**, particularly among households in the lower half of the income distribution. Although Berkshire's average earnings are above the national average, inequality within the county is growing. Action will focus on upskilling and reskilling, improving productivity, and promoting pathways into higher-paid work.
- **Early Intervention and to prevent long-term unemployment** - Growth in referrals to Work Coaches, Health & Employment Services, or IPS (Individual Placement and Support) programmes.
- **Inclusive Economic Growth** -More diverse groups accessing employment, including people with disabilities, health conditions, single parents, and ethnic-minority communities.
- **Improved Partnership Working** - Stronger collaboration between JCP, local authorities, FE colleges, NHS partners, and voluntary/ community organisation. Sharing data and tracking of outcomes across multi agencies e.g. % increase in qualifications. Better integration of health, wellbeing, and employment support across Berkshire.
- **Health-related metrics** will sit alongside employment outcomes, including -reductions in health-related economic inactivity; improvements in self-reported wellbeing; decreases in long-term sickness absence; and increased participation among residents with long-term conditions.

Intermediate Outcome Metrics

To monitor progress, actions will be aligned with DWP's intermediate outcome metrics, adapted for Berkshire's context:

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

Implementation and Next Steps

An initial Berkshire-wide action plan is outlined in Annex 3 but will be further developed collaboratively with local partners early 2026, with measurable targets and milestones co-designed with stakeholders. The plan will be reviewed quarterly through the **Get Berkshire Working** Partnership Board (ODG) and updated until at least June 2027.

The next iteration of the plan (March 2026) will include detailed action setting for priority groups, including:

- Disabled residents and people with long-term conditions (e.g., MSK and mental health)
- Care leavers and care-experienced young people
- Young people at risk of NEET
- Residents in low-paid or insecure work

Summary

The **Berkshire Employment and Inclusion Action* Plan** translates national priorities from *Get Britain Working* into local action. By aligning employment, health, and skills systems across the six Berkshire local authorities, the Frimley and BOB ICBs, and wider partners, we will build a more inclusive and resilient labour market, where every resident has access to good work, fair pay, and better health.



10

Governance, Local Engagement and Future Iterations



10.1
Governance

Slough Borough Council as the Accountable Body led the formal engagement with the partners that signed off the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) and will be responsible for ensuring its success. This partnership is made up of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board and Frimley Integrated Care Board, Department of Work and Pensions and the six Berkshire Local Authorities and REDA.

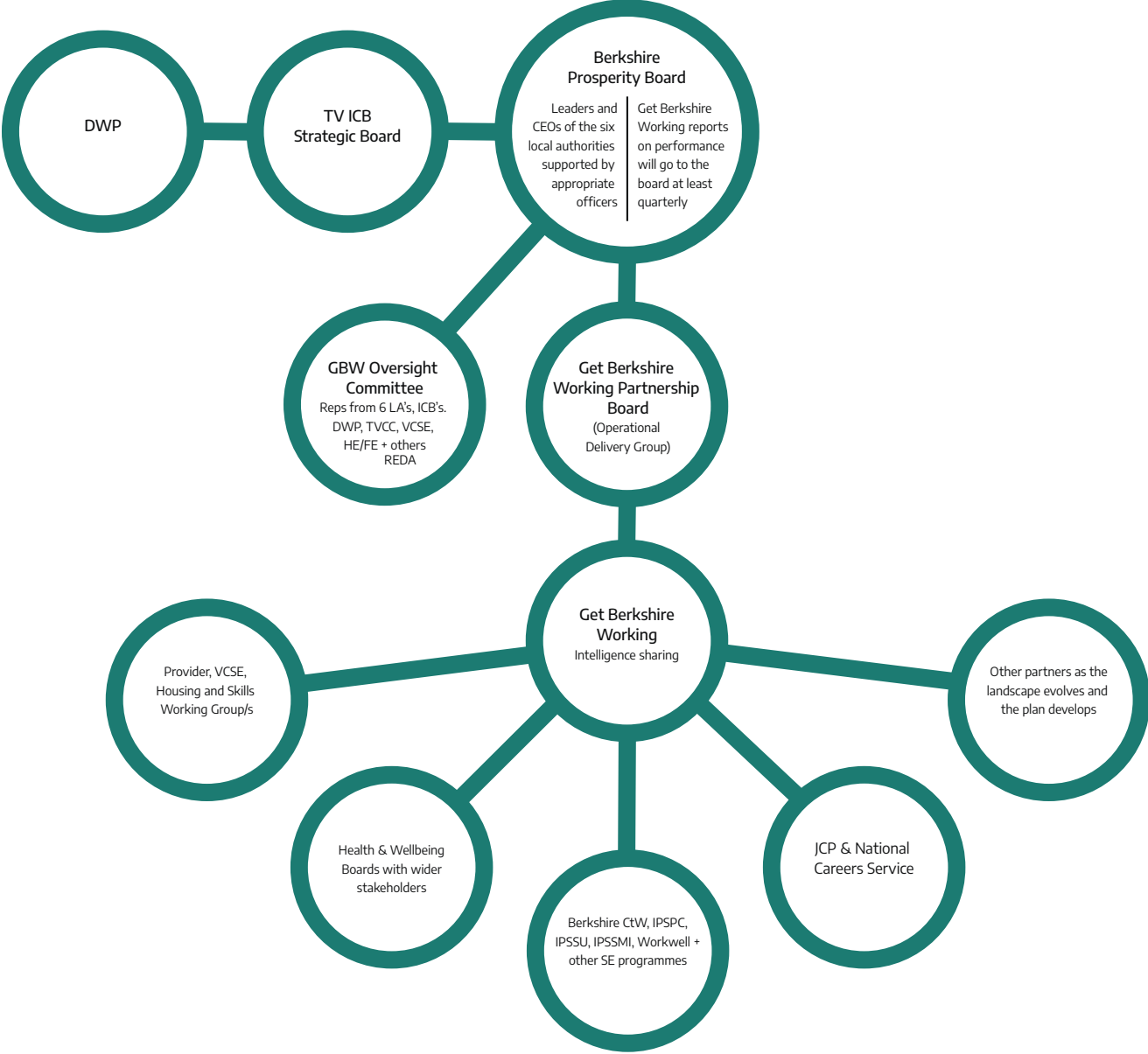
10.2
Working with Partners

The governance structure for **Get Berkshire Working** has been designed to ensure that the plan is delivered collaboratively, under the joint leadership of the six Berkshire Local Authorities, the Frimley and BOB Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), alongside a broad coalition of local and regional stakeholders. This structure provides opportunities to learn, as all stakeholders have different examples of good practice and outcomes that can be shared. It also provides an opportunity to reduce inequalities through systematic identification of groups with poor outcomes across the region.

This partnership model reflects Berkshire’s commitment to shared ownership, joint accountability, and system-wide collaboration, recognising that employment, health, and wellbeing outcomes are deeply interconnected.

Where possible, existing forums will be used to support delivery, including the Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) or their future replacement arrangements, and local Employment and Skills Boards. In areas where suitable mechanisms do not yet exist, new coordinating forums will be established to enable regular engagement and alignment between sectors.

An example under consideration is the creation of a Berkshire VCSE Employment and Inclusion Forum, bringing together the umbrella organisations and voluntary sector networks operating across the county to ensure that community voices and lived experience inform delivery.



The co-development of the action plan with partners ensures that all parties are actively engaged and jointly accountable for the success of **Get Berkshire Working**. This inclusive and structured approach provides a strong foundation for locally owned, meaningful, and sustained change across Berkshire’s diverse communities.

Further engagement will continue through 2025, particularly with Jobcentre Plus, trade unions, employer groups, and training providers, to ensure alignment across all sectors.

Alignment with the National Framework

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) is directly aligned with the *Department for Work and Pensions’ Get Britain Working* outcome metrics and strategic objectives. These provide the overarching national framework through which progress will be monitored and reported.

The key metrics are:

- Employment rate
 - Real earnings
 - Regional and local variation in employment rates
 - Health-related economic inactivity rate
 - Disability employment rates
 - Proportion of 18–24-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)
 - Employment gaps among parents
 - Female employment rate
- These measures will guide the development, delivery, and evaluation of Berkshire’s local actions and ensure that activity at place level contributes directly to national outcomes.

10.3 Monitoring

Monitoring will be overseen by a shared Berkshire Monitoring and Insights Group, coordinated by the host local authority (to be confirmed) in partnership with the ICBs and DWP. This group will use the *Get Britain Working* outcome indicators as the primary framework for tracking delivery and performance across Berkshire.

Performance monitoring will take place quarterly for the first 24 months following publication of the plan. The frequency will then be reviewed in line with progress and partner feedback.

Monitoring will use DWP-recommended national data sources as a minimum:

- NOMIS – <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>
- Census 2021 – <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>
- Stat-Xplore – <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>
- Local Health and OHID Fingertips – <https://www.localhealth.org.uk/> and <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/>
- ONS Real Time Information (RTI) Statistics – <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket>

Where additional local or partner-held datasets exist, including ICB population health data, local authority economic insight, or VCSE data, these will also be incorporated.

It should be noted that while many statistical sources currently report outcomes for people aged up to 66, the *Get Britain Working* framework applies to people up to **age 68**, and local monitoring will evolve accordingly.

10.4 Reporting

Quarterly progress reports will be produced by the monitoring team for at least the first 24 months and presented to the plan’s governance bodies, including:

- The **Berkshire Prosperity Board** (representing the six local authorities)
- The **Frimley and BOB ICB Boards** (or an appropriate committee.)
- The **DWP** (through regional employment partnerships)

Reports will also be shared with local Employment and Skills Boards, VCSE partners, and other key stakeholders. Summaries will be made publicly available through the relevant local authority and LEP websites to ensure transparency and shared accountability.

10.5 Evaluation

A formal evaluation – with ongoing learning - of the plan’s effectiveness will be undertaken 24 months after publication, following DWP and national evaluation guidance wherever available. In the absence of specific national methodologies, recognised independent evaluation frameworks will be applied to ensure consistency and credibility.

If additional funding becomes available, an external evaluation partner may be commissioned to undertake this work and provide independent assessment of impact and value for money. Findings will be published in line with the regular reporting process.

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) will be included as part of the plan’s formal evaluation to assess the outcomes attributable to the **Get Berkshire Working** initiatives. A retrospective HIA will also be undertaken to capture lessons learned and inform future improvements.

10.6 Future Iterations

This version of the **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) marks the start of a process of deeper collaboration across Berkshire’s six local authorities and system partners. It is recognised that several areas, including data integration, youth employment pathways, health-related worklessness, and skills alignment, require further co-design with partners during 2025 and into 2026.

A second iteration of the plan will therefore be developed and published in March 2026, incorporating refined targets, agreed outcome measures, and actions for priority groups. This plan will also consider the impact of future benefit reforms and the anticipated additional demands for employment support on the system, including:

- **Strengthening local health-employment-skills partnerships:** Working with ICBs, NHS, DWP, FE providers to design pathways for claimants with health conditions or disabilities.
- **Increase capacity for tailored, place-based employment support:** Recognise that metrics such as employment rate, health-related inactivity, disability employment gap need local targets and action plans.
- **Prepare for increased demand:** Ensure job-centre and local employment-support infrastructure is ready, with staff training, partnerships and referral routes.
- **Focus on transition management:** As eligibility and benefit levels change, local systems must support claimants through transitions (e.g., from health benefits to employment, or changing conditions under reform) to avoid drop-out.

- **Ensure data and monitoring systems align:** Track how support is translating into employment, retention, progression, benefit transitions. Use this to refine local interventions.
- **Promote employer readiness:** Engage local employers in inclusive hiring, adapting roles for health/disabled workers, leveraging apprenticeships, and good job design.
- **Plan budget/resource flexibility:** Given the reforms’ timescales and volume implications, local programmes must be adaptable, with effective cost monitoring and prioritisation of interventions with high return.
- **Mitigate risks of hard-to-reach groups:** Some claimants might face multiple barriers (health, skills, caring responsibilities). Local delivery should include specialist interventions for such cohorts to avoid them falling through cracks.

As wider devolution discussions progress, Berkshire partners will explore opportunities for alignment with neighbouring regional plans and future cross-boundary collaboration where this supports shared labour market and population health outcomes.

Conclusion

The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) represents a bold, integrated response to the UK Government’s *Get Britain Working* White Paper, tailored to the diverse economic, social, and health landscape of Berkshire. It brings together the six Berkshire local authorities, the Frimley and BOB Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and a wide range of local partners in a shared commitment to create a more inclusive, resilient, and productive labour market.

At its heart, the plan addresses six key challenges identified through local analysis and stakeholder engagement:

- i. Exclusion from the labour market
- ii. Youth employment and progression
- iii. Insecure and low-quality work
- iv. Gender disparities and barriers for carers
- v. Persistent employer vacancies and skills mismatches
- vi. Local inequalities and employment outcomes

These challenges are rooted in Berkshire’s lived experience, from pockets of deprivation in of the local authority areas, to transport and accessibility barriers in rural West Berkshire, and the cost-of-living pressures affecting households across the county.

The plan’s strength lies in its ability to translate complex, cross-cutting issues into coordinated, place-based actions that are both locally grounded and nationally aligned. Berkshire’s economy benefits from global employers, high levels of innovation, and proximity to London and Heathrow. Yet, it also faces challenges including skills shortages, housing affordability, and growing health-related economic inactivity. The plan recognises these disparities and sets out targeted interventions to bridge gaps between opportunity and access.

Integrating Health, Employment and Skills

A defining feature of **Get Berkshire Working** is its focus on the integration of health and employment support. The plan builds on the evidence that *good work is good for health* and seeks to align employment initiatives with NHS, ICB, and local authority programmes, particularly in areas of high health inequality or long-term inactivity.

Partnerships between primary care networks, employment advisers, and community organisations will help residents with long-term conditions, mental health challenges, or musculoskeletal disorders to move closer to work. This aligns with the national ambition to reduce economic inactivity and supports the White Paper’s goal of enabling everyone to participate fully in the workforce.

Inclusive and Preventative Growth

The plan is grounded in the principle of inclusive growth, ensuring that economic opportunity reaches those who have historically been left behind. It prioritises women, carers, disabled people, young people, those with low qualifications and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation, ensuring that prosperity is shared across all communities.

Prevention and early intervention are central themes. By linking employment and skills pathways to health, housing, and education services, Berkshire partners are developing a holistic model that supports residents through life transitions and helps prevent long-term disengagement from the labour market.

Joint programmes will strengthen career pathways in health and social care, expand access to supported internships and apprenticeships, and connect skills development with local employer demand, supporting the workforce needs of growing sectors such as life sciences, green technologies, and digital innovation.

Partnerships and Leadership

The plan's success depends on the strength of Berkshire's partnerships. The involvement of local authorities, ICBs, DWP, employers, housing associations, skills providers, and the VCSE sector ensures that delivery is shared, coordinated, and accountable.

Local authorities and the ICBs are well placed to provide strategic leadership through place-based approaches and joint commissioning, while the VCSE and housing sectors play a critical role in engaging underserved communities and providing culturally competent, person-centred support.

Although financial pressures and structural uncertainties remain, the commitment of Berkshire's partners to collaboration, innovation, and inclusion is clear. National investment and policy stability will be key to sustaining this momentum and embedding long-term integration.

Data, Evaluation and Long-Term Impact

Robust data sharing, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks will underpin the plan. Quarterly reporting and a formal evaluation after 24 months will ensure transparency, track progress, and enable continuous learning across systems. These mechanisms will also demonstrate the value for money and social impact of integrated approaches, supporting future investment and scalability.

A Shared Vision for Berkshire

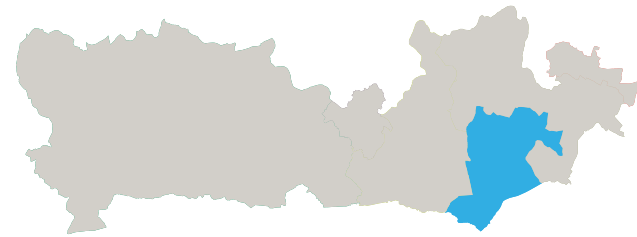
The **Get Berkshire Working** (Plan) is more than a policy document, it is a blueprint for transformation. It embodies a shared regional vision: that every Berkshire resident, regardless of background, health status, or postcode, should have access to good work, lifelong learning, and better health.

With its clear roadmap, strong partnerships, and commitment to equity, the plan sets a new benchmark for collaborative, place-based employment strategies in England. By harnessing Berkshire's economic strengths, addressing inequalities head-on, and aligning with the ambitions of **Get Britain Working**, this plan positions Berkshire as a leader in integrated economic and social development, a county where everyone can contribute, thrive, and share in its success.



Annex I

Challenges and
Strengths by Area



Bracknell Forest Challenges & strengths:

Economic Context

Bracknell Forest sits at the intersection of the M4 and M3 growth corridors and benefits from strong connectivity to London and the wider Southeast economy. Its strategic location has helped attract major corporate headquarters and global firms across technology, pharmaceuticals and advanced manufacturing sectors. Companies including 3M, Fujitsu, Dell, Boehringer Ingelheim, Afton Chemical and Syngenta have established significant operations within the borough, reinforcing Bracknell Forest's reputation as a major Thames Valley business location.

The regeneration of the town centre, centred around The Lexicon development which opened in 2017, has significantly strengthened the borough's retail and leisure offer and contributed to improved place identity and investment confidence. The area continues to attract businesses and residents due to its high quality of life, strong schools and access to green space.

The Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024–2034 highlights both the borough's competitive strengths and several structural challenges. The area performs well in terms of wellbeing, digital infrastructure and sustainability indicators. However, the local economy continues to evolve in response to wider economic change, including shifts in office space demand, new working patterns and increasing pressure for residential development.

Challenges

Despite its strong economic performance, Bracknell Forest faces several structural challenges that may constrain future growth and productivity. One of the most significant issues identified in the borough's Economic Strategy is a shortage of vocational and intermediate-level skills, particularly at NVQ Levels 3 and 4. This includes gaps in technical capability and first-line management skills that can limit productivity and career progression for residents.

The local economy is also characterised by relatively low business creation rates compared with other areas in the Thames Valley. Although the borough hosts many large international

firms, the level of entrepreneurial activity and SME growth remains modest. This limits the development of a more diversified business base and weaker local supply chains.

Another challenge is the comparatively limited presence of knowledge-economy businesses relative to neighbouring innovation hubs. This creates a reinforcing cycle in which lower levels of advanced skills make it more difficult to attract high-growth sectors, while the absence of these industries reduces incentives for workforce upskilling.

Finally, the borough's reliance on multinational corporations exposes the local economy to global market volatility and corporate restructuring decisions made outside the UK. Changing workplace patterns, including hybrid working, are also reshaping demand for office space and affecting commercial property markets and town centre activity.

Strengths

Bracknell Forest benefits from a strong and established corporate base supported by a network of successful business parks and employment sites. Its strategic location between the M3 and M4 corridors provides excellent connectivity to London, Heathrow Airport and key national transport routes, making it an attractive destination for investment and business operations.

The borough's infrastructure is well developed, with reliable digital connectivity and high-quality transport links supporting economic activity. These factors, combined with a high quality of life, contribute to Bracknell Forest's ability to attract and retain skilled workers.

The regenerated town centre has also strengthened the borough's identity as a commercial and leisure destination, providing new opportunities for businesses and enhancing the local visitor and consumer offer. Strong environmental quality and access to green space further reinforce its attractiveness as a place to

live and work.

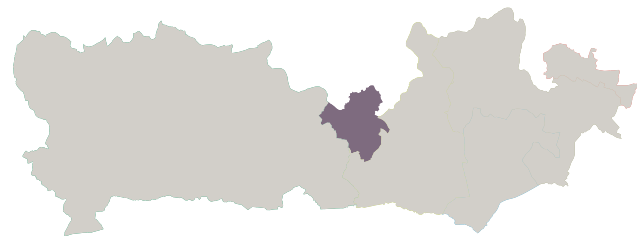
The Economic Strategy 2024–2034 provides a clear framework for building on these strengths. Its priorities include improving workforce skills, supporting enterprise and innovation, and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the borough.

Outlook for 2025 and Beyond

Looking ahead, Bracknell Forest's economy will continue to adapt to evolving patterns of work and changes in the commercial property market. Further phases of town centre regeneration are expected to create additional commercial, residential and community opportunities.

The delivery of the Economic Strategy will focus on strengthening vocational skills, improving access to higher-quality employment and encouraging entrepreneurship. By addressing these challenges while building on its established corporate base and strategic location, Bracknell Forest is well positioned to sustain economic growth and enhance its role within the wider Thames Valley economy.





Reading

Challenges & strengths:

Economic Context

Reading is one of the UK's most dynamic urban economies and is forecast to lead national economic growth over the coming years. Located at the centre of the M4, M3 and M40 corridors, the town plays a pivotal role within the wider Thames Valley economy and benefits from strong connectivity to London, Heathrow Airport and the national transport network. This strategic position has helped Reading develop into a major centre for technology, professional services and innovation.

Historically associated with information technology and knowledge-intensive services, Reading has evolved into a diverse and resilient economic hub. In addition to its established technology and professional services base, the local economy is increasingly expanding into emerging sectors including sustainability, film and media production, defence technologies and artificial intelligence.

The presence of the University of Reading and Henley Business School further strengthens the town's economic foundations, supporting more than 20,000 students each year and contributing to research, innovation and graduate talent

pipelines. Reading's riverside setting, cultural heritage and vibrant communities also contribute to a strong quality of life that attracts businesses, workers and visitors.

Strategic planning is guided by the Reading 2050 Vision and the Economic Development Framework 2025–2035, which set out long-term ambitions to maintain economic competitiveness while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth.

Challenges

Despite strong economic performance, Reading faces a number of structural challenges that must be addressed to sustain future growth. One key issue is labour market imbalance. Workplace earnings are significantly higher than the earnings of residents, reflecting a substantial level of commuting into the town. At the same time, the local job market contains a relatively high proportion of elementary roles and fewer opportunities at intermediate or skilled-trade levels.

Technological change is also reshaping labour demand, particularly in sectors affected by automation and artificial intelligence. Ensuring that the local workforce has the skills required to adapt to these changes will be essential for maintaining productivity and competitiveness.

Inequality remains another important challenge. Certain neighbourhoods, particularly in South Reading, experience persistent deprivation characterised by higher levels of child poverty, lower employment rates and weaker educational outcomes. Addressing these issues requires coordinated, place-based interventions across education, employment, health and community development.

Additional priorities include maintaining Reading's competitiveness in core sectors such as technology and professional services, supporting growth in emerging industries, and revitalising the town centre. The town must also accommodate population growth through housing development while improving sustainable transport infrastructure and strengthening the visitor economy.

Strengths

Reading is one of the most productive economies in the UK and plays a key role in driving regional and national economic growth. Forecasts suggest that the town will experience strong economic expansion over the coming years, supported by high productivity, strong employment rates and relatively high disposable incomes among residents.

The local workforce is highly skilled, with around 62% of residents holding qualifications at NVQ Level 4 or above. This strong skills base supports a large cluster of digital technology and innovation-led businesses. The town is home to thousands of digital and IT firms, making it one of the most significant technology clusters in the Southeast.

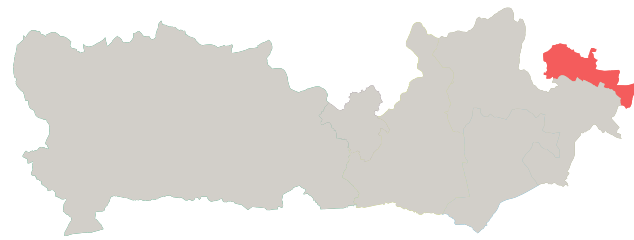
Connectivity is another major advantage. The Elizabeth Line has significantly improved access to London and Heathrow, strengthening Reading's attractiveness as a location for businesses and commuters. The town also benefits from strong cultural, environmental and quality-of-life assets that contribute to its reputation as a desirable place to live and work.

Sustainability is an increasingly important element of Reading's economic development strategy, with significant opportunities emerging in low-carbon energy and green employment.

Outlook for 2025 and Beyond

Reading's long-term vision is to become an internationally recognised, low-carbon and inclusive city with a strong innovation economy and high quality of life. By 2035, the Economic Development Framework aims to raise productivity, reduce inequality and diversify the town centre economy through a greater mix of housing, culture, leisure and business activity.

Major redevelopment projects, including the Minster Quarter regeneration, new town centre housing and infrastructure improvements such as the proposed Third Thames Crossing and redevelopment of the Royal Berkshire Hospital, will play a key role in shaping the town's future growth. Together, these initiatives position Reading to remain a leading economic centre within the Thames Valley.



Slough

Challenges & strengths:

Economic Context

Slough is a major employment centre within the Thames Valley economy and has long been recognised for its strong industrial and commercial base. The borough hosts a wide range of businesses across logistics, information technology, professional services and life sciences, with the Slough Trading Estate serving as a central economic asset. As Europe's largest industrial estate in single private ownership, it accommodates hundreds of businesses ranging from multinational corporations to advanced manufacturing and logistics firms.

Slough's strategic location close to London, Heathrow Airport and the M4 corridor has helped establish the borough as a key hub for global companies and international investment. Strong transport connectivity, including the Elizabeth Line, further enhances access to regional and national labour markets.

While Slough's economy has traditionally been shaped by large corporate employers and industrial activity, there are increasing efforts to diversify into emerging sectors such as digital technology, creative industries and green innovation.

Challenges

Despite these strengths, Slough faces several challenges that may limit its future economic potential. The borough continues to contend with perceptions of being a transient industrial town with limited cultural and leisure appeal. This perception can affect both investor confidence and the ability to attract and retain skilled workers.

The town centre and evening economy are also relatively underdeveloped, limiting opportunities to increase visitor activity and local spending. At the same time, representation in certain high-growth sectors, including financial technology and creative industries, remains limited.

Skills shortages and labour market mismatches present further challenges. While Slough has a young and diverse population, adult qualification levels in some areas remain relatively low. This can make it more difficult for residents to access opportunities in high-value sectors such as life sciences and digital technology. Strengthening pathways for vocational training, higher education and employer engagement will therefore be critical.

Housing affordability and access to suitable commercial space also present constraints. The availability of flexible and affordable workspace for start-ups and growing businesses remains limited, which can hinder entrepreneurial activity.

Strengths

Slough's strategic location is one of its greatest assets. Excellent connectivity to London, Heathrow Airport and the wider UK transport network supports business operations, trade and investment. The Slough Trading Estate remains a major driver of employment and innovation, continuing to evolve with a focus on sustainability and advanced technologies.

The borough also benefits from an exceptionally diverse and multilingual workforce. As one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the UK, Slough's population contributes to a dynamic labour market and enhances the town's appeal as an international business location.

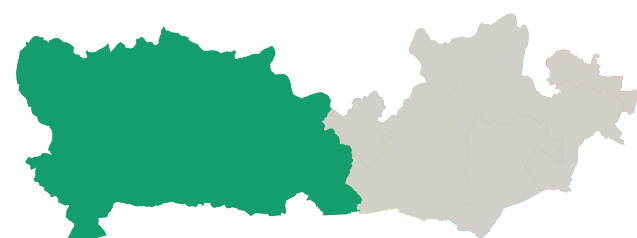
Local education providers and nearby universities offer opportunities to strengthen partnerships between employers and training institutions, helping to address skills shortages and support workforce development.

Slough's sustainability agenda is also generating opportunities in the green economy, including areas such as energy-efficient construction, sustainable transport and environmental services.

Outlook for 2025 and Beyond

Looking ahead, Slough's economic future will depend on continued investment in skills, infrastructure and regeneration. The borough's Regeneration Framework and Local Plan aim to transform the urban core through improvements to housing, public spaces and transport infrastructure.

With its strong corporate base, strategic location and diverse population, Slough is well positioned to diversify its economy and build a more resilient and inclusive model of growth.



West Berkshire Challenges & strengths:

Economic Context

West Berkshire forms part of the highly productive Thames Valley economic area and benefits from strong transport connections via the M4 corridor and rail links to Reading, London and the West Country. The district hosts a diverse economic base that includes advanced manufacturing, defence, digital technology and professional services, alongside many small and medium-sized enterprises.

Major employers include organisations in sectors such as defence, pharmaceuticals and telecommunications, supported by a network of engineering and technical firms. The district's Economic Development Strategy identifies four key priorities: supporting business growth, strengthening workforce skills, enabling infrastructure investment and promoting environmental sustainability.

Although the district has high employment rates and a well-qualified workforce, its largely rural character presents unique opportunities and constraints for economic development.

Challenges

Housing affordability and supply represent a major challenge for West Berkshire. Housing delivery has not kept pace with demand, and revised national targets have increased the pressure to deliver significantly more homes each year. Rising house prices can limit labour mobility and make it difficult for younger residents and key workers to remain in the area.

Transport connectivity also presents challenges, particularly in rural areas where public transport options are limited. Congestion around growth centres such as Newbury and Thatcham can further constrain labour mobility and business expansion.

Environmental constraints add complexity to development. Significant parts of the district fall within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or flood-risk zones, requiring careful planning to balance economic growth with environmental protection. Planning restrictions around the defence sector also limit the availability of land for development.

Skills shortages in areas such as digital technology, advanced manufacturing and green industries remain an issue, while demographic trends indicate an ageing population and the out-migration of younger residents to larger cities.

Strengths

West Berkshire benefits from a highly skilled workforce and a strong reputation for innovation in engineering, science and technology sectors. Its location within the Thames Valley provides excellent access to markets, research institutions and major economic centres including Reading, Oxford and London.

The district also has a diverse and resilient business base that includes multinational companies, high-technology manufacturers and a vibrant SME sector. This diversity helps reduce reliance on any single industry and enhances economic stability.

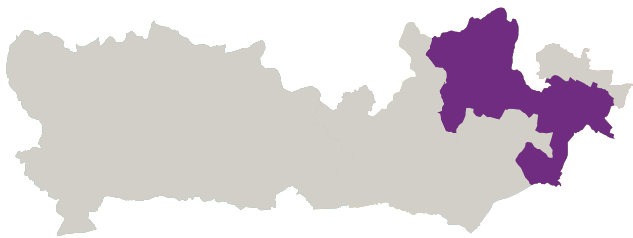
West Berkshire's rural economy also contributes to its distinctiveness, supporting industries such as agriculture, equine activities and rural estate management. These sectors add diversity to the local economy and provide a range of employment opportunities.

High environmental quality and access to open countryside contribute to a strong quality of life, helping attract skilled workers and businesses.

Outlook for 2025 and Beyond

West Berkshire is well positioned to benefit from future growth in clean technologies, digital industries and defence-related sectors. However, achieving this potential will require continued investment in housing delivery, transport infrastructure and workforce skills.

Through the implementation of its Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy, the district aims to deliver balanced economic growth while protecting its natural environment and maintaining a high quality of life for residents.



Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

Challenges & strengths:

Economic Context

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (RBWM) has a diverse and highly skilled local economy with strong representation in professional services, hospitality and tourism, information and communication, construction and property sectors. The borough benefits from a highly educated population, with more than 60% of residents holding higher education qualifications.

RBWM's proximity to London, Heathrow Airport and the wider Thames Valley economic corridor supports business investment and visitor activity. The borough is internationally recognised for its cultural heritage and tourism assets, which attract millions of visitors each year.

Challenges

Despite its relative affluence, RBWM faces several structural challenges. Pockets of deprivation exist within the borough but can be masked by overall prosperity, making it more difficult to access external funding to address inequalities.

Redevelopment of town centres is also creating short-term disruption for retail businesses and the evening economy, which may affect visitor activity during the construction period.

The borough has limited representation in certain high-growth sectors such as defence and financial technology, while stronger business networks are needed to support start-ups and SMEs.

Demographic pressures also present challenges. The borough has fewer younger residents compared with similar areas, and a growing proportion of workers approaching retirement age. At the same time, housing affordability remains a concern for younger professionals and families.

Strengths

RBWM's visitor economy is one of its most distinctive strengths. World-renowned attractions, major events and a strong hospitality sector contribute significantly to local employment and economic activity. The borough also hosts several globally recognised companies across sectors including pharmaceuticals, technology and professional services.

A highly educated workforce supports a knowledge-based economy with strong employment levels and relatively high incomes. The borough's quality of life, historic environment and riverside setting make it an attractive place for both residents and businesses.

Local strategies also emphasise sustainability, with initiatives supporting green infrastructure, energy efficiency and sustainable transport.

Outlook for 2025 and Beyond

RBWM's economic future will be shaped by continued investment in town centre regeneration, infrastructure and sustainable development. New commercial developments and office projects demonstrate ongoing investor confidence.

By building on its strong visitor economy, skilled workforce and international reputation, the borough aims to strengthen economic resilience while expanding opportunities for innovation and inclusive growth.

Wokingham – Challenges & Strengths

Economic Context

Wokingham has developed a strong reputation as a centre for technology and life sciences within the Thames Valley economy. Major multinational companies, including Microsoft, Oracle and Bayer, operate in the borough, supported by business parks such as Thames Valley Park and Thames Valley Science Park.

These industries contribute significantly to local productivity and economic output, while the borough's proximity to Reading and London enhances access to wider labour markets and investment networks.

Challenges

Although economic output is strong, Wokingham's economy is heavily concentrated in the information and communication sector. This concentration creates potential risks if the sector experiences downturns or structural change.

The borough has also experienced a decline in the number of businesses in recent years, including within the voluntary and community sector. Changing working patterns and the growth of remote working have reduced demand for some office space, affecting the commercial property market.

Economic inactivity, while still relatively low overall, has recently been higher than in other parts of Berkshire. This includes residents who have taken early retirement as well as individuals facing barriers to employment, such as people with learning disabilities.

Additional challenges include the presence of workless households, child poverty in some communities and widening pay disparities between men and women.

Strengths

Wokingham benefits from strong connectivity to London and the wider Thames Valley economy, making it an attractive location for businesses and skilled workers. Major institutions such as the University of Reading, Royal Berkshire Hospital and Shinfield Studios act as important anchors within the local economy.

Education and skills development are key priorities for the borough, with increasing emphasis on vocational training and partnerships between employers and education providers. Initiatives such as the Construction Skills Training Academy aim to strengthen workforce capability and improve access to employment opportunities.

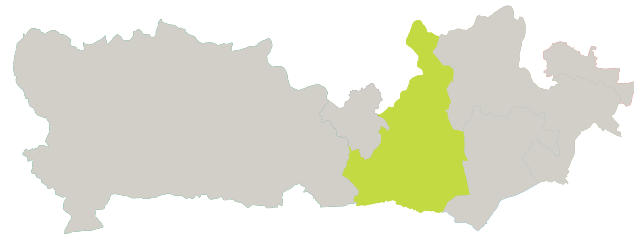
Wokingham's Climate Emergency Action Plan also supports the growth of the green economy through initiatives in sustainable transport, energy efficiency and environmental innovation.

Outlook for 2025 and Beyond

Wokingham's long-term economic outlook remains positive, supported by its strong skills base, global business connections and high quality of life. Continued investment in infrastructure, housing and workforce development will be important in maintaining competitiveness.

By supporting economic diversification, strengthening skills pathways and promoting inclusive growth, the borough aims to ensure that future prosperity benefits both residents and businesses across the community.





Wokingham

Challenges & strengths:

Economic Context

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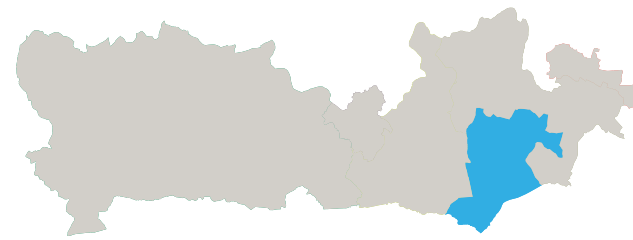
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WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Annex II

Local Area Provision



Relevant provision in **Bracknell Forest** include:

Drug & Alcohol Treatment & Employment Support (IPS)

- *New Hope Drug & Alcohol Recovery Service (run by Change Grow Live - CGL)*: Free and confidential service for anybody looking for help with drugs and alcohol addictions.
- *Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust – IPS SMI*: Individual Placement Support for people with severe mental illness, helping them into and to sustain employment.
- *Berkshire IPS (CGL)*: Regional IPS service covering Bracknell Forest.
- *WorkWell (Frimley ICS)*: Joint Frimley and DWP initiative providing free, one-to-one work support for people with health issues / and or

DWP Work & Health Programme

- *RESTART (FedCap)*: Available through Bracknell Jobcentre Plus, offering tailored employment support for people who are unemployed and facing barriers to work.

National Careers Service

- Accessible to Bracknell residents for careers advice and information.
- Local delivery also through Bracknell Open Learning Centre (OLC) and colleges.

Rough Sleeper & Homeless Support

- *Pilgrim Hearts Trust*: Night shelter provision and homeless outreach services in Bracknell.
- *Bracknell Forest Council Housing Options Team*: Statutory homelessness support and prevention services.
- *Soup run & foodbank (Kerith Community Church and Bracknell Foodbank)*: Practical support and signposting.
- (Gap: confirm if there is an equivalent to enhanced health outreach for Bracknell).

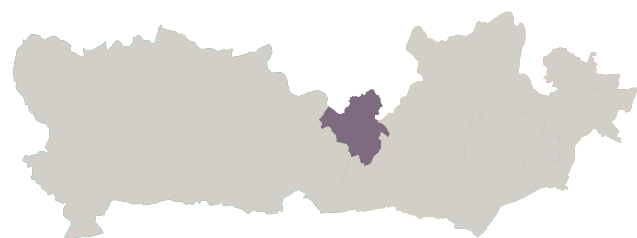
Children, Young People & Employability Support

- *Bracknell Forest Virtual School & Care Leavers Team*: Support for care-experienced young people up to 25 with education, training, and employment. Includes Stellar Grove tuition.
- *Elevate Team (Bracknell Forest NEET support service)*: Dedicated support for young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- *Breakthrough Supported Employment Service*: Bracknell Forest Council's supported employment service for people with additional needs.
- *Ways into Work and Optalis*: Additional supported employment and job coaching options available locally.
- *Activate Learning (Bracknell & Wokingham College)*: Careers & Progression Team provides impartial advice, employability workshops, and employer engagement.
- *Bracknell Skills Hub (Open Learning Centre)*: A central hub for employability support, training opportunities, and employer connections.
- *Adult Learning Service (Open Learning Centre)*: Practical support for jobseekers (19+), including CVs, applications and interview preparation, as well as learning opportunities such as English, maths and IT qualifications.
- *Bracken Walk Youth Hub*: A base used by the Access to Education team, providing support for young people with a range of needs.

Relevant provision in Bracknell Forest: Summary Table

Support Area	Local Provider / Service
Drug & Alcohol + IPS Support	New Hope (CGL); Berkshire Healthcare NHS (IPS SMI); Berkshire IPS (CGL); WorkWell (Frimley ICS - confirm local delivery)
Employment Support Programme	RESTART via Bracknell JCP
Careers Advice	National Careers Service; Activate Learning (Bracknell & Wokingham College); Open Learning Centre (Bracknell Skills Hub & Adult Learning Team, including Job Club)
Homeless / Rough Sleeper Support	Pilgrim Hearts Trust; BFC Housing Options; Kerith Community Church; Bracknell Foodbank (gap: check for enhanced health outreach)
Youth Employability & Education	BFC Virtual School & Care Leavers Team (incl. Stellar Grove); Elevate NEET support team; Breakthrough; Ways into Work; Optalis; Bracknell & Wokingham College Careers Team; Bracken Walk Youth Hub
Adult Employability, Skills and Volunteering Support	West Berkshire Community Learning, Ways into Work, Volunteer Centre, Link Up, NCRC, WBTC





Relevant provision in Reading include:

Drug & Alcohol Treatment & Employment Support (IPS)

- **Berkshire IPS (CGL):** Change Grow Live provide the Berkshire Wide Individual Placement Support programme, a free employment support service that helps individuals find and maintain paid work aligned with their personal goals and strengths. Covering Reading, Bracknell Forest, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Wokingham. Employment support (IPS) - Drug and Alcohol Service - Berkshire | Change Grow Live
- **IPS SMI (Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation):** Individual Placement Support for Severe/Significant Mental Illness (SMI), helping people with SMI gain, sustain and retain paid work. Individual Placement and Support (IPS) | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- **FedCap Employment Limited: Inspiring Futures** is a Supported Employment and Training Services programme in Reading. Designed to help people living with learning disabilities and/or autism find the right role within the work environment that adapts to their

circumstances and supports their health and wellbeing. The programme will complement and enhance the customers' existing support plans that they have in place.

- **New Directions** (for 19+ year olds) provides careers advice for their learners. Supported learning for Employment in Hospitality programme and employability support. Extensive delivery of Employability courses to support residents apply for and obtain work including a weekly Job Search Hub/Workshop where adults can access support to apply for work.
- **Supported Internships for EHCP holders**, aged 16-25 provided by specialist SEND organisations: **Shaw Trust** and **Ways into Work**.
- **REDA Oct 2025- March 2026:** Outreach sessions held on a weekly basis, for those wanting support to start a business, grow a business or for advice and support to find employment. Including signposting to relevant useful organisations in particular New Directions College. Delivery is in the community working closely with WCDA.

Careers Support

- **Elevate Careers Service (BFfC)** provides impartial careers information, advice and guidance, 1:1 personalised career session, careers workshops and employer encounters, focusing on young people NEET aged 16-18 (18-25 with SEND and care leavers). Elevate's services are available from the central location in Reading town centre 2 days per week (at Reed Employment Agency), and at Reading College, Civic and Katesgrove Community centre.
- **New Directions College – Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance Provision:** The College works with local VS organisations as well as community hubs to support adults 19+ and provides impartial careers information, advice and guidance, 1:1 personalised career session, careers workshops and employer encounters including volunteering and work experience opportunities for residents.

Rough Sleeper & Homeless Support

- **Churches in Reading Drop-in Centre (CIRDIC):** Helps people experiencing homelessness or poverty in Reading take steps towards employment by offering practical support and a safe, welcoming environment. Offering free meals, clothing, and hygiene facilities, the centre provides access to phones and computers for job searching, help with CV writing, and referrals to job training and specialist services.
- **FAITH Christian Group Reading:** Helps people move towards employment by providing essential support services that address poverty and homelessness. Through initiatives like ReadStreet, ReadFood, Reading Pantries and A Bed for the Night Winter Shelter, they offer food, shelter, and practical help that stabilise lives and create the conditions needed for job-seeking.

- **New Beginnings:** Supports access to employment by providing a safe space, food, and clothing to help people stabilise their lives. They also signpost to housing, benefits, and job-related services, helping individuals overcome barriers and connect with training, volunteering, and work opportunities.
- **St Mungo's Recovery College (Reading):** Part of a wider initiative by the homelessness charity St Mungo's, offering free educational and wellbeing-focused courses to individuals who have experienced homelessness or are rough sleeping.
- **Launchpad 135:** A work and life skills centre in Reading, operated by local homelessness charity Launchpad Reading. The centre supports adults who are homeless, rough sleeping, vulnerably housed or living in short-term supported accommodation – particularly those who have struggled in traditional learning environments.
- **Reading's Homelessness Support Services:** Commissioned by the Council to accommodate single people and couples who are homeless or rough sleeping: Services help people move towards employment by offering a stable place to live along with tailored support such as job search help, skills training, and wellbeing services.
- **Launchpad Floating Support / Tenancy Sustainment Service:** Commissioned by the Council - helps individuals maintain stable housing while supporting their journey into employment. By offering practical help with budgeting, benefits, and tenancy management, the service reduces the risk of homelessness and provides a secure base for job-seeking
- **Connect Reading:** helps disadvantaged groups, including those facing homelessness, access employment by linking charities, businesses, and public services.
- **Communicare Reading – Advice, Information and Support:** Helps people move towards employment by offering free advice and support on job searching, benefits, and housing.

- **Compass Recovery College:** helps people in Reading – including those with mental ill-health and/or homelessness – build confidence and skills for work through free, peer-led workshops on wellbeing, goal setting, and self-management.
- **Refugee Support Group (Reading):** Supporting refugees and asylum seekers rebuild their lives and move towards employment. They offer OISC-accredited legal advice, English classes, and practical support with job seeking, education, and volunteering.
- **Alana House (PACT):** Supports disadvantaged women in Reading – often homeless or precariously housed – through trauma-informed guidance, group sessions, and access to training and employment.
- **Utulivu Women's Group, Reading:** Supports BAMER women and families – including those facing homelessness – by offering trauma-informed support and pathways into work.

Children, Young People & Employability Support

School Year 7-13: All our schools are providing access to training providers, FE colleges, HE institutions, employers encounters, work experience and personalised careers advice and guidance to students from year 7 to year 13. RBC provides work experience placements across various departments for several Reading schools.

Post 16: FE colleges including Reading College provide access to careers advice and employability from a team of careers advisers.

- Elevate Careers Service (BFfC) is available at Reading College for students who are withdrawn or at risk of exclusion, who need support to access alternative options such as apprenticeships.

Elevate Careers Service (BFfC) offers employability programmes for NEET young people 16- 18, care leavers and EHCP holders aged 18-25):

- Step into Employment (delivered in partnership with Thames Water)
- Accelerate Employability programme (developed by Elevate and delivered in partnership with various employers)
- Annual Careers Fair in July for young people aged 15-25
- Apprenticeships careers fair in spring
- RBC work experience placement for 10-12 NEET young people in February.
- Supporting recruitment and onboarding of care leavers for RBC's ring-fenced apprenticeships for care leavers.
- Supporting young people aged 16-25 to access work placements with John Lewis Partnership (as part of the nationwide Building Happier Futures programme)

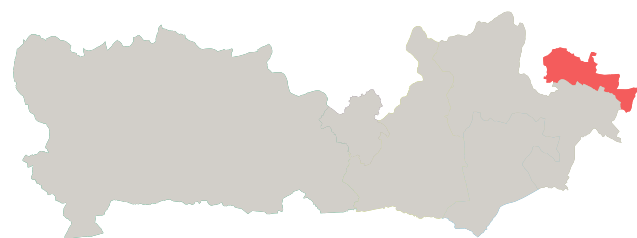
Starting Point (part of Mustard Tree, voluntary sector organisation) offer access to youth hubs: social and employability support, 1:1 mentoring for NEET/ risk of NEET young people aged 16-25

Supported Internships for EHCP holders, aged 16-25 provided by specialist SEND organisations: **The Shaw Trust** and **Ways into Work**.

Adult Education & Skills

Activate Reading and New Directions College

Offer a range of qualification and non-qualification provision to upskill, reskill adult learners in Reading to support entrance into the world of work. Offer includes T levels, Apprenticeships as well as Adult Skills provision.



Relevant provision in **Slough** include:

Drug & Alcohol Treatment & Employment Support (IPS)

- **Slough Treatment Advice and Recovery Team (START):** A free, confidential service for individuals concerned about substance use, offering a range of tailored interventions including one-to-one support, group work, harm reduction, peer mentoring, and needle exchange. [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)
- **IPS SMI (Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation):** Individual Placement Support for Severe/Significant Mental Illness (SMI), helping people with SMI gain, sustain and retain paid work.
- **Berkshire IPS (CGL):** The region's Individual Placement Support programme, covering Slough as well as Bracknell Forest, Reading, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Wokingham. IPS Grow
- **Slough IPSPC (Ability Slough):** specific to Slough the Individual Placement Support in Primary Care, supports those facing a range of disabilities and long-term health conditions into and remain in work, through its tailored supported employment programme.

- **WorkWell (Frimley Trust)** WorkWell is a joint initiative from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department of Health and Social Care with the vision of a healthier and more productive nation. WorkWell aims to provide a free, one-to-one work support service, helping people with health issues and/or disabilities to get back to or remain in work by supporting them, or connecting them to relevant local support providers.

DWP Work & Health Programme

- **RESTART (FedCap):** Slough participants are supported through Jobcentre Plus (JCP) into tailored employment services as part of the Work & Health Programme.

National Careers Service

- Young people and other residents of Slough can access the **National Careers Service** for career advice and information, operating nationwide. Slough Children First

Rough Sleeper & Homeless Support

- **SHOC – Slough Homeless Our Concern:** Offers day-centre services including meals, housing advocacy, referrals (e.g. to Trinity Homeless Projects, Look Ahead, YMCA, Slough Borough Council), drop-in JCP and mental health support, plus access to Turning Point. www.sloughhomeless.org.uk
- **Slough Outreach:** A grassroots charity providing hot meals, warm clothes, hygiene essentials, advocacy, and assistance accessing health care, benefits, housing, and drug & alcohol or mental health services. Slough Outreach | Supporting the Homeless & Vulnerable in Slough
- **Enhanced Primary Care Outreach:** This service runs targeted healthcare for rough sleepers in Slough, offering clinical support and working to integrate with other local partners to provide comprehensive care.

Children, Young People & Employability Support

- **Slough Children First (Virtual School & Young People's Service):** Specialist workers support care-experienced young people (up to age 25) into education, training, apprenticeships, and employment. They help with applications, funding (e.g. for equipment, transport), and career guidance. Programs include access to **Prince's Trust, Youth Engagement Slough (YES), Together As One, National Citizen Service, The Challenger Trust**, and support through **Slough CVS**. Slough Children First
- **The NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) team** In Slough is part of the Targeted Young People's Service, which is a branch of the Virtual School. They support young people aged 16 and over who are not in education, employment, or training, and their responsibilities include encouraging participation in education and training and assisting those who are at risk of

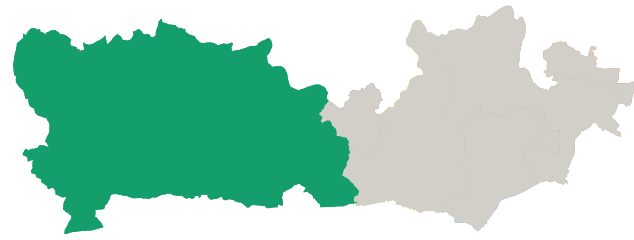
becoming NEET.

- **Windsor Forest Colleges Group – Slough & Langley College:** Their **Careers & Progression** team offers impartial careers advice, course selection guidance, employability workshops, CV training, career fairs, and employer engagement for students. Slough & Langley
- **Viva Slough – Employability Programme** supports residents on individual journeys back into employment, education, or volunteering
- **The Skills and Business Hub / Berkshire Growth Hub** - Our Skills Bootcamps are open to all individuals aged 19 and over from all employment backgrounds and of any experience level, focusing on sectors that employers are actively looking to recruit.
- **Learning Curve Group** - Fully funded online courses available in Slough and surrounding areas, by Learning Curve Group. The courses will help develop and give different skills to use in your career. The courses are completed online and typically take 6-8 weeks to complete based on a couple of hours of work per week. Once completed, a nationally recognised qualification is achieved, most of the qualifications are accredited by NCFE or CACHE, which are equivalent to GCSE level qualifications. The courses are ideal for those keen to learn a new skill to further their career with an existing employer, as well as to support entry into a new sector or job role.

Relevant provision in Slough: Summary Table

Support Area	Local Provider / Service
Drug & Alcohol + IPSDA Support, IPS SMI, IPS PC and WorkWell	START (Slough Treatment Advice & Recovery Team) + Berkshire IPS (CGL), Berkshire Healthcare NHS, Ability Slough, Frimley NHS Trust ICB
Employment Support Programme	DWP Work & Health Programme via Slough JCP
Careers Advice	National Careers Service; Slough & Langley College
Homeless / Rough Sleeper Support	SHOC; Slough Outreach; EBPC enhanced health outreach
Youth Employability & Education	Slough Children First; Colleges Careers Team
Adult Employability, Skills and Volunteering Support	West Berkshire Community Learning, Ways into Work, Volunteer Centre, Link Up, NCRC, WBTC





Relevant provision in **West Berkshire** include:

Drug, Alcohol and Smoking Treatment & Support

- Via – West Berkshire: A free and confidential advice, care and support for people in West Berkshire, Support for adults aged 18+, Information for professionals, Support for young people (the Edge) and help for someone you know.
- Smoke Free Life Berkshire: A free, four-week CO Check Challenge.

Public Health and Wellbeing

- Wellbeing Walks (formerly Walking for Health).
- Running in West Berkshire (Run Together).
- Exercise Referral (formerly Activity for Health).
- Weight Management (Physical activities and NHS programmes).
- Ageing Well with Ever Active.

National Careers Service

- Young people and other residents of West Berkshire can access the National Careers Service for career advice and information, operating nationwide.

Rough Sleeper & Homeless Support

- Homeless Support Team: Homelessness Prevention, Relief and Support.
- West Berkshire Homeless: A community-based charity in West Berkshire set up to assist the homeless back into a home.
- Two Saints: Services include safe, flexible and reliable client led housing and support with a focus on reducing homelessness, improving health and wellbeing and building on individual's skills and resilience to break the cycle of homelessness, poverty and exclusion.
- Newbury Soup Kitchen: A Charity voluntary organisation providing help and support to the Newbury homeless, rough sleeper community.

Children, Young People & Employability Support

- Virtual School: Specialist workers support care-experienced young people (up to age 25) into education, training, apprenticeships, and employment. They help with applications, funding (e.g. for equipment, transport), and career guidance.
- Newbury College and West Berkshire Training Consortium: Offers impartial careers advice, course selection guidance, apprenticeships, access programmes, employability workshops, CV training, career fairs, and employer engagement for students.
- West Berkshire Careers and Participation Officer: 1-2-1 support for 16-17-year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- Ways into Work provides a range of Supported Employment service, supporting both young people and adults who have a disadvantage in finding employment.
- Education Business Partnership: Help a wide range of businesses to meet their objectives through the programmes they develop and deliver with them, harnessing the value from around 2200 volunteer hours, plus gaining vital support from local business who host up to 1800 students across the region on work experience each year.

Adult Employability, Skills and Volunteering Support

- West Berkshire Community Learning: Working in partnership with local organisations and council services to support adult and family learning courses aimed at enhancing the lives of people living, working and volunteering in West Berkshire.
- Ways into Work provides a range of Supported Employment service, supporting both young people and adults who have a disadvantage in finding employment.
- Ascend support assisted employment opportunities: ASCEND (Assisted Support for Carers and Extra Needs and Disabilities).
- Link Up West Berkshire: A work skills project for adults with Learning Disabilities.

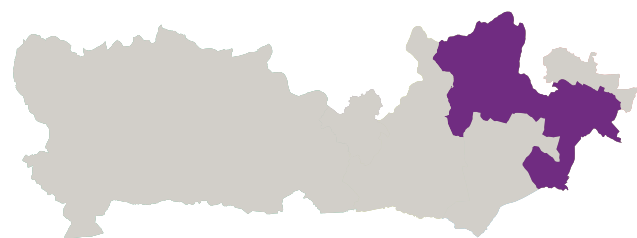
Newbury Community Resource Centre: A registered charity that helps local people in need by reason of their youth, infirmity, disablement, poverty or social and economic circumstances. We promote independent living by providing re-used furniture and household goods and opportunities for volunteering, training and work experience.

Volunteering Centre West Berkshire: A charitable incorporated organisation, formed in 1974. The organisation's overriding ethos is to match local people to local need, providing information, advice and guidance and personally match people to one of the more 350 volunteering opportunities in West Berkshire.

Relevant provision in West Berkshire: Summary Table

Support Area	Local Provider / Service
Drug & Alcohol + IPSDA Support, IPS SMI, IPS PC and WorkWell	START (Slough Treatment Advice & Recovery Team) + Berkshire IPS (CGL), Berkshire Healthcare NHS, Ability Slough, Frimley NHS Trust ICB
Employment Support Programme	DWP Work & Health Programme via Slough JCP
Careers Advice	National Careers Service; Slough & Langley College
Homeless / Rough Sleeper Support	SHOC; Slough Outreach; EBPC enhanced health outreach
Youth Employability & Education	Slough Children First; Colleges Careers Team
Adult Employability, Skills and Volunteering Support	West Berkshire Community Learning, Ways into Work, Volunteer Centre, Link Up, NCRC, WBTC





Relevant provision in Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead include:

Drug & Alcohol Treatment & Employment Support (IPS)

- **Drug and Alcohol Treatment & employment Support:** A free, confidential service for individuals concerned about substance use, offering a range of tailored interventions including Harm reduction (needle exchange, naloxone, BBV testing); Detox and rehab access; Psychosocial interventions (1:1, group work); Outreach and mutual aid RBWM | Cranstoun
- **IPS SMI (Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation):** Individual Placement Support for Severe/Significant Mental Illness (SMI), helping people with SMI gain, sustain and retain paid work.
- **Berkshire IPS (CGL):** The region's Individual Placement Support programme, covering Slough as well as Bracknell Forest, Reading, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Wokingham. IPS Grow

- **WorkWell (Frimley Trust)** WorkWell is a joint initiative from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department of Health and Social Care with the vision of a healthier and more productive nation. WorkWell aims to provide a free, one-to-one work support service, helping people with health issues and/or disabilities to get back to or remain in work by supporting them, or connecting them to relevant local support providers.

DWP Work & Health Programme

- **RESTART (FedCap):** RBWM participants are supported through Jobcentre Plus (JCP) Slough & Maidenhead into tailored employment services as part of the Work & Health Programme.

National Careers Service

- Young people and other residents of Windsor & Maidenhead can access the **National Careers Service** for career advice and information, operating nationwide. AfC info

Rough Sleeper & Homeless Support

- People at risk of becoming homeless can access housing support through RBWM Homelessness we also operate a cold weather emergency scheme. Severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP)
- **Windsor Homeless Project:** A grassroots charity supporting homeless and vulnerable people with practical support towards rebuilding more stable lives, including drop in sessions, hot meals, warm clothes, hygiene essentials, advocacy and support to access housing, health care, benefits and drug or alcohol and mental health services. windsorhomelessproject
- **The Brett Foundation:** A grassroots charity supporting people in need in Maidenhead. Main areas of focus are people who are isolated, in poverty or in need of help. They run regular soft play, tea lounge and a homeless support lounge at The Salvation Army. They provide washing facilities, hot meals, clean clothes and hygiene essentials for rough sleepers, and will provide further support to regular users with accessing healthcare, mental health services. Alcohol & Drug support The Brett Foundation.

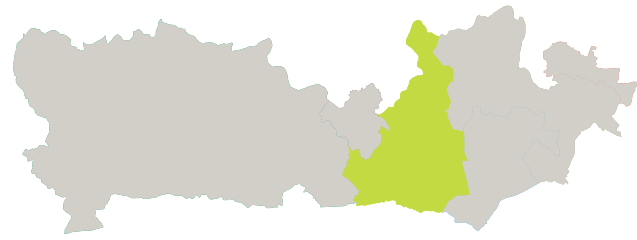
Children, Young People & Employability Support

- **RBWM Achieving for Children (Virtual School & Employability and Education Services)** Specialist workers support care-experienced young people (up to age 25) into education, training, apprenticeships, and employment. They help with applications, funding (e.g. for equipment, transport), and career guidance. There is AfC - Windsor and Maidenhead AfC info
- **Windsor Forest Colleges Group – Slough & Langley College; Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA) & Windsor College:** Their **Careers & Progression** team offers impartial careers advice, course selection guidance, employability workshops, CV training, career fairs, and employer engagement for students. Slough & Langley
- **Henley College** is also a key destination for some of our young people. They offer impartial careers support Careers & Progression Advice - The Henley College,
- **Reading College**, which is run by Activate Learning, also provides places for vocational learning for young people in the borough. Their careers support provides strong focus on preparation and readiness for students next steps. reading.activatelearning
- **The Baby Bank** is a CIO that operates in Windsor and Maidenhead. They provide families in extreme need with items that help them, including school uniform and also refers families for additional support. thebabybank

Relevant provision in **Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead:** **Summary Table**

Support Area	Local Provider / Service
Drug & Alcohol + IPSDA Support, IPS SMI, IPS PC+ and WorkWell	RBWM Cranstoun; Berkshire IPS (CGL), Berkshire Healthcare NHS, Frimley NHS Trust ICB
Employment Support Programme	DWP Work & Health Programme via Slough JCP & Maidenhead JCP
Careers Advice	National Careers Service; Slough & Langley College; BCA; Windsor College; Henley College, Reading College
Homeless / Rough Sleeper Support	RBWM Homelessness support; SWEP; Windsor Homeless Project, The Brett Foundation
Youth Employability & Education	AFC Windsor & Maidenhead; Colleges Careers Advice: WFCG, Reading College, Henley College
Adult Employability, Skills and Volunteering Support	West Berkshire Community Learning, Ways into Work, Volunteer Centre, Link Up, NCRC, WBTC





Relevant provision in **Wokingham** include:

Drug & Alcohol Treatment & Employment Support (IPS)

- **IPS SMI (Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation):** Individual Placement Support for Severe/Significant Mental Illness (SMI), helping people with SMI gain, sustain and retain paid work.
- **Berkshire IPS (CGL):** The region's Individual Placement Support programme, covering Slough as well as Bracknell Forest, Reading, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Wokingham. IPS Grow
- **NHS Talking Therapies:** Those currently being supported by NHS Talking Therapies can access employment support alongside their therapy to address practical work-related issues
- **Optalis:** Supported Employment Service providing support for Wokingham residents covered under the disability provision of the Equality Act 2010 and carers



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**



Annex III

Action Plan

Get **Berkshire** Working: Berkshire Local Authorities’ Employment and Skills Action Plan

1 Objective: Overarching

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Agree delivery framework for Get Berkshire Working partnership	Berkshire Local Authorities, Public Health DWP, NHS Frimley ICB, West Berkshire Health & Care Partnership	July-Aug '25	Overarching		
Agree how best to share information, intelligence, business networks and best practice across the Berkshire area (aligned with Berkshire Prosperity Board and Berkshire Business Board).	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, REDA	July Aug '25	Overarching		
Explore opportunities for co-location of employment and skills services (e.g. Jobcentre Plus within community or civic hubs).	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB	July 25- June '26	Overarching		

2

Objective: Achieve 80% Employment Rate

Target: To be confirmed (targeted approach)

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Launch Connect to Work Berkshire programme in all six LAs, aligned to DWP approval timeline.	Local Authorities, Public Health Connect to Work Providers, DWP	Jan '26 – '30	Increase employment rate (18-66)/ reduce regional variation.		
Deliver inclusive employer engagement via Berkshire: A place where everyone can work and thrive* campaign, supporting Disability Confident and flexible hiring. (*working title: can be changed by agreement)	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, Employers, ICB, REDA	Long term from '25	Inclusive employment and health-related economic activity		
Coordinate Employment Support Providers (Health, VCSE, Housing) to prevent duplication and share good practice.	Local Authorities, Public Health, VCSE, Housing, FE & HE Providers	Qtly from Jan '26	Efficient use of provision		
Maximise Social Value in procurement to prioritise local employment, apprenticeships and inclusion.	Local Authorities, Public Health, Suppliers	Long term from '25	Increase employment for excluded groups		
Work with large employers (e.g. Heathrow supply chain, Thames Valley Science Park, Slough Trading Estate) to promote job retention and upskilling.	Local Authorities, Employers, Public Health, REDA	Long term from '25	Support job retention		
Align activity with Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and major investment corridors.	Local Authorities, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Business Board, REDA, Public Health.	Long term from '25	High-quality job creation		

3

Objective: Increase Earnings

Target: TBC

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Support inward investment through the Berkshire Economic Strategy.	Berkshire Prosperity Board, Local Authorities, Public Health, REDA	Long term from '25	Increase real earnings (non-retired households)		
Coordinate providers to expand upskilling and reskilling (e.g. digital, health, green skills, logistics, health literacy and financial wellbeing).	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, Employers, ICB, REDA	Long term from '25	Upskilling and progression		
Ensure Connect to Work matches people to sustainable, well-paid roles.	Local Authorities, Public Health, CTW Providers, DWP	Jan '26 – Mar '30	Better job matching		
Work with employers to increase access to better opportunities	Local Authorities, Public Health, Employers, REDA	Long term from July '25	Improve job quality		

4

Objective: Reduce Labour Market Exclusion

Target: TBC

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Ensure employment programmes (CtW, WorkWell) support people with health conditions into paid work.	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB	June '25 – Mar '30	Reduce health-related inactivity		
Deliver regional Disability Confident campaigns with focus on flexibility and workplace adjustment.	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB, REDA, VCSE	June '26 – June '27	Reduce disability employment gap		
Ensure preventative programmes (WorkWell, Pathways to Work) help people stay in work.	Local Authorities, Public Health, VCSE, Skills, FE Providers	June '25 – June '26 (extendable)	Retention support		
Use data to target support for those with MSK, MH, LD, and neurodiverse conditions.	Local Authorities, Public Health, ICB, DWP, VCSE	Aug '25 – Mar '30	Health-related inclusion		

MSK – Musculoskeletal
MH – Mental Health
LD – Learning Disability

5

Objective: Reduce Youth Unemployment

Target: TBC

Berkshire is committed to ensuring that every young person can access the support, skills, and opportunities they need to move successfully into work. Across all six local authorities, there is a shared ambition to reduce youth unemployment by strengthening early intervention, improving transitions from education to employment, and expanding high-quality opportunities for those who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Establish Berkshire Youth Employment Pathway with focus on NEET prevention, care leavers, and disadvantaged youth.	Local Authorities, Public Health, Youth Hubs, Growth Hub, DWP, Schools	Jan '26 – Jan '27	Reduce NEET (18–24)		
Enhance provision through Youth Hubs, to move young people into sustainable employment.	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP	July '25 – June '27	Increase youth employment		
Expand apprenticeships, T-Level placements and work experience opportunities.	Local Authorities, Public Health, FE Providers, Employers	July '25 – June '27	Improve skills transition		
Promote Modern Work Experience with local schools and employers	Local Authorities Public Health,	Sept '25 – June '27	NEET prevention		

6

Objective: Improve Job Security and Quality

Target: TBC

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Support inward investment and promote high-quality jobs via Berkshire Economic Strategy.	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, REDA	Long term from July '25	Reduce family worklessness		
Increase childcare and flexible work options to support working parents.	Local Authorities, Public Health, Employers, DWP	Long term from Sept '25	Increase parental employment		
Promote female employment and return-to-work initiatives including wellbeing and Carer support.	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB, VCSE	Long term from Sept '25	Increase employment rate of women		

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Objective: Support Workforce Retention and Progression

Target: TBC

The Keep Britain Working review, led by Sir Charlie Mayfield, highlights a critical opportunity to improve workforce retention and progression by tackling health-related economic inactivity. The report argues for a fundamental shift: health at work should become a shared responsibility among employers, employees, and the health system, rather than being left solely to individuals or the NHS.

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Support retention through WorkWell Berkshire and Connect to Work	Local Authorities, Public Health, VCSE, Skills Providers	Aug '25 – June '27	Reduce economic inactivity		
Raise awareness of Access to Work and in-work support (currently under review and subject to change. Monitor changes.)	DWP, Local Authorities Public Health,	Sept '25 – June '27	Reduce health-related inactivity		
Share good practice through a Berkshire-wide mentoring programme, including wellbeing and resilience. (Based on Common Purpose programme)	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB	Sept '25 – June '27	Workforce development		
Promote health and safety, wellbeing and stress prevention campaigns	Local Authorities, Public Health, Employers, REDA	Long term from July '25	Improve job quality		
Promote health and safety, wellbeing and stress prevention campaigns	ICB, Local Authorities Public Health,	From Jan '26	Healthy workplaces		
Expand in-work training and flexible career pathways	Local Authorities, VCSE, FE Providers Public Health,	Sept '25 – June '27	Support progression		

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Objective: Address Labour and Skills Shortages

Target: TBC

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Deliver Berkshire Skills & Employment Partnership* objectives on labour and skills shortages. (*BPB Skills & Employment Workstream to expand and include DWP & ICB's)	Local Authorities, FE Providers, DWP, REDA Public Health	July '25 – June '27	Reduce local variations in employment		
Focus initiatives on key Berkshire sectors: Tech, Health & Care, Logistics, Green Skills, Construction, Education.	Local Authorities, Skills and FE Providers, REDA Public Health,	July '25 – June '27	Address local shortages		
Align training to industry needs via Berkshire Business Board and Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (LSIP's).	Berkshire Business Board, Local Authorities, FE Providers TVCC, Public Health,	Sept '25 – June '27	Align skills to demand		

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Objective: Reduce Labour Market Disparities

Target: TBC

Key Action	Stakeholders	Timeline	DWP Outcome	Owner	Status/ Progress
Target support to disadvantaged areas with lower pay and employment rates: Slough, Whitley (Reading), Newbury East, parts of Bracknell.	Local Authorities, VCSE, FE Providers, DWP, REDA Public Health	July '25 – June '27	Reduce local variation		
Focus support on priority cohorts: NEET, risk of NEET, long-term unemployed, neurodiverse, LD, and MSK conditions.	Local Authorities, Public Health, DWP, ICB, REDA, VCSE	June '26 – June '27	Reduce disability employment gap		
	Local Authorities, DWP, Public Health,	July '25 – June '27	Prevent inactivity		
Promote short-term learning and quick accreditation where it leads to progression and good job opportunities (CSCS, Food Hygiene, Forklift).	Local Authorities, Public Health, ICB, DWP, VCSE	Aug '25 – Mar '30	Health-related inclusion		
	Local Authorities, Providers, Public Health,	July '25 – June '27	Accelerated access to work		
Promote adult functional skills, ESOL and digital inclusion	Local Authorities, FE, VCSE, Public Health,	July '25 – June '27	Improve employability		
Promote transport and connectivity improvements (rail, bus, Western Rail Access to Heathrow, Elizabeth Line).	Local Authorities, Businesses, REDA, Public Health,	Long term from Sept '25	Remove barriers to work		

Annex IV

Programmes & Providers

Notable Programmes and Providers

Key employment and skills programmes identified across Berkshire include:

- **Activate Learning and Newbury College:** Offering Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, and sector-specific training aligned with local employer demand.
- **Reading College and Bracknell & Wokingham College:** Delivering SWAPs, vocational qualifications, and employer-designed training.
- **Adviza Partnership:** Careers guidance, employability skills, and youth transition support across Berkshire.
- **The Prince’s Trust:** Support for young people aged 16–30 to gain confidence, training, and employment.
- **Ways into Work:** Supported employment service for people with disabilities and learning difficulties.
- **Building Better Opportunities (BBO) – Elevate Berkshire:** Tailored employability support for economically inactive adults.
- **NHS Talking Therapies (Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust):** Integration of health and employment support for those with mental health needs.
- **Career Springboard** – Executive Job Search support and support for graduates.

Most programmes are ongoing or have secured funding through 2026–2028, with several pilot initiatives underway to test innovative models of delivery.

Reading Borough Council

- **Reading Neurodiverse Hub – in Partnership with Activate Learning (Reading College)**
- **Ways into Work and Launchpad Reading** – Supporting individuals with disabilities and people at risk of homelessness.
- **Reading Voluntary Action** – Community-based volunteering and employability support.
- **Activate Learning, Reading College** – Sector-based training in IT, care, and sustainable construction. film and media, car mechanics, ESOL,
- **NHS Integrated Employment Support** – Mental health and wellbeing-linked work support,
- **REDA** targeted community outreach startup in self-employment clinics supported by startup business courses
- **REDA** Local area jobs fairs in South Reading and town Jobs fair in Reading Town Centre
- **REDA** Careers and personal development in least well performing schools.

Slough Borough Council

- **Slough Aspire and Learning to Work** – Apprenticeships and local employer engagement.
- **Slough Jobcentre Plus and Youth Hub** – Intensive employability support for under-25s.
- **Citizens Advice East Berkshire** – Financial and employment-related advice.
- **Ways into Work** – Supported employment for residents with learning disabilities.
- **Health and Work Programme** – Integration of employment with local NHS inclusion services.

West Berkshire Council

- **Building Communities Together Partnership** – Community-based employability and volunteering opportunities.
- **Newbury College** – Skills Bootcamps and apprenticeships aligned with rural and green sectors.
- **Employment Hub West Berkshire** – Support for economically inactive adults.

Bracknell Forest Council

- **Bracknell & Wokingham College** – SWAPs and apprenticeship delivery for IT, business, and life sciences.
- **Bracknell Forest Job Club** – Support for long-term unemployed adults.
- **Elevate Bracknell Forest** – Skills development and youth employment initiatives.
- **Ways into Work** – Supported employment and inclusion programmes.
- **Bracknell Forest Skills Hub (UKSPF)** - supporting employers, career seekers and training providers to match jobs and business needs.
- **Breakthrough supported employment** – helping people with learning disability and/or autism to find a job.
- **Bracknell Forest Youth Employment Hub** - opening January 2026 – 16–24-year-old support.

Wokingham Borough Council

- **Elevate Wokingham** – Youth employability and mentoring.
- **Wokingham Volunteer Centre** – Pathways into work through volunteering and skills development.
- **Ways into Work** – Supported employment partnerships with local employers.
- **Adult Learning Service** – Lifelong learning and reskilling for over-25s.
- **Optalis** - support and care services for older people, adults with a disability and people with mental health needs, in the community and at home.

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

- **Windsor Forest Colleges Group** – Apprenticeships, adult learning, and green skills training.
- **Windsor & Maidenhead Youth Hub** – Tailored support for young jobseekers.
- **Ways into Work** – Support for residents with disabilities or learning difficulties.
- **NHS Employment Pathway Pilot** – Helping residents access roles in local hospitals and care services.
- **Optalis** - support and care services for older people, adults with a disability and people with mental health needs, in the community and at home.

DWP Work & Health Programme

- **RESTART (FedCap)**: Wokingham participants are supported through Jobcentre Plus (JCP) into tailored employment services as part of the Work & Health Programme.

Employment Support Available to all

- **Wokingham Job Support Centre**: Provides one-to-one support in person or online to Wokingham residents. A blend of coaching, advice and practice support delivered either online, from their centre in Wokingham Town or their outreach centre in Earley.
- **Adult Education Team**: Deliver a programme of employability, basic/ essential skills and confidence building courses aimed at supporting you to find work.

National Careers Service

- Young people and other residents of Wokingham can access the **National Careers Service** for career advice and information, operating nationwide.

Rough Sleeper & Homeless Support

- **Salvation Army:** Offers day-centre support for people who are homeless, rough sleeping, lonely, or vulnerable. Services include hot meals, washing facilities, sleeping bags, blankets, food parcels, clothing, advocacy, job-seeking support, tenancy sustainment, and help with homeless applications to Wokingham Borough Council
- **Transform Housing and Support:** Supports Wokingham Borough residents to prevent homelessness and achieve independence. Assistance includes form filling, tenancy sustainment, landlord mediation, budgeting and debt advice, benefit applications, and food vouchers.
- **StreetLink:** A national alert system to report people sleeping rough. Reports can be made online or by phone and are referred to Wokingham Borough Council’s Rough Sleeping Outreach Service, delivered by Two Saints, who monitor and support rough sleepers

Children, Young People & Employability Support

- **Wokingham Virtual School:** Specialist workers support care-experienced young people (up to age 25) into education, training, apprenticeships, and employment. They help with applications, funding (e.g. for equipment, transport), and career guidance.
- **Here4U Team:** Provide support for young people in long term care and leaving care in all aspects of their life
- **NEET/ Elevate Team:** Provide information, advice and guidance to 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (including those up to 25yrs with SEND)
- **Activate Employability Training and Skills Centre:** Deliver a range of employability courses and basic/ essential skills. In addition, provide one-to-one support from dedicated coaches to help move you closer to your next job opportunity.

Get Berkshire Working

Annex IV:

Summary Table

Support Area	Local Provider / Service
Drug & Alcohol, mental health and disability employment support	Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation, IPS Grow, NHS Talking Therapies, Optalis
Employment Support Programme	DWP Work & Health Programme via Wokingham JCP, WJSC, Adult Education Team
Careers Advice	National Careers Service;
Homeless / Rough Sleeper Support	Salvation Army, Transform Housing and Support, StreetLink
Youth Employability & Education	Wokingham Virtual School, Here4U, Elevate, Activate College
Adult Employability, Skills and Volunteering Support	West Berkshire Community Learning, Ways into Work, Volunteer Centre, Link Up, NCRC, WBTC



Get  **Berkshire
Working**



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Produced by Sally-Anne Bone