

# Buckinghamshire Works

January 2026



Buckinghamshire  
Council



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions



Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire  
and Berkshire West  
Integrated Care Board

## Table of Contents

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|                                                            |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Foreword.....                                              | 3  |
| 1 Background.....                                          | 5  |
| 2 Context .....                                            | 10 |
| 3 Priority Communities and Groups .....                    | 14 |
| 4 Current system and offer .....                           | 17 |
| 5 Priorities .....                                         | 22 |
| 6 Ways of working .....                                    | 28 |
| 7 Levers .....                                             | 29 |
| 8 National asks .....                                      | 30 |
| 9 Measuring progress .....                                 | 32 |
| Appendices.....                                            | 33 |
| Appendix 1: Buckinghamshire’s place-based governance ..... | 34 |
| Appendix 2: Buckinghamshire Works Governance .....         | 36 |
| Appendix 3: Opportunity Bucks .....                        | 38 |
| Appendix 4: Priority Groups.....                           | 40 |
| Appendix 5: Action Plan.....                               | 55 |

## Foreword

Buckinghamshire's residents benefit from living in one of the UK's most dynamic labour markets. With London and other major employment centres within easy reach, and a population that is more highly qualified than the national average, our residents largely enjoy higher employment rates, better wages, and stronger health outcomes than those living elsewhere in the country.

Yet beneath the positive headline, there are challenges that require attention.

First and foremost, our local economy is experiencing a period of weak growth. Productivity has stalled and employment is showing signs of falling. As set out in the Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan; to help reverse these trends, local employers need access to a skilled, healthy and adaptable workforce. A thriving labour market is a key driver of productivity, whilst a thriving economy is the foundation for prosperity and wellbeing.

Secondly, in some areas—and for some cohorts—unemployment and economic inactivity remain stubbornly high. Long-term health conditions, caring responsibilities, transport barriers, and skills mismatches hold people back from accessing work. Particularly residents from 'Opportunity Bucks' wards – the wards identified by Buckinghamshire Council as being the areas of the county in which residents are experiencing greatest hardship.

In addition, new challenges are emerging. Notably affecting early-career entrants and older workers approaching retirement

There are signs of fragility in the youth labour market. The number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is edging up. Whilst the proportion of young people claiming unemployment-related benefits rose between 2024 and 2025. Trends that practitioners link, in part, to the sharp rise in the number of young people reporting mental health challenges, alongside a drop in the number of job vacancies.

Currently, a greater proportion of working age residents have a work-limiting disability than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the proportion of working age residents claiming health-related benefits has soared. Older workers are more likely to be managing health conditions. As the population ages and the state pension age increases, a greater proportion of working-age people will be in poor health.

This plan is our response to these challenges. By building on the success of existing programmes, deepening our commitment to partnership working, working with local employers and adopting innovative approaches, we aim to ensure that our residents have easy access to the right support at the right time to prepare for, get into and stay in employment.

**Councillor Steven Broadbent, Leader, Buckinghamshire Council**

# Buckinghamshire Works on a page

Buckinghamshire's employment rate of **82%** exceeds the national target of **80%**

Our **ambition** therefore is to:

Boost employment rates in Buckinghamshire's most challenged communities while strengthening the local talent pipeline for employers.



**Priority Communities:**  
Residents of Opportunity Bucks Wards

## Priority Groups

- Young people (including care leavers)
- Working age people with health conditions
- Working age people with low skills
- Working age carers
- Individuals with complex needs
- Long-term out-of-work benefit claimants

## Short-term priorities

- Deepen partnership working between core partners
- Maintain and promote a dynamic register of employment support provision
- Regularly monitor local employment support provision to identify duplication or gaps
- Deliver targeted activities within Opportunity Bucks wards
- Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support programmes
- Align Buckinghamshire Works with related strategies

## Long-term priorities

- Continue to align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy, with a particular focus on high value sectors and sectors facing recruitment challenges
- Enable the new Jobs and Careers Service to make immediate impact within the county
- Explore ways to better support local employers to recruit and retain workers from priority communities and groups (including through volunteering)
- Explore ways to build the capacity of employment support delivery organisations
- Explore the potential for social value and Corporate Social Responsibility to improve employment outcomes for residents

## Ways of Working

- Partnership approach
- Person centred support
- Neighbourhood delivery
- Make Every Contact Count
- Culturally competent
- Test, evaluate and scale
- Data and insight sharing
- Digital solutions

## Local levers

- Adult Skills Fund
- Local Skills Improvement Plan
- Joint commissioning
- Social value
- Co-location of support services
- Infrastructure & service planning

## National Asks

- Funding to replace the UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Greater flexibility and reduced bureaucracy in national training programmes
- Data sharing framework
- Powers and funding to enable strategic transport improvements

# 1 Background

## 1.1 About

Local areas are required by central government to produce local Get Britain Working plans. These plans form part of the national strategy set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper to reduce economic inactivity and improve employment outcomes for individuals. The national backdrop being higher levels of economic inactivity than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, more people claiming out-of-work benefits, more people not working due to ill health and a relatively large number of young people (one in eight 16-24 year olds) not in education, employment or training.

*Buckinghamshire Works* is Buckinghamshire's local Get Britain Working plan. The title reflecting Buckinghamshire's comparatively high employment rate. Co-designed by Buckinghamshire Council, Jobcentre Plus and the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB)<sup>1</sup>, it sets out how partners will work together at system level to help more people access good work.

*Buckinghamshire Works* will be regularly refreshed and will evolve over time to take into account organisational changes (i.e. the forthcoming merger of Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service to create a new Jobs and Careers Service, and the restructuring of Integrated Care Boards) and the roll out of new national policy initiatives.

## 1.2 Scope

This first iteration of *Buckinghamshire Works* sets out Buckinghamshire's labour market challenges and priorities for reducing **unemployment and economic inactivity**. Future iterations will consider **employment outcomes** - such as job security, job quality, pay and progression - more widely.

In terms of actions, *Buckinghamshire Works* concentrates on how we can strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of our local **employment support system**, while also acknowledging the broader need to provide employers with the right support and incentives to create jobs and retain staff. If we are helping more people to become job-ready, we need to have the jobs available within the local economy for them to move into.

## 1.3 Strategic context

*Buckinghamshire Works* seeks to support the delivery of the Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan and raise productivity levels by helping to ensure Buckinghamshire employers have access to a skilled, healthy and adaptable workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> As stipulated by national guidance

*Buckinghamshire Works* forms part of the Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy and the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and sits alongside Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan, and Adult Skills Fund Strategic Plan (see [Appendix 1](#))<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.4 Opportunity Bucks

For the last three years, Buckinghamshire Council has been targeting health, work and education interventions in the areas of the county in which residents experience most hardship. This programme of activity, called 'Opportunity Bucks', targets 14 wards<sup>34</sup> within three areas - Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham. *Buckinghamshire Works* learns from and builds on this approach.

## 1.5 What do we mean by unemployment and economic inactivity?

The term **unemployment** is used to describe working age adults who are not working but are actively seeking work whilst the term **economically inactive** is used to describe working age adults who are not working and not actively seeking work.

The economically inactive group comprises: students; those who are looking after family and/or homes, those who are long-term sick and those who have taken early retirement. Roughly a quarter of those who are economically inactive would like a job.

Not all those who are unemployed or economically inactive will claim state benefits. It is important we understand the needs of, and target support at, the cohort who do, as they are most likely to need support<sup>5</sup>.

Table 1 sets out the number of Buckinghamshire residents claiming out-of-work related benefits, and the type of benefits they are claiming. In total, 32,100 residents were claiming out-of-work related benefits in February 2025. Of whom approximately a third (11,100) were required to seek work as a condition for their benefit claim. We have categorised this group of claimants in the table below as being 'unemployed'. Approximately two-thirds of Buckinghamshire's out-of-work benefit claimants are not required to seek work. We have categorised this group of claimants as being economically inactive. A greater proportion of

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<sup>2</sup> All local areas are required by government to produce Local Skills Improvement Plans, and areas with devolved skills responsibilities (such as Buckinghamshire) are required to produce Adult Skills Fund Strategic Plans.

<sup>3</sup> Originally the programme targeted 10 wards. This was increased to 14 in 2025 to reflect ward boundary changes. Much of the data analysed to inform the development of Buckinghamshire Works still uses former boundaries (i.e. the original 10 wards).

<sup>4</sup> Aylesbury North, Aylesbury North-West, Aylesbury South-West, Aylesbury West, Chesham North, Chesham South, Abbey, Booker and Cressex, Castlefield and Oakridge, Disraeli, Marsh and Micklefield, Sands, Terriers and Amersham Hill, Totteridge and Bowerdean.

<sup>5</sup> Whilst being mindful that for a some, employment is ultimately unlikely

out-of-work claimants are in the 'unemployed' category in Buckinghamshire than regionally and nationally<sup>i</sup>. Suggesting they are closer to the labour market.

Table 1: Buckinghamshire residents claiming out-of-work related benefits – February 2025

Out of work benefit claimants

| Type of claimant                                              | Benefit/conditionality group                    | Number of residents |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 'Unemployed' claimants (required to seek work)                | Universal Credit (searching for work)           | 10,300              |
| 'Unemployed' claimants (required to seek work)                | JobSeekers Allowance                            | 800                 |
| 'Unemployed' claimants (required to seek work)                | <b>Unemployed claimants<sup>6</sup> – total</b> | <b>11,100</b>       |
| 'Economically inactive' claimants (not required to seek work) | Universal Credit (no work requirements)         | 14,000              |
| 'Economically inactive' claimants (not required to seek work) | Incapacity related benefits <sup>7</sup>        | 4,600               |
| 'Economically inactive' claimants (not required to seek work) | Universal Credit (preparing for work)           | 1,800               |
| 'Economically inactive' claimants (not required to seek work) | Universal Credit (planning for work)            | 700                 |
| 'Economically inactive' claimants (not required to seek work) | <b>Economically inactive claimants - total</b>  | <b>21,000</b>       |
| <b>All out of work benefit claimants</b>                      | <b>N/A</b>                                      | <b>32,100</b>       |

Source: DWP via Stat-Xplore

Note 1: Data rounded to nearest 100, numbers may not add to totals due to rounding

Note 2: Data includes those claiming Personal Independence Payments (PIP) if they are out-of-work and claiming out-of-work related benefits

Note 3: Some within the Universal Credit (searching for work) group work a few hours on low pay and are required to seek additional or new work to increase their earnings.

The overall number of residents claiming out-of-work related benefits soared at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Numbers subsequently fell but remain higher than they were prior to the pandemic.

## 1.6 What do we mean by good work?

Within this report we refer to the concept of 'good work.' As defined in the 2017 Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, good work is employment that offers fair pay, security

<sup>6</sup> Referred to as the Claimant Count

<sup>7</sup> Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance or Income Support on the basis of incapacity

with flexibility, opportunities for progression, voice and autonomy in the workplace, and supports health and wellbeing.

## 1.7 What do we mean by employment support?

Employment support services, programmes and initiatives are designed to help people prepare for, enter, stay in, and progress in work.

Support can be universal (i.e. available to anyone who is out of work or at risk of being so), targeted at certain groups (e.g. those with health conditions, low skills, young people or prison leavers) and/or targeted at those living in specific geographic areas (such as the Opportunity Bucks wards).

The type of support provided ranges from outreach (i.e. proactive efforts to connect with and engage individuals or groups who might not otherwise access services or information) to confidence building, skills development and in-work support.

## 1.8 Governance

The *Buckinghamshire Works* is collectively owned by the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership. The Partnership (as stipulated by government) comprises Buckinghamshire Council, Jobcentre Plus and the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB)<sup>8</sup>.

Full details of the *Buckinghamshire Works* governance arrangements are provided in [Appendix 2](#).

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<sup>8</sup> Note, a new NHS Thames Valley ICB (comprising the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB and the Frimley ICB) will be formally established on 1 April 2026

## 2 Context

### 2.1 Labour market participation

Buckinghamshire residents are more likely to be in employment than the national average and are less likely to be economically inactive or unemployed<sup>ii</sup>.

Buckinghamshire's estimated employment rate of **82%** already exceeds the national Get Britain Working outcome target of 80%\*

In addition, a higher proportion of Buckinghamshire's economically inactive population are students than the national average, whilst a lower proportion are long-term sick or disabled<sup>iii</sup>.

Buckinghamshire's working age residents are also less likely to be claiming out-of-work related benefits than the national average<sup>iv</sup> and are less likely to be in poor health<sup>v</sup>.

That said, for the estimated 7%<sup>vi</sup> of Buckinghamshire's working age residents who are not working but would like to, the ramifications can be extensive, from reduced income to poorer wellbeing.

We also know that the headline data masks variation between different groups and places. For example, within Buckinghamshire:

- Young people from vulnerable groups (including those who are in care, care leavers and those with mental health conditions) along with those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are less likely than average to be participating in education, employment or training.<sup>vii</sup>
- Employment rates are lowest amongst those with a disability, those who do not speak English well and those providing care<sup>9viii</sup>.
- Economic inactivity due to long term sickness is more prevalent in Buckinghamshire's urban areas and to the north of the county.<sup>ix</sup>
- The proportion of working age residents claiming out-of-work benefits varies considerably across the county, from 2% in Stone and Waddesdon to 24% in Aylesbury North West<sup>x</sup>.
- Female residents are more likely to be claiming out-of-work related benefits than men.<sup>xi</sup>

Whilst emerging trends indicate a growing imperative to sharpen our approach to supporting certain population groups. These trends include:

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<sup>9</sup> Caring for those with long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age

\*Source: Annual Population Survey, April 2024 to March 2025, Office for National Statistics. Full details are provided on slide 16 of the accompanying Evidence Pack

- A rise in the number of young people reporting mental health issues<sup>xii</sup> - which can be a significant barrier to entering and staying in learning and employment.
- An increase in the proportion of children who are persistently absent from school<sup>xiii</sup>
- A large increase in the number of children and young people receiving Special Educational Needs support or having an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHP), confirming SEND.<sup>xiv</sup>
- A rise in the proportion of the working-age population experiencing work-limiting health conditions.<sup>xv</sup>
- An increase in the proportion of adults with depression, with numbers projected to more than double by 2039/40.<sup>xvi</sup>

## 2.2 The Buckinghamshire Economy

Whilst Buckinghamshire residents' labour market participation levels are amongst the highest in the country, the Buckinghamshire economy does not top performance tables. In recent years, the local economy has had lower productivity and slower productivity growth than the national average<sup>xvii</sup>. These two apparently contradictory facts are heavily influenced by high levels of out-commuting from the county<sup>xviii</sup>, particularly to London, where residents can access a wide range of well-paid jobs.

High levels of out-commuting, along with connectivity challenges associated with being a rural county, are key reasons why Buckinghamshire employers find it particularly difficult to recruit<sup>xix</sup>.

In addition, there is a mismatch between the demand for skills and labour in the local economy, and the skills held, and jobs sought by local residents. Skills shortages are particularly prevalent for associate professional and skilled trade roles. Whilst job vacancies in occupations concentrated in the manufacturing; health; professional, scientific & technical and construction sectors tend to take the longest time to fill – indicating labour or skills supply shortages<sup>10</sup>.

Employers cite 'work-readiness' as a key cross-cutting skills gap, along with digital skills. Recruitment difficulties and skills gaps within the workplace can weaken business performance, affect service levels and be a barrier to economic growth.

The latest data suggests that the number of jobs in the Buckinghamshire economy fell between 2023 and 2024.<sup>11 12</sup> Whilst over the last five years, job growth in Buckinghamshire has been slower than the national average.

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<sup>10</sup> Source: [Buckinghamshire Labour Market and Skills Analysis 2025](#), Buckinghamshire Council

<sup>11</sup> Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, Office for National Statistics, 2024

<sup>12</sup> Local jobs data is volatile, therefore changes between two years should be treated with caution.

To maintain local job opportunities, and support the creation of new jobs, the new Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan sets out ambitions to retain and attract high value firms and help existing businesses to grow. The Plan seeks to achieve this by retaining, nurturing and creating key employment sites, encouraging a vibrant mix of commercial premises, and improving transport connectivity.

High value sectors - that tend to drive productivity growth - currently make up a smaller segment of the Buckinghamshire economy than in most neighbouring areas.

Buckinghamshire does, however, have world-class strengths in three high value clusters: high performance engineering (centred around Silverstone); film and high-end television (key assets including Pinewood Studios and the National Film and Television School); and space (at Westcott). And has a higher proportion of employment in the life sciences sector than the national average. All four align with national Industrial Strategy priority sectors and require strong pipelines of talent to continue to flourish<sup>13</sup> and help drive Buckinghamshire's productivity rates upwards.

A key feature of the Buckinghamshire economy is the prevalence of Small and Medium-Sized (SME) businesses, particularly micro-firms (employing fewer than 10 people)<sup>xx</sup>. Given the resource constraints faced by such firms, many prefer to recruit individuals who require little training or support. Furthermore, these firms often find it more difficult to operate when staff are absent from the workplace (for example due to ill-health or caring responsibilities) than larger firms who are more able to reallocate work.

## 2.3 Buckinghamshire the place

Buckinghamshire is home to approximately 580,000<sup>14</sup> people. Of whom 350,000 (60%) are of working age<sup>15</sup>. Around two-fifths of residents live in the county's two main towns of Aylesbury and High Wycombe.

The population of Buckinghamshire is projected to grow at a faster rate than national average over the next 20 years. Buckinghamshire has an ageing population and a higher old age dependency ratio (older people as a proportion of working-age residents) than the national average. In the context of *Buckinghamshire Works*, these trends are likely to increase demand for health and social care workers, result in a larger share of working-age residents having health conditions associated with older age and lead to a larger share of working-age residents taking on elder-care responsibilities.

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<sup>13</sup> [Buckinghamshire's Economic Growth Plan](#) – See Priority 3: Investing in people and skills

<sup>14</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024. Mid-Year Population Estimates

<sup>15</sup> 18-66 year olds

The rural nature of Buckinghamshire can make it hard for residents (particularly those without access to a car) to get around. Transport challenges are often cited by employers as a barrier to recruitment, and by residents as a barrier to accessing work.<sup>xxi</sup>

Other challenges include the high cost of housing<sup>xxii</sup> (which is a particular barrier for employers trying to attract staff to the county to fill entry level and lower skilled roles) and the cost, availability and flexibility of childcare provision for under-fives (which can lock some parents, particularly mothers, out of work).<sup>xxiii</sup>

The Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan has a strong focus<sup>16</sup> on how Buckinghamshire's towns and key employment sites can be further enhanced to create the types of places where existing and new businesses will want to grow and people will want to work and live. The Plan seeks to achieve this through improving transport links, easing congestion, delivering effective regeneration projects, and providing quality housing options.

Aligned to this, the draft Local Plan includes options for where future housing and employment sites could be located to best connect people to work.

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<sup>16</sup> [Buckinghamshire's Economic Growth Plan](#) - See Strategic Priority 2: Enhancing place and infrastructure

### 3 Priority Communities and Groups

The ambition for this first iteration of *Buckinghamshire Works* is to:

Boost employment rates in Buckinghamshire's most challenged communities while strengthening the local talent pipeline for employers.

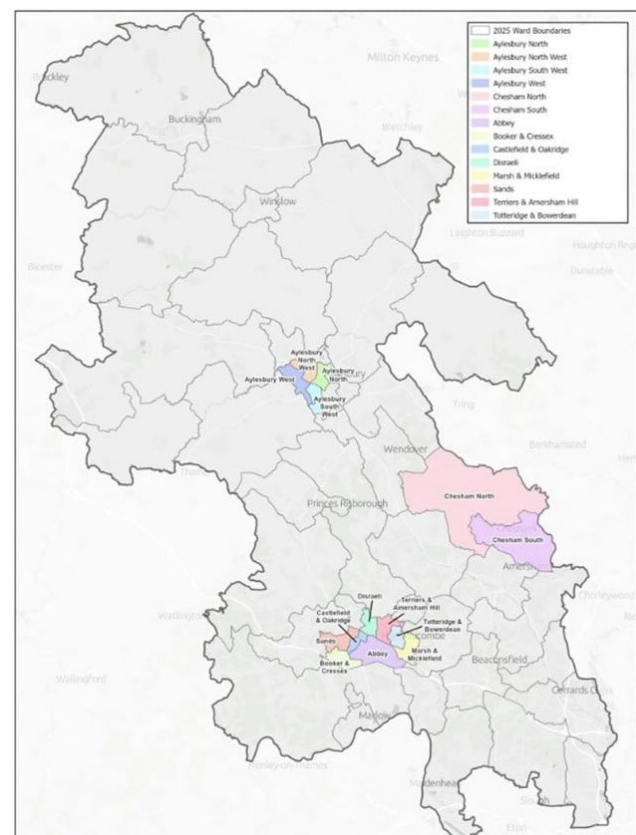
#### 3.1 Priority communities

The 14 Opportunity Bucks wards will be the initial geographic focus of *Buckinghamshire Works*. In this section we set out the rationale for this approach.

The 14 wards (table 2) were identified through robust analysis of a set of metrics which identify hardship including: the proportion of children in low-income families, the proportion of residents claiming state benefits and the proportion of residents with no qualifications.

Table 2: Ward ranking – based on a composite score derived from a set of metrics

| Ward name                | Buckinghamshire Rank |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Castlefield & Oakridge   | 1                    |
| Aylesbury North West     | 2                    |
| Aylesbury South West     | 3                    |
| Aylesbury North          | 4                    |
| Totteridge & Bowerdean   | 5                    |
| Marsh & Micklefield      | 6                    |
| Sands                    | 7                    |
| Booker & Cressex         | 8                    |
| Abbey                    | 9                    |
| Disraeli                 | 10                   |
| Chesham North            | 11                   |
| Chesham South            | 12                   |
| Terriers & Amersham Hill | 13                   |
| Aylesbury West           | 14                   |



Deep dive analysis undertaken over the last three years to better understand the challenges facing residents of Opportunity Bucks wards found that:

- Young people from Opportunity Bucks wards overall perform worse across all key stages of education, from Early Years Foundation stage to Key Stage 4
- Opportunity Bucks ward residents are less likely to be aware of where to look for work and are less willing to travel more than 15 minutes to access work than the Buckinghamshire average.
- There is less accessible childcare in Opportunity Bucks wards than elsewhere in the county, and residents are less likely to be utilising their free childcare entitlement.

Additional analysis conducted to support the development *Buckinghamshire Works*, found that:

- Residents of Opportunity Bucks wards are more likely to be unemployed or inactive due to long term sickness than the Buckinghamshire average.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- Residents of the Opportunity Bucks wards are more likely to be claiming out-of-work related benefits than the county average.<sup>xxv</sup>
- Five of the six wards with the highest rates of economically inactive due to individuals 'looking after family or home'<sup>17</sup> are Opportunity Bucks wards.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Whilst the vast majority of employment support is available to all Buckinghamshire residents, irrespective of where they live, *Buckinghamshire Works* will target some activities (for example promotional work and pilots) within Opportunity Bucks wards to help improve employment outcomes within these communities.

Further details of the Opportunity Bucks programme can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

### 3.2 Priority groups

Having reviewed a wide range of data and qualitative insight, the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership has identified the following groups as experiencing particular challenges accessing and benefiting from 'good work':

- Young people (including care leavers)
- Working age people with health conditions
- Working age people with low skills
- Individuals who are carers
- Individuals with complex needs
- Long-term out-of-work benefit claimants

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<sup>17</sup> Some of whom will be unpaid carers

These groups are not mutually exclusive. For example, a young person could have a health condition, as could individuals who are carers.

*Buckinghamshire Works* activities will give particular consideration to those in priority groups. Detailed information on each of these priority groups is set in [Appendix 4](#).

## 4 Current system and offer

### 4.1 Overview

Employment support services, programmes and initiatives are designed to help people prepare for, enter, stay in, and progress in work.

As set out in section 1, support can be universal (i.e. available to anyone who is out of work or at risk of being so), targeted at certain groups (e.g. those with health conditions, low skills, young people or prison leavers) and/or targeted at those living in specific geographic areas.

The type of support provided ranges from outreach (i.e. proactive efforts to connect with and engage individuals or groups who might not otherwise access services or information) to confidence building, skills development and in-work support (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Stages of employment support

- |                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stage 1 – Engagement (e.g. outreach, provision of information, signposting)   |
| Stage 2 – Pre-employment (e.g. CV support, confidence building, volunteering) |
| Stage 3 – Help to find work (e.g. employment-related training)                |
| Stage 4 – Transition to employment (e.g. in-work support)                     |
| Stage 5 – Sustainability and progression (e.g. training & development)        |

When put together, we can refer to these services, programmes and initiatives as the local employment support system. As is the case in many other localities, a complex range of funding mechanisms and different accountabilities mean that the system is **highly fragmented**.

Employment support services, programmes and initiatives are usually funded by government departments (mainly the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care), local authorities and charitable organisations. Funding tends to be time-limited and there are often gaps between one programme or initiative finishing and a similar one starting.

An overview of employment support provision currently (November 2025) available to Buckinghamshire residents is set out in table 3. The provision is broadly ordered within the table by the five stages set out in figure 1.

Table 3: Current provision (snapshot – November 2025)

| Programme / activity              | National Level | Local Level | DWP | DfE | DHSC | MHCLG (UKSPF) | Employment Stage 1 | Employment Stage 2 | Employment Stage 3 | Employment Stage 4 | Employment Stage 5 | Bucks Council | Job centre plus | NHS | Bucks Business First | Summary                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-------------|-----|-----|------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Virtual School                    |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Support for children in care, with social workers & young carers                    |
| Health on the High Street         |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 | ●   |                      | Accessible town-centre health hubs promoting prevention and wellbeing               |
| CHWW <sup>18</sup> pilot          |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 | ●   |                      | Local health outreach supporting prevention, referrals, digital inclusion           |
| Bucks Skills Hub website          |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     | ●                    | Connecting learners, employers, and educators to build futures                      |
| Bucks Skills Hub careers activity | ✓              |             |     | ✓   |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     | ●                    | Careers education through employer / school partnerships                            |
| Bucks Skills Show                 |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     | ●                    | Showcasing careers, inspiring futures, connecting talent with employers             |
| Confident Futures Skills Show     |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     | ●                    | Inclusive careers event empowering SEND young people and jobseekers                 |
| Workplace wellbeing for firms     | ✓              | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     | ●                    | Resources & events to help employers support workers with health challenges         |
| RESET                             |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Employment support for ex-offenders who have housing needs                          |
| 16-18 NEET support                | ✓              |             |     | ✓   |      |               | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | IAG <sup>19</sup> to help 16–18-year-olds (up to age 25 with an EHCP) into learning |
| PCAMs <sup>20</sup>               |                | ✓           |     |     |      | ✓             |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Mentors at Bucks College Group supporting those at risk of becoming NEET            |

- Stage 1 – Engagement (e.g. outreach, provision of information)
- Stage 2 – Pre-employment (e.g. CV support, confidence building, volunteering)
- Stage 3 – Help to find work (e.g. employment related training)
- Stage 4 – Transition to employment (e.g. in work support)
- Stage 5 – Sustainability and progression (e.g. training & development)

<sup>18</sup> Community Health and Wellbeing Worker, targeting two Opportunity Bucks wards

<sup>19</sup> Information, Advice and Guidance

<sup>20</sup> Personal Careers and Apprenticeships Mentors,

| Programme / activity                  | National Level | Local Level | DWP | DfE | DHSC | MHCLG (UKSPF) | Employment Stage 1 | Employment Stage 2 | Employment Stage 3 | Employment Stage 4 | Employment Stage 5 | Bucks Council | Job centre plus | NHS | Bucks Business First | Summary                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|-----|-----|------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mentoring Circles                     | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Employer led group-based mentoring sessions for young jobseekers               |
| Tailored Learning provision           | ✓              | ✓           | ✓   |     |      |               | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Learning for wellbeing, family support & strengthening communities             |
| Opportunity Bucks                     |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Targeted support unlocking potential in priority communities                   |
| UC <sup>21</sup> – Planning for work  | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Early employability support for claimants who are carers/health limitations    |
| UC <sup>22</sup> – Preparing for work | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Active employability support for claimants who are carers / health limitations |
| Reduced entry requirements            |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     |                      | New Bucks College Group courses with lower entry requirements                  |
| Browns                                | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Support for prison leavers to remove barriers and raise employability          |
| Building Futures <sup>23</sup>        |                | ✓           |     |     |      | ✓             |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Action plans, key worker support, employability training & work experience     |
| Horizons <sup>24</sup>                |                | ✓           |     |     |      | ✓             |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Work experience in public sector bodies for those with barriers to work        |
| Reach4Work (BUDS)                     |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               |                    | ●                  |                    |                    |                    |               |                 |     |                      | Employment support and volunteering for disabled people                        |
| Jobcentre Work Coaches                | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Personalised employment support guiding claimants into sustainable work        |
| Specialist Work Coaches               | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Specialist work coaches working with specific groups of clients <sup>25</sup>  |
| Additional Work Coach time            | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Extra support from Jobcentres for over 50s, those with health conditions       |
| SWAPs <sup>26</sup>                   | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Sector-specific training building confidence, skills, and job readiness        |

targets residents of Opportunity Bucks wards

<sup>21</sup> Universal Credit

<sup>22</sup> Universal Credit

<sup>23</sup> Until March 2026

<sup>24</sup> Until March 2026

<sup>25</sup> Including: Prison Work Coaches; Armed Forces Champions; Family and Community Work Coaches; Youth Employability Coaches; Disability Employment Advisors and Employment Advisors

<sup>26</sup> Sector-based Work Academy Programmes

| Programme / activity                     | National Level | Local Level | DWP | DfE | DHSC | MHCLG (UKSPF) | Employment Stage 1 | Employment Stage 2 | Employment Stage 3 | Employment Stage 4 | Employment Stage 5 | Bucks Council | Job centre plus | NHS | Bucks Business First | Summary                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|-----|-----|------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Routes to Work                           |                | ✓           | ✓   |     |      | ✓             |                    | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Employment support for those out of work for 12 months plus                   |
| Adult Skills provision                   | ✓              | ✓           | ✓   |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  |                    |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Vocational learning and basic skills (English, Maths, ESOL, digital)          |
| Waythrough/BTT <sup>27</sup>             |                |             |     |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |                    |               |                 | ●   |                      | Employment support for those with mild to moderate mental health conditions   |
| Supported internships                    |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |                    |               |                 |     |                      | Supporting 18-24 year olds with an EHCP into work                             |
| Talkback programmes                      | ✓              |             |     |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |                    |               |                 |     |                      | Employability programme (incl. supported internships) for those with autism   |
| Connect to Work <sup>28</sup>            |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |                    | ●             |                 |     |                      | Intensive support & placements for those with complex barriers to work        |
| IPS <sup>29</sup> Employment & Retention | ✓              |             |     |     | ✓    |               |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |                    |               |                 | ●   |                      | Employment support for people with health conditions                          |
| Restart <sup>30</sup>                    | ✓              | ✓           | ✓   |     |      |               | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |               | ●               |     |                      | Intensive support for long-term UC claimants – available for 12 months        |
| BHSCA <sup>31</sup>                      |                | ✓           |     |     |      |               | ●                  |                    | ●                  |                    | ●                  | ●             |                 | ●   |                      | Partnership-led training hub for health and social care workforce development |
| National Careers Service                 | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●                  |               | ●               |     |                      | Free careers advice, skills support, and job guidance nationwide              |
| Access to Work                           | ✓              |             |     |     |      |               |                    |                    |                    | ●                  |                    |               | ●               |     |                      | Employment support for disabled people / those with health conditions         |
| Disability Confidence                    | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    |                    |                    | ●                  | ●                  |               |                 |     | ●                    | Supports employers to recruit, retain, and develop disabled talent            |
| Apprenticeships                          | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    |                    |                    | ●                  | ●                  |               |                 |     |                      | Job training combining work, wages, and recognised qualifications             |
| Skills Bootcamps                         | ✓              |             | ✓   |     |      |               |                    |                    |                    | ●                  | ●                  | ●             |                 |     |                      | Free 16-week training for adults in local priority sectors.                   |

<sup>27</sup> Buckinghamshire Talking Therapies

<sup>28</sup> Starting from April 2026

<sup>29</sup> Individual Placement and Support Employment and Retention Service

<sup>30</sup> Until June 2027

<sup>31</sup> Bucks Health and Social Care Academy

## 4.2 Assessment of provision

The Buckinghamshire Works Partnership's initial assessment is that there is minimal duplication in the current employment support provision available for Buckinghamshire residents, and no immediately obvious gaps. With potential exceptions being support for: carers; individuals with specific health conditions; and those with limited English language skills. The next phase of assessment will focus on these three groups. The further assessment of support for those with health conditions will be led by a new Health and Work Partnership (further details are provided within the Action Plan in Appendix 5). This will consider the support for available for both those who are economically inactive and those who are currently in work, recognising the need to support people within the workplace to prevent them from dropping out of the labour market and becoming inactive.

While there appears to be little duplication and few gaps in provision for priority groups, several challenges exist, including:

- **Funding uncertainty.** Programmes funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will come to an end in March 2026 and it is unlikely Buckinghamshire will receive successor programme funding.
- **Short-term (e.g. single year) funding and tight delivery timescales.** This makes programmes challenging to deliver and can affect the quality of provision.
- **Lengthy commissioning processes.** This can delay service delivery.
- **Employment support provider feasibility issues.** In recent years, charities delivering employment support programmes have stopped operating due to financial pressures.
- **Access to new funding and initiatives.** Buckinghamshire, as a non-Mayoral local authority, with higher labour market participation rates than the national average, is less likely to be allocated national funding that can be used to fund employment support initiatives or selected to pilot new initiatives.

Whilst some of these challenges are outside the direct control of the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership, efforts will be made to mitigate their impact where possible.

## 4.3 Looking ahead

Welfare reforms, as set out in the Pathways to Work Green Paper (March 2025), are expected to create additional demand for employment support provision across the country. In due course, the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership will consider the implications of this for local capacity and potential gaps in provision.

The Keep Britain Working Review, published in November 2025, set out recommendations for employers, employees and the state to share responsibility for tackling ill-health and economic inactivity. The Buckinghamshire Works Partnership will pay close attention to this work and will adopt best practice approaches locally where possible.

## 5 Priorities

This section sets out the county's initial short and long-term priorities to improve the local employment support system. Specific actions that relate to these priorities are set out in the Action Plan ([Appendix 5](#)).

### 5.1 Short-term priorities

#### 5.1.1 Deepen partnership working between core partners

Establish new ways of working to deepen partnership working between the three core partners responsible for developing and delivering *Buckinghamshire Works*: Buckinghamshire Council; the local Integrated Care Board; and Jobcentre Plus.

This will include exploring:

- Opportunities for joint commissioning
- Opportunities to co-locate support services
- Options to improve data sharing

#### 5.1.2 Maintain and promote a dynamic register of employment support provision

Local employment support provision has been mapped to inform both the development of this plan (see table 3), and the development of the **Buckinghamshire Employment Support Tool** (BEST).

BEST is an online signposting resource designed to help users identify the most appropriate employability support programme for their needs. By answering a few simple questions on the webpage, individuals are directed to relevant services. The tool was developed by students from Bucks College Group in collaboration with employers, skills providers, and community organisations across Buckinghamshire, in response to feedback from residents who reported difficulties in identifying suitable employment support services.

Ongoing work is needed to:

- Ensure all provision is captured
- Maintain the accuracy of information
- Promote the BEST to individuals and those referring individuals to support

#### 5.1.3 Regularly monitor local employment support provision to identify duplication or gaps

As set out in section 4, our initial assessment is that there is minimal duplication in the current employment support provision available for Buckinghamshire residents, and no immediately obvious gaps. With potential exceptions being support for: carers; individuals

with specific health conditions; and those with limited English language skills. The next phase of assessment will focus on these three groups.

In the longer term, it is anticipated that welfare reforms will create additional demand for employment support provision. The Buckinghamshire Works Partnership will consider the implications of this for delivery capacity and potential gaps.

#### **5.1.4 Deliver targeted activities within Opportunity Bucks wards**

This initial phase of *Buckinghamshire Works* activity places particular emphasis on community engagement, hyper-local initiatives and promotional activities related to employment, health, and skills support within the **Opportunity Bucks wards**. These locations are also considered the most optimal for piloting new initiatives.

Activities planned for 2026 that aim to improve employment outcomes for residents of Opportunity Bucks wards are included within our Buckinghamshire Works Action Plan ([Appendix 5](#)). These have been developed to address the findings of a series of deep-dive research projects that have been undertaken over the last three years.

#### **5.1.5 Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support programmes**

Partners have identified a number of ways in which the impact of employment support programmes could be maximised for the benefit of local residents and the economy. These include strengthening partnership working, growing successful skills provision and exploring ways to increase the use of volunteering as a stepping stone to employment. Actions that relate to specific programmes and initiatives are listed in the Action Plan.

#### **5.1.6 Align Buckinghamshire Works with related strategies and plans**

There are a plethora of local strategies and plans (published and in development) that interplay with *Buckinghamshire Works*. Linkages have been made in key strategies and plans that have been developed within the last six months (e.g. the Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy – see table 4) and will be made in strategies and plans in development (e.g. a refreshed Skills and Employment Strategy and new Local Skills Improvement Plan).

Table 4: How Buckinghamshire Works aligns with the Economic Growth Plan and Health and Wellbeing Strategy

| Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan - 2035                                                                                                                                                   | Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy - 2035                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strategic priority 3 (Investing in People and Skills) sets out actions to reduce recruitment difficulties for employers                                                                       | Outcome 3 of the Live Well theme (Empowering Communities) sets out actions to increase employment rates through the better integration of health and employment support. |
| Strategic priority 2 (Enhancing place and infrastructure) recognises the need to enhance public transport and improve connectivity to facilitate access to jobs and educational opportunities |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <a href="#">Buckinghamshire's Economic Growth Plan</a>                                                                                                                                        | <a href="#">Health Wellbeing Strategy.pdf</a>                                                                                                                            |

Other local strategies and plans set out goals and actions that could influence employment outcomes for individuals - for example, the Buckinghamshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy and the Buckinghamshire All-Age Autism strategy. There is a need for engagement between responsible teams to ensure a shared understanding of goals and actions.

## 5.2 Long-term priorities

### 5.2.1 Continue to align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy, with a particular focus on high value sectors and sectors facing recruitment challenges

Efforts have been made in recent years to better align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy. This has included:

- The production of the first [Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) and associated activities, including the establishment of local engineering education and training provision; the roll out of skills bootcamps in key sectors; learning providers prioritising digital training; and work-readiness being further embedded within local learning provision.
- The establishment of the [Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy](#) (BHSCA) which aims to optimise health and social care workforce education, training and development in order to deliver the best possible care to the population of Buckinghamshire. Health and social care is one of Buckinghamshire's largest employment sectors<sup>xxvii</sup> with high vacancy rates<sup>xxviii</sup> - creating a wide range of job opportunities for local residents. The BHSCA helps connect education and employment and create local career pathways.

- Activity undertaken by the Bucks Skills Hub, including running of the annual Bucks Skills Show and Confident Futures Skills Show, the provision of information on the local economy via the Bucks Skills Hub [website](#) and directly to schools, and the coordination of work inspiration and work experience activity for school-aged young people.

Such alignment work will continue, through:

- The development of the second Buckinghamshire **Local Skills Improvement Plan** – to be published in 2026.
- Commissioning of adult learning provision through a local **Adult Skills Fund**, which will help provide pathways for individuals into local priority sectors.
- The new **Growth and Skills Levy** which will be more flexible than the previous Apprenticeship Levy meaning it can be used to fund some short courses (Apprenticeship units) in skills in high demand.
- Opportunities to expand **Skills Bootcamps** for priority sectors to quickly upskill individuals in high-demand areas.
- The roll out of the government’s new **Work Experience** offer
- Potential access to skills funds made available as part of the government’s **Industrial Strategy**.

Along with other opportunities emerging from the new Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (published in October 2025).

### **5.2.2 Enable the new Jobs and Careers Service to make immediate impact within the county**

The Government is merging Jobcentre Plus with the National Careers Service (NCS) to create a unified **Jobs and Careers Service**. Local pilots have begun across the UK with more pilots anticipated in 2026. The Buckinghamshire Works Partnership, and other local stakeholders, will monitor the success of these pilots and seek to embed ‘what works’ within Buckinghamshire’s service. This could include adopting methods for increasing the proportion of local employers recruiting via Jobcentres, preparing local systems for secure data sharing, and establishing immediate opportunities to deliver visible results within the early days of operation.

### **5.2.3 Explore ways to better support local employers to recruit and retain workers from priority groups**

There are opportunities to deepen relationships between the employment support system and employers to ensure the latter have access to the information they need to recruit and support employees from priority groups in order to fill jobs, reduce absenteeism and maintain productivity.

Many local businesses are SMEs, who often lack dedicated HR, training or occupational health capacity. It is important therefore that these firms are aware of the benefits of inclusive recruitment and reducing absenteeism, have access to relevant toolkits, and are aware of any incentives and initiatives designed to help them recruit and retain staff from priority groups.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) plan to introduce a new Jobs Guarantee to help prevent long-term unemployment amongst young people. This will provide a wage subsidy for employers taking on a young person who is disadvantaged. There is an opportunity for DWP to work with local employers and business support organisations to promote this to local employers. Those who benefited from the similar Kickstart scheme, which operated during the Covid-19 pandemic, may be particularly keen to participate.

In terms of health and wellbeing, business support organisation Buckinghamshire Business First currently provides signposting to [wellbeing support](#), works with the Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS) to promote the national Disability Confidence initiative and has run wellbeing workshops. There may be opportunities to do more in this area.

There are also potentially further opportunities for local employers (particularly larger ones) to learn from each other by sharing best practice approaches to recruitment, absenteeism, retention, work experience, training and development, and to increase the use of volunteering to help reduce economic inactivity.

In addition to the above, the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership will review the recommendations set out in the Keep Britain Working Review<sup>32</sup> and establish how these could be implemented at the local level.

#### **5.2.4 Explore ways to build the capacity of employment support delivery organisations**

Short-term funding - most recently via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) - creates instability which makes it challenging for employment support providers (who are often Voluntary and Community Sector organisations) to maintain engagement with individuals, embed long-term learning and retain skilled staff.

A long-term priority of *Buckinghamshire Works* is therefore to help strengthen the capacity of the organisations who deliver employment support. A first step is to lobby for funding to replace the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to work collaboratively with local employment support delivery organisations to identify practical solutions to challenges. Potential actions include:

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<sup>32</sup> [Keep Britain Working Review: Final report - GOV.UK](#), November 2025

- Running workshops with employment support providers to share best practice (for example in relation to employer engagement)
- Providing shared training opportunities to upskill employment support delivery staff
- Encouraging employment support delivery organisations to develop joint bids for funding, to reduce fragmentation and share risk
- Developing common data systems to streamline reporting and improve service integration

### **5.2.5 Explore the potential for social value and Corporate Social Responsibility to improve employment outcomes for residents**

There are a number of ways in which social value can be used to improve employment outcomes for economically inactive and unemployed residents. For example:

- The inclusion of local employment clauses in contracts (particularly used with contractors delivering public services or infrastructure projects to encourage the hiring of local residents).
- Including commitments to provide opportunities such as work experience and Apprenticeships in tender specifications.

In addition, large private sectors firms are often keen to generate social value within the communities in which they operate via Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities.

The potential to better coordinate such activity to deliver for communities and groups in most need of support will be explored, whilst being alert to not creating barriers for local SMEs seeking to secure public sector contracts.

## 6 Ways of working

At the heart of *Buckinghamshire Works* is partnership working. The programme is collectively owned by the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership<sup>33</sup>. It is anticipated that partnership approach will help avoid duplication, improve efficiency, leverage existing resources, and ensure interventions complement wider initiatives. Operationally, partnership working will enable the pooling of expertise and resources, and improve the coordination of delivery, which should result in an easier employment support system for residents to navigate.

In delivering *Buckinghamshire Works*, we will adopt the following best practice ways of working:

- Championing **person-centred support** – support that seeks to address the whole range of barriers facing an individual - such as health conditions, transport, and skills gaps – whilst creating long-term, trust-based relationships to help people build confidence and self-belief. Person-centred support is proven<sup>34</sup> to significantly outperform traditional ‘train then place’ employment support models (whereby individuals are trained first and then placed into jobs).
- Making support available where it is most likely to be accessed - e.g. within **neighbourhoods**, town centres, GP surgeries, hospitals, schools, colleges, youth groups, cultural and faith community groups, family hub network.
- Adopting the **Make Every Contact Count** (MECC) public health approach - using everyday interactions that those from priority groups may have with different agencies to have brief, positive conversations about work opportunities.
- Ensuring those who design and provide support are **culturally competent**, to ensure provision is accessible and relevant for people of all ethnicities, faiths, languages, and communities.
- Improving the **sharing of data and insight** between local agencies to help create a unified customer journey. For example, exploring ways for data on individuals’ skills gaps, qualifications and barriers to work to be shared between agencies.
- Adopting ‘**test, evaluate and scale**’ approaches to rolling out new initiatives.

We will also seek to maximise the use of **digital solutions**, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), to improve efficiency, make information more easily accessible and improve user experiences. Whilst recognising that not all people can or are able to access digital resources, so in person support is also needed.

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<sup>33</sup> Comprising Buckinghamshire Council, Jobcentre Plus and the BOB / Thames Valley ICB

<sup>34</sup> In studies on supported employment and Individual Placement and Support (IPS)

## 7 Levers

Policy levers are tools or mechanisms that can be used to influence outcomes and achieve specific objectives. A lever can be adjusted or activated to drive change.

The levers set out in the table below will be used to help meet the objectives of *Buckinghamshire Works*. Please note, these levers are available at the time of writing. Additional levers may come into play in the future.

Table 5: Local employment support policy levers

| Type of lever | Examples of local levers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strategic     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adult Skills Fund Strategic Plan</li><li>• Local Skills Improvement Plan</li><li>• Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan</li><li>• Health and Wellbeing Strategy</li><li>• Education Strategy</li><li>• SEND and Inclusion Strategy</li></ul> |
| Financial     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adult Skills Fund – funding allocation</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Governance    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Joint commissioning – aligning budgets and priorities across agencies</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                              |
| Structural    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-location of support services – integrating services to improve access</li><li>• Infrastructure and service planning – to enable job growth and access to jobs</li></ul>                                                                   |
| Contractual   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social value – embedding community benefits in procurement, and monitoring outcomes</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                |

## 8 National asks

To help Buckinghamshire organisations successfully deliver *Buckinghamshire Works*, we have a number of key asks of national government. These are:

- Funding to replace the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has been used to fund a number of employment support programmes in Buckinghamshire in recent years. The benefit of such funding is that it can be used flexibly to address local needs. This funding comes to an end in March 2026. Buckinghamshire, as a non-mayoral area, with lower-than-average levels of deprivation, looks unlikely to be allocated funds via successor programmes. This will lead to gaps in provision that are unlikely to be able to be filled through core budgets. We therefore ask that future national funds, that can be used flexibly by local areas to support residents into work, are made available to the county.

- Greater flexibility and reduced bureaucracy in national training programmes

Employers consulted during the development of *Buckinghamshire Works* identified the need for greater flexibility and reduced bureaucracy to encourage more firms to offer national training programmes (such as Apprenticeships) and provide supported employment. Complexity currently acts as a barrier with many firms who wish to offer opportunities for individuals not having the capacity to navigate the processes to do so.

- Establishment of data sharing frameworks or protocols

Efforts have previously been made to share more data and insight on individuals who require employment support between local organisations. Little progress has been made however, primarily due to organisations being concerned that doing so will put them in breach of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), or local operations that are part of national organisations being unable to make such decisions at a local level. The establishment of national data sharing frameworks or protocols could help overcome these barriers and unlock the potential of sharing such data to aid service delivery.

- Powers and funding to enable strategic transport improvements

Transport plays a key role in enable residents to access work. Powers and funding to enable strategic transport improvements within the county could play a transformative role in increasing access to jobs and raising productivity.

For example, delivering the East West Rail Aylesbury Link - originally included in East West Rail plans but still subject to a final feasibility decision - has the potential to increase employment opportunities for Buckinghamshire residents, particularly those living in Aylesbury and surrounding areas. It is anticipated that the link would support

the regeneration of Aylesbury and attract inward investment, growing the number of jobs in the local economy.

## 9 Measuring progress

Buckinghamshire's current employment rate of 82% is well above national and regional averages, placing it among the highest-performing counties in the country. This suggests the county is already operating near 'full employment,' where further gains are marginal and harder to achieve. There will always be some level of unemployment due to normal labour market dynamics (e.g. people changing jobs, seasonal work, or structural shifts) and economic inactivity.

*Buckinghamshire Works* therefore focuses on raising employment rates with Buckinghamshire's most challenged communities. To measure progress, the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership will set specific targets in relation to:

- Reducing the proportion of working-age residents from Opportunity Bucks wards claiming out-of-work related benefits.
- Increasing the proportion of young people with EHCPs entering education, employment or training.
- Increasing the proportion of care leavers entering education, employment or training.

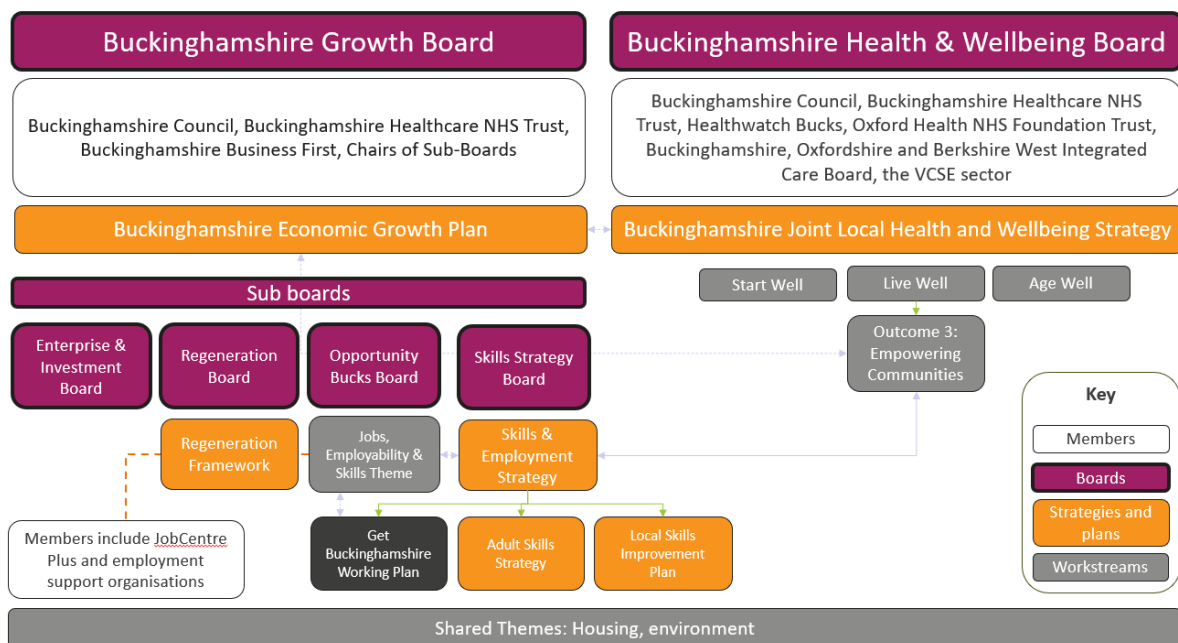
In addition, partners will monitor progress towards the achievement of targets which have been set for specific programmes, including:

- 1,640 individuals supported through the Connect to Work programme by 2030.
- 75% of Skills Bootcamp participants gaining a new job, achieving career progression, or becoming self-employed.

## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Buckinghamshire's place-based governance

The diagram below sets out how *Buckinghamshire Works* relates to other joint local strategies and plans overseen by the place-based Buckinghamshire Growth Board and Buckinghamshire Health & Wellbeing Board.



The three Buckinghamshire Works Partnership organisations are represented within this structure at strategic and operational levels.

The **Buckinghamshire Economic Growth Plan** is the county's guiding framework or 'north star' for growth and prosperity. It aligns economic, spatial and social plans and activities.

One of the Plan's five strategic priorities is **investing in people and skills** to ensure that Buckinghamshire employers have access to a skilled, healthy and adaptable workforce and Buckinghamshire residents have access to 'good work'<sup>35</sup> both now and in the future.

Buckinghamshire's **Skills and Employment Strategy** sets out what is required to achieve this. Three specific plans form part of the Skills and Employment Strategy. These are listed in the table overleaf.

<sup>35</sup> Fairly paid, secure, safe and healthy, inclusive and accessible, meaningful and engaging, supportive of work-life balance, and empowering.

| Buckinghamshire Skills Plans – required by central government | Purpose                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Local Skills Improvement Plan                                 | Local skills provision meets the needs of employers and the local economy    |
| Adult Skills Fund Strategic Plan                              | Adult education provision meets the needs of the local community and economy |
| Buckinghamshire Works                                         | Reduce economic inactivity and improve employment outcomes for individuals   |

There are also strong links between *Buckinghamshire Works*, the Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Opportunity Bucks programme (which aims to improve life chances in the county’s most disadvantaged communities). Plus links with a variety of other strategies and plans produced by Buckinghamshire Council – including the Local Plan, the Education Strategy, the Housing Strategy, the Local Transport Plan, the SEND and Inclusion Strategy and the All Age Carers Strategy.

## Appendix 2: *Buckinghamshire Works* governance

*Buckinghamshire Works* is owned collectively by the **Buckinghamshire Works Partnership**. As stipulated by central government, the Partnership comprises:

- Buckinghamshire Council (the Accountable Body)
- Jobcentre Plus
- The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board<sup>36</sup>

Buckinghamshire Council in its role as the Accountable Body is responsible for:

- Establishing governance arrangements
- Managing the grant related to the development of a local Get Britain Working plan
- Writing Buckinghamshire's local Get Britain Working plan

All three Partnership organisations are responsible for:

- Co-designing the plan
- Decision making in relation to the plan
- Executing the delivery of the plan
- Reviewing and updating the plan at appropriate junctures

Senior staff of each of the three Buckinghamshire Works Partnership organisations have been nominated be the lead representative from their respective organisations on the Partnership. With additional staff from the three organisations also attending meetings as and when required.

The Partnership has met regularly to develop *Buckinghamshire Works*. It will continue to meet regularly to focus on the execution of the plan, ensuring activity is coordinated and responsive national policy changes.

Members of the **Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy Board** have contributed to the development of Buckinghamshire Works. Their input has helped to ensure strategic alignment with the broader local economic growth and skills agenda.

Skills Strategy Board members include:

- Buckinghamshire Council
- Buckinghamshire Business First
- Representatives from Buckinghamshire's key sectors
- Education and training providers (including Buckinghamshire College Group, Buckinghamshire New University and the University of Buckingham)
- Representatives from the voluntary and community sector

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<sup>36</sup> Becoming the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board in 2026

In the delivery phase of *Buckinghamshire Works*, the Skills Strategy Board will be regularly updated on progress and be provided with opportunities to contribute to project development.

Members of the **Opportunity Bucks Jobs, Employability and Skills Forum** have been kept informed of the development of the plan and will be key contributors to its delivery. The forum includes representatives from the organisations listed above, plus frontline employment support providers.

Finally, a **Health and Work Partnership** is being established to review employment support available for those with health conditions (both for those in and out of work). In addition to Buckinghamshire Works Partnership organisations, this partnership includes:

- Employment support providers
- Mental health providers
- Office for Health Improvements and Disparities
- Voluntary and Community Sector Enterprises
- Leap (the Sport and Activity Partnership for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes)

## Appendix 3: Opportunity Bucks

### Background

The Opportunity Bucks programme is a five-year programme that was launched in December 2022 by Buckinghamshire Council. Its core aim is to address disparities in life outcomes across the county, particularly in 14 identified wards where residents experience poorer outcomes in areas such as employment, health, education, and crime.

From the outset, Opportunity Bucks was structured as a collaborative initiative involving statutory bodies, voluntary and community sector organisations, and other local stakeholders. The partnership model was seen as essential to tackling entrenched challenges in the target wards.

The governance model for the programme is summarised in figure 2 and explained in more detail within table 6.

Figure 2: Opportunity Bucks governance structure

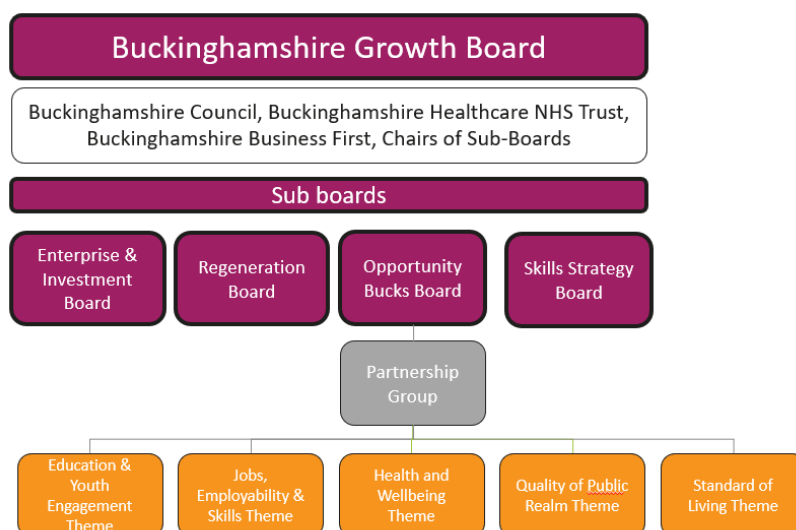


Table 6: Opportunity Bucks – Governance

| Board/group             | Purpose                                                                                                                                                        | Members include                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Opportunity Bucks Board | Provides strategic oversight and is responsible for monitoring delivery                                                                                        | Bucks Council Cabinet Member for Communities and senior Bucks Council executives.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Partnership Group       | Meets regularly to explore specific topics in depth, building a shared understanding of resident challenges and co-developing practical, place-based solutions | Bucks Council members, senior Bucks Council executives, Bucks Healthcare NHS Trust, DWP, Cities and Local Growth Unit, Thames Valley Police, Bucks College Group, Bucks New University, Bucks Business First, housing associations, VCSE organisations |
| Five Thematic Groups    | Operational groups responsible for developing and delivering thematic action plans                                                                             | Wide range of theme-specific stakeholders                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Ward Partnerships       | Provide hyper-local intelligence and insight into the needs of communities and the challenges they face                                                        | Local Council members, Bucks Council officers, community organisations, resident associations, and local stakeholders                                                                                                                                  |

### Jobs, Employability and Skills Theme

A key aim of the Opportunity Bucks programme is to ‘reduce unemployment and improve job and employability opportunities for residents in target wards.’

Activity to this end is primarily co-ordinated through **the Jobs, Employability and Skills Theme**. Members of the Jobs, Careers and Skills Thematic group include: Buckinghamshire Council; Jobcentre Plus; NHS representatives; Public Health, employment support providers; Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs); Bucks College Group; Bucks Adult Learning; and Buckinghamshire Business First.

The group meets quarterly to serve as a collaborative forum for sharing updates on employment support activity, exploring solutions to shared challenges, and aligning resources to achieve common goals.

Activity that could contribute to a reduction in unemployment and economic inactivity is also undertaken within the **Health and Wellbeing Theme** and in the **Education and Youth Engagement Theme**. Along with cross-cutting activities – such as community transport initiatives.

### Achievements to date

To date, over 80 initiatives have been delivered across the target wards. These include: inspiring young people through school mentoring; empowering communities with self-defence classes; establishing financial support hubs; creating real job opportunities in the Council for those experiencing challenges; and major infrastructure projects to improve road safety.

## Appendix 4: Priority Groups

This section outlines six priority groups that *Buckinghamshire Works* pays particular consideration to. These groups are not mutually exclusive—individuals may belong to more than one. While not everyone in these categories will require tailored support, and some in need may fall outside them, focusing on these six groups provides an initial framework for assessing the effectiveness of provision. Over time, the Buckinghamshire Works Partnership will review and consider the needs of additional groups.

### 1. Young people

#### Why a priority

Preventing young people from becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is critical for individual well-being, economic prosperity, and social cohesion.

Across the UK, one in eight 16- to 24-year-olds were estimated to be NEET in the period April to June 2025<sup>37</sup>. This is a larger proportion than immediately prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although data for Buckinghamshire is not published regularly, the 2021 Census indicates that the proportion of 16- to 24-year-olds who are NEET in Buckinghamshire is approximately one percentage point below the national average, equating to approximately 6,100 of our 16–24-year-old residents.

Today's cohort of 16- to 24-year-olds were aged between 11 and 19 at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, which led to a severe disruption in learning, social isolation and a significant increase in mental health difficulties - particularly amongst girls.

Buckinghamshire Council has a statutory responsibility to track the status of young people of Y12 and Y13 age (16–17-year-olds). At the end of 2024<sup>38</sup>, 7.6% of this group were either NEET or had an unknown status<sup>39</sup>. Although this figure exceeds the average for England (5.6%), the difference is largely driven by Buckinghamshire having a higher proportion of young people whose activity is unknown (5.1% compared to 2.2% across England)<sup>xxix</sup>.

Vulnerable groups (including those with mental health conditions, looked after children, care leavers and youth offenders), are consistently overrepresented in 16-18 NEET statistics. Buckinghamshire's NEET (and unknown status) rate for vulnerable groups is 28.8%, just above the England average (28.2%)<sup>40</sup>. NEET rates are also higher for those with Special Educational Need and/or Disabilities (SEND)<sup>xxx</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>38</sup> Average for December 2024 to January 2025

<sup>39</sup> Source: [NEET and participation Local Authority scorecard](#) - see Evidence Pack slide 36 for further details

<sup>40</sup> Source: [NEET and participation Local Authority scorecard](#) - see Evidence Pack slide 36 for further details

The proportion of 16-18 year olds who are NEET or unknown varies considerably across Buckinghamshire wards, from 23.4% to 2.4%<sup>41</sup>. The three wards with the highest proportion of 16-18 year olds who are NEET or have an unknown status are Opportunity Bucks wards. Of the remaining 18 wards with higher-than-Buckinghamshire-average rates only four are Opportunity Bucks wards.

Among the wider age cohort of 16–24-year-olds, research suggests the most significant risk factors associated with becoming NEET include low academic attainment, long term health condition or limiting disability, having a child at a young age, poor mental health and having Special Educational Needs (SEN).<sup>42</sup> Further research published in 2025 shows that outcomes for young people who leave the care system are also poor. Nationally, 39% of care leavers aged 19–21 are not in education, training or employment and a third become homeless within two years of leaving care<sup>43</sup>.

Key groups of young people with low academic attainment (a significant risk factor associated with becoming NEET) include: those with SEND, those who are disadvantaged and eligible for free school meals, looked-after children, young carers and young offenders.

There is strong and consistent evidence that being NEET has long-term negative effects on young people's life chances including their employment outcomes, earnings potential, mental and physical health, qualification levels, and likelihood to engage in risky behaviours (including drug misuse and crime).

## Key challenges

Factors contributing to young people finding it difficult to access learning or work include:

- An increase in school absenteeism<sup>xxx</sup>, which affects learning and can make transitions to post-16 education or work more difficult.
- Long waiting lists for mental health support.
- Undiagnosed Special Educational Needs - exacerbated by a shortage of educational psychologists.
- Difficulties accessing learning and employment sites without a car.
- A lack of awareness of vocational pathways and/or local job opportunities.
- A declining number of level 2 Apprenticeships, which provide a route into employment.
- Hybrid and home working making it more difficult for some employers to provide work experience and/or support young people in their early career.

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<sup>41</sup> Buckinghamshire Council data for August 2025

<sup>42</sup> [Research Risk-factors-for-being-NEET-among-young-people 2023 National-Centre-for-Social-Research.pdf](#)

<sup>43</sup> [How to fix children's social care and restore care leavers' life chances – report - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

## Strategies and Plans

A number of local strategies and plans are in place that seek to tackle some of the risk factors and challenges listed above, the key ones being:

- The [Buckinghamshire Education Strategy 2022 to 2027](#), which, amongst other things, aims to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils and their peers.
- The [Buckinghamshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025 to 2030](#) which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- The [Buckinghamshire Council Care Leavers Offer](#) – which includes careers guidance, education, training and employment support for care leavers.
- The [Buckinghamshire Virtual School Annual Report 2023 to 2024](#) which outlines successes and areas for development in relation to improving the life chances of young people in care and those with a social worker.
- The [Local Area Strategy \(2023-26\): Early Identification and Intervention to Better Support Children and Young People's Therapy Needs](#) which aims to improve support for children presenting with therapy needs.
- The [Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy 2024 to 2029](#) which aims to improve opportunities to achieve by supporting those with additional barriers into learning and employment.

## Existing support and provision

Existing support and provision that aims to prevent young people becoming NEET, support those who are NEET into learning or work, and address wider barriers that may prevent young people from accessing learning or work is listed in [table 3](#).

These include a mix of national initiatives delivered locally, local initiatives funded through short term funding pots (such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund) and initiatives established by individual organisations (e.g. Buckinghamshire College Group introducing courses with lower entry requirements).

## System challenges

Some of the key system challenges that inhibit organisations' ability to help this cohort include:

- **Difficulty tracking 16–18-year-olds**, making it hard to accurately identify and support all NEET individuals. This has been made more challenging in recent years due to the closure the voluntary sector organisation that provided a local tracking service.
- **Short term funding pots** leading to service discontinuity and gaps in provision making it difficult for organisations (often charities) delivering provision to sustain engagement with individuals and retain skilled staff.

- **A reliance on charities** to deliver provision, some of whom operate under financial uncertainty, which can jeopardise their sustainability.

## Opportunities

The government's new **Youth Guarantee** aims to tackle youth economic inactivity and improve early career outcomes. Once piloting has been completed in trailblazer areas, it is expected to be rolled out across the UK. This could provide an opportunity for greater local co-ordination of support for this group.

**Foundation Apprenticeships**, aimed at young people, were launched in 2025. They have been developed as an alternative route for young people who need extra support with employability skills and the transition to the workplace, including those moving from full-time education and those not currently in education, employment or training. Initially Foundation Apprenticeships will be available in:

- **Construction:** Building services engineering, finishing trades, and onsite trades
- **Digital:** Hardware, network and infrastructure; software and data
- **Other:** Engineering and manufacturing; health and social care

All of which are sectors identified in Buckinghamshire's 2022 Local Skills Improvement Plan as requiring focus.

**Volunteering** can provide many benefits to young people who are struggling to stay in learning and/or make the transition into work. There are opportunities to work with voluntary sector organisations and local employers to increase the use of volunteering to help reduce economic inactivity.

**Careers support** plays an important role in inspiring young people and helping them to become job-ready. This has the potential to reduce the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. The government is currently (November 2025) reforming **Work Experience** for young people, with an aim to expand access and improve quality. There will be opportunities for local stakeholders (including schools and employers) to work together to deliver the new offer. Within Buckinghamshire, this activity, along with other careers support for schools, is co-ordinated by the Bucks Skills Hub.

**Youth Hubs** are locations at which DWP work coaches are co-located with wider services to support young people facing barriers to employment. There are currently no Youth Hubs in Buckinghamshire but plans are underway to explore options for establishing one (or more) within the next three years.

## 2. Working age residents with health challenges

### Why a priority

Health and work are mutually reinforcing - poor health can limit work opportunities, while good work can support better health. Work-limiting ill health has far-reaching consequences for individuals, the economy, and the state.

National data<sup>44</sup> shows that the number of working-age people experiencing work limiting ill-health is at a record high,<sup>xxxii</sup> a trend that accelerated during and following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Around half of this group are working, and half are economically inactive. Of those who are economically inactive, around half receive work-related health benefits.

Within this first iteration of *Buckinghamshire Works*, we focus our attention on those who are economically inactive, or at risk of becoming so, as a result of ill-health.

Whilst a smaller proportion of Buckinghamshire's working age residents are economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability than the national average (2.4% compared with 4.7%), there is significant variation across the county, with rates highest in three Aylesbury wards along with Booker, Cressex and Castlefield<sup>45</sup> in High Wycombe.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The most common causes of sickness-related economic inactivity are mental ill health and musculoskeletal (MSK) problems, both of which appear to be rising both nationally and locally. For example:

- Since 2021 the population of children and young people (CYP) in the Thames Valley has grown at rate of 0.83% (slightly above national average of 0.66%). However, growth in demand for CYP mental health services has been growing at a significantly higher rate (32%).<sup>46</sup>
- Nationally, mental ill health is the most common work-limiting health condition amongst 16–34-year-olds, with the number of workers in this age group reporting that their mental health limits the type or amount of work they can do rising steadily over the past decade.<sup>47</sup>
- The number of people in contact with NHS funded secondary 'mental health, learning disabilities and autism' services in Buckinghamshire increased from approximately 19,500 in 2020/21 to 29,800 in 2023/24.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Comparable data is not available at the local level; however, analysis of other sources indicates that Buckinghamshire broadly reflects the national trend

<sup>45</sup> New ward boundaries came into effect in Buckinghamshire in 2025 however, most datasets (including the 2021 Census) still use the previous boundaries

<sup>46</sup> Source: [Thames Valley ICB Commissioning Intentions, 2026/27 to 2029/30](#)

<sup>47</sup> Source: The Health Foundation 2025

- 57,900 adults (aged 18+) in Buckinghamshire were diagnosed with depression in 2022/23, representing 12.7% of the adult population. This marks a substantial increase from 5.6% in 2012/13.<sup>xxxv</sup> If current patterns continue, projections suggest that by 2039/40, the prevalence of depression could more than double, reaching 26.0% of the adult population
- In 2023/24 MSK conditions made up 32% of new and long-standing cases of work-related ill health nationally,<sup>xxxvi</sup> highlighting their substantial impact on workforce wellbeing.
- Locally, 15.8% of Buckinghamshire residents aged 16 and over reported living with a long-term MSK condition in 2024. While this remains below the national average of 17.9%, it represents an increase from 13.7% in 2021, suggesting a growing burden of MSK-related health issues in the county.

Finally, projected declines in healthy life expectancy will mean more people enter poor health before the (rising) state pension age. This has implications for individuals who are likely to require additional support to remain in work, may have periods of absence (that could impact pay and other employment benefits), could experience stress in addition to their existing condition, and could ultimately retire earlier than they would wish. More widely it will increase the burden on health and social care systems, increase the take-up of sickness benefits and shrink the available labour pool.

### Wider challenges

Wider factors that are affecting ill health prevention, early diagnosis and treatment, and in-work support for Buckinghamshire residents with health conditions include:

- The length of NHS waiting lists, which have grown significantly over the last 10 years, largely, but not solely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The complexity of navigating and accessing employment support tailored to different health conditions.
- The high prevalence of SMEs within the local economy, who can in some cases be less well able to absorb the impact of employing staff with health conditions than larger firms.

### Strategies and Plans

A number of local strategies and plans are in place that seek to tackle issues relating to work and health. The key ones being:

- [The Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy - 2035](#)
- [The Thames Valley Integrated Care Board Commissioning Intentions - 2026/27 to 2029/30](#)
- [The Buckinghamshire All-Age Autism strategy 2025 - 2030](#)

## Existing support and provision

Existing support and provision that aims to help those with health conditions enter and remain in sustained employment are listed in [table 3](#).

These include a mix of national initiatives being delivered locally, along with locally developed provision. Key providers being the NHS and charities.

Health-related employment support initiatives have consistently been grounded in evidence-based practice, with models such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS) (primarily designed for people with severe mental illness or substance misuse issues) demonstrating proven effectiveness in integrating work and health outcomes.

## Opportunities

**Pathways to Work** is the banner under which DWP plan to bring together work, health and skills support for those with a health condition or disability, including Connect to Work, WorkWell, Individual Placement and Support and the new Jobs and Career Service. The aim being to build towards a guarantee of personalised employment, health and skills support for anyone on out of work benefits with a work-limiting health condition or disability. There will be a ‘no wrong door’ approach meaning that people can access Pathways to Work through various routes. It is anticipated that this shift will increase the demand for employment support provision.

**Connect to Work** is a voluntary supported employment programme designed to help people with disabilities, health conditions, or complex barriers to employment [find and sustain good jobs](#). Building on DWP’s Work and Health Programme (which ended in Autumn 2024), it will provide personalised, one-to-one support, vocational profiling, employer engagement, and in-work retention support.

Connect to Work will provide opportunities to: strengthen alignment between health systems and employment support; tailor support in line with local priorities and reach individuals who are the ‘hidden unemployed’ (i.e. those who are economically inactive and not claiming benefits).

Buckinghamshire Council is the accountable body for the local delivery of Connect to Work, which will commence in April 2026. It is anticipated that the programme will support 1,640 individuals by 2030.

**WorkWell** is an initiative led by DWP and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). It aims to tackle rising economic inactivity due to ill health by integrating employment and health support at a local level. The programme provides early intervention for people with health conditions or disabilities to help them [stay in work or return to work following a period of absence](#). Participants receive tailored support from a work and health coach.

WorkWell is being piloted in 15 Integrated Case System (ICS) areas in England. Whilst Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) ICB's bid to become a pilot area was unsuccessful, Frimley ICB (which is part of the Thames Valley ICB cluster and will be integrated with the BOB ICB from April 2026 to form the Thames Valley ICB) is one of the 15 pilot areas. This could present opportunities for the roll out of the programme across the wider geography.

Buckinghamshire is one of 43 areas that has been selected to join the first wave of the **National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP)**. This is a major national initiative designed to transform the NHS over the next decade by delivering high-quality, joined-up care closer to people's homes. The selection recognises the county's evolving neighbourhood model and the strong commitment to collaborative working across health, care, the voluntary and community sector, and wider partners. The programme will support the development of integrated neighbourhood health services across Buckinghamshire, with a specific focus on High Wycombe, North Buckinghamshire, Beaconsfield and Marlow. This could create a new opportunity to embed employment support information and referrals into health models.

The **Community Health and Wellbeing Worker (CHWW)** initiative (funded by the local ICB) is designed to reduce health inequalities and improve access and experience to health and wellbeing services. The initiative will do this by embedding locally recruited workers into communities and taking a proactive approach to building trust and supporting people to help themselves. An outcome of which could be gaining or staying in employment, through improved health, wellbeing and awareness of opportunities. CHWWs are trained, paid workers recruited from the communities they serve. They work in defined hyper-local areas and visit every household regularly, regardless of need. Their role is proactive, holistic and preventative, addressing physical, mental, and social health issues before they escalate. Within Buckinghamshire, the initiative is being piloted in two Opportunity Bucks wards in Wycombe (Castlefield) and Aylesbury (Quarrendon). Funding is currently in place for one year.

There are opportunities to deepen relationships between **public health and employers** to ensure the latter have access to the information they need to support employees with ill-health in order to reduce absenteeism and maintain productivity.

Buckinghamshire Business First currently provides signposting to [wellbeing support](#), promotes the Disability Confidence initiative and has run wellbeing workshops.

There are also opportunities for local employers (particularly large ones) to learn from each other by sharing approaches to reducing absenteeism due to ill-health.

### 3. Working age residents with low skills

#### Why a priority

People with low or no qualifications are statistically more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive. They often face structural barriers such as fewer job opportunities, lower wages, and less job security.

‘Essential skills’ generally refer to the core, transferable abilities that enable individuals to succeed in work, learning, and life. They are not job-specific but are fundamental across all sectors and roles. Commonly recognised essential skills are: communication (including clear writing and speaking); numeracy; digital literacy; teamwork; problem solving; and self-management.

For some individuals, the lack of a certain qualification (usually GCSE maths and/or English) is a blocker on their CV that limits progression.

Whilst for those who do not speak English well, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) training offers significant benefits for individuals, employers, and communities.

Buckinghamshire employers frequently identify work-readiness<sup>xxxvii</sup> as lacking amongst job applicants, particularly amongst those entering employment for the first time from education. Work readiness is seen as essential and, without it, technical skills cannot be effectively developed.<sup>48</sup>

Targeted programmes can bridge the gap between individuals’ current skill levels and employer needs, opening up a wider range of job opportunities for individuals and supplying employers with the skills they need to operate and grow.

#### Wider challenges

There are a number of barriers that can prevent individuals from accessing learning provision to raise their skills. These include:

- Personal barriers (e.g. confidence, fear of failure, health challenges, language barriers).
- Practical barriers (e.g. cost, lack of affordable or suitable transport, childcare responsibilities, inability to take time off work as would lose income).
- Structural barriers (e.g. digital exclusion – a lack of devices or internet access).
- Awareness (low awareness of what support exists/confusing referral routes).

Challenges within the system include:

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<sup>48</sup> Source: Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan, Bucks Business First, 2023

- The wide range of training options can make it challenging for learners to navigate and for third parties to identify and refer individuals to the most suitable provision.
- It is difficult to reach those who are not known to support services or involved in community activities to be able to inform them of the provision available.

## Strategies and Plans

A number of local strategies and plans are in place that aim to reduce the number of residents with low skills, the key ones being:

- The [Buckinghamshire Education Strategy 2022 to 2027](#), which, amongst other things, aims to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils and their peers.
- The [Buckinghamshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025 to 2030](#) which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- The [Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy 2024 to 2029](#) which sets out priorities for increasing access to and provision of in-demand skills and qualifications.
- The Buckinghamshire Adult Skills Fund Strategic Skills Plan (forthcoming) which sets out how Adult Skills Funding will be allocated locally to support individuals and the economy.

## Activities and provision

Existing support and provision that aims to raise the skills levels of adults with low or no qualifications is set out in [table 3](#). Key providers are Buckinghamshire Adult Learning and Buckinghamshire College Group.

## Opportunities

The Buckinghamshire Adult Skills Fund Strategic Plan (forthcoming) will set out how Adult Skills Funding will be allocated locally to support individuals and the economy. This will include funding for legal entitlements (essential English and Maths – up to Level 1 and essential digital skills – up to Level 1), tailored learning (which aims to support those who are disadvantaged or least likely to engage in learning), skills formula-funded provision (delivering qualifications up to and including Level 2) and Free Courses for Jobs (which enable adults without a Level 3 qualification to gain one from a defined list of qualifications). The devolution of adult skills funding to the local area will enable greater tailoring of provision to local needs.

There are also opportunities to further strengthen links between health and skills. Through joint outreach and clear referral protocols, organisations can ensure that disadvantaged individuals receive holistic support. When a person engages with one service - such as a health provider - the system should enable onward referral to skills and learning opportunities, creating a smooth, person-centred journey.

## 4. Working age carers

### Why a priority

Individuals with caring responsibilities who want to work often face barriers to entering, staying in and progressing within employment. Caring responsibilities can include general childcare, caring for older relatives, caring for adults with long-term illness or disability and caring for children with additional needs.

An estimated 10% of the population provide unpaid care, which equates to approximately 55,000 Buckinghamshire residents, a large proportion of whom are of working age. Nationally, 600 people a day leave work due to their caring responsibilities<sup>49</sup>.

Within this iteration of *Buckinghamshire Works* we consider the needs of individuals who are economically inactive or unemployed and have caring responsibilities that present a barrier to accessing employment.

There is no single dataset that provides us with a comprehensive picture of the type of care being provided by working age adults in Buckinghamshire, and the extent to carers would like to work. What we do know is that:

- Carers are much more likely to be women than men.
- Being a carer can affect an individuals' health, confidence and wellbeing.
- Working-age residents who provide over 20 hours of unpaid care<sup>50</sup> each week are more likely to be economically inactive than average, and those providing more than 50 hours are significantly more likely to be out of the labour market.<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- Five of the six wards with the highest rates of economically inactive due to individuals 'looking after family or home' are Opportunity Bucks wards.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- Overall, there is greater utilisation of funded childcare in Buckinghamshire than nationally. However, rates are lower in Opportunity Bucks wards.<sup>51xl</sup>

### Wider challenges

For those with young children (usually under-fives), the cost, availability and flexibility of childcare can be a significant barrier to employment. Particularly for those with more than one child and for those who have traditionally worked in occupations with irregular hours/shift patterns.

Being a carer can also reduce the distance individuals are willing to travel for work, affect the number of hours the individual is able to (or would like to) work, and influence the level

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<sup>49</sup> Source: Carers UK (2019). *Juggling work and unpaid care: A growing issue*.

<sup>50</sup> Excluding general childcare

<sup>51</sup> [Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023-24 1.pdf](#)

of flexibility required in a job, reducing the overall number of opportunities available to them.

For those retraining to find work that fits around caring responsibilities, accessing courses at suitable times and finding the time to study can be particularly challenging.

System challenges include recruitment difficulties in the childcare and adult care sectors, which can impact the availability of suitable provision for carers to utilise.

## Strategies and Plans

Local strategies and plans in place to help those with caring responsibilities include:

- The [Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Assessment report](#) - Buckinghamshire Council has a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment.
- The [Buckinghamshire All-Age Carers Strategy – 2025 to 2030](#) – which includes a focus on supporting carers to remain in the workplace alongside their caring role.

## Activities and provision

CarersBucks in Buckinghamshire's dedicated service for supporting carers. It provides information and advice on carers' issues (including access to employment), along with opportunities to meet other carers and to talk in confidence.

Much of the existing employment support offer (table 3) includes flexibility to help enable it to be accessed by those with caring responsibilities. It can however be difficult to quickly ascertain the level of flexibility and identifying accessible support can therefore be a time-consuming process.

Jobcentre Plus currently provides specific support to those claiming Universal Credit due to being out-of-work as a result of caring for young children through its Planning for Work and Preparing for Work offer. This includes helping individuals to set goals, write CVs and access training.

## Opportunities

At a strategic level, there is an opportunity to develop a mechanism for the Bucks Carers Partnership Board to input into the roll out of *Buckinghamshire Works* activities, to ensure the needs of carers are taken into account.

There are opportunities to strengthen links between the employment support system and CarersBucks. This includes exploring the potential to develop career pathways for young carers, many of whom do not explore further or higher education as they do not want to leave the person they care for.

There are also potential opportunities to strengthen links between public bodies and large employers / business support organisations to promote the business benefits of supporting carers to enter and stay in the workplaces. This includes ensuring Apprenticeships can be accessed by young carers.

Over the coming year, there are plans for the Opportunity Bucks programme to increase the availability and quality of childcare within the Opportunity Bucks wards, developing intergenerational and peer support for parents and reducing the social isolation often experienced by new parents.

## 5. Individuals with complex needs

*There will be overlap between those in this group and those in other priority groups already discussed. For example, someone with complex needs may be a young person with health challenges.*

### Why a priority

Some individuals have particularly complex needs that mean they require more intensive or tailored support to access employment opportunities.

We have chosen to highlight this group to acknowledge that for some individuals, challenges are multiple and often harder to overcome. Individuals who fall into the following categories are recognised to have particularly complex needs:

- Those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- People with substance misuse issues
- Prison leavers
- Care leavers
- Victims of domestic abuse
- Those with severe mental health conditions
- Those with learning disabilities and neurodivergent conditions<sup>52</sup>
- Those with overlapping health and social issues (e.g. chronic illness and housing insecurity)
- Military veterans

### Strategies and Plans

Local strategies and plans that aim to help those with complex needs include:

- The [Buckinghamshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025 - 2030](#) which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

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<sup>52</sup> Recognising that learning disabilities and neurodivergent conditions (such as autism and ADHD) exist on a spectrum.

- The [Buckinghamshire All-Age Autism strategy 2025 - 2030](#) which sets out priorities to ensure autistic people can access information, services and support they require at the right time.
- The [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022–2025](#) which focuses on prevention, early intervention and rapid re-housing.
- The [Buckinghamshire Council Care Leavers Offer](#) – which includes careers guidance and education, training and employment support for care leavers.
- The [Buckinghamshire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2023 – 2028](#) – which aims to provide the right support at the right time to prevent and reduce harm from drugs and alcohol.

### Activities and provision

Key employment support programmes that target those with complex needs include the Individual Placement and Support Employment and Retention Service and Connect to Work, which have both been described within this document.

### Opportunities

A key opportunity is to ensure that everyone supporting individuals with complex needs has timely, accurate information on available employment support and can make referrals quickly and seamlessly to the right provision.

## 6. Long term out-of-work benefit claimants

*There will be overlap between those in this group and those in other priority groups already discussed. For example, someone who is a long-term claimant of out-of-work benefits could have health issues and/or other complex needs.*

### Why a priority

The longer someone is out of work, the harder it becomes to re-enter employment due to skills erosion, loss of confidence, and the weakening of work habits. Extended unemployment often leads to complex needs such as mental health challenges, debt, housing insecurity, and social isolation, which require intensive, tailored support.

Of those claiming Universal Credit in Buckinghamshire who are actively searching for work, 57% have been claiming benefits for more than one year and 17% have been claiming for more than five years.<sup>xli</sup> Whilst for those claiming Universal Credit who have no work requirements (usually due to health or other challenges), 73% have been claiming for more than 1 year and 23% for more than five years.

## Activities and provision

Existing employment support provision that targets long-term claimants include Restart and Routes to Work (see [table 3](#)). The latter is funded via the UKSPF and will come to an end in March 2026.

## Opportunities

In addition to the Youth Guarantee (outlined earlier), DWP plan to introduce a new Jobs Guarantee to help prevent long-term unemployment amongst young people. This will provide a wage subsidy for employers taking on a young person who is disadvantaged. There is an opportunity to work with local employers and business support organisations to promote this to local employers. Those who benefited from the similar Kickstart scheme that was operational during the Covid-19 pandemic may be particularly keen to participate.

## Appendix 5: Action Plan

| Priority                                                                           | Action                                                                                  | Partners                                                           | Funding            | Challenge / barrier                    | Lever      | Year    | Priority group |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------|
| Deepen partnership working between core partners                                   | Identify opportunities for joint commissioning                                          | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB                               | Existing resources | Fragmentation of support               | Governance | 2026/27 | All            |
| Deepen partnership working between core partners                                   | Identify opportunities to improve data sharing to enable data informed service planning | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers | Existing resources | Fragmentation of support               | Governance | 2026/27 | All            |
| Deepen partnership working between core partners                                   | Identify opportunities for the co-location of support services                          | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers | Existing resources | Fragmentation of support               | Structural | 2026/27 | All            |
| Maintain and promote a dynamic register of employment support provision (the BEST) | Develop systems to maintain accurate information                                        | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers | Existing resources | Lack of awareness of support available | Governance | 2026/27 | All            |
| Maintain and promote a dynamic register of employment support provision (the BEST) | Promote the BEST to maximise use and benefit to residents                               | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers | Existing resources | Lack of awareness of support available | Strategic  | 2026/27 | All            |

| Priority                                                                             | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Partners                                                                                                      | Funding            | Challenge / barrier              | Lever      | Year    | Priority group                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------|---------|------------------------------------------------|
| Maintain and promote a dynamic register of employment support provision (the BEST)   | Regularly review provision to identify potential duplication and gaps                                                                                                                                                                                     | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers                                            | Existing resources | Fragmentation of support         | Governance | 2026/27 | All                                            |
| Regularly monitor local employment support provision to identify duplication or gaps | Assess the extent to which existing provision meets the needs of carers and those with limited English language skills.                                                                                                                                   | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, CarersBucks                                                             | Existing resources | Availability of tailored support | Governance | 2025/26 | Carers, low skills                             |
| Regularly monitor local employment support provision to identify duplication or gaps | Establish a Health and Work Partnership to assess existing employment support available for those with health conditions, review the recent Buckinghamshire Work and Health evidence review and establish an action plan to take forward recommendations. | Buckinghamshire Council, TV ICB, DWP, Employment support providers, Mental health providers, OHID, VCSE, Leap | Existing resources | Availability of tailored support | Governance | 2025/26 | Health conditions                              |
| Regularly monitor local employment support provision to identify duplication or gaps | Review the implications of forthcoming welfare reforms in terms of local capacity to deliver employment support and potential gaps                                                                                                                        | Buckinghamshire Council, TV ICB, DWP                                                                          | Existing resources | Fragmentation of support         | Governance | 2026/27 | Long term benefit claimants, health conditions |
| Deliver targeted activities within                                                   | Increase the availability and quality of childcare within the target                                                                                                                                                                                      | Buckinghamshire Council                                                                                       | Existing resources | Childcare                        | Structural | 2026/27 | Carers                                         |

| Priority                                                    | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Partners                                                      | Funding            | Challenge / barrier                       | Lever      | Year    | Priority group                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------|---------|-----------------------------------------|
| Opportunity Bucks wards                                     | wards, developing intergenerational and peer support for parents and reducing the social isolation often experienced by new parents                                                                                                                                      |                                                               |                    |                                           |            |         |                                         |
| Deliver targeted activities within Opportunity Bucks wards  | Raise aspirations of young people within target areas, ensuring that there is visibility and access to a wide range of opportunities                                                                                                                                     | Buckinghamshire Council, Bucks Skills Hub                     | Existing resources | Lack of awareness of opportunities        | Structural | 2026/27 | Young people                            |
| Deliver targeted activities within Opportunity Bucks wards  | Expand opportunities for residents in the target wards to develop new skills, gain qualifications and enter the workforce                                                                                                                                                | Buckinghamshire Council                                       | Existing resources | Low skills                                | Strategic  | 2026/27 | Low skills                              |
| Deliver targeted activities within Opportunity Bucks wards  | Build on the success of the Aylesbury Health on the High Street initiative, establishing a further hub in Wycombe to ensure that residents have access to health services locally to them, as well as addressing wider determinants of health including social isolation | Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Buckinghamshire Council | Existing resources | Health conditions                         | Structural | 2026/27 | Health conditions                       |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide | Secure partner commitments to support the roll out of Connect to Work (including promotion, employer engagement and                                                                                                                                                      | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB                          | Existing resources | Employer engagement, lack of awareness of | Structural | 2025/26 | Health conditions, complex needs, long- |

| Priority                                                                                                  | Action                                                                                                                                                         | Partners                                                                          | Funding            | Challenge / barrier                     | Lever      | Year    | Priority group         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------|---------|------------------------|
| employment support programmes and initiatives                                                             | integration into health services e.g. GP surgeries)                                                                                                            |                                                                                   |                    | support available                       |            |         | term benefit claimants |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support programmes and initiatives | Explore ways of increasing the number of Foundation Apprenticeship opportunities available in the county, which can provide a route into work for young people | Buckinghamshire Council,<br>Buckinghamshire Business First,<br>Learning Providers | Existing resources | Reduced L2 apprenticeship opportunities | Strategic  | 2026/27 | Young people           |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support programmes and initiatives | Work with schools and employers to deliver the government's new work experience offer                                                                          | Bucks Skills Hub,<br>Schools, employers,<br>business representative organisations | Existing resources | Work-readiness                          | Strategic  | 2026/27 | Young people           |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment                                    | Explore the feasibility of establishing Youth Hubs in Buckinghamshire, and potentially co-locating them with health services                                   | DWP, TV ICB and Buckinghamshire Council                                           | Existing resources | Lack of awareness of support available  | Structural | 2026/27 | Young people           |

| Priority                                                                                                  | Action                                                                                                                  | Partners                             | Funding                                | Challenge / barrier                    | Lever      | Year    | Priority group    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------|---------|-------------------|
| support programmes and initiatives                                                                        |                                                                                                                         |                                      |                                        |                                        |            |         |                   |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support programmes and initiatives | Learn from WorkWell pilots and potentially roll out within the county                                                   | TV ICB, DWP, Buckinghamshire Council | Roll out dependent on national funding | Health conditions                      | Financial  | 2026/27 | Health conditions |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support programmes and initiatives | Learn from Youth Guarantee pilots to identify opportunities for greater local co-ordination of support for young people | DWP, Buckinghamshire Council         | Existing resources                     | Fragmentation of support               | Structural | 2026/27 | Young people      |
| Maximise the impact of existing and forthcoming county-wide employment support                            | Identify potential opportunities to strengthen links between the employment support system and CarersBucks              | Buckinghamshire Council              | Existing resources                     | Lack of awareness of support available | Structural | 2026/27 | Carers            |

| Priority                                                                                                                                                                    | Action                                                                                                      | Partners                                                | Funding                         | Challenge / barrier                 | Lever                | Year    | Priority group |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---------|----------------|
| programmes and initiatives                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                             |                                                         |                                 |                                     |                      |         |                |
| Align <i>Buckinghamshire Works</i> with related strategies and plans                                                                                                        | Communicate the purpose <i>Buckinghamshire Works</i> to organisations and teams working on related activity | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB                    | Existing resources              | Fragmentation of support            | Structural           | 2025/26 | All            |
| Continue to align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy, with a particular focus on high value sectors and sectors facing recruitment challenges | Publish the second Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan                                            | Buckinghamshire Business First, Buckinghamshire Council | Existing resources (DWP funded) | Job applicants lack required skills | Strategic            | 2026/27 | All            |
| Continue to align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy, with a particular focus on high value sectors and sectors                               | Align adult skills provision with the needs of the economy                                                  | Buckinghamshire Council                                 | Existing resources (DWP funded) | Job applicants lack required skills | Strategic, financial | 2026/27 | Low skills     |

| Priority                                                                                                                                                                    | Action                                                                                                    | Partners                                                                    | Funding                         | Challenge / barrier                 | Lever      | Year    | Priority group |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------|
| facing recruitment challenges                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                           |                                                                             |                                 |                                     |            |         |                |
| Continue to align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy, with a particular focus on high value sectors and sectors facing recruitment challenges | Expand Skills Bootcamps for priority sectors to quickly upskill individuals in high-demand areas          | Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Business First, Learning Providers | Existing resources (DWP funded) | Job applicants lack required skills | Strategic  | 2026/27 | All            |
| Continue to align employment support provision with the needs of the local economy, with a particular focus on high value sectors and sectors facing recruitment challenges | Seize opportunities to access skills funds made available as part of the government's Industrial Strategy | Buckinghamshire Council, businesses, business support organisations         | Existing resources              | Job applicants lack required skills | Strategic  | 2025/26 | All            |
| Enable the new Jobs and Careers Service to make                                                                                                                             | Monitor learning from pilot areas                                                                         | DWP, Buckinghamshire Council                                                | Existing resources              | Fragmentation of support            | Structural | 2025/26 | All            |

| Priority                                                                                          | Action                                                                                                                                                      | Partners                                                                                            | Funding            | Challenge / barrier                      | Lever      | Year    | Priority group |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------|
| immediate impact within the county                                                                | Start discussions with local stakeholders who could help the new service achieve its goals                                                                  | DWP, Buckinghamshire Council, Bucks Skills Hub, business support organisations                      | Existing resources | Fragmentation of support                 | Structural | 2026/27 | All            |
| Explore ways to better support local employers to recruit and retain workers from priority groups | Establish what more could be done to help local firms access the information they need to recruit and support employees from priority groups                | Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Business First, other local business support organisations | Existing resources | Employer incentives, employer engagement | Strategic  | 2026/27 | All            |
| Explore ways to better support local employers to recruit and retain workers from priority groups | Explore the potential of establishing a large-employer peer action group to share learning on approaches to recruitment, retention and reducing absenteeism | Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Business First, other local business support organisations | Existing resources | Employer incentives, employer engagement | Strategic  | 2026/27 | All            |
| Explore ways to better support local employers to recruit and retain workers from priority groups | Work with employer and business representative groups to promote the benefits of the forthcoming Jobs Guarantee                                             | Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Business First, other local business support organisations | Existing resources | Employer incentives, employer engagement | Strategic  | 2026/27 | Young people   |

| Priority                                                                                                                | Action                                                                                                                                                       | Partners                                                                                                               | Funding            | Challenge / barrier                                                          | Lever       | Year    | Priority group |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|----------------|
| Explore ways to better support local employers to recruit and retain workers from priority groups                       | Explore opportunities to work with voluntary sector organisations and local employers to increase the use of volunteering to help reduce economic inactivity | Buckinghamshire Council, VCS organisations, Buckinghamshire Business First, other local business support organisations | Existing resources | Work readiness, job applicants lack the required skills, employer engagement | Strategic   | 2026/27 | All            |
| Explore ways to build the capacity of employment support delivery organisations                                         | Work with delivery organisations to establish the support they require to deliver consistently high-quality outcomes                                         | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers                                                     | Existing resources | Short-term funding / staff & knowledge retention                             | Strategic   | 2026/27 | All            |
| Explore ways to build the capacity of employment support delivery organisations                                         | Run a workshop with delivery organisations to share best practice in relation to employer engagement                                                         | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB, employment support providers                                                     | Existing resources | Short-term funding / staff & knowledge retention                             | Strategic   | 2026/27 | All            |
| Explore the potential for social value and Corporate Social Responsibility to improve employment outcomes for residents | Explore how procurement and commissioning could be further used to improve employment outcomes for residents. To include improved reporting of outcomes.     | Buckinghamshire Council, DWP, TV ICB                                                                                   | Existing resources | Employer incentives, employer engagement                                     | Contractual | 2026/27 | All            |

| Priority                                                                                                                | Action                                                                                                               | Partners                                                                                   | Funding            | Challenge / barrier                      | Lever     | Year    | Priority group |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|----------------|
| Explore the potential for social value and Corporate Social Responsibility to improve employment outcomes for residents | Work with large employers to embed support for priority groups and delivery of employment outcomes in CSR activities | Buckinghamshire Council, large employers, business support organisations, Bucks Skills Hub | Existing resources | Employer incentives, employer engagement | Strategic | 2026/27 | All            |

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- <sup>i</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, February 2025, Department for Work & Pension (Evidence Pack, slide 24)
- <sup>ii</sup> Source: Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2024, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 15)
- <sup>iii</sup> Source: Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2024, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 17)
- <sup>iv</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, February 2025, Department for Work & Pension (Evidence Pack, slide 25)
- <sup>v</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 43)
- <sup>vi</sup> Source: Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2024, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 18)
- <sup>vii</sup> Source: Department for Education, 2024 (Evidence Pack, slide 37)
- <sup>viii</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 21)
- <sup>ix</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 19)
- <sup>x</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, February 2025, Department for Work & Pension (Evidence Pack, slide 25)
- <sup>xi</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, February 2025, Department for Work & Pension (Evidence Pack, slide 26)
- <sup>xii</sup> Source: Buckinghamshire CAHMS (Evidence Pack, slide 38)
- <sup>xiii</sup> Source: Department for Education, 2024 (Evidence Pack, slide 39)
- <sup>xiv</sup> Source: SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025 to 2030, Buckinghamshire Council (Evidence Pack, slide 40)
- <sup>xv</sup> Source: Annual Population Survey, 2019 – 2025, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 41)
- <sup>xvi</sup> Source: Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2025 (Evidence Pack, slide 47)
- <sup>xvii</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics, 2025 (Evidence Pack, slide 3)
- <sup>xviii</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 4)
- <sup>xix</sup> Source: Employer Skills Survey 2022, Department for Education (Evidence Pack, slide 7)
- <sup>xx</sup> Source: User Requested Data, Office for National Statistics, 2024 (Evidence Pack, slide 5)
- <sup>xxi</sup> Source: Buckinghamshire Business Survey, 2024, Buckinghamshire Council (Evidence Pack, slide 48)
- <sup>xxii</sup> Source: Office for National Statistics, 2024 (Evidence Pack, slide 49)
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Source: Childcare Sufficiency Statement 2023-24, Buckinghamshire Council, year (Evidence Pack, slide 50)
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 20)
- <sup>xxv</sup> Source: Stat-Xplore, February 2025, Department for Work & Pension (Evidence Pack, slide 25)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 20)
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Source: Business Register & Employment Survey, 2023, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 8)
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Source: Lightcast, 2025 (Evidence Pack, slide 9)
- <sup>xxix</sup> Source: Department for Education, 2025 (Evidence Pack, slide 37)
- <sup>xxx</sup> Source: Department for Education, 2025 (Evidence Pack, slide 37)
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Source: Department for Education, 2024 (Evidence Pack, slide 39)
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Source: Labour Force Survey, 2023 (Evidence Pack, slide 42)
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics, (Evidence Pack, slide 44)
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Source: NHS England Digital, *Mental health dashboards*.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Source: Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) (2025)
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Source: Health and Safety Executive, *Statistics - Work-related ill health and occupational disease*.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Source: Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan 2023, Buckinghamshire Business First (Evidence Pack, slide 11)
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 21)
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Source: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics (Evidence Pack, slide 20)
- <sup>xl</sup> Source: Buckinghamshire Council, Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023-24 (Evidence Pack, slide 50)
- <sup>xli</sup> Source: Department for Work and Pensions, NOMIS (Evidence Pack, slide 29)