



LEAD MEMBER FOR ECONOMY

DECISIONS to be made by the Lead Member for Economy,
Councillor Penny di Cara

TUESDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2025 AT 3.00 PM

REMOTE MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

AGENDA

1. Decisions made by the Lead Cabinet Member on 22 January 2025 (*Pages 3 - 4*)
2. Disclosure of Interests
Disclosure by all Members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
3. Urgent items
Notification of any items which the Lead Member considers urgent and proposes to take at the appropriate part of the agenda.
4. Get Sussex Working Plan (*Pages 5 - 232*)
Report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
5. Any urgent items previously notified under agenda item 3

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6 October 2025

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LEAD MEMBER FOR ECONOMY

DECISIONS made by the Lead Member for Economy, Councillor Penny di Cara, on 22 January 2025 at Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Councillors Bowdler, Hollidge and Redstone spoke on item 4 (see minute 10)

6. DECISIONS MADE BY THE LEAD CABINET MEMBER ON 25 NOVEMBER 2024

6.1 The Lead Member approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2024.

7. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

7.1 There were none.

8. URGENT ITEMS

8.1 There were none.

9. REPORTS

9.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

10. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION SKILLS BOOTCAMPS DEVOLVED FUNDING

10.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport.

DECISIONS

10.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

- 1) Approve the County Council's headline proposal for Skills Bootcamps funding to be submitted to the Department for Education; and
- 2) Delegate authority for the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to take any actions necessary in relation to the implementation of the Skills Bootcamps programme.

REASONS

10.3 The County Council has developed a Skills Bootcamps offer that will provide Level 2 and Level 3 training that supports local businesses and residents by upskilling the East Sussex workforce, moving people from unemployment into work and addressing vacancies.

10.4 Delegation of authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to take any actions necessary in relation to the implementation of the Skills Bootcamps programme will ensure the programme is implemented efficiently.

Report to:	Lead Member for Economy
Date of meeting:	14 October 2025
By:	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title:	Get Sussex Working Plan
Purpose:	To seek endorsement of the Get Sussex Working Plan and agreement to the current Partnership Group overseeing the delivery of the Plan until new governance structures are determined.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Endorse the Get Sussex Working Plan (The Plan) as a strategic framework for employment, health and skills integration across Sussex.**
 - 2) Agree the continuation of the current Partnership Group to oversee delivery of the Plan until governance structures are confirmed via the proposed new Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA); and**
 - 3) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to make future minor amendments to the Plan.**
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1. Background Information

1.1 The Get Sussex Working Plan (GSWP or 'the Plan') is a pan-Sussex response to the UK Government's Get Britain Working white paper. It aims to reduce economic inactivity and increase long-term employment to 80% by 2035, through a whole-system approach to employment, health and skills. The Plan is live and evolving, to be delivered and reviewed over the coming decade.

1.2 The Plan has been developed collaboratively by East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council at the request of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

1.3 As per DWP requirements, the draft plan in its current form has been formally endorsed by the DWP Regional Office, supported by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and has been submitted for review to the DWP and ICB in line with the end of September 2025 deadline.

1.4 To produce the Get Sussex Working Plan (Appendix 1), the partners commissioned a Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis Report (Appendix 2) and stakeholder consultation and user voice workshops (Appendix 3 - Stakeholder list and Appendix 4 - Stakeholder consultation reports).

1.5 Over 200 stakeholders contributed to the consultation process, including employers, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises, education providers, National Health Service and the DWP. Insights from Connected Futures Hastings peer research further shaped the

Plan. In East Sussex, the Skills and Employment East Sussex Board was actively involved in the development of the plan from inception, at a mid-point workshop and undertook a review of the draft plan.

1.6 An officer working group from across the 3 authorities reviewed findings of the analysis and stakeholder reports, in conjunction with local and national policy and strategies including Economic Growth Plans, the Local Skills Improvement Plan, DWP and ICB reports and the NHS 10-year plan. The officer group made recommendations to the Get Sussex Working Partnership Group, established to steer the development of the Plan.

1.7 The Partnership Group includes the DWP, Sussex Chamber of Commerce (the lead accountable body for the Local Skills Improvement Plan), Public Health and Employment and Skills leads from all 3 upper tier local authorities. Officers from the 3 authorities collaborated to draft the Plan.

1.8 The Plan will run from 2025 until 2035, spanning a period of major change including:

- Reorganisation of the Integrated Care Board
- Development of the second Local Skills Improvement Plan 2026-2029
- Formation of the proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) from May 2026 and devolution of funding (including funds for skills and employment support)
- Development of the MCCA Strategic Skills Plan by December 2026
- Proposed Local Government Reorganisation by 2028
- Merger of Job Centres and National Careers Service into the new National Jobs and Careers Service.

All of the above developments have implications for the delivery of the Get Sussex Working Plan.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 Sussex faces significant challenges in relation to employment including low job density, a predominantly SME (Small to Medium Sized Enterprise) based economy, skills shortages, a low skilled workforce, low wages but a high cost of living, intergenerational worklessness and relatively high levels of economic inactivity. In addition, the geography of the county limits access to jobs, with pockets of significant coastal deprivation and limited transport links providing another barrier to employment for many living in rural parts of the county.

2.2 Targeted employment support interventions are needed and the GSWP identifies how results can be maximised by targeting the priority groups identified by the data mapping and stakeholder consultation. Groups identified are: NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people (including those who are SEND and care-experienced), older adults, migrants and refugees, unpaid carers, adults with multiple complex needs, low skilled adults and those with mental and physical health needs.

2.3 The GSWP identifies system changes that could support greater economic activity, such as improved coordination of training, inclusive employment advice for SMEs, leveraging social value to yield employment and learning outcomes, and working closely with primary care settings to create referral pathways between GP surgeries and employment support provision.

2.4 The GSWP sets out 6 ambitions:

Ambition 1: Build an education, skills and employment infrastructure to achieve the Get Sussex Working Plan.

Ambition 2: Address needs of diverse resident groups to increase economic activity.

Ambition 3: Develop a joined-up approach with employers to inclusive workforce development, training and careers progression.

Ambition 4: Respond to diverse place-based needs to increase economic activity, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Ambition 5: Embed careers, employment and skills at the heart of decision-making to facilitate a systems-wide approach.

Ambition 6: Develop and upskill our workforce to boost employment and growth

2.5 The accompanying Implementation Plan identifies short, medium and long-term actions to support each of the ambitions and 7 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to enable progress to be measured.

2.6 The GSWP outlines proposed governance and oversight, advocating quarterly monitoring and reporting by the current GSW Partnership Group; and in East Sussex, ongoing input and scrutiny by the Skills and Employment East Sussex Board.

Mapping provision

2.7 The GSWP maps current provision in the Employment and Skills arena across Sussex, identifying areas of best practice that can be built on, ongoing core delivery, as well as gaps such as a lack of employment support programmes for NEET young people or funding for 'stepping stone' programmes for those furthest from accessing work or learning.

Risk and/or liability for East Sussex County Council

2.8 The GSWP is developed and led by the 3 local authorities but will transition to the proposed MCCA when it is ready to oversee it. Targets are set by the GSW Partnership Group and the Implementation plan is a live document which can change.

2.9 Actions focus on delivering programmes with known funding (e.g. Connect to Work) or on activities where there is no cost (e.g. sharing best practice in employer engagement). Where aspirational activities and/or asks for the longer term are included, these are recorded as 'subject to funding' in the Implementation Plan, as instructed by the Minister for Employment, with no obligation to deliver them unless funds are forthcoming.

2.10 The Plan states that delivery towards the identified KPIs is subject to funding and subject to a policy and economic environment that is conducive to the delivery of the identified actions.

2.11 The Government has not provided any requirements for reporting to the DWP on progress against the GSWP, however, has advocated that it is for the Local Authority to agree reporting and monitoring processes.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The Get Sussex Working Plan (the Plan) provides a robust, evidence-based framework to address employment and skills challenges across Sussex. It supports inclusive

growth, aligns with national policy, and prepares the region for future governance and funding changes.

3.2 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to endorse the Get Sussex Working Plan as a strategic framework for employment, health and skills integration across Sussex and to agree the continuation of the GSW Partnership Group to oversee the Implementation Plan until governance structures are confirmed via the proposed new Mayoral Combined County Authority.

3.3 To allow for the plan to be finalised, the Lead Member is recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Communities Economy and Transport to make future minor amendments to the Plan.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All members

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

NONE

GET SUSSEX WORKING PLAN

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Executive summary

1. Introduction and approach
2. The Sussex employment and skills picture
3. Current infrastructure and provision
4. Which priority groups will the Get Sussex Working Plan support?
5. Identifying the key challenges and opportunities for Sussex
6. Pan-Sussex vision, goal and ambitions
7. Governance and oversight
8. Implementation Plan

Appendices

Appendix 1: Pan-Sussex Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis Report

Appendix 2: List of stakeholders and partnerships that have contributed to the report

Appendix 3: Stakeholder reports:

- Brighton and Hove
- East Sussex
- West Sussex

Executive Summary

Vision:

A dynamic Sussex workforce, enabled by integrated support across employment, health, post-16 education and skills. All residents are empowered to aspire, to develop the skills they need now and for the future; to access meaningful employment that improves lives, addresses inequalities, and enables businesses to thrive.

The Get Sussex Working Plan has been developed in response to the UK Government's Get Britain Working white paper. Its purpose is to reduce economic inactivity and increase long-term employment by taking a whole-system approach to employment, health, post-16 education, and skills support across Sussex. This is a live and evolving plan, to be delivered and reviewed over the coming decade.

Sussex is located in the South-East of England and is generally assumed to be prosperous, an area with high employment, high skills, high productivity and high pay. However, the reality is a Sussex that faces multiple challenges in relation to work and skills, including:

- high unemployment,
- low employment density and a high proportion of SMEs,
- low wages and low economic activity,
- an ageing workforce,
- inter-generational worklessness,
- low educational attainment,
- high deprivation and
- skills and labour shortages in key industries.

In addition to addressing these and other challenges, such as coastal deprivation and rural access to work and learning, there is a need for solutions that address the specific requirements of different groups of residents.

Our priority groups include:

- unemployed people with multiple complex needs including mental and physical health conditions and disabilities
- young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), including those who are vulnerable, with special educational needs, or disabilities (SEND) or experience of the social care system,
- residents who are aged 50 and over,
- adults with learning disabilities and neurodivergence,
- global majority communities - particularly migrants and refugees,

- parents and unpaid carers and
- adults with low skills and low incomes.

Each group needs tailored approaches to effectively support them into learning and work.

To meet needs and realise the region's full potential, The Plan presents clear, credible, evidence-based ambitions, that will provide a constant during the coming period of change:

Ambition one: Build a skills and employment infrastructure to achieve the Get Sussex Working Plan.

Ambition two: Address needs of diverse resident groups to increase economic activity

Ambition three: Develop a joined-up approach with employers to inclusive workforce development, training and careers progression.

Ambition four: Respond to diverse place-based needs to increase economic activity, health and wellbeing outcomes

Ambition five: Embed careers, employment and skills at the heart of decision-making to facilitate a systems-wide approach

Ambition six: Develop and upskill our workforce to boost employment and growth.

Under each of these ambitions, the GSW Implementation Plan (Section 8) outlines the strategic and aspirational short and medium-term actions that we will undertake to move towards our KPIs (Section 7).

Sussex's abundant natural assets, historic towns, villages, cities, rural areas and protected landscapes such as the South Downs National Park, make it an attractive place to live and work. However, these protected landscapes and coastal geography boundary restrict development and economic opportunities and create challenges for transport and digital connectivity, particularly in remote and rural areas.

The Sussex economy is broad and varied, with a diverse polycentric nature and presents with a mix of urban, coastal and rural challenges and opportunities. While many coastal and rural communities continue to face long-term productivity issues, there are significant areas of strength across the county. The economy around Gatwick Airport and Crawley in particular, is a major driver of growth, with strong transport links and a concentration of businesses including in the aviation supply and value chains, logistics and advanced manufacturing. In 2024, according to the Centre for Cities Outlook Report 2025 Brighton and Hove had the highest share of new economy (technologically advanced knowledge driven sectors) firms per 10,000 population and Worthing was the fourth most productive city or large town for Growth Value Added in 2022.

Across Sussex, there are important economic hubs and clusters of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing and engineering, creative industries, digital technologies, health and life sciences and a growing green economy. Brighton and Hove continues to be a hub for digital and creattech and professional services. The city has the biggest concentration of Games companies outside of London, while areas like Crawley, Burgess Hill, Worthing, Hastings and Horsham support a growing number of tech, engineering and manufacturing firms. Sussex has a strong coastal and cultural visitor economy offer, and a significant land-based sector with strengths in agritech, farming, horticulture and a growing viticulture presence. These clusters are not only vital to the resilience of the local economy but also provide real opportunities for future-focused growth, innovation and high-quality employment.

Anchor institutions (large, established organisations such as local authorities, universities, education providers, hospitals and major employers) are deeply embedded in their local communities, unlikely to relocate and therefore play a pivotal role in supporting social and economic wellbeing. These organisations have a stake in the prosperity of Sussex, not only through providing essential services and employment, but also by fostering partnerships, investing in local development and driving inclusive growth. Their presence enables collaborative approaches that address the region's specific challenges, helping to adapt and expand innovative practices in employment and skills provision across diverse communities.

It is critical that these strengths are recognised and built upon as we collectively shape and deliver the future strategy for growing work and skills capability in Sussex. Adopting a place-based approach which harnesses the potential of our sectoral clusters, addresses longstanding challenges, seizes existing opportunities and ensures inclusive access to skills development via a strong employment and skills infrastructure will be vital.

Significant changes that will affect the skills and employment infrastructure and funding in Sussex are imminent. The Plan covers the period when a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) will be formed for Sussex and Brighton. Powers will be devolved from government to the new authority with an elected mayor from May 2026, including authority over skills and employment support. Future funding such as Adult Skills Fund and Skills Bootcamps, which are key to employment pathways, will be devolved to the MCCA.

In addition, local government reorganisation will see the whole of Sussex made up of unitary Councils by 2028; Job centres and the National Careers Service will integrate to form a new Jobcentre and Careers Service; and it has been proposed to NHS England that the Integrated Care Boards of Surrey and Sussex combine, to deliver on the Government's 10-Year Health Plan and improve outcomes for the populations of Surrey and Sussex.

Some key funds will cease to exist in 2026, such as the UK's Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which currently supports some programmes for young people not education, employment and training (NEET), for unemployed adults who are furthest from the workplace and careers provision. Employment support programmes and funds such as Adult Skills Fund (ASF) and Skills Bootcamps will be devolved to the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) who will need to secure more and longer-term funding to meet employment and skills objectives.

Nationally, the UK Industrial Strategy and Sector Action Plans aim to drive coordinated action across government and with partners at national, sectoral and regional levels to support informed decision-making on labour market and skills policy, helping to align investment, innovation and workforce development to address fragmentation in the skills system and ensure that strategies and policies work together to meet current and future economic needs.

Other national reforms expected to have an impact on the future workforce include changes to the immigration system (Restoring Control over the Immigration System), employment rights (Employment Rights Bill), Education and Skills White Paper (anticipated), Pathways to Work (reforming benefits and support to Get Britain Working) and the Plan for Small and Medium Sized Businesses.

As policy, governance and funding change, Sussex must secure the investment and strategy needed to grow its economy, strengthen its workforce, support residents in finding meaningful jobs and help businesses to access a skilled workforce.

The success of the Get Sussex Working Plan (GSWP) and its six ambitions will depend on:

- Adopting a clear shared strategic vision and dynamic and committed collaboration across a wide range of Sussex stakeholders
- Making effective use of existing financial and infrastructure resources
- Availability of new and additional long-term funding streams to facilitate the delivery of the GSWP Implementation Plan

Government policy and reforms, including housing to business taxes, being delivered and conducive to the delivery of the Get Sussex Working Implementation Plan

1. Introduction and approach

The Get Sussex Working Plan ('The GSWP' or 'The Plan') is a Pan-Sussex response to the Government's Get Britain Working strategy, which aims to reduce economic inactivity and raise national employment levels to 80% via systemic reforms across employment, health and skills sectors. The Get Britain Working white paper identifies six areas for Local Plans to consider:

- Labour market exclusion
- Essential skills and youth support
- Insecure and low-quality work
- Barriers for women carers
- Labour and skills shortages
- Regional and community labour market disparities

The Plan is informed by robust evidence - a comprehensive data review and stakeholder insight. It sets out a focused approach to bring together multi-agency stakeholders to address barriers and seek collaborative opportunities to improve skills and employment outcomes across Sussex. The Plan is designed to support and align with existing Council and Stakeholder resources and strategies in areas such as economic development and skills, education, health and wellbeing, transport and housing infrastructure and social inclusion. While the Plan recognises the interconnected nature of these challenges, it concentrates on levers and interventions within the employment landscape. It should be read alongside wider strategic frameworks to understand the full picture of Sussex priorities and opportunities.

Grounded in the strengths and needs of our communities, it sets out ambitions to reduce inequality and increase opportunity, ensuring that no one is left behind.

1.1 The approach to developing The Plan

The Plan has been collaboratively written by representatives from East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council, to align with Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and Integrated Care Board (ICB) geographies, in accordance with the Department for Work and Pensions, April 2025 [Guidance for Developing local Get Britain Working plans \(England\) - GOV.UK](#). It has been steered, co-designed and reviewed by a wider Partnership Group comprising Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Public Health and the Department for Work and Pensions DWP. The guidance sets out that The Plan should be signed off by each Local Authority, the Regional DWP lead and the ICB, prior to publication.

The development of The Plan draws on local authority expertise and extensive stakeholder engagement encompassing the health sector (including with the ICB), the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, higher education institutions (HEIs), further

education (FE) and independent training providers (ITPs), employers and careers and employment services. It is supported by a substantial data review of the Sussex-wide geography and consultation with people with lived experience and service users. The Get Sussex Partnership Group has worked together to understand the commonality and nuances across Sussex and to carefully consider how to address existing and future employment and skills needs over the coming decade.

1.2 Methodology

To support the development of this plan, the three local authorities commissioned two key pieces of research to ensure that the ambitions, priorities and proposed implementation plan are evidence led, data-informed and rooted in stakeholder insights and lived experience.

1.2.1 Evidence report - Data mapping and analysis

The Pan-Sussex Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis Report (Appendix 1) provides an evidence base, drawing primarily on publicly available data, local plans and strategic reports to review employment and skills across the area. While it focuses on quantitative data at district, city, county and regional levels, it recognises the limitations of such data, particularly at smaller geographies, where sample sizes can be inconsistent. Where possible, maps and charts have been used to illustrate more localised trends. The mapping recognises that data is time sensitive for example the report recognises that data about job vacancies is based on postings on job boards, whereas there are significant levels of word-of-mouth recruitment in construction, health, visitor economy and land-based industries in Sussex.

To ensure strategic alignment, The Plan has been informed by relevant strategies, plans and reports including:

- Invest 2035 (The UK's industrial strategy)
- The NHS 10-year plan
- The Get Britain Working white paper
- Keep Britain Working review
- Brighton and Hove Economic Plan, 2024-27
- East Sussex Economic Prosperity Strategy, 2024-2050
- West Sussex Economic Strategy, 2025-2035
- West Sussex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2025-2030
- 'Creating healthy and sustainable places' framework for West Sussex
- Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan and associated sector deep dives
- Public Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA)
- NHS Sussex Workwell Discovery report, 2025

- DWP reports 'Work aspirations and support needs of health and disability customers' July 2025
- Plan for Small and Medium Sized Businesses, July 2025
- Youth Employment UK, Pathways for All: Towards Universal Opportunity for Young People
- Think Work First: The transition from education to work for young disabled people

These reports are not referenced in the Plan itself but are used to inform the supporting Mapping and Analysis report, the findings of which inform the Plan. Whilst overall the key challenges identified in The Plan are relevant to the whole of Sussex to a greater or lesser degree, the county and city level data does not reflect the nuanced situation in districts and boroughs. Whilst The Plan does highlight some areas of difference, the pan-Sussex Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis report (Appendix 1) accompanying this plan should be referred to for greater detail.

1.2.2 Stakeholder engagement

The Plan draws on a blend of stakeholder insight gathered from across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove (Appendix 3). Feedback was gathered through group discussions, one-to-one conversations and a widely distributed on-line survey. Engagement questions were aligned with the Get Britain Working White Paper and tailored to the participants' areas of expertise, generating cross-sector insight on workforce and training inclusion, partnership working and effectiveness of current provision and best practice to support the coordination of skills, work and health and wellbeing interventions and strategies. Additionally, individuals with lived experience of barriers to employment and periods of economic inactivity, shared personal experiences and views through facilitated sessions with trusted partner organisations.

In total, over 200 stakeholders were included in the consultations (Appendix 2) including:

- 11 stakeholder workshop consultations
- 28 stakeholder interviews
- 68 user voice inputs from young people and adults with lived experience via interviews and focus groups
- 135 online survey responses.

The stakeholder engagement was conducted in coordination with the three Local Authorities, through a working group comprised of Economy, Employment and Skills leads for each of the Councils, who shaped and led engagement locally. A broad range of partners and stakeholders contributed to the process – including employers, local authority services,

the DWP, VCSE organisations, housing providers, education providers (further education, higher education, independent training providers), public health, NHS representatives and the Integrated Care Board. Broad engagement ensured that The Plan captures both place-specific and system-level insights to inform future planning.

The stakeholder insights were further informed by recent Connected Futures Hastings peer-to-peer research, funded by the Youth Futures Foundation. Young researchers with lived experience gathered feedback from 450 young people, 91 employers and 84 stakeholders in Hastings and East Sussex, to identify systemic barriers to young people's employment, social mobility and economic prosperity, much of which is relevant to the experience of young people across Sussex.

Some strong themes emerged from stakeholder engagement including:

- The need for improved careers advice, employer engagement and structured transitions for young people, NEETs, care leavers, and SEND cohorts.
- expansion of supported internships, mentoring and youth hubs to provide support and progression pathways.
- The alignment of skills with infrastructure, regeneration and future skills/green economy opportunities.
- An increased emphasis on community-responsive and person-centred approaches to employment support.
- A greater focus on sustainable funding and joined-up delivery, avoiding fragmented or short-term projects.
- The need for reforms to the benefit system

These are explored further and reflected in the Implementation Plan.

Membership of the Get Sussex Working Partnership Group

Brighton and Hove City Council, Skills and Employment

DWP Regional and Local Area Teams

East Sussex County Council, Employability and Skills Strategy Team

Public Health Departments for Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council

Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) lead

West Sussex County Council Economic Growth Team

2. The Sussex employment and skills picture

Sussex is a place of contrasts – geographically, economically and demographically diverse and varied. It spans vibrant urban centres, tranquil rural areas and a long and varied coastline with a rich natural and cultural offer, all of which offer unique opportunities and challenges. While Sussex benefits from strong employment clusters many communities face significant labour market challenges. Understanding this complexity and nuance across the county is essential for planning and delivering effective employment and skills interventions that can support inclusive economic growth.

2.1 The Sussex economy and labour market context

Sussex is often viewed as an affluent area, benefiting from proximity to London and being situated in the South-East. Sussex has a diverse, polycentric nature meaning that it does not fit comfortably into a neat economic geography. West Sussex has a relatively strong economy with diverse employment sectors including aviation and manufacturing with Crawley and Worthing performing particularly well; Brighton & Hove is heavily service sector based with a strong creative and digital cluster and benefits from two large universities and a well-qualified resident population. In contrast, East Sussex has too few jobs for its working-age population, with an economy that is generally reliant on lower and intermediate level service sector, public and health and social care sector jobs.

The overall perception of prosperity masks deep disparities. Much of East Sussex and many coastal towns across Sussex face economic underperformance, characterised by lower job density, weak infrastructure and reliance on low-paid, seasonal industries such as tourism, retail and social care. These sectors often lack clear progression routes, leading to insecure jobs and underemployment and limiting long-term earnings potential.

The region has high levels of self-employment, often driven by necessity or lifestyle choice, which although reflects entrepreneurial spirit, does not consistently translate into business growth or job creation.

Technological change is affecting Sussex. The rise of automation and AI is altering job roles and driving demand for higher-level creative, digital and analytical skills. Hybrid and remote working models are expanding, creating new opportunities for innovation and flexibility, including opportunities to access higher paid roles in other parts of the country or even internationally while living in Sussex, but hybrid working can also exclude and amplify digital exclusion for some. Economic growth plans and strategies across Sussex seek to boost productivity and growth, including through key sectors with potential for growth, increased high value employment, and inward investment.

Nationally, government funded employment support programmes, for example Connect to Work, are evolving to address economic inactivity and reduce ill-health-related

worklessness, aiming to support more people into sustainable jobs. These reforms provide opportunities for Sussex to develop locally tailored and more holistic approaches to employment support and inclusive workplaces, that address current and future workforce needs and residents' experiences. Many residents have an immediate financial need to work and earn; there is also a need to develop pathways to career progression.

2.2 Demographics and geographic disparities

Sussex has a total population of 1.74 million. Of these, 60.5% are of working age, lower than the national average (62.9%). This is particularly acute in East Sussex (57.2%) and West Sussex (59.2%), compared to Brighton & Hove (71.2%), which has a younger population, influenced in part by its student demographic.

Dependency ratios, the proportion of dependents (young or elderly) to working-age people, are increasing, particularly in Rother District (0.89) and Arun District (0.74), due to ageing populations. By 2035, Sussex's post-working-age population is projected to grow by over 94,000 (23%), while the working-age cohort is expected to decline. This demographic imbalance presents significant risks to labour supply. It also increases pressure on services for older people and is likely to increase the volume of vacancies in the health and social care sector.

There are significant geographic differences in job availability across Sussex. Crawley and Chichester are among the few areas with more jobs than working-age residents, while East Sussex and Brighton and Hove have 0.72 and 0.88 jobs per adult, respectively. Many rural areas and coastal towns face transport challenges, which affect employment prospects. Housing affordability remains a major issue, with median prices exceeding ten times median earnings in all parts of Sussex. Deprivation in Sussex is concentrated along the coastal strip, with Hastings ranking the 13th most deprived local authority in England and many of its neighbourhoods among the most deprived 10% nationally. Parts of Eastbourne, Newhaven, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Crawley and wards in Brighton & Hove also face significant deprivation, marked by high unemployment, poor health outcomes, low educational attainment and limited progression. These areas struggle with entrenched socio-economic challenges, limited access to higher education (particularly in East Sussex where there are no Higher Education Institutions) and economies reliant on low-paid, seasonal work.

East and West Sussex both feature significant rural areas, as well as urban hubs and the coastal strip. This rural character presents distinct challenges and opportunities for employment and skills development. Transport and digital connectivity impacting access to essential services, training, job centres and employment support can restrict opportunities for both residents and employers and create disparities between communities. However, rural locations offer growth opportunities in sectors such as green tourism, agritech,

advanced manufacturing and viticulture, which can boost local employment, when backed by targeted support.

2.3 Labour supply

The mismatch between labour supply and labour demand is a central issue across Sussex. On the supply side, an ageing population, low qualification levels in some geographies, health inequalities and caring responsibilities reduce the number of people available and able to work. The region has high levels of self-employment. For many, part-time or flexible work is essential to support health and caring commitments but for many it can be illusive and low-paid.

2.4 Disability and health

Disability and health are critical barriers to labour market participation in Sussex. Over 311,000 residents, or 18.2% of the population, live with a disability that limits their daily activities, 60% to some extent and 40% significantly. This is above both the South-East average (16.1%) and the national average (17.3%).

In Sussex, 50% of people with long-term mental health conditions are employed, similar to the South-East average (50.9%) and above the national rate (46.4%). Musculoskeletal and mental health conditions are the leading causes of work absence in Sussex, creating a cycle of poor health, limited job access and reduced productivity.

Within this picture, people with learning disabilities are especially underrepresented in the labour market. In West Sussex, just 2.8% of adults with learning disabilities are in paid employment, below the average in Sussex of 5.4% and close to the lowest figure nationally (1.1%). East Sussex performs slightly better, with 5.7% in paid work, above the mean but still far from the maximum (11.8%). In Brighton & Hove, 8.6% of adults with learning disabilities are employed, significantly above the unitary authority average (5.4%) but still some way off the highest national figure (21.1%). These figures highlight persistent inequality in access to work and the need for more tailored pathways into employment for this group and improved representation, leadership opportunities and employer training to foster inclusion and well-being.

Research commissioned by the Office for Equality and Opportunity: Disabled people's employment in the UK: Reviewed academic and other material about disabled peoples lived experience of employment in the UK. It concluded that disabled people continue to encounter significant barriers to work, especially those with learning disabilities. Systemic discrimination, negative employer attitudes and limited career progression contribute to

exclusion. Disclosure of impairments often reduces employability and workplace cultures can undervalue disabled staff.

Further research recently commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions, titled 'Work aspirations and support needs of health and disability customers' (July 2025), surveyed 3,401 individuals receiving health and disability benefits, including Personal Independence Payment, Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit. The findings revealed that nearly half of respondents (49%) felt they would never be able to work again, with the majority being over 50 years old and most anticipating a decline in their health. Only 5% believed they could work immediately with the right support, particularly those with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions. Furthermore, 27% felt future employment was possible if their health improved, a sentiment more common among those experiencing mental health conditions. The study also highlighted substantial barriers, such as lengthy waits for healthcare treatment and concerns about losing benefits if attempting work. Despite these challenges, 69% were receptive to support from the DWP, expressing a desire for more tailored assistance, improved skills development and better coordinated services.

2.5 Education, skills and youth employment

Qualification levels are below national averages in both East and West Sussex. Only 52.6% of 19 year-olds in East Sussex and 56.9% in West Sussex achieve Level 3 qualifications, compared to 57.6% nationally and 61.1% in Brighton and Hove. In Hastings qualification levels are particularly low at 36.4% and coastal areas of both counties including Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and Eastbourne fall below or close to 40%.

Across Sussex, there is a significant gap in attainment and achievement at Level 3 between young people who receive Free School Meals (FSM) or have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their peers. For young people with SEND, Brighton & Hove has the highest gap at 36.5%, above the South-East average of 29.4%. For those receiving Free School Meals (FSM), Brighton & Hove also records a 33.2% gap, compared to 31.7% regionally. In East Sussex, the FSM attainment gap is 25.7%, but even non-FSM learners attain 10% less than Brighton & Hove and 5.5% less than West Sussex. In Hastings in particular, only 36.4% of 19-year-olds achieve a Level 3 qualification, severely limiting their future prospects.

In West Sussex, the SEND attainment gap reaches 41.0% in Worthing and 34.8% in Horsham and Chichester. For FSM students in Mid Sussex, the gap is 35.65%. It is of note that there is a marked gap in attainment in some of the more affluent areas of West Sussex where the attainment gap for young people receiving free school meals and those with SEND are

considerably higher than South-East and national averages highlighting pockets of disadvantage that can be difficult to reach.

Low levels of skills remain a significant barrier to employment progression in parts of Sussex, particularly in coastal and rural areas. In East Sussex, 34.5% of adults are classified as low-skilled, rising to 42.7% in Rother and 40.9% in Hastings. In Crawley, where job demand is high, 35.4% of residents still lack essential qualifications, with a similar figure in Arun (37.1%). Brighton and Hove has a more highly qualified population overall, but data is skewed by the high volume of students and disparities exist across the city.

Lower skills often confine people to low-wage sectors such as care, hospitality and retail, with limited progression opportunities, increasing reliance on Universal Credit to supplement earnings. Skills mismatches are also evident: of Sussex's 221,000 working adults, 29% are in roles demanding higher skills than they currently hold, leaving them vulnerable to automation and other labour market shifts.

The annual national NEET comparator scorecard published by the Department for Education in July 2025 recorded the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in each area: in Brighton and Hove 5% are NEET, in East Sussex 4.9% and in West Sussex 2.2%. While West Sussex reports a relatively low NEET rate, 9.3% of young people have an 'unknown' destination (compared to 0.9% in East Sussex and 1.7% in Brighton and Hove), which may conceal a higher number of NEET young people within the county.

The data illustrates how the challenges are compounded for vulnerable young people, those who are looked after/in care or have left care, refugees and asylum seekers, carers, with disclosed substance misuse, mental health issues, youth offenders or have been in alternative provision. 40.6 % in Brighton and Hove of this cohort are NEET, 24.7 % in East Sussex, 35.1 % in West Sussex. And for those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or with SEND, often combined with the above vulnerabilities, the figure is 30.1% (combined) in Brighton and Hove, 21.4% for both East Sussex and West Sussex.

There are also notable concentrations of NEET young people, particularly in coastal areas and in certain deprived wards, most significantly in Hastings, where the NEET rate stands at 9.5%. East Sussex and Brighton and Hove were identified in a recent report by Impetus, 'Exploring Compound Disadvantage', as one of the few places in the South of England where disadvantaged young people have a similarly high likelihood of being NEET as in some of the most deprived areas of the North and Midlands.

Rising numbers of NEET young people, limited access to post-16 education and training in parts of Sussex and low attainment hinder long-term labour market prospects and highlights deep-rooted challenges in ensuring equitable educational outcomes and life chances.

2.6 Employment rate and economic inactivity

Between April 2024 and April 2025, claimant unemployment in Sussex rose 11.7% (33,010 to 36,875), outpacing South-East and national averages. West Sussex experienced the sharpest increase at 14.7%, and Brighton & Hove had the highest unemployment rate at 4.4% (East Sussex 3.7%, West Sussex 3.1%). The steepest rise was among people aged 50+, up 17%.

Universal Credit Claimant rates are particularly high in coastal areas: Hastings (3.3%), Adur (3%), Brighton & Hove (2.9%) and Eastbourne (2.6%). Older workers (50+) represent 70% of the increase in Universal Credit claims. Due to wages not covering the cost of living, around 41% of Universal Credit claimants in West Sussex are in employment, higher than the national average of 36%. While Universal Credit claimant numbers have risen, it is important to recognise that part of this increase reflects those that have transitioned from legacy benefits. As such, caution should be exercised when interpreting UC growth figures in isolation, as they may not fully represent new demand."

Resident earnings are below average in East Sussex where workplace earnings are 87% of the national average. The result is a workforce that is often underpaid and reliant on Universal Credit, which is claimed by 2% of Sussex's population, slightly above the regional average of 1.8%.

Benefit data reflects wider health-related worklessness. As of November 2024, 31,807 residents across Sussex were claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA), which supports people whose disability or health condition limits their ability to work. Around half of these claims were linked to mental health issues, with musculoskeletal conditions another leading cause. These trends point to the critical role of health, both physical and mental, in shaping labour market participation.

The Keep Britain Working review identifies several groups disproportionately affected by unemployment and economic inactivity, including young people, over-50s, disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions. It emphasises that tailored, flexible support is needed to address the specific barriers each group faces from skills gaps and lack of experience among younger people, to health-related challenges and employer perceptions for older workers and disabled people.

People who are economically inactive are neither employed nor have they been actively seeking work in the previous four weeks. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, having ill health, providing care or being retired. Economic inactivity, excluding students, stands at 14.9% across Sussex lower than England (16.3%), however higher than the South-East (13.7%); and it is particularly high at 18.9% in East Sussex.

Health-related worklessness is the most common reason for economic inactivity. Just over a quarter of Sussex's economically inactive residents are not participating in the labour market due to long-term sickness, with the highest percentages reported in Chichester (44.2%), Crawley (44.1%) and Rother (38.9%). However, the majority are inactive for other reasons, notably early retirement, which accounts for 17% of all working-age residents, much higher than the regional and national averages. Looking after a family or home accounts for just under 16% of economic inactivity in Sussex, lower than both the South-East and England (both at 19%), though the voluntary or involuntary nature of this remains unclear due to factors such as work-life balance, childcare costs and those with lone parent responsibilities. In Sussex, there are over 42,000 lone parent households with dependent children, accounting for 5.7% of all households. While slightly below the national average (6.9%), areas such as Crawley (7.8%) and Hastings (7.7%) stand out as hotspots.

Sussex also has 145,000 residents providing unpaid care (8.9% of the population), with nearly half supporting someone for 20+ hours per week. The proportion of intensive carers is highest in East Sussex (4.9%).

Sussex has an increasingly ageing population, with many individuals choosing early retirement or relocating to the area after retiring. People aged 50–64 account for over 20% of residents in East and West Sussex. Currently, 34,400 working-age residents in Sussex are inactive due to early retirement, representing 17.2% of all economically inactive individuals, higher than both the national average (11.5%) and regional average (12.8%). National statistics from March–May 2025 indicate that economic inactivity among 50–64-year-olds at 25.9%, more than double the 11.5% rate for 35–49-year-olds. Given Sussex's demographic profile, the local inactivity rate is likely even higher, posing a significant barrier to achieving the national target of 80% employment.

Over the past year, unemployment claims from people aged over 50 rose by 17% in Sussex, with Brighton & Hove recording the highest increase at 20.2%.

A significant number of economically inactive residents in Sussex, 44,200 (22.1%), express a desire to work, a figure that surpasses regional and national rates but the majority of economically inactive individuals do not state a wish to rejoin the workforce; although figures are subject to wide confidence intervals and should be interpreted with a degree of caution.

2.7 Labour Demand

While areas like Crawley and Chichester have more jobs than working-age residents, the job density lags behind in the rest of West Sussex (0.86), in Brighton and Hove (0.88) and in East Sussex (0.72). This underscores a fundamental shortage of local employment opportunities and results in out-commuting and underemployment.

According to Lightcast data, there were 16,231 unique job postings across Sussex in May 2025, marking a substantial decline from the June 2023 peak of 26,341. Despite this overall drop, these remain above pre-pandemic levels and job demand has persisted across key sectors. Between December 2024 and May 2025, the most in-demand occupations across Sussex included teaching assistants (around 19,400 postings) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers (around 7,400 postings), followed closely by roles in cleaning, education, care work and administration. Translator and sales roles also featured prominently in job posting volumes.

At the local level, this wider trend is reflected with varying emphasis. East Sussex recorded 4,215 job postings in May 2025 (down from 6,092 in June 2023 but well above pre-pandemic levels), with top vacancies in teaching assistants (around 3,500) and homecare roles (around 1,800). Other notable sectors included translation services, cleaning, early years, admin, nursing and care work. In West Sussex, there were 11,045 job postings in May 2025 (a significant reduction from a peak in June 2023 of 21,342, but higher than general levels pre-pandemic), with homecare and cleaning leading (around 1,500 each), followed by administration, finance, education, retail, sales, healthcare and translation services. Meanwhile, Brighton and Hove saw 5,713 job postings, (significantly lower than the 16,334 posted in June 2023), with demand highest for sales-related roles and care workers (around 1,600 each), as well as cleaners and teaching assistants (around 1,200 each).

Across Sussex, jobs in tourism, retail and social care make up a significant proportion of employment in some areas but provide limited opportunities for progression into higher-skilled or better-paid roles.

Some residents in Sussex face additional challenges in securing employment including people with a disability or health conditions and those whose first language is not English. While larger employers and public sector bodies could help drive programmes of activity that facilitate truly inclusive recruitment practice, there are relatively few large employers, with most concentrated in around Crawley and Gatwick particularly in the Manor Royal Business District, one of the largest business parks in the South East. A high proportion of businesses in Sussex are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) or microbusinesses, reflective of the national picture, many of whom do not have the in-house human resources

capability to engage in supporting inclusive recruitment interventions or workforce development.

Self-employment is high, which may reflect either lifestyle choices or limited access to traditional employment for some.

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3. Current employment support infrastructure and provision

Like many areas, Sussex benefits from established anchor institutions, including local authorities, universities, education providers, hospitals and major employers such as Gatwick Airport, which play a key role in creating jobs and promoting inclusive employment. Their presence enables collaborative approaches that address the region's specific challenges, helping to adapt and expand innovative practices in employment and skills provision across diverse communities. Their collaboration is essential to support the region's employment and skills.

Further Education, training providers, the three universities, centres of innovation and the new Institute of Technology provide a solid platform for delivering high-level, qualifications, skills and training that match the evolving demands of the local economy. Strong sectoral partnerships, for example through the Sussex LSIP, Skills and Employment East Sussex, the SEND Supported Employment Forum, the Synchronise Network in West Sussex and the ICB's WorkWell Board, facilitate coordinated responses to employment and skills needs. Skills networks and economic growth boards provide further governance to support skills policy across the region.

The following institutions and delivery mechanisms play a key role in the employment and skills agenda:

3.1 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) offers a range of services and support programmes to help jobseekers in the UK find employment. These include:

Job search and training support is offered through Jobcentre Plus, which provides training, CV and interview preparation, Work Experience Placements, and Work Trials. Jobcentre Plus also offers employers recruitment support, help with job descriptions, faster hiring, vacancy promotion, interview space, recruitment events and future recruitment campaign planning.

Financial support includes New Style *Jobseeker's Allowance* (JSA), a fortnightly payment for eligible jobseekers based on National Insurance contributions, and Universal Credit, a monthly payment that can be claimed alongside or instead of JSA depending on income, savings, and circumstances. Both help provide stability while people search for work, undertake training or prepare to re-enter employment.

Programmes like *Sector-Based Work Academies* (SWAPs) combine training, work experience, and guaranteed interviews, while *The Skills Toolkit* offers free online courses in digital, numeracy, and employability skills. Work Coaches give tailored job-search guidance, the *Restart Scheme* is a National Contracted provision, offering additional support for UC

Jobseekers upon reaching six months of unemployment and is also accessible from day one for disadvantaged claimants, and the *Flexible Support Fund* (discretionary) can cover costs related to starting in work such as travel or work tools.

Specialised support includes *Access to Work* grants for people with disabilities or health conditions for equipment, workplace adaptations, or support workers. Jobcentre Plus also offers targeted help for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, alongside advice for individuals balancing work with caring responsibilities, including guidance on flexible working and childcare. A range of Specialist Advisers offer this support (e.g. Prison Work Coaches, Youth Work Coaches, Family & Community Work coaches, Disability Employment Advisers).

3.2 Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The Pan-Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan (Future Skills Sussex) is funded by the Department for Education and led by the Employer Representative Body (ERB), Sussex Chamber of Commerce. It sets out a framework to tackle regional skills shortages in sectors such as health and care, construction, creative and cultural, engineering and manufacturing, digital, visitor economy and hospitality, and land-based industries. Its goals include helping employers recruit and upskill staff, improving access to training, raising sector profiles and aligning education with business needs. Its priorities are:

- Speak with one voice in Sussex to influence national and local policy using an evidence-based approach.
- Ensure a joined-up approach to meeting the skills needs in Sussex as identified by local businesses
- Supporting employers to recruit, retain and upskill their workforce
- Ensuring a coordinated approach to addressing skills needs identified by local businesses
- Raising awareness and building the profile of key Sussex sectors
- Making training and employment inclusive and accessible.

Oversight is provided by the Future Skills Sussex Board, which brings together employers, colleges, universities, the ITP representative body, local authorities and public agencies (including the DWP), with sector champions representing priority industries and themes.

The next iteration of the LSIP will be published in Summer 2026 which will set the priorities for 2026 to 2029.

3.3 Local Authorities

3.3.1 Brighton and Hove City Council

Brighton & Hove City Council's Skills and Employment Team sits within the Families, Children and Wellbeing Directorate, which also includes Public Health, Education and Health, Commissioning, Communities and Family Health and Protection. Strong collaboration across the directorate reflects the links between health, wellbeing, skills, employment and social cohesion, with close external partnerships across the voluntary sector, post-16 education and independent training providers.

The team supports delivery of the council's vision of a healthy, fair and inclusive city where everyone thrives, aligning with the Council Plan goals.

Skills and Employment covers adult education, Skills Bootcamps, post-16 education, youth employment, supported employment services, skills partnerships and the West Sussex & Brighton and Hove Careers Hub. Work focuses on tackling unemployment, digital exclusion, ESOL provision and sector-specific skills gaps through delivery and procurement of adult learning. Key priorities include:

- Reducing barriers to participation and increasing employment rates
- Meeting employer skills needs to support business growth and resident earning potential
- Coordinating a collaborative citywide response to skills challenges
- Implementing national policy locally, securing funding and supporting Skills England priorities
- Engaging employers to promote inclusive recruitment

Brighton & Hove City Council delivers a range of initiatives that could inform wider practice. Integrating Adult Learning into Jubilee Library, a recognised Library of Sanctuary, has created an inclusive space for learning, supported by outreach such as commissioned films promoting ESOL provision, community participation, and employment services. Public Health's recent Health Counts survey, the largest of its kind in the city, provides valuable data on inequalities to shape targeted interventions. Projects such as Step by Step offer tailored English, maths and digital skills support for residents in supported housing, while an ESOL common assessment framework streamlines learner referrals across providers. The award-winning Youth Employment Hub, delivered with the DWP, offers a safe and supportive environment for unemployed young people, and from autumn 2025 the Connect to Work programme will provide sustained employment support for 1,500 residents over the next five years.

3.3.2 East Sussex County Council

East Sussex County Council's Employment and Skills Team sits within the Education and Economy directorates and works collectively across the county council through the Corporate Employment and Skills board (HR, procurement, property, Adult Social Care &

Health) delivering the council's core priorities to drive sustainable economic growth, maximise resources through obtaining external funds and helping people help themselves. The aim of the team is to ensure that local people have access to well-paid, high-quality employment; and that employers are able to address critical skills gaps in order that their businesses are able to grow.

The team facilitates the Skills and Employment East Sussex (SEES) Board established in 2015, a multi-agency partnership including FE, HE, ICB, DWP, HMPS, independent training providers, VCSE organisations, employers, District and Borough councils and the National Careers Service.

SEES works to six shared priorities, with business led Sector Task Groups developing new initiatives, curricula and careers campaigns. Three specialist groups - Apprenticeships East Sussex, ESTAR Employability Forum, Adult Learning Network - focus on apprenticeships and technical education, employment support and adult provision.

The Employment and Skills Team delivers work experience, NEET prevention, a Careers Hub, adult learning (Skills Bootcamps, ASF), Apprenticeship Levy transfer and employment support programmes, managing large-scale projects like Connect to Work through commissioning of local VCSE place-based delivery and small sector specific projects via task groups. The Team works closely with colleagues to address priorities identified by the Supported Employment Forum and deliver on Internships Work funding.

The County Council commissions the East Sussex *Youth Employability Service* (YES) to provide personalised careers guidance and support for young people aged 16-18 who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

East Sussex County Council leverages social value via its commissioning processes, encouraging suppliers to offer vacancies, placements, apprenticeships and other opportunities for local people.

Community Learning is delivered by a countywide library network offering job search help, CV support, and free digital skills coaching from volunteers.

The Employment and Skills Team delivers a range of targeted skills and employment programmes with potential for wider application, pan-Sussex.

- The *Skills and Employment East Sussex* board and task groups provide a robust multi-agency model able to respond quickly and actively to changing employment and skills policy and employer needs.
- The *Transform Service* enables SMEs to access apprenticeships, skills training and workforce development support, including financial incentives, such as ESCC's apprenticeship levy transfer to fund apprenticeship training.

- Initiatives such as *Moving on Up* and *Level Up* provide personalised guidance, training, and employer-led experiences for unemployed residents, including for adults who are low-income, housing-insecure, or NEET young people aged 16–24, helping to improve confidence, employability and access to sustainable work.
- The *Homeless Prevention Employment Service* works with those at risk of homelessness via local housing teams to improve financial stability.
- *Support into Work* offers bespoke employment support for refugees and migrants, from CV preparation to qualification translation.
- The *Careers Hub* strengthens links between education and employers, coordinating initiatives like careers fairs, Open Doors, and Industry Champions.
- *Steps to Success* is a NEET prevention programme providing 1:1 careers coaching and work experience for young people in years 10 and 11 who are at risk of becoming NEET, with a focus on those facing multiple barriers to progression.
- Resources such as the *Careers East Sussex* website offers information and signposting about skills and jobs for residents and businesses, and a common application system for year 11s applying for post-16 courses.

3.3.3 West Sussex County Council

West Sussex County Council has a diverse skills offer embedded across council teams and services. The Economy Team leads on skills initiatives and supports the West Sussex Economic Growth Board, which oversees the West Sussex Economic Growth Strategy (2025–2035) aiming to ensure a dynamic, skilled workforce. This includes developing training for growth sectors and helping residents access employment.

The council delivers *Connect to Work* and the *Internal Skills Reset* – a cross-council strategy aligning skills development to foster a demand-led system supporting inclusive economic growth. Close partnership with District and Borough Councils includes joint engagement and funding, notably for the *West Sussex Careers Hub*. UKSPF-funded programmes support young people and older adults into employment.

The *Adult Learning Team* delivers a broad service via a devolved adult skills budget, including ESOL, ‘Routes into’ courses for priority sectors and a wide Skills Bootcamps offer co-designed with business and education to meet local skills gaps. The Library Service runs a countywide network offering job search and CV support, plus digital skills training via Library Digital Volunteers.

The *Learning and Development Team* promotes career tasters and apprenticeships, including levy transfer to SMEs and partners with Jobcentre Plus to boost council workforce diversity. Employment support is delivered through *Work Aid* and *Workability* supported employment,

the *Your Space* youth hub, Careers Service for NEET youth, care leaver support and refugee employment services. Supported employment will expand with *Connect to Work*.

The council's social value offer creates opportunities for the Careers Hub, including work experience and school engagement, with plans to grow further.

West Sussex County Council delivers approaches that could be scaled across Sussex.

- *The Internal Skills Reset* strategy promotes cross-council collaboration to develop a demand-led, inclusive skills system
- The Adult Learning Team's co-designed *Skills Bootcamps*, '*Routes into*' programmes and *Adult Skills Fund* provision address local skills gaps and widen access to work.
- *Community Learning*, including ESOL and sector-specific training, is supported by a countywide library network offering job search help, CV support, and free digital skills coaching from volunteers.
- *Apprenticeship levy transfers to SMEs* and targeted recruitment initiatives with Jobcentre Plus help increase workforce diversity, while supported employment programmes
- *The Connect to Work service* provides comprehensive support for residents facing barriers to work.
- Embedding *social value* in commissioning creates tangible Careers Hub opportunities, linking procurement to community benefits and employer engagement.

3.3.4 District and Borough Councils

The District and Borough Councils engage with skills and employment in different ways.

Where Districts and Boroughs are more actively involved in skills and employment work this is often linked to planning and development, leveraging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and social value to support local job creation and learning opportunities or to community hubs and partnerships.

In East Sussex, the Districts and Boroughs allocated a share of their UKSPF funding to ESCC to use for county-wide employment support initiatives; they engage in collaborative skills and employment activity through Skills and Employment East Sussex. In East Sussex, the District and Boroughs have allocated a portion of their UKSPF to enable ESCC's Employment and Skills team to commission the *Moving on Up* and *Level Up* programmes, providing personalised guidance, training, and employer-led experiences for those furthest from the labour market – adults who are low-income, in insecure housing, or are NEET young people

aged 16–24. The programmes have provided an importance stepping stone to employment by helping to improve confidence, employability and access to sustainable work.

The Districts and Boroughs have used UKSPF funding to deliver a range of commissioned and in-house careers and employment programmes. In West Sussex, this has included funding the WSCC Careers Service to deliver NEET support, in-house delivery of employment programmes for adults with barriers to employment (e.g. Choose Work in Chichester, Journey to Work in Arun and Employ Crawley) and commissioned specialist provision for older workers in Horsham. They are also joint funders of the West Sussex Careers Hub. In West Sussex, the District and Borough authorities will be instrumental to the delivery of local, place-based, generalist Supported Employment for Connect to Work.

3.4 National Careers Service (NCS)

The National Careers Service (NCS) offer information, advice and guidance appointments to individuals as well as sector focused group sessions. In Sussex, CXK holds the main contract, offering services in East Sussex and, and through a sub-contract with the Education and Development Trust, in Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. The NCS will be merged with Jobcentre Plus to create a *Jobcentres and Careers Service*, with DWP pilots underway in England to inform future planning.

3.5 Post-16 education and training providers

Post-16 education in Sussex is delivered through a rich network of FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, ITPs and HEIs, offering academic, technical and vocational pathways such as higher level apprenticeships to support progression into employment and further study with the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, offering adults the opportunity to access this higher level provision as careers changers or for the first time. These organisations collaborate through groups like FE Sussex, Sussex Council of Training Providers (SCTP), the Sussex Learning Network (SLN) and SES Sector task groups to drive and shape employment and skills strategy and respond to employer need.

FE institutions deliver technical education including apprenticeships and T-Levels, adult education, Skills Bootcamps, NEET and employability programmes, supported internships and bespoke courses for adults tailored to support employment pathways and address local skills gaps.

The new Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology (IoT) brings together FE and HEI providers with employers to deliver high-quality technical education in priority sectors such as digital, engineering and sustainable technologies, helping to address local skills gaps and drive economic growth across the region.

ITPs play a key role in the skills system, delivering specialist employability and skills programmes that help people enter work, reach their potential, and contribute to the local economy. They deliver a wide range of government-funded schemes, for example, Restart, Shared Prosperity Fund, Skills Bootcamps, NEET and Pre-employment programmes, Adult Education, Study programmes, Apprenticeships, Supported Internships and the National Careers Service. ITPs also design bespoke vocational provision to address locally identified skills needs.

3.6 Public Health (within the local authorities)

Public Health directorates in all three authorities play a part in commissioning programmes relating to employment.

East Sussex County Council Public Health commissions employability and skills initiatives with a focus on underrepresented groups. The *ESTAR employability* programme provides tailored support for vulnerable and homeless adults, with Employability Brokers helping residents at risk of homelessness, into work. *Changing Futures* expands trauma-informed training across housing, health and care and the *Wellbeing at Work* accreditation scheme helps employers create supportive, healthy and productive workplaces. *Aspirations* inspires Hastings primary school pupils to explore careers in health and care, engaging peers, parents and teachers through interactive sessions with local professionals.

West Sussex County Council Public Health commissions schemes and promotes employment within other services. Commissioned community drug and alcohol treatment services delivered by *Change Grow Live (CGL)* offer *aftercare services* which includes supporting employment, training and education. *Individual Placement and Support (IPS)* employment support is also commissioned as part of CGL service. This is a 'work first' intervention designed to support people into jobs that they want to do regardless of their stage on their recovery journey. In addition, Turning Tides is commissioned to deliver *accommodation-based support for people on their recovery journey* from high-risk substance use with clients supported to gain employment whilst within this service. West Sussex County Council Public Health contributes to the commissioning of the *Changing Futures* Programme which expands trauma-informed training across housing, health and care.

Commissioned services such as Family Nurse Partnership and Citizens Advice may also support in their interactions with individuals to get to a better place in their lives and be able to work. West Sussex County Council seeks to promote social value within its commissioned services, for instance through encouraging employment of staff who live in the county and an apprenticeship offer in some cases. **Wellbeing programmes** provide support to SME workplaces offering advice and support to keep people of working age well. The **Making**

Every Contact Count programme supports local workplaces with training to encourage behaviour change. An **inclusive approach to recruitment** has been fully embraced in West Sussex including the development of Public Health Apprenticeships as a career entry point, as well as providing information, advice and guidance for careers in Public Health for local people.

Brighton and Hove City Council Public Health commission Individual Placement and Support (IPS). IPS is recovery-oriented, focusing on competitive employment as a key step toward independence, improved wellbeing, and long-term social inclusion. IPS helps people with health conditions, such as alcohol or drug dependence, enter and sustain paid employment, delivered locally by *Change Grow Live (CGL)*. IPS prioritises rapid job search over lengthy training, matching individuals with roles aligned to their interests and strengths. Specialist employment advisors work closely with treatment teams to integrate support at all stages of the employment journey. A personalised coaching service *EVOLVE* is also commissioned from *YMCA Brighton* for people in drug and alcohol treatment or residential rehab, often in partnership with IPS. The up to 12-week programme offers one to one support to overcome barriers and move toward recovery, independence, and to progress into work, learning, or volunteering. Public Health support the health and wellbeing for all through a workplace wellbeing offer for city employers, Brighton and Hove city council teams and schools.

Across Sussex Public Health invests in system-wide workforce development, providing a vibrant learning environment through Foundation Year 2 doctor placements, public health registrars, apprenticeships and technical training, and other staff development opportunities.

3.7 The Integrated Care Board (ICB)

The local ICB, serves as the statutory body responsible for planning and funding of local NHS services to address hospital and community health needs. Informed by NHS transformation, reforms to ICBs were announced in March 2025 which strengthen their role in the employment and skills arena by making them more central to work, health and skills integration, working collaboratively with local authorities and mayoral combined authorities.

Currently, NHS Sussex commissions employment related provision supporting those who are economically inactive or at risk of losing employment due to their mental or physical health. These include:

- *Individual Placement and Support in Employment (IPSE)*: Delivered by Southdown (VCSE) across Sussex, this programme helps people with severe mental health conditions secure and maintain paid employment through personalised, one-to-one support integrated with local mental health services. Partners include NHS Sussex, local authorities, employers and employment specialists.

- *Local Workwell Pilots*: Funded by small grants of £12,000 will pilot place-based initiatives in Crawley, Brighton and Hastings for individuals with specific health needs, such as musculoskeletal or mental health conditions.
- *Integrated Community Teams (ICTs)* are being established in all local areas in Sussex, bringing together health, social care, and community services to make services easier to access, better coordinated, more proactive and more tailored to community needs. Over time, it is anticipated that services like community nursing, mental health, primary care, social work, voluntary support and housing will be brought into ICTs to provide consistent and comprehensive care locally. ICTs have the potential to identify and refer people into appropriate employment support provision at a local level and to offer a 'no wrong door' approach for referrals from employment support programmes for wider health and wellbeing support.

The ICB works with the Primary Care Network, Social Prescribers, Allied Professionals (Occupational and Physio Therapists), GPs and front line (reception staff) to issue 'Fit Notes' and to hold Fit Note conversations with patients, providing an opportunity to refer those at risk of becoming unemployed into employment support programmes.

The new WorkWell Discovery Report outlines steps that the NHS can take to support the skills and employment agenda in Sussex through integrated partnership approaches.

3.8 The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCSE)

Sussex boasts a plethora of VCSE organisations who are key to place-based delivery of employment support. Most are strongly embedded into local communities and are trusted by and able to access the priority groups identified in The Plan. Many have specialist knowledge about key cohorts (e.g. neurodivergence, NEET, SEND, homeless, long-term unemployed) and highly trained staff (e.g. Employment Specialists, Careers and Wellbeing Advisers).

They deliver a range of programmes from Supported Internships, Connect to Work, employment support, 'first steps' and confidence building schemes for those who are furthest from the workplace and not yet able to access mainstream offers, wrap-around wellbeing and employment/benefit related advisory services, health and housing support services.

The VCSE is key to the effective implementation of the Get Sussex Working Plan, and going forward, it is important to provide opportunities for small and grass roots organisations to access funding to sustain this vital work at the heart of their communities.

3.9 Employers

Employers in Sussex play an active part in job creation, investing in the training and development of their workforces as well as in inclusive employment. Many offer apprenticeships and technical training and inform the school and college curriculum. Many play a part in raising aspirations through involvement with Careers Hubs and Jobcentres.

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4. Which priority groups will the Get Sussex Working Plan support?

Analysis of the data (Appendix 1) and stakeholder feedback (Appendix 3) has identified a need to focus on key priority groups. Tailoring interventions to meet the needs of these groups will reduce labour market inequalities, change lives and contribute to reaching 80% employment across all areas of Sussex.

Individuals in these priority groups often experience multiple and complex barriers to employment, such as homelessness, time in care, criminal records, disabilities, neurodiversity, health issues, caregiving duties, family unemployment, poverty, low qualifications and poor educational experience. Various infrastructure and support organisations are needed to provide tailored support for individuals in their communities, including local employment support organisations, local authorities, education and training providers, health services and VSCE organisations.

Within the wider bracket of economically inactive people in Sussex, the more specific priority groups identified are:

4.1 Unemployed adults with multiple complex needs:

“Flexible work would help, but no one is offering it in jobs I can do.” - Single parent

“I needed more than a job offer. I needed someone who understood what I’d been through.”
Participant with lived experience

“Until their wider barriers to employment are addressed... a successful progression into work is quite challenging... those support issues come first.” - SCTP representative

The economically inactive and unemployed population in Sussex is diverse and often faces multiple, overlapping barriers to work, including long-term physical and mental health conditions, addiction recovery and extended absences from the workforce. Many individuals become discouraged after repeated unsuccessful job searches, may disengage from mainstream services or find traditional jobcentre programmes impersonal or hard to access.

Long-term worklessness is often linked to health issues, low qualifications and a shortage of flexible, secure jobs. Returning to work is hindered by a lack of accessible training, workplace adjustments and employer caution in the current economic climate.

Service provision is often fragmented, with individuals ‘bouncing’ between multiple agencies without coordinated support or clear plans, especially those with limited digital access or support networks. Geographic challenges further restrict access: rural areas face unreliable public transport, while coastal communities contend with high travel costs, poor infrastructure and limited affordable options.

Government data from 2023 shows that while benefit sanctions may shorten Universal Credit claims, they fail to improve long-term employment or pay. Many sanctioned claimants continue to struggle after exiting benefits, highlighting the urgent need for approaches that go beyond short-term fixes. Therefore, we must co-design person-centred employment pathways with local partners, focusing on building skills, confidence and durable employment opportunities. These pathways must be rooted in the lived experiences of economically inactive and unemployed individuals and designed with a deep understanding of the specific obstacles they face in their towns, villages and communities.

To deliver genuine impact and lasting change, Sussex needs place-based employment initiatives that respond directly to the realities faced by local communities. It is not enough to apply generic solutions, effective support must be tailored to the distinct challenges brought by geography, transport, infrastructure and digital access in rural and coastal areas. Only by recognising and actively responding to these limitations and barriers can we build employment pathways that are truly inclusive and sustainable.

Effective engagement relies on approaches that prioritise active listening, peer-led outreach, mentoring, lived experience panels, one-to-one support and community-based interventions. These methods build trust, foster social connections and gradually increase self-confidence, improving prospects for returning to work and contributing to the local economy.

Local authorities, education, health service providers, jobcentres and community organisations will need to collaborate to create coordinated, place-based solutions that break down systemic barriers, restore hope and offer everyone in Sussex a fair chance to thrive in meaningful and secure work. Through collective action, informed by local insight and partnership, employment support can reach those who need it most and pave the way for a more inclusive future across Sussex.

4.2 Young people

If you're anxious, broke and stuck at home, getting a job feels like climbing a mountain." - Young person

Young people face significant barriers when entering the workforce, often due to limited qualifications, skills, experience and restricted access to early career opportunities. For those with disrupted backgrounds including experiences in care, seeking asylum, mental health challenges, substance misuse, youth offending, poverty, young carers, interrupted education, alternative provision, SEND, or low educational attainment the journey toward employment can be especially difficult. Many have not received the targeted support necessary to prepare them for work.

Young people who are NEET express experiencing isolation, low confidence and a combination of complex needs that require prolonged and flexible support. They may lack clear information about career paths and have minimal access to professional adult role models. The transition from education to employment is frequently disjointed, with inconsistent careers advice and limited awareness of the labour market, emphasising the need for local work experience and personalised guidance. Young people with SEND face a 'cliff edge' with the sudden loss of support and services as they transition from childhood to adulthood, leaving them unsupported and struggling to navigate new systems for education, health, and social care.

At present, there is insufficient post-16 provision at Entry Level, Levels 1 and 2 for NEET young people, those with SEND, or needing re-engagement and employability support. This gap in foundational education limits further progression in both education and employment, adversely affecting long-term career prospects, earning potential and increasing the risk of economic and social exclusion. Expanding targeted programmes that both support young people before they become NEET as well as to re-engage young people when they have fallen out of education, employment or training will be vital to help build resilience and empower young people to progress and achieve personal and financial independence. However, additional funding is required to provide a suitable range of services at appropriate levels and locations, acknowledging that certain young people face geographical challenges to accessing provision.

The rising number of NEET young people, constrained access to post-16 education and training in parts of Sussex and persistently low attainment rates highlight deep-seated challenges in ensuring equitable educational outcomes and life chances. With many young people concentrated in coastal areas where work is often seasonal and low-paid, or in rural locations where access to transport is limited, holistic place-based interventions are essential for tackling the complex issues they face and supporting meaningful, long-term engagement in employment.

To effectively support young people, especially those who are NEET, have SEND, or come from backgrounds marked by disadvantage, the approach to employment pathways must be more comprehensive and inclusive. This begins with offering local, personalised careers advice, job coaching, mentoring, preparation for adulthood, employability provision,

volunteering, work experience opportunities, alongside sector-specific qualifications and bespoke training, to provide the practical exposure needed to enable progression into employment. This will require investment to increase access to foundational post-16 education at Entry Level, Levels 1 and 2 and the targeted expansion of programmes such as supported internships, traineeships, foundation apprenticeships and tailored employability initiatives.

These pathways are crucial for ensuring that all young people can engage with learning and progress in both education and employment and to help young people develop essential skills, build confidence and acquire the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours required for successful careers.

Collaboration across education, health, employment services, charities and local authorities is vital to coordinate interventions and respond effectively to the complex, multifaceted needs of young people. Enhancing employer engagement is a key part of this effort, championing inclusive hiring practices, reducing barriers to entry and creating flexible entry routes into the workforce. Sustained mentoring from professional adult role models, as well as the guidance and aspiration-building offered by community mentors, help foster long-term personal and financial independence.

By investing in these place-based interventions, particularly within coastal and rural communities where access is most limited, we can break down persistent cycles of disadvantage and ensure that every young person is equipped to build a meaningful future and contribute to a resilient, diverse workforce.

4.3 Residents aged 50 and over

“There is an emotional toll to job searching, receiving lots of rejections affects your motivation and self-esteem” - Older job seeker

“We need coordinated efforts... not just individual projects, but collaboration among councils, services, charities and employers.” – Older job seeker

Sussex has a growing ageing population, including many individuals over 50 who retire early or relocate to the area in retirement. While many are economically inactive, they bring a wealth of skills, experience and insight. Meaningful employment, volunteering and mentoring draw on their skills and offer valuable opportunities to this cohort not only to support the development of younger workers and local community initiatives, but also to enhance older residents’ own wellbeing, confidence and sense of purpose.

Whilst being unemployed is a challenge regardless of age, analysis shows that over 50s face unique barriers to re-entering or staying in the workforce, including health conditions, entrenched age-related bias in recruitment and progression, gaps in digital skills and a lack of flexible employment options. Furthermore, the upward shift in retirement age has widened the vulnerability window for older individuals who are unable to remain in work due to poor health, care responsibilities, or job market barriers. Without adequate support, this cohort faces a heightened risk of poverty, with long-term implications for public health, social care demand, and economic inclusion. These obstacles can undermine confidence, threaten financial stability and increase the risk of social isolation, ultimately reducing participation in the workforce and impacting wellbeing.

Older employees can contribute significantly with valuable knowledge and skills that can enhance team performance and drive innovation. Employers can support this demographic by fostering inclusive workplaces, delivering digital skills training, offering flexible working arrangements and proactively tackling age bias. Furthermore, involving older workers as mentors can accelerate the professional development of younger staff, promote confidence, foster intergenerational learning and build stronger, more resilient organisations.

To address the challenges faced by residents aged 50 and over, it is essential to change the narrative around older workers by highlighting their skills and value to employers. Strategies include broadening recruitment from this cohort by promoting retraining opportunities via lifelong learning entitlements and programmes such as Skills Bootcamps and those funded by the Adult Skills Fund to enable career changes or upskilling. Additionally, engaging early retirees and asset-rich older adults in activities that foster aspiration, mentorship and knowledge sharing can extend their valuable contribution to the community.

The Plan calls for targeted interventions including bespoke, sector-specific training, expanded hybrid and flexible work models and efforts to address workplace bias through active employer engagement. Collaboration among councils, services, charities and employers is key to delivering these solutions effectively and maximising the contribution of older adults. In parallel, harnessing the skills of older adults who choose to leave work early by involving them as mentors or community volunteers offers a meaningful way to support younger generations and strengthen workforce resilience through intergenerational learning.

4.4 Disabled and neurodivergent individuals

“They say they’re inclusive, but when it comes to reasonable adjustments, they either don’t understand or don’t want to.” – Adult job seeker

Disabled and neurodivergent people in Sussex continue to face significant barriers when entering or re-engaging in the workforce, with those who have learning disabilities particularly underrepresented. Key challenges include non-inclusive recruitment processes, limited workplace awareness of neurodiversity and poor access to reasonable adjustments. Stakeholders have observed that the growing reliance on AI and automated recruitment systems is especially detrimental to this group, as screening tools often exclude their applications early in the selection process.

As a result, too many are excluded from meaningful employment which has an impact not only on their financial security, but also on their confidence, social connections and overall wellbeing.

Yet the case for inclusion is strong. When organisations create accessible career pathways and foster genuinely inclusive cultures, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. Businesses gain from diverse perspectives, enhanced problem-solving and greater innovation. Supporting disabled and neurodivergent workers through targeted outreach, flexible roles and proactive adjustments helps unlock potential, build stronger teams and create more resilient, connected communities.

Within this picture, people with learning disabilities are especially underrepresented in the labour market.

Tackling the persistent inequality in access to work for people with disabilities or neurodiversity will require tailored pathways into employment and deeper collaboration between education providers, health services and local authorities, including Integrated Health Teams. Continued NHS reform is also vital, particularly to improve access to mental health care, preventative services and timely treatment. Employers, meanwhile, need support to adopt inclusive hiring practices, embed reasonable adjustments and better understand the value of neurodiversity and difference in their workforce.

Our ambition is that everyone who wants to work should be able to work. By removing both structural and attitudinal barriers and investing in inclusive recruitment practices and workplace cultures, we can work towards making this goal a reality and ensure that all Sussex residents, regardless of their circumstances, have the chance to contribute, thrive and help shape a stronger, fairer economy.

4.5 Global majority communities, migrants and refugees

“Refugees and ESOL learners often have high-level qualifications in [their] home country, but often re-do lower-level training to secure work. If better supported, there’s much potential here.” – Community Learning provider

“Community hubs... that combine ESOL, employment and wellbeing support have delivered strong results.” – Local Authority representative

Global majority communities, migrants and refugees in Sussex often face significant barriers to employment, even when they hold advanced qualifications and extensive professional experience from their countries of origin. Limited English proficiency, unfamiliarity with UK recruitment practices and non-recognition of overseas qualifications frequently result in underemployment or unemployment. Visa restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles can further complicate job searches and deter employers from offering opportunities.

Across Sussex, around 136,000 residents (18.1%) identify as being from a global majority background. Diversity is highest in Brighton & Hove, where over 26% of residents are from global majority groups and in Crawley, where the figure is 38.2%. The largest ethnic group is ‘White Other’ (45.7%), which includes sizeable Polish, Irish and other European communities. Language remains a key barrier: in 2021, 14,200 residents reported speaking little or no English, with the highest concentration in Crawley (2,500 people).

Since 2021, Sussex has welcomed over 8,800 refugees and asylum seekers, including 5,400 Ukrainians, 1,800 Afghans and 1,500 from other countries. Many arrive with complex needs such as trauma, disrupted education and unrecognised qualifications, which can further limit access to meaningful employment.

Brighton & Hove and Crawley are particularly diverse. In Brighton & Hove, 20% of residents were born outside the UK and between 2011 and 2021 the proportion of residents from global ethnic majority backgrounds increased by 35%, reaching 26.2% of the population. In Crawley, 38.2% of residents are from global majority groups. While growing ethnic diversity offers opportunities to diversify the workforce, it also highlights the urgent need for sufficient English language provision and employment and skills services that are responsive to newcomers navigating the UK labour market for the first time.

To address these challenges, The Plan considers expanded ESOL provision, culturally informed employment and skills services and stronger employer support for inclusive recruitment. By improving access to training, work experience and fair hiring processes, Sussex can better unlock the skills, experience and perspectives these communities bring, helping to tackle labour shortages while building a more inclusive and dynamic workforce.

4.6 Parents and unpaid carers

“Flexible work would help, but no one is offering it in jobs I can do.” - Single parent

“Lack of childcare places [is] challenging - government provides funding but there are not enough early years staff to provide places.” - Employment support provider

“I’d love to work part-time, but there’s no flexibility for carers.” Over-50 jobseeker and unpaid carer

“When you’re out of the workforce for a few years, your confidence just disappears.” — Former care worker now unemployed

“Until their wider barriers to employment are addressed... a successful progression into work is quite challenging... those support issues come first.” - SCTP representative

Caring responsibilities are an important factor in economic inactivity in Sussex, including caring for children or other individuals. These responsibilities commonly affect women and may result in individuals leaving the labour market when childcare options are unaffordable or when caring duties require significant time. Parents, lone parents and unpaid carers often take career breaks and face limited opportunities for progression and financial challenges. High childcare costs, limited flexible working options and the emotional toll of juggling multiple roles can affect wellbeing and confidence, making returning to the workforce more difficult.

While some employers offer hybrid or flexible arrangements, access remains uneven across sectors. Expanding flexible hours, remote work, job-share schemes and targeted support, such as peer networks and tailored job matching, can help carers rebuild skills, confidence and access meaningful employment. These steps will enable employers and communities to benefit from the resilience, adaptability and valuable life experience carers bring. Improved alignment between employment and care systems, including more flexible jobs, sufficient local childcare and respite services, alongside tailored employment support for parents and carers can create the conditions for people to combine work with caring responsibilities.

4.7 Adults with low skills levels and low incomes

“The lack of clear, trusted advice about how earnings affect benefits leads people to avoid job offers or limit hours with many afraid to connect with agencies, leaving people unconnected from employability options” - Voluntary sector representative

Adults with low skills, who earn low incomes and who are often in insecure employment face persistent barriers to progression that may be compounded by perceived benefit-related disincentives. The precariousness of their work means they are less likely to access training or development opportunities, while apprehension regarding losing benefits and limited knowledge of available options can discourage individuals from upskilling or seeking better-paid roles. Many in this group may experience digital exclusion, prohibiting access to learning, careers information and the capacity to apply for work.

Low qualification levels can often confine people to low wage sectors such as care, hospitality and retail, with limited progression opportunities and increasing reliance on Universal Credit to supplement earnings. Poor literacy, oracy and numeracy skills also impede the successful uptake of learning and work. The mainstream use of AI tools to support job applications also puts this group at a disadvantage due to a lack of digital and AI language model skills.

To address these challenges, The Plan must prioritise tailored interventions such as flexible, locally accessible training linked directly to career advancement, clearer and accessible information on in-work benefits and personalised guidance to support transitions between benefits and employment. Improving the availability and consistency of support with Better Off Calculations (BOC) through training community organisations and stakeholders can help to change perceptions. Strengthening links between employers, training providers and support agencies will help individuals build skills and confidence, enabling sustainable progression out of low-wage, insecure work. The Plan will need to reduce skills gaps through accessible, sector and progression focused adult skills provision.

By fostering strong partnerships across education and community providers, adult skills programmes can be aligned with employer needs, creating more opportunities for adults to upskill and reskill, increasing both employment prospects and earning potential. Targeted, bespoke interventions will need to focus on areas with identified skills gaps and specific learning needs.

5. Identifying the key challenges and opportunities for Sussex

As well as identifying who the Get Sussex Working Plan needs to support, the data mapping and stakeholder feedback enabled the Partnership Group to identify the core challenges to employment faced by the seven priority groups for Sussex:

- Unemployed adults including those with health conditions and disabilities
- Young people
- Residents aged 50 and over
- Adults with learning disabilities and neurodivergence
- Global majority communities, migrants and refugees
- Parents and unpaid carers
- Adults with low skills levels and low incomes

The Implementation Plan addresses the following challenges in order to support Sussex residents towards sustained employment in line with the national 80% employment target.

5.1 Unequal economic activity, universal credit claimants and unemployment across Sussex

What the data says:

Economic inactivity, defined as people aged 16-64 who are not employed and have not actively sought work in the previous four weeks, affects approximately 147,500 people (excluding students) in Sussex, representing 14.9% of the working-age population, higher than the South East average of 13.7%. East Sussex experiences particularly high levels at 18.9%, with coastal wards including Adur District (25.8%), Worthing Borough (18.1%), Hastings and Bexhill in Rother (31.8%) showing especially elevated rates.

The main causes of economic inactivity include long-term health conditions and disabilities (accounting for 25.8% of cases), caring responsibilities (looking after a family, relative or home) predominantly among women and early retirement which represents 18% of economically inactive working-age residents in East Sussex, 20% in West Sussex and 10% in Brighton & Hove.

200,000 economically inactive residents (including students) report that they want to work. This represents a higher proportion than in the South East 18.7% and England 20.5%. 37.5% of economically inactive residents in Brighton & Hove want work compared to 14.9% in East Sussex and 21.2 % in West Sussex.

Universal Credit claimant rates align with these trends. In 2024, Sussex had an average claimant rate of 2%, slightly above the South East's 1.9%. Coastal areas like Hastings (3.3%),

Adur (3%), Brighton & Hove (2.9%), Eastbourne (2.6%), alongside Crawley (2.8%) have higher rates. Hastings particularly has a high 16–24 claimant rate of 7.2%, while Brighton & Hove's highest claimant groups are aged 25–49 and 50–64.

These statistics point to a skills mismatch between local populations and jobs, limited employability support and the pressures of high living and housing costs, amongst other issues. Unemployment in Sussex rose by 11.7% between April 2024 and April 2025, exceeding the 10.3% national rise. West Sussex increased most sharply (14.7%), followed by Brighton & Hove (12.1%). Employment rates vary: Sussex overall is at 77.6%, West Sussex highest at 81.4%, Brighton & Hove at 76.6% and East Sussex lowest at 72.1%. Areas such as Rother (64.7%), Hastings (67.3%) and Adur (68.1%) fall well below South East and England averages. Employment for adults with learning disabilities also varies, with West Sussex at 2.8% , compared to , East Sussex at 5.7% and Brighton & Hove at 8.6%, but some way off the highest national figure of 21.1%.

What stakeholders say:

Stakeholders emphasise that unemployed and economically inactive residents face complex, intersecting barriers including long-term physical and mental health issues, low confidence, caring responsibilities, housing instability, low or no qualifications and digital exclusion. These challenges are amplified for individuals with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), insecure immigration status and those living in deprived rural or coastal areas. Unemployment severely affects financial resilience and self-worth.

“Many clients have complex situations, multiple conditions, health and mental health issues, language barriers, it is hard for people to consider employment on top of managing what is a complex life”. Local authority representative.

“Flexible work would help, but no one is offering it in jobs I can do.” — Single parent

“A lot of the time you need lots of experience, which young people won't have.” — NEET young person

“My main challenges have been my addiction and recovery which has affected my mental health. However, with counselling, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, service and involvement, medical support, working a daily programme, completing courses and support of my IPS worker, I have been able to identify my full potential.” - Service user with multiple needs

Barriers in employment practices include rigid qualification requirements, which are sometimes in excess of that required for the role, inaccessible recruitment processes and a lack of flexible working, alongside employer bias and a lack of awareness and

misconceptions of disabilities and neurodivergence. Stakeholders report that many employment support services fail to accommodate mental health challenges and the impact of housing instability, highlighting the need for integrated, person-centred, trauma-informed approaches. They all requested accessible, consistent careers advice and personalised support that builds on each individual's starting point, including early interventions and work experience for those not yet ready for employment.

Services often lack flexibility for hidden or changing needs:

"If someone has poor mental health and unstable housing, they're not going to prioritise work, they need support first." Support Practitioner, VCSE

"We need to start with the basics – housing, transport, food. Then people can think about work." VCSE representative

"Until those wider barriers to employment are addressed... a successful progression into work is quite challenging... those support issues come first." ITP representative

Due to complexity in the benefits system claimants can make incorrect assumptions about the impact of work on benefits and the fear of losing them can discourage upskilling, seeking work or better-paid roles. People in supported accommodation can sometimes be discouraged from working due to a benefits cliff edge. The precariousness of their situation often means they are less likely to access training or development opportunities.

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

Addressing this challenge and levelling out employment across Sussex requires a nuanced, coordinated approach across agencies. Opportunities include:

- The expansion in childcare provision which should help working parents.
- Multi-agency partnerships (e.g. Integrated Care Teams, housing services, social services and employment support) can tackle the varied causes of unemployment in areas with the greatest needs.
- Holistic national employment programmes like Connect to Work and Workwell target high-need geographies, focus support on those with health-related barriers like musculoskeletal and mental health conditions and help employers improve their awareness of inclusive employment practice.
- A future local Youth Guarantee plan could offer young people advice, employability skills, workplace exposure and experience, as well as helping them to address barriers to employment.

- Social Value requirements in procurement could be leveraged to stimulate support for areas with high claimant and unemployed populations.
- Enhanced careers provision and employer engagement in schools, colleges and communities, especially in deprived areas
- Engaging economically inactive older adults as mentors, sharing skills and raising aspirations among unemployed residents.
- Tailored programmes such as Bootcamps can offer specific qualifications in combination with employment support, providing an opportunity for careers changers and older adults to progress their careers.
- Recent Universal Credit reforms may improve financial incentives for part-time work and may boost labour market participation.
- Launch of the new national jobs and careers service (DWP) may make it more possible to offer personalised guidance on benefit-to-work transitions but it will be important that employers, training providers and support agencies are aware of benefits and how to support individuals to progress from low-wage, insecure work.

5.2 Availability of jobs in Sussex

What the data says:

Job availability varies significantly across Sussex. Only Crawley (1.16 jobs per working-age resident) and Chichester (1.08) have more jobs than their working-age population, largely due to concentrations of public sector roles, employment at Gatwick Airport and jobs within Manor Royal Business District. By contrast, East Sussex has just 0.72 jobs per working-age resident. Lower job density, especially in East Sussex and coastal areas of West Sussex, limits residents' ability to work locally and access quality employment. Rural and urban disparities are evident, with rural communities facing additional accessibility barriers.

What stakeholders say:

Seasonal, short-term and part-time jobs dominate coastal areas, contributing to instability and limited progression opportunities. Such roles can suit young workers as entry points to employment but often discourage those with additional needs or health conditions due to lack of security.

"Job market is sparse, especially in coastal areas – not well suited to those with additional needs." Adult user voice participant

"Young people are often drawn to larger cities. More could be done to retain young people in the county, working with FE and HE to promote local opportunities." Local Government officer

“There’s no low-risk recruitment. If it doesn’t work out, we’re the ones carrying the cost.”

Local employer

Stakeholders stress that rural areas face unreliable or expensive public transport, making it harder to reach workplaces, interviews, or training. Weak digital infrastructure and low digital literacy further disadvantage rural jobseekers, hampering job searches, online training and applications. These combined barriers can leave residents, particularly those on low incomes, isolated from the labour market unless transport and digital access are improved.

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- Leverage **Skills Bootcamps** to help residents transition into employment or self-employment.
- Employers harness automation and hybrid working to increase remote work options, reducing transport barriers.
- Use programmes such as **Adult Skills Fund** to upskill residents in AI and new technologies to enable remote or tech-based work.
- **Growth Hubs** support micro-business and SME growth, creating more local jobs.
- Exploit opportunities can from the **Industrial Strategy** in sectors like construction, green energy and retrofitting (insulation, solar, heat pumps).
- Capitalise on national advertising campaigns to support job growth in sectors such as early years provision.
- Use Levers such as the Apprenticeship Levy to incentivise employers to offer opportunities
- Explore opportunities through Anchor Institution Social Value policy and related commitments in commissioned contracts and in Section 106 agreements to lever job opportunities
- Use other incentives to encourage employers to provide opportunities such as training (Bootcamps), HR or OT support around inclusive workforce policy.
- **Growth Plans** can support job creation

5.3 A limited number of large employers

What the data says:

Sussex's business landscape is characterized by a predominance of small and micro-enterprises. In East Sussex, for instance, 86.3% of business units have fewer than 10 employees, and 73.8% have fewer than 5 employees, surpassing the national averages of

84.6% and 71.8%, respectively. This trend is mirrored across the region, with the majority of businesses being small-scale operations.

The public sector remains a significant employer in many areas of Sussex, encompassing local authorities, health services, and education. However, notable exceptions exist with some larger employers across the area, and with a particular concentrations around Gatwick Airport and Crawley including at the Manor Royal Business District.

The overall scarcity of large employers in Sussex limits the availability of higher-skilled roles and career progression opportunities. Many microbusinesses and SMEs lack dedicated Human Resource departments, which can impede their capacity to recruit individuals from priority groups who may require additional support.

What our stakeholders say:

"We want to help but don't have a clue where to start or who to talk to." - Small business owner

"There are so many schemes out there - it's hard to know what's still running or worth our time." - SME manager

"Many employers lack the knowledge and skills to employ the disabled. Even those signed up to the 'Disability Confident scheme' [are] not necessarily employing disabled people. The support to do so, especially for SMEs, could have an impact." Local Authority officer

"I'd offer placements if someone could guide us through it." — Construction SME

"Flexible working helps us attract staff, but we need clearer guidance to make it work for different needs." — Hospitality employee

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- By improving the skills and diversity of the workforce, businesses can grow, leading to more job opportunities
- There are many SMEs and micro businesses that have scope to grow. Growth Hubs can be leveraged to deliver sector-specific support and employer engagement that reflects the unique needs of Sussex's economy and supports the growth of our SMEs.
- Employers don't always know about advances in new technology or artificial intelligence, so are not always aware of the skills that they may need to grow. There is an opportunity for Employer Representative Bodies to support this knowledge.

- Advocate for simplified and consistent messaging around funding streams and recruitment incentives to help SMEs access and sustain inclusive employment practices.
- Developing tailor support and guidance for SMEs to implement inclusive recruitment and employment practices, (e.g. Promoting flexible working arrangements with practical guidance and case studies to help employers meet diverse workforce needs) including dedicated HR toolkits and workshops.
- Support SMEs to offer placements and work experience through hands-on guidance, brokerage services, that connect businesses with local talent pools.
- Build on existing employer engagement initiatives that build stronger partnerships between education providers, training organisations and businesses, fostering collaboration.
- Leverage the employing power of our anchor institutions and larger employers, exploring options for them to offer job opportunities and retain and upskill/make resilient their existing workforce.

5.4 Low resident earnings

What the data says:

Across Sussex, median resident earnings are lower than both the England and South-East averages. The gap is widest in East Sussex, where resident earnings are just 87% of the national average (£37,630). Both East and West Sussex show significant disparities between the north and south of the counties. Much of the local economy is dependent on lower-value sectors, many of which provide insecure, seasonal, or part-time work, limiting long-term financial stability. Disposable incomes is a real challenge across Sussex.

What our stakeholders say:

“Where I live is rural which makes getting to places difficult and can take a long time... bus fees have gone up meaning I have to budget and limit my journeys.” - Young benefits claimant and jobseeker

“We can’t just count job starts; we need to see people staying and growing in those roles.” - Community employment support provider

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- Increase qualification levels to Level 3 and Level 4 through Bootcamps, Higher Level Technical Qualifications, Apprenticeships, T Levels and lifelong learning, helping to stimulate a higher-wage economy.
- The Lifelong Learning entitlement can support adults to access higher level learning.

- Offer good quality careers advice to support people through their employment pathway
- Support people with undertaking Better Off Calculations, so that they can understand how earning can help them with living costs.
- Capitalise on potential economic uplift from the second runway at Gatwick.
- The LSIP to focus on developing higher-skilled roles and career pathways.
- Enable and grow sector clusters identified as locally significant to stimulate job creation and economic growth.
- Harness opportunities from the growth of future and green jobs, new technologies, AI and automation such as use of drone technology in landbased and construction, roles in planning, bio-diversity, cybersecurity and food production.

5.5 Low qualification attainment levels

What the data says:

Level 3 attainment among 19-year-olds in Sussex is below both national and South-East averages. Only **52.6%** in East Sussex and **56.8%** in West Sussex achieve Level 3 qualifications, compared to **58.7%** in the South-East and **57.6%** nationally. Coastal districts like Arun and Crawley have particularly low attainment and Hastings is markedly low at **36.4%**. Brighton & Hove is slightly above regional averages at **59.1%**.

For adults, **34.5%** of working-age residents in East Sussex lack Level 3 qualifications, **31.2%** in West Sussex and **28.4%** in Brighton & Hove. Levels of adults lacking a level 3 qualification are especially high in Hastings (**40.9%**) and Rother (**42.7%**). LSIP data (2023/24) shows that Sussex residents have lower essential skills (17.4%) than the England average (23.6%).

What stakeholders say:

‘To attract larger businesses into Sussex and or to help our existing SMEs to grow, we need a higher skilled workforce. Higher skilled jobs would mean better pay and growth and would encourage people to aspire to more complex roles and to continue in learning to secure higher level qualifications.’ Local Government Officer

“Colleges are trying, but they can’t do it alone. We need real dialogue with employers.” — Training provider

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- Expand the **Careers Hub** to connect young people with clear, informed pathways and to raise aspirations.
- Build on **NEET prevention programmes** to support transition into higher level learning

- Promote technical education by creating more apprenticeships particularly foundation apprenticeships and increasing the provision of **T-Levels** as practical, career-focused alternatives.
- Use **Skills Bootcamps** to quickly upskill residents in priority sectors.
- Target funding through the **Adult Skills Fund (ASF)** to improve access to higher-level learning.

5.6 Gaps in skills and employment support for young people

What the data says:

The annual national NEET comparator scorecard published by the Department for Education in July 2025 recorded the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in each area: in Brighton and Hove 5% are NEET, in East Sussex 4.9% and in West Sussex 2.2%. While West Sussex reports a relatively low NEET rate, 9.3% of young people have an 'unknown' destination (compared to 0.9% in East Sussex and 1.7% in Brighton and Hove), which may conceal a higher number of NEET young people within the county.

The data illustrates how the challenges are compounded for vulnerable young people, those who are looked after/in care or have left care, refugees and asylum seekers, carers, with disclosed substance misuse, mental health issues, youth offenders or have been in alternative provision. 40.6 % in Brighton and Hove of this cohort are NEET, 24.7 % in East Sussex, 35.1 % in West Sussex. And for those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or with special educational needs (SEN), often combined with the above vulnerabilities, the figure is 30.1% (combined) in Brighton and Hove, 21.4% for both East Sussex and West Sussex.

Level 3 attainment among 19-year-olds in Sussex is below both national and South-East averages as detailed above.

Provision at Level 1 and 2 for young people with SEND, NEET status, or requiring re-engagement is limited, restricting foundational skill-building and progression. Without tailored support, this can lead to reduced career opportunities, lower earnings, long-term unemployment and social isolation.

What stakeholders say:

Young people face compounded barriers including lack of personalised guidance, limited work experience opportunities, unclear career pathways and insufficient employer engagement. Those living with poverty, family unemployment, care experience, SEND, health issues, or poor school attendance often face the greatest challenges and may have low aspirations. Stakeholders consistently highlight the need for closer collaboration between education providers, the VCSE sector and health services.

On post-16 guidance:

"Everything stops when college ends. No one checks where you land." Parent of SEND learner.

"You leave school and it's like, now what? No one really prepares you for work." Young jobseeker.

"I just think there needs to be more opportunities, better training and better preparation, because you only really get help if you actively seek it." Young person focus group participant.

On employment:

"Navigating employers' requirements is hardest because they ask for experience no young person can feasibly have." Young person focus group participant.

"We need more employers willing to take a chance and provide real, supportive placements." Youth support worker.

"Not for the lack of trying, but I haven't found work beyond volunteering, that's the best I've been able to get." Young jobseeker.

On aspirations:

"Most training doesn't help unless you have hard qualifications like A-levels or degrees - things I cannot and will never achieve." Young person

"Young people come to us already defeated – they don't think work is for them." Education provider.

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- Develop and deliver a **local Youth Guarantee** offering advice, guidance, employability preparation, workplace exposure and early intervention for NEET prevention and re-engagement.
- Design and formalise transition pathways for key subgroups within the 'Young People' priority group (such as SEND and Care Leavers) into post-16 provision, employment and employment support schemes.
- Expand NEET prevention programmes such as **Steps to Success** to provide personalised careers support and structured work experience for at-risk young people.
- Strengthen the **Careers Hub** to embed labour market insights and prepare young people at key transition points (post-16 and post-18).
- In the absence of funding for NEET provision, maximise the benefits of programmes such as Connect to Work to support young people with aspirations.
- Improve awareness and accessibility of technical and vocational pathways including **Apprenticeships and T-Levels** and support employers to create more entry-level opportunities such as Foundation Apprenticeships and industry placements.
- Work collaboratively with the VCSE sector, positioned to engage young people furthest from the labour market through a community-rooted approach, to provide increased pre-employment opportunities for example volunteering, mentoring and career support.

5.7 Health inequalities

Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England recognises the importance of supporting people with long-term health conditions to remain in or return to work. Poor health is both a cause and consequence of unemployment, and work is generally good for physical and mental health. The NHS plan commits to expanding access to occupational health and employment support, particularly for people with mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions. The NHS Sussex Workwell Discovery report reinforces, calling for greater integration between health and employment services, recommending co-located provision, shared data to identify those at risk of leaving work, and rapid access to vocational rehabilitation.

What the data says:

The leading causes of sickness absence in Sussex are mental health conditions and musculoskeletal disorders, which often overlap. Multiple factors contribute to poor mental health, including environmental stressors, physical health issues and family history. In 2022-23, General Practitioners issued 262,409 Fit for Work notes across Sussex, predominantly for mental and behavioural disorders and musculoskeletal and connective tissue diseases.

The Keep Britain Working review emphasises that the chances of returning to work decline rapidly the longer someone is out of employment, with a marked drop after six months and an even steeper fall beyond 12 months, often requiring more intensive support. The

Workwell report highlights that early intervention is key, showing that timely employment support for people with health conditions can reduce average sickness absence from six months to under three, significantly improving the likelihood of a successful return to work.

The national disability employment rate for Q2 2024 (latest data published June 2025) stood at 53.1%, compared to 81.6% for non-disabled people, a gap likely reflected locally in Sussex. The employment gap is especially wide for disabled men, older disabled adults (aged 50–64) and those without qualifications. Sussex has a higher registered disability rate (18.2%) than the South-East (16.1%) and England (17.3%). Of these, 40% report their condition limits daily activities significantly, equating to 7.2% of Sussex's population and 8.3% in East Sussex.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights deep-rooted health inequalities in Sussex, driven by structural challenges such as unaffordable housing, precarious employment and low pay. These factors create significant barriers to wellbeing and pose risks to economic resilience.

What stakeholders say:

Poor physical and mental health are key barriers to employment, often exacerbated by social isolation, low confidence and a lack of personalised, trauma-informed support. Stakeholders consistently call for integrated, person-centred services offering mentoring, counselling and flexible employment pathways to help individuals rebuild confidence and secure meaningful work. Challenges are worsened by fragmented health and employment systems and stretched services.

"Everything feels more difficult when you have anxiety and don't know where to start." Adult participant

"If someone's struggling with anxiety or trauma, you can't just give them a job and hope for the best." — Health practitioner

"Be aware that my addiction is not a choice, be non-judgmental and educated and remove the stigma." Adult Jobseeker IPS

"Just being listened to made a difference. It felt like someone was finally on my side." Mentored jobseeker

"I didn't even know we could get funding to help adapt a job for someone with health needs." Employer in logistics

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- Programmes such as Workwell and Connect to Work offer the opportunity to develop and expand integrated, person-centred support services that combine mental health, physical health and employment assistance to address complex barriers holistically.
- Building on the interagency integration work developed through Workwell and Connect to Work, strengthen this collaboration between health, employment and social care services to ensure seamless pathways between other training and wellbeing programmes.
- Increase investment in trauma-informed mentoring, counselling and coaching programmes to support individuals with health-related work challenges.
- There is a need to support employer awareness about health-related workplace adaptations, Access to Work including funding options, improve job retention and recruitment of people with disabilities and health conditions and about supporting flexible, hybrid and part-time working models to accommodate varying health needs to enable sustained employment.
- Use programmes such as Bootcamps to introduce sector-specific training and reskilling initiatives for individuals with health challenges to open new job opportunities and career progression or to enable people to sustain their jobs.
- Build on existing partnerships and commissioning with VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) organisations to deliver place-based support in the most affected communities.
- Reforms to Access to Work and the Disability Confident Scheme which are widely considered to be failing and ineffective and are under review.
- Embedding health and employment within community settings

5.8 Ageing population

What the data says:

Across Sussex, the population is older than both the South-East and national averages. Coastal areas such as Rother (East Sussex), Arun and Chichester (West Sussex) have particularly high proportions of older residents, with 33% aged 65 or over. While Crawley and Brighton & Hove have younger populations, all areas are projected to see growth in the 65+ age group over the next decade, with Crawley expected to reach 31% by 2035. This shift presents competing challenges: Brighton & Hove must sustain enough job creation to retain its younger workforce (16–49), while other areas face a shrinking working-age population, higher dependency ratios and significant economic inequalities.

What stakeholders say:

“No one tells you what help is available and when you ask, it’s a maze.” Older jobseeker

“I had to leave my job to care for my mum. Going back now feels impossible.” Unpaid carer

“I’ve worked for 35 years — now I’m told I’m ‘over-qualified’ for everything.” Worker aged 58 facing redundancy

“Retraining sounds great, but courses are far away and buses stop early.” — Older resident in rural Sussex

What opportunities are there to address this challenge?

- Leverage older residents’ skills and experience through targeted over-50 employment and retraining programmes.
- Expand flexible and remote work opportunities, especially in sectors facing skills shortages.
- Support transitions for unpaid carers back into work, including re-skilling and flexible hours.
- Predicted job vacancies from retirements could be used to create pathways for younger and mid-life jobseekers.
- Growth in leisure, health and care sectors due to the effects of an ageing population could be matched with local workforce development plans.

5.9 High levels of deprivation

What the data says:

Deprivation remains a significant challenge across Sussex, particularly in coastal areas. In East Sussex, 14% of wards fall within the most deprived 20% nationally, with half of these concentrated in Hastings and a further 25% in Eastbourne and Newhaven. West Sussex has 4% of its wards in the most deprived national quintile, 90% of which are coastal, including 10 in Arun. These deprived areas consistently show higher rates of economic inactivity and lower skill levels. In Brighton & Hove, 15 neighbourhoods are among the 10% most deprived nationally, 6 are in the East Brighton ward.

What stakeholders say:

Stakeholders highlight the importance of delivering holistic support directly within the communities most affected by deprivation. Services that are embedded in trusted community hubs, where people already seek help, greatly improve engagement and outcomes. This place-based, accessible approach removes barriers related to travel and complex service navigation. West Sussex community hubs received particular praise for their integrated employment support tailored to local needs.

“Having services in one place — where people already go for help and support — really helps engagement.” — Local coordinator

“The support has to come to us - not expect us to travel or know where to start.” — Health-related benefit claimant

What are the opportunities?

- Leveraging regeneration funding such as Plan for Neighbourhoods funding in Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne, or Town Deals in Crawley, Hastings and Eastbourne to drive regeneration and targeted support
- Capitalising on local investment plans including housing development to improve economic conditions
- Expanding growth in key sectors clustered along the coastal strip such as the visitor economy and niche specialisms in manufacturing and engineering to create employment opportunities
- Building on strong VCSE sector presence and multi-agency collaboration to deliver coordinated, community-centred, place-based services
- Delivering at local place-based level through joined up approaches via programmes such as Connect to Work.

5.10 Transport, Housing and Infrastructure challenges

What the data says:

Transport infrastructure across much of rural Sussex, combined with an overburdened East-West A27 corridor and A259 coastal road, creates significant challenges for accessing training and employment in both rural and many coastal areas. Housing supply is inadequate, especially for affordable homes. Many residents find house purchase unaffordable and private rental costs consume a disproportionately high share of household income compared to regional and national averages. These issues are particularly acute in areas where wages are low, compounding economic pressures.

According to the ONS Rural Urban Classification (2024), Horsham, Chichester, and Rother are designated as Majority Rural, while Wealden is classed as Intermediate Rural - reflecting residents' relative limited access to urban centres and services. As of May 2025, the average house price in England was £290,000, yet prices in Brighton and Hove (£435,157), West Sussex (£373,743), and East Sussex (£327,154) far exceed this (ONS). Rural areas such as Horsham (£449,471), Chichester (£435,157), and Wealden (£412,068) face significantly higher average house prices, creating acute disadvantage for residents on low incomes and those facing barriers to employment and training associated with rural connectivity.

What stakeholders say?

These transport and housing challenges constrain access to employment and opportunities, especially for people facing additional barriers, and for those in rural areas. Stakeholders highlighted that many low-paid workers in this high-cost region experience financial hardship, which limits their ability to commute and access training or jobs.

Key stakeholder insights include:

- Public transport is a fundamental barrier, particularly in rural areas where services are infrequent, poorly connected and expensive. This especially affects those without personal vehicles, such as young jobseekers, shift workers and low-paid employees, limiting their access to jobs, support services and education.
- High housing costs make it difficult for residents to access and sustain employment or training, reducing mobility and sometimes forcing individuals to leave training early or prioritise immediate income over longer-term skill development.
- Digital exclusion is prevalent, notably but not exclusively among older people, disabled jobseekers, refugees, care leavers and low-income groups. Poor connectivity, limited device access and low digital literacy mean many struggle to engage with online job applications, remote learning, or digital-only services, increasing inequality.

"Public transport is unreliable in rural areas." Adult user voice participant

"It takes me over an hour to get to the nearest Job Centre and I can't afford the bus." — Coastal resident

“The cost and reliability of public transport is a major barrier for our services, especially in remote areas.” — Rural employment advisor

“Where I live is rural which makes getting to places difficult and can take a long time... bus fees have gone up from £2 to £3 per journey and means I have to limit my journeys and budget more”. JCP client

“We’re constantly hiring for the same roles because people can’t get here or can’t afford to stay.” — Care provider

“We’ve got vacancies we can’t fill because the bus doesn’t run early enough.” — Logistics employer

“I lost count of how many forms I had to fill in online — I gave up.” — Participant with limited digital access

What opportunities are there to address this challenge?

- The Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) is taking on responsibility for transport, presenting a chance to better integrate access to work and learning in transport planning.
- Using the evidence base in the Plan to advocate for infrastructure investments, such as transport, digital connectivity, and accessible learning space, that enable equitable access to education and training across all communities.
- The upcoming Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5), under the MCA, offers an opportunity to shape regional transport strategy to improve connectivity and affordability, specifically embedding employment and education access priorities across Sussex.
- There are opportunities for Get Sussex Working ambitions to be integrated into local Transport plans (Freight, Rail, Logistics, Haulage, Bus etc).
- Local Government Reorganisation will see changes to how Housing policy and Planning is undertaken locally. This may present opportunities for new approaches to considering pan-Sussex housing needs in relation to access to work and learning.
Digital inclusion is often delivered by VCSE organisations who have insecure funding.
Digital inclusion needs to be a priority of all Local Authorities.

5.11 Insufficient service integration or system-wide approaches

What the data says:

While no single dataset captures “integration” between services, stakeholder evidence highlights that fragmented systems including how services are funded by central government, local government, health, education and the VCSE, leave individuals facing duplication, confusion and missed opportunities for coordinated support into employment. This affects residents across Sussex but is felt most acutely in coastal, rural and disadvantaged urban areas where needs are complex and resources are stretched.

What stakeholders say:

Partnership working is widely recognised as essential, yet gaps remain in integration and communication.

- **Fragmentation and silos:** Poor information-sharing, unclear referral pathways and a lack of coordination between organisations mean people are “bounced between services.”
- **Loss of frontline voice:** Strategic decisions sometimes overlook valuable operational insights.
- **Differing local authority priorities and funding structures:** Each upper tier local authority is funded and resourced to support the skills and employment agenda differently, so the infrastructure to support this area of work varies across Sussex. Where some employment and skills infrastructure is recognised as strong and proactive, this has fostered a desire to collaborate and led to good outcomes.
- **Barriers to trust and efficiency:** Duplication of work, competition for funding and limited joint commissioning reduce effectiveness.
- **Underrepresented partners:** Health services (especially GPs and social prescribers) and smaller faith-based and cultural organisations are not consistently involved, despite being trusted community anchors.

“People fall through cracks because we don’t know what each other is doing.” — Careers adviser

“We all want the same outcome, but we’re not talking to each other.” — Public sector partner

“Everyone is doing good work, but we’re not all rowing in the same direction.” — Strategic partner

“People are bounced between services; it’s exhausting and confusing.” — Young Adult Service User

“The way [Skills East Sussex] is constructed... is a well-developed structure that supports what we’re all trying to achieve really well.” — DWP Officer

What are the opportunities to address this challenge?

- There are existing structures in Sussex that could be built on or replicated to support better multi-agency coordination (e.g. Skills and Employment East Sussex, the West Sussex Synchronise Group and Supported Employment Forum as well as the commissioning structure for West Sussex Adult Skills.)
- Programmes such as Connect to Work and Workwell offer an opportunity to pilot colocation or community setting models for Employment Support and to deliver joint/multi-agency professional development (e.g. trauma-informed practice, neurodiversity awareness, inclusive communication, local employment support offers)

to build shared understanding across sectors. In the longer term, these programmes offer opportunities to better align employment, skills and health services.

- Youth Guarantee funding could provide Sussex young people with valuable additional resources and targeted programmes to support youth employment.
- Local navigation roles within Family Hubs, Youth Hubs, GP surgeries could help to guide residents through services.
- Co-development of programmes is starting but in an adhoc way. Embedding regular feedback loops from service users in all new employment support programmes, with visible action taken on input (e.g. lived experience panels, check-ins during/after programmes) would improve the quality of the offer and outcomes.
- Partners with employer engagement teams and strategies could identify how better to coordinate and align their practice, linking into local provision (Growth Hubs, the Transform programme) to ensure that employers have streamlined access to information about training and employee support.
- Many areas have a 'No Wrong Door' approach so residents can access advice and support from any entry point, with effective signposting and warm handovers between services. Improved mapping and awareness of provision linked to shared multi-agency training (above) would assist with this.
- There is a need to work with central government to consider how best to share data between agencies and data about the support that clients are receiving or have received with a longer-term goal of creating cross-sector case management systems, multi-agency referral and delivery data processes.

6. Pan-Sussex vision, goal and ambitions

The following shared vision, goal and ambitions have been determined for the Get Sussex Working Plan. These ambitions have been shaped through the robust data mapping and extensive stakeholder engagement outlined above, which has provided a clear understanding of the main considerations and challenges including current barriers and opportunities across Sussex's labour market.

By aligning national employment goals with local insight, we have identified six Sussex ambitions to provide strategic focus through pan Sussex and local area action planning, to help build an inclusive, dynamic economy. where employers thrive and residents are supported into meaningful work through integrated approaches to health, skills and employment.

Vision statement:

A dynamic Sussex workforce, enabled by integrated support across employment, health, post-16 education and skills. All residents are empowered to aspire, to develop the skills they need now and for the future; to access meaningful employment that improves lives, addresses inequalities, and enables businesses to thrive.

Overarching goal:

Sussex aims to meet the government's national ambition of an 80% employment rate across the county, through an integrated and targeted, data and stakeholder-led approach, providing inclusive services which meet the needs of people, employers and places.

The Get Sussex Working Plan ambitions:

Ambition one: Build a skills and employment infrastructure to achieve the Get Sussex Working Plan

To achieve our overarching goals - in light of the anticipated changes brought by Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation in Sussex, ICB restructures and the launch of the new national jobs and careers service - we must work collectively to design systems, forge partnerships and establish processes that directly support through and beyond this transition.

Ensuring we have the right employment and skills partnerships in place, ready to collaborate, adjust to changing needs (economic, social and political) and influence together is key., This way we can be swift to meet the needs of residents; drawing on the skills of partners (for example the research skills and innovation support of HEIs, Local Authority policy expertise, Employer Representative Bodies and voluntary sector access to

employer/service user voice) to respond quickly to funding and policy opportunities that emerge from central government. This will enable us to quickly translate policy into action and outcomes for our residents and employers.

We will need to look at how existing partnerships such as Skills and Employment East Sussex, the Brighton Economic Growth Board, the West Sussex Economic Growth Board, the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the Get Sussex Working Partnership can evolve or collaborate to ensure effective delivery to meet our targets.

Exploring how we map and raise awareness of provision to support residents and employers with careers and employment pathways will be key, as will considering how we develop referral processes between skills and employment provision and 'wraparound services' such as health, financial support and housing, to support people coherently, into sustained work. For example, supporting individuals with long-term health conditions who often miss out on training and employment opportunities. Infrastructure must include health-informed support services to ensure these individuals can participate and succeed, and that we are addressing health inequalities.

As the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) works to create the new national jobs and careers service, strong partnerships will be essential to align the new service with local support.

The UK Government is transferring more responsibility for skills and employment to Strategic Authorities and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). This shift is part of a wider approach to devolution, which aims to give local leaders greater powers to shape services that best meet the needs of their areas.

In line with this direction, MCAs are being given direct control of funding and decision-making for adult education, skills training and employment support programmes. As a result, areas with MCAs will have increasing autonomy to plan and deliver skills and employment support, aligning it with other areas for which they will hold responsibility including transport, housing and economic development, that meets both the needs of local communities and contributes to local growth and productivity.

As the Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority evolves and devolution arrangements are agreed, the three local authorities will need to work closely to ensure careers provision for young people, delivered through the Careers Hub model, informs understanding of the current and future labour market and that activities continue to be place-based and respond to the needs of different geographies, education settings and local employers.

Ambition two: Address needs of diverse resident groups to increase economic activity

Our evidence base and stakeholder consultation clearly demonstrate that in order to move our residents into sustained and meaningful work, we need to support a diverse range of cohorts, addressing their specific barriers to accessing training and work.

When developing programmes collaboratively with stakeholders, we need to ensure that user voice is central to the design or improvement of schemes and that Information, Advice and Guidance including signposting to wider services such as childcare, access to transport, digital inclusion, health services and financial advice are delivered alongside careers advice employment support or training. Without wraparound support we are likely to see people leaving employment after a brief period, re-entering periods of unemployment before embarking on employment support schemes again - a cycle that we need to break.

Confidence, communication, understanding career and progression pathways, working culture and aspiration-raising play a key part in helping young people and adults move into work and future programmes need to consider activities that can help residents with these areas of personal growth as they move towards employment. In geographies which experience intergenerational unemployment, these factors are particularly important to address.

Careers provision should be integrated, progression-focused and responsive to local needs and involve collaboration between employment, education, health and voluntary sector partners, ensuring seamless pathways into work, training and further guidance. There should be a focus on supporting residents into good work with opportunities for progression, using tools such as skills audits, mid-career reviews and targeted upskilling.

Provision should be tailored to the needs of priority groups, including over-50s, parents, young people not in education or work and those with health-related barriers to work, with wraparound support to build confidence and employability. Provision should be inclusive to reduce inequalities – for example health inequalities disproportionately affect certain groups including those with disabilities, neurodiverse individuals, and people from deprived areas. Tackling these barriers means ensuring inclusive pathways into work for all demographics

Delivery should be accessible and co-located in community settings such as Jobcentres, libraries and health and community hubs, combining digital tools with in-person support. Careers advice must be grounded in current labour market intelligence, with a strong focus on growth sectors such as health and care, digital and green industries.

Ultimately, provision should be outcome-focused, measuring success by sustained employment, progression and engagement in learning, to ensure individuals are supported not just into work, but into fulfilling, long-term careers.

Ambition three: Develop a joined-up approach with employers to inclusive workforce development, training and careers progression

Employers are central to the Get Sussex Working Plan, they create jobs, fill vacancies, shape training needs and invest in upskilling staff to support their growth and sustainability. Just as importantly, they play a key role in developing future talent. Young people need to understand the purpose and possibilities of work and employers can be the inspiration that sparks their ambition.

Employer engagement is vital to ensure that employment support and careers information is genuinely demand-led and aligned with local labour market needs.

Employers have said that they want to see better coordination of information about skills and employment.

Collectively, we will need to engage employers effectively, to ensure that they are actively involved in shaping inclusive employment practices and have clarity about the ways that they can support all residents with career pathways. For example, employers often lack awareness or resources to support employees with health conditions. A joined-up approach involves educating employers, promoting reasonable adjustments, and co-developing inclusive career progression models that accommodate health needs.

There is an ambition for organisations that collaborate closely with employers, such as Chambers, FSB, Local Authorities, Job centres, VCSE and training organisations that deliver Employment Support programmes to find ways of working in a more coordinated way with employers. Existing resources, including online communication channels and networks, could be built on, to facilitate this. The LSIP networks and Implementation Framework, overseen by Sussex Chamber of Commerce, offers one such mechanism that can be used for this purpose.

The Sussex economy is largely composed of small and micro businesses, most of whom do not have access to HR teams, training teams or occupational therapists. To create a more inclusive employment base in the county, we need to find ways to support our employers to provide entry roles, progression routes and training and to develop inclusive employment practice, from workplace adaptations, to flexible and inclusive recruitment and employment contracts. We need to find ways to support our employers to welcome a more diverse workforce into their business and offer opportunities for those starting out in their careers to get the experience they need.

Sussex needs to develop a joined-up multi-agency strategy for communicating skills and employment support opportunities with our employers and for supporting our employers and partners to engage with education providers to inform careers activities and training routes, as well as develop inclusive workplaces, recruitment practices, training and progression pathways.

Ambition four: Respond to diverse place-based needs to increase economic activity, health and wellbeing

Sussex has a rich geography of urban, rural and coastal settlements, each with distinct employment and skills needs.

Different geographic areas require tailored approaches that respond to locally specific employment challenges - such as unequal access to opportunities, limited transport links, seasonal job markets, housing affordability issues, concentrations of health-related barriers to work, and entrenched deprivation and generational worklessness

Place-based solutions should build on existing community connections and proven local best practice to strengthen and tailor provision that meets the unique needs of each area.

Approaches will need specific multi-agency partnerships to work together to respond to place-based needs if we are to see residents moving towards increased economic activity.

Ambition five: Embed careers, employment and skills at the heart of decision-making to facilitate a systems-wide approach

To boost employment levels and build a more inclusive economy, large and long-standing organisations, known as anchor institutions, have a vital role to play. These include local authorities, NHS trusts, DWP, colleges and universities, transport providers and other major employers. Because they are deeply rooted in the local area and unlikely to relocate, their decisions have a lasting impact on people and places. By thinking about careers, employment and skills as part of their core strategies, anchor institutions can help drive positive change. For example, embedding employment and skills into health planning ensures that health services actively support work readiness.

This includes building social value into procurement contracts, identifying careers activities and job opportunities linked to new capital developments e.g. construction projects (both during and after development), considering the impact of transport planning and improvements on enabling better access to work and training, or aligning housing plans with local labour market needs. They can also lead by example, putting careers, inclusive employment and upskilling at the heart of their own workforce planning. Through system-wide approaches to policy design, commissioning and investment decisions, anchor institutions have the power to influence the wider system and help more residents into good jobs, while supporting local businesses to thrive.

Ambition six: Develop and upskill our workforce to boost employment and growth

To ensure long-term employment sustainability in the county and to support the growth of local businesses and jobs, we must focus on raising the skill levels of our residents.

This means ensuring that our workforce has sector-specific skills up to at least Level 3 and keeps them up to date with evolving tools and systems, including advancements in AI, automation and digital technology, to help them progress in their careers.

Clear, accessible information about skills development and training opportunities, whether through further and higher education, voluntary and community organisations, or independent training providers, is essential, along with guidance on how such learning can support career progression.

Many people with multiple barriers to training and work, for example those with health conditions, have untapped potential, and with tailored upskilling and confidence-building many could re-enter or progress in work. Encouraging adaptive training and supportive work environments boosts participation and productivity, contributing to regional growth

By collaborating with local employers as active partners, we can help shape inclusive, future-ready training that supports workforce development and empowers residents to advance into higher-skilled, better-paid roles

A more highly skilled workforce will drive productivity, strengthen our local economy and make Sussex an increasingly attractive location for businesses looking to invest and grow.

7. Governance and oversight

This plan has been developed at a time when significant changes are imminent in relation to the way that Sussex is governed and in terms of wider changes to other anchor institutions and stakeholders (NHS, DWP, ICB, National Careers Service).

The Get Sussex Working Plan has been overseen by a Multi-Agency Partnership Group in accordance with the DWP guidance. The group comprises Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Public Health, the DWP and the Employer Representative Body (Sussex Chamber of Commerce) for the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Due to its current period of change and consultation on restructure, the Sussex ICB involvement has been via the Sussex Workwell Board, Skills East Sussex and the West Sussex Economic Growth Board.

Wider input into the formation of the Plan has been sought from the VCSE sector, further education, higher education, district and borough councils and businesses via key local authority strategic partnerships, including Skills East Sussex, the Brighton and Hove Business Board and West Sussex Economic Growth Board. These wider stakeholder forums and existing networks will continue to shape and deliver the Implementation Plan through a highly collaborative process, liaising and working with relevant multi-agency partners across the county to ensure that provision is locally responsive, and grounded in the needs of our communities

The Plan is proposed for endorsement by each of the three Local Authorities (BHCC, WSCC, ESCC).

Until such time as the Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) is established and its remit confirmed and the ICB and DWP new structures are known, it is proposed that in the interim Get Sussex Working Partnership Group will continue to oversee the implementation, monitoring and ongoing evolution of The Plan, liaising with local partnerships. Once the MCCA is established, decisions about oversight of the Get Sussex Working Plan will need to be made by the MCCA with Upper Tier Authorities and key stakeholders.

We have worked to ensure the Get Sussex Working Plan and the current Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) align, using data from the LSIP 'deep dives' to support development of The Plan. The LSIP Board and Get Sussex Working Partnership Group need to work together to ensure that the objectives and delivery of each plan complement and enhance the other as new LSIPs are developed.

Implementation and review

The Get Sussex Working Plan will be delivered in line with the high-level and local area implementation plan (Appendix 3), identifying delivery at pan-Sussex and at East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove geographies to achieve the ambitions.

The Implementation Plan sets out the six ambitions and the priorities to progress them over time. It includes collaborative actions for the whole of Sussex and actions that respond to the challenges and opportunities in each of East Sussex, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex. It highlights actions that are underway or in development and future aspirational areas for focus.

The Plan identifies confirmed activities that are resourced as well as aspirational activities that are not. The success of the overall plan in terms of the ability to meet KPIs will depend on funding and resources being available to the MCCA and partners to continue to deliver effective programmes and interventions and to implement those areas of work that are identified as key. Without funding for needed provision Sussex stakeholders will only be able to work towards the KPIs, rather than able to meet them.

The Get Sussex Working Implementation Plan is a live document that will be reviewed and updated at regular intervals so that the Partnership Group can respond to the changing economic, social, employment and skills context and needs within the county. We will adapt the local-level actions where necessary, to ensure that the implementation plan is focussed on tackling the right challenges and harnessing the right opportunities and will produce a concise annual impact report that includes metrics and narrative. Where project reports already exist (e.g. Connect to Work or Skills Bootcamp delivery reports) these will be used. We will also produce impact reports and case studies where available.

We have agreed key performance indicators with a baseline at the point of The Plan's publication (Sept 2025).

These indicators should be seen as contextual as many of the influences on them are outside the control of local partners. Key to the successful delivery of The Plan is having the right infrastructure and partnerships in place (nationally and locally) and securing investment for key initiatives where available

Where activities are desirable but not yet funded, the expectation is that partners will seek funding to deliver them, or that provision may be made from future MCA, LGR, Skills, ICB or DWP funding allocations to support them. Reports against these activities, will initially relate to whether funding has been sourced. If funds are secured, full reporting will be undertaken as these actions move from desirable to delivery.

The GSW Partnership Group's will have oversight on an interim basis until the Mayoral Combined County Authority role is known. The Partnership members recognise that this is a multi-agency delivery plan that requires a system-wide approach to be effective. This is a

jointly owned plan, with a wide range of stakeholders contributing to its delivery and success. Delivery partners named in the implementation plan will contribute to reporting processes.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

KPI 1: Employment rate (16–64) Baseline (2024): 77.5% Target (2035): 80%

Year	Sussex Target
2027	78%
2030	79.2%
2035	80.0%

KPI 2: NEET rate (16–17) Baseline (2024): 6.5% Target (2035): 4.5%

Year	Sussex Target
2027	5.8%
2030	5.2%
2035	4.5%

KPI 3: Economically inactive over-50s (excluding students) Baseline (2024): 29% Target (2035): 25%

Year	Sussex Target
2027	28%
2030	26.5%
2035	25%

KPI 4: Population holding Level 3 qualifications (19+) Baseline (2024): 58% Target (2035): 65%

Year	Sussex Target
2027	60%
2030	62.5%
2035	65%

KPI 5: Integrated referral processes between health and employment services

Target: Pilot integrated referral processes by 2028 with annual reporting on cross-referrals.

KPI 6: Coordinated approach to employer support and engagement

Target: Develop a coordinated employer engagement strategy and adopt across Sussex by 2028, with agreed sector priorities and shared metrics for employer participation.

KPI 7: Facilitate and enable anchor institutions to actively contribute to economic growth and inclusive employment

Target: Develop a coordinated approach to inclusive workforce strategies with wide engagement from the institutions.

8. Local Implementation Plan**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Pan-Sussex Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis Report

Appendix 2: List of stakeholders and partnerships that have contributed to the report

Appendix 3: Stakeholder reports:

- Brighton and Hove
- East Sussex
- West Sussex

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Pan-Sussex

Labour Market Data Mapping and Analysis

Get Britain Working Local Plans



Nairne Consultancy Services Ltd

with

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August 2025

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1. Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. Its aim is to inform the Get Sussex Working Plan and the implementation plan, and to identify pan-Sussex common themes that can be worked on collaboratively. These themes will also help inform decisions made by the future Sussex & Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority. Sussex comprises East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

This is principally a data evidence report that draws on a wide range of mainly publicly available data. It will be used alongside a stakeholder engagement report that has been commissioned by the three councils.

This report presents baseline employment data and supporting evidence, that is related to and can inform initiatives to support people into sustainable employment. The latest available figures are presented at district and borough level, county and unitary authority level, and compared with the South-East region and England where possible. Data at sub-county/unitary level are often not robust due to sample sizes; nevertheless, where possible and appropriate, maps and charts have been used to illustrate more localised issues. The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) also includes data mapping that aligns with evidence in this report whilst Future Skills Sussex has recently produced and deep dive reports¹ for the construction, creative & digital, engineering & manufacturing, health & care; land-based and visitor economy & hospitality sectors alongside and its 2025 progress report².

Quantitative data do not always tell the full story of place and community-based opportunities and challenges. They often represent a particular point in time and are typically historic. How data is classified and characterised also shapes the narrative. Quantitative data are helpful in answering 'what?', but less effective in framing 'why?' and 'how?'. And while they help set the context, they do not, in and of themselves, determine future direction - that is a matter of vision, partnership, leadership, ambition and strategy.

This study has therefore also been informed by discussions with economy, employment and skills leads at Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council, and by a review of documents, plans and strategies that outline and aid understanding of challenges and opportunities at different spatial levels.

The stakeholder engagement summaries that accompany this report provide further qualitative insights into labour market conditions and recommendations on 'how' these can best be addressed.

2. Setting the Context

In November 2024, the UK Government published the *Get Britain Working* White Paper, setting out its approach to reducing economic inactivity and supporting people into employment, education and training by improving provision. Its ambition is to achieve an 80% national employment rate - equivalent to getting an additional two million people into work.

¹ Sector deep dives: Construct

² <https://www.futureskillssussex.co.uk/about>

The *Get Britain Working White Paper* stems from concern that the current employment support system is not operating as effectively as it should. In 2024, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation noted that Jobcentre operations prioritise Universal Credit compliance, which “crowds out the opportunity for support which could help people towards work”. It also suggested that “unacceptably low” benefit levels for jobseekers may be contributing to higher levels of health-related worklessness.

The White Paper identifies ill health, caring responsibilities and low skills as key barriers to labour market participation. It also acknowledges that too many people are in insecure, poor-quality and low-paid jobs once in employment.

Alongside this, the Pathways to Work Bill (2025) aims to fix what the Government sees as a “broken incapacity and disability benefits system” that produces poor employment outcomes. This includes creating a “pro-work” benefits system that supports people to manage their health conditions so that they are better able to work and removing binary fitness to work assessments.

Improving employment outcomes are also a key of the NHS 10-Year Health Plan. It aims to narrow health inequalities, including by joining up support from across work, health and skills systems to help people find and stay in work³.

The Government recognises the need for a localised approach and expects areas to develop their own Local Get Britain Working Plans. This aligns with devolution plans, including the proposed Sussex-wide Mayoral Authority and associated unitary authorities - the details of which are still emerging.

The Government is currently working with established Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Welsh Government to establish eight ‘trailblazer’ areas to test new approaches to:

- Reducing economic inactivity in ways that can be scaled up elsewhere.
- Delivering a new Youth Guarantee, including reforms to the Apprenticeship Levy and benefit rules.

Sussex does not include any of the designated trailblazer areas.

The *Get Britain Working White Paper* includes plans to reform the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus. The aim is to offer a universal, digital service, with personalised support where needed most.

Other proposed reforms include a review of the role of employers in fostering healthy and inclusive workplaces, and changes to the health and disability benefits system to increase participation in work.

Analysis by national charity Impetus⁴ suggests that one million young people across England are neither earning nor learning. These young people are significantly more likely to have been on Free School Meals, and to have low qualifications, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Impetus recommend a four-pronged approach:

- Targeted, flexible and holistic support;
- Localised support;
- Representation and work experience;

³ Fit for the Future – 10 Year Health Plan for England; NHS; July 2025

⁴ Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring Compound Disadvantage; Impetus; 2025

- Better data collection and evaluation.

It also calls for programmes to better reflect the characteristics of young people, and to acknowledge the specific barriers facing particular communities.

The Get Sussex Working Plan and local area implementation plan will be informed by the evidence in this study, which draws together both qualitative data and quantitative insights from the three councils, and other publicly available or council-held data.

Wider Labour Market Influences

The way people work - and the skills they need - are evolving rapidly. Many people now work from home part- or full-time. Meanwhile, rapid technological change, including the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), is altering or replacing many job roles and opening new possibilities for businesses and employees.

The UK Government's *Invest 2035 - A Modern Industrial Strategy* prioritises sectors and places that are expected to drive future growth.

- Advanced manufacturing
- Clean energy
- Creative industries
- Defence
- Digital and tech
- Financial services
- Life sciences
- Professional and business services

It also emphasises the need to strengthen the resilience of the foundational industries⁵ and their supply chains, enhance skills and access to talent by improving the skills and employment support systems, support Mayors and local authorities, strengthen links between and within city regions and clusters, and support small and medium-sized businesses.

Sussex has some key strengths in several of the industrial strategy's growth-driving sectors, which are highlighted in the councils' economic growth strategies. There are also strengths in other sectors including construction, health and social care, tourism and hospitality, transport and the land-based industries including horticulture and viticulture.

Skills development is central to the Industrial Strategy. A priority of *Skills England* is to address the fragmented skills system and drive action nationally in key sectors and across regions through strategic authorities and Local Skills Improvement Plans. This will support technical education and apprenticeships, enabling employers to access the skilled workforce they need and enhance the understanding of learning pathways among learners, providers and employers

⁵ These include electricity networks, ports, construction, steel, critical minerals, composites, materials, and chemicals

Local Economic Boards and economic strategies exist across the UK - including in Brighton & Hove⁶, East Sussex and West Sussex - to help shape local contributions to this agenda.

Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

AI and digitalisation are transforming jobs and the labour market. Adapting to these technologies is essential.

AI, although in its early stages of development, already offers employers potential productivity boosts and time savings. Jobs involving manual dexterity are less exposed to AI, while those relying on data and cognitive tasks - such as in admin and finance - are more vulnerable.

One study estimates that AI could ultimately result in 1 to 3 million displaced jobs, peaking at 60,000 to 275,000 UK job losses annually. While significant, this remains relatively modest in the context of a 33-million-strong workforce⁷.

According to the World Economic Forum, technology-related jobs are the fastest growing jobs internationally. This includes Big Data specialists, Fintech Engineers, AI and Machine Learning Specialists and Software and Application Developers. It suggests that the most sought-after core skill is analytical thinking, followed by resilience, flexibility and agility, along with leadership and social influence⁸.

A PWC report suggests that 7% of UK jobs were at high risk of automation over five years from 2021, rising to 30% over the next two decades⁹.

Job losses are expected to be most likely in manufacturing, logistics, public administration, defence, and retail. Lower-paid administrative roles are particularly at risk, whereas job gains are expected in health, care, education, professional services, and IT.

In the short term, digitalisation and AI are likely to assist people in their jobs, with potential social-levelling effects in sectors like education. Over the longer term, it will change the face of the labour market, and could reduce repetitive work, improve workplace diversity, and increase overall productivity.

Hybrid and Remote Working

In 2022, around 22% of the UK workforce worked from home at least one day per week, with 13% working exclusively from home - up from pre-pandemic levels of 12% and 5% respectively¹⁰. Those working in information and communication, professional, technical and administrative sectors are more likely to work remotely, as are people in senior roles or with higher-level qualifications.

Hybrid working brings potential benefits including improved well-being, productivity and job satisfaction. It can also widen access to the labour market, particularly for people with caring responsibilities. However, there are challenges - such as blurred work-life boundaries, increased isolation, digital exclusion, and reduced opportunities to build workplace culture or share tacit knowledge.

⁶ Fairer, Greener, More Productive - Brighton & Hove Economic Plan 2024-2027; Brighton & Hove City Council & Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership; 2024

⁷ The Impact of AI on the Labour Market; Tony Blair Institute for Global Change; 2024

⁸ Future of Jobs Report; World Economic Forum; 2025

⁹ The Potential Impact of Artificial Intelligence on UK Employment and the Demand for Skills, PWC/BEIS, October 2021

¹⁰ The impact of remote and hybrid working on workers and organisations; UK Parliament Research Briefing; 2022

Research from the Policy Institute at King's College London suggests that young people in particular value remote working, although some face barriers to working from home. They report being more confident asking questions and volunteering for tasks in virtual settings¹¹.

A study into public sector office space across Sussex found that enabling home-working required upgrades to IT systems, training and management support. It also highlighted the need for employers to better understand domestic working conditions. Challenges included onboarding new staff and creating appealing environments for young or inexperienced workers¹².

Supporting long-term hybrid working will mean improving digital infrastructure and skills, developing inclusive approaches to remote work, and offering more cybersecurity training.

Benefits and Worklessness

In 2022/23, a report to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee¹³ suggested that the UK workforce has been 'squeezed' by four factors:

- Large numbers of people aged 50-64 who have 'retired' from the labour market;
- Increasing sickness;
- Changes in the structure of migration; and
- The impact of the UK population with people in older age groups likely to have lower participation rates.

Sickness related worklessness is a significant challenge that the Government is seeking to address. The UK has a complicated system of benefits, which are perceived by some to act as a barrier to labour market participation.

A study by the Department for Work & Pensions in 2023¹⁴ found that benefit sanctions reduce the duration of Universal Credit claims, but this does not translate into better PAYE earnings. The report found that sanctions decrease the exit from Universal Credit into higher paid work. Sanctioned claimants are also more likely to earn less than non-sanctioned claimants on exit from Universal Credit, largely due to lower employment earnings.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies¹⁵ has also found that whilst changes to the benefits system over the past decade has led to higher employment, they have largely pushed people into low paid, part-time work, with the result that they often continue to receive in-work benefits and have little prospect of career progression.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁹ suggests that initiatives to support people with disabilities into work should focus on improving job design and providing a more supportive environment for employees when they become ill. This includes increasing job adaptability, flexible working and encouraging a shift in

¹¹ Young people most likely to see career benefits to remote working; Kings College, London; 2022

¹² The Future of Public Sector Office Spaces; Marshall Regen & Nairne Consultancy Services Ltd; 2022

¹³ Where have all the workers gone? Economic Affairs Committee Report; House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee; 2022

¹⁴ The Impact of Benefit Sanctions on Employment Outcomes; Department for Work & Pensions; 2023

¹⁵ Decades of benefit reforms have pushed more people into work – but very often into part-time, low-paid work with little prospect of progression; Institute for Fiscal Studies; 2023

employers' attitudes towards people with disabilities. People who move from work-related benefits into work can face risks around benefit loss, if they find out that they are unable to work as they had intended.

Health & Disability

In July 2025, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) undertook a survey¹⁶ of 3,401 disability benefit claimants¹⁷ found that nearly half (49%) of customers responding to their survey did not believe that they would be able to work again. This rose to nearly two-thirds (62%) of claimants aged 50+.

The proportion of claimants who reported that they were able to work "right away" was small (5%) and just over a quarter (27%) of respondents believed that they might be able to work in the future, but only if their health improved. People with mental health conditions (44%) were more likely to believe that they might be able to work again in the future.

The report identifies a link between the take up of benefits and waiting lists for treatment – half (50%) of out of work respondents believed that their ability to work depended on receiving treatments.

The rise of homeworking was identified as an opportunity, but a majority (60%) of respondents were concerned that the DWP would make them look for "unsuitable" work. There was interest in receiving skill development support and finding and staying in work, but this needed to be based on a personal approach from DWP staff that involved understanding their unique needs and circumstances.

- 49% of customers felt they would never be able to work or work again. 62% of were over the age of 50, and 66% felt their health was likely to get worse in the future
- 5% of customers felt they could work right away if the right job or support was available. Those whose main health condition was a cognitive or neurodevelopmental impairment - including memory and concentration problems alongside learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as autism - were around twice as likely to feel this way compared to other customers
- 27% of customers felt they might be able to work in future but only if their health improved. Those with mental health conditions were more likely to feel this way: 44% of customers whose main health condition was a mental health condition felt they might be able to work again if their health improved
- the findings indicated a link between take up of health and disability benefits and challenges in the healthcare system: two in five customers (41%) were on a waiting list for treatment for their health condition(s), and half (50%) who were out of work felt their ability to work was dependent on receiving treatment
- a key challenge is the complex relationship many customers have with DWP. Of those customers not in work who didn't rule out work permanently, 60% were worried that DWP would make them look for unsuitable work, and 50% were worried they would not get their benefits back if they tried working.
- 69% of customers were open to receiving contact from DWP about offers of support for employment, benefits or disability services. They wanted help to develop skills, including emotional, social and communication skills. They wanted help finding and applying for jobs, and help to stay in work, including engaging with employers to ensure their needs were met.
- They wanted genuine attempts to understand their unique needs and circumstances. They wanted to feel supported rather than coerced, monitored or blamed. They wanted to see more joined-up services so that they didn't need to explain their health conditions repeatedly to different staff and agencies

¹⁶ Work aspirations and support needs of health and disability customers: Final findings report; Department for Work & Pensions; July 2025

¹⁷ Those receiving Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and those on the Universal Credit (UC) Health Journey

3. Sussex

3.1 Sussex Summary

Sussex covers an area of 1,461 square miles, with a 140-mile coastline stretching from Camber Sands in the east to Chichester Harbour in the west. The South Downs National Park and the densely wooded Weald are key features of Sussex, contributing to its outstanding natural environment.

The population of Sussex is:

West Sussex	882,726	51.46%
Brighton	277,000	16.15%
East Sussex	555,484	32.39%
	1,715,184	100.00%

Administratively, Sussex has two county councils - East and West Sussex - and a unitary authority, Brighton & Hove. East Sussex comprises five districts and boroughs (Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes, Rother and Wealden), while West Sussex has seven (Adur, Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Mid Sussex and Worthing). Brighton & Hove is the largest conurbation in Sussex, with a resident population of around 280,000. Other urban centres include Hastings and Eastbourne in East Sussex, and Worthing and Crawley in West Sussex.

Sussex's natural environment means that it is an appealing place to live, but it also restricts development opportunities, contributes to transport and connectivity difficulties in some areas, high property and land prices, and leaves several coastal towns suffering from peripherality and isolation.

Housing affordability is a major issue across Sussex. Median house prices are 10.6 times median earnings for full-time workers, compared with 7.7 times in England. Local jobs generally do not match the high cost of housing, making it difficult for those who are solely reliant on employment for their income and for businesses trying to attract and retain staff.

Sussex has a diverse, polycentric nature meaning that it does not fit comfortably into a neat economic geography. West Sussex has a relatively strong economy with diverse employment sectors, with Crawley and Worthing performing particularly well; Brighton & Hove is heavily service sector based and benefits from two large universities and a well-qualified resident population. In contrast, East Sussex has too few jobs even for its relatively small working-age population, with an economy that is generally reliant on lower and intermediate level service sector jobs.

Key sectors include tourism, land-based industries, and health and social care - often low-value sectors contributing to low median earnings in many parts of Sussex. West Sussex has several large private sector employers, with a particular concentration in Crawley and around the economic hub of Gatwick Airport in the north. However, in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, the number of large employers is small. Many of these are public sector 'anchor institutions'. Anchor institutions are place-based institutions, such as councils, hospitals and universities, that play an important role in building successful local economies and communities. Characteristics include spatial immobility, embeddedness in the local economy and community, and a large resource base that is manifested in local purchasing, employment and business

support. They provides opportunities to take a coordinated approach to promoting skills and employment both through direct employment and training, and through effective procurement and commissioning.

Sussex is an attractive part of the country with significant natural assets. Much of it is covered by environmental designations, which restricts development opportunities. Its coastal location makes it a 180° economy, which naturally constrains movement and development opportunities. Transport and connectivity are significant issues for much of the county, particularly along east-west routes, and connecting employment hubs and urban areas to rural areas. There are significant congestion issues on the east–west A27, while coastal rail services can be slow and fragmented. The extensive rural landscape poses challenges for accessing services - particularly for those who rely on public transport.

Coastal decline, the economic and social downturn experienced by many seaside towns and communities, and often characterized by a decrease in tourism, job losses and population decline, is a feature of several parts of the Sussex coast. Towns like Hastings, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Bexhill, Eastbourne and Newhaven are having to adapt to new economic realities. There has been considerable public investment to support their regeneration, but low qualification and skills levels, and low-paying and often seasonal employment persist, making it difficult to boost economic productivity and improve people’s lives. These characteristics are not confined to the coast, however. In West Sussex, there are major skills challenges in Crawley, for example, despite the plentiful supply of jobs in the Borough.

Much of the social and economic deprivation in Sussex is found along its coastal strip. There is evidence of significant achievement gaps between young people with Special Education Needs and on Free School Meals and others, across many parts of Sussex. This makes it doubly challenging for them to enter and progress successfully through the labour market. NEET and claimant unemployment rates, particularly amongst residents aged 50+, have begun to rise quite sharply in several parts of Sussex – not just those that have tended to have higher levels of worklessness.

Larger coastal towns like Worthing have arguably fared better; their size enables them to sustain a broader economic base. Brighton & Hove has become one of the UK’s more prosperous coastal locations, likely benefiting from its proximity to London and Gatwick Airport, its two universities, and its overall scale. However, skills and employment challenges are often most acute among residents living on the city’s outskirts, particularly in neighbourhoods where socio-economic conditions are challenging, whilst its diverse population means that employment and skills programmes need to respond to the support needs of different communities.

Crawley is a significant economic driver for Sussex and the wider South-East economy. It offers a plentiful supply of good jobs and good transport connections, that attract talent from a wide geographical area, although this can increase the competition for these jobs for local people. In Horsham, Mid Sussex and much of Wealden socio-economic conditions are generally markedly different to those along the coast. These areas are characterised by high economic activity and smaller pockets of deprivation.

Overall, Sussex has an older resident population, but this masks extremes: Brighton & Hove and Crawley have much younger populations, while areas like Arun and Rother have significant and growing proportions of post-working-age residents. Brighton & Hove’s population is heavily influenced by its student population; this contributes to the diversity of the city but also contributes a high level of

population transience. Post-working age residents are projected to account for most of the population increase over the next decade, and for many parts of Sussex this is from an already high baseline. This will influence the demand for local services, including in health and social care. It may also partly explain quite high levels of long-term ill-health and disability amongst the population. However, with the right support, older people and those with long-term health challenges could also provide a relatively untapped resource if engaged more effectively in the labour market, for example through greater flexibility in the workplace.

The high proportion of older and post-working-age residents and the shortage of younger people in some parts of Sussex has labour market implications. With some exceptions, earnings are low, and house prices are high - reflecting a part of the country that may be considered asset-rich but productivity-poor. In some parts of Sussex, there is high demand for low-value services that do not provide incomes aligned with local housing costs, whilst in places like Crawley there are challenges in supporting residents to access better paying local jobs.

For Sussex to achieve the Government's 80% employment rate across the geography, 25,500 more working age residents would need to be in work, assuming no increase in the working age population. More than 300,000 Sussex residents have a disability that limits daily activity, and there are 145,000 unpaid carers. Those with long-term health conditions are less likely to be in work - particularly in East and West Sussex. Over a quarter of the economically inactive population are so due to long-term sickness.

Self-employment rates are high, possibly partly reflecting a lack of good quality jobs that reflect skills levels, and barriers to accessing employment opportunities. Self-employment can be a positive lifestyle choice for some; but for others it will be necessity-driven because they lack the qualifications, language skills or face other barriers to securing traditional employment. Self-employment is not always a proxy for entrepreneurship, if we take entrepreneurs to be people who plan to grow businesses that employ others.

Nevertheless, some self-employed will be looking to grow businesses and join the large number of micro-businesses in Sussex. These are likely to need additional support to recruit, train and retain the inclusive workforce that they need to succeed.

Sussex is a disparate geography, with different challenges in different areas. Isolation and poor digital and transport connectivity hinder access to work in many rural parts, while homelessness, low skills and health-related issues are more prevalent along the coastal strip, where job quality is often poor and housing costs are high.

Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, and West Sussex all have established partnerships and current and emerging programmes to support people into work. These include the Connect to Work and Skills Bootcamp programmes, and Careers Hubs. The Future Skills Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan provides detailed analysis of skills demand deep dive reports into Sussex's key employment sectors¹⁸.

A challenge in some parts of Sussex is delivering employment and skills services to small, dispersed populations, some of which are within relatively affluent areas, where support infrastructure may be weaker than in urban centres. However, the Pathways to Work Bill - Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper outlines reforms to the welfare and employment support systems

¹⁸ <https://www.futureskillssussex.co.uk/about>

There is already a good track record of collaborative working within each local authority and increasingly across Sussex. The Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the NHS are in a more central position alongside the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), to provide employment-related support, particularly for people with long-term disabilities and health conditions.

The pan-Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Board and other emerging regional networks are increasingly embedding skills and employment initiatives. There are well-established skills and employment networks in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex, including Skills East Sussex, the Synchronise Network (West Sussex) and the Pre-Employment Network in Brighton and Hove. Reviewing where Sussex-wide networks and partnerships would be beneficial to shared employment and skills outcomes could be explored whilst new Economic Growth Boards offer opportunities to enhance the skills and employment agenda and support governance across Sussex.

Chichester College Group and East Sussex College are the largest FE providers in the region, and both are working in collaboration with local HE through the associated Institutes of Technology in both East and West Sussex. Sussex Council of Training Providers represents training organisations operating across Sussex. Brighton & Hove and West Sussex have higher education institutions in the Universities of Brighton and Sussex, and the University of Chichester, but following the closure of the University of Brighton campuses in Hastings and Eastbourne, East Sussex now lacks a higher education presence, potentially dampening aspirations among residents, reducing the availability of specialist business and innovation support, and the pipeline of qualified people for local high-value employment.

Sussex has a diverse socio-economic landscape, with significant local distinctiveness across the geography. Approaches to supporting people into sustained, good quality work are likely to require a 'managed difference' approach that recognises and responds to pan-Sussex opportunities and challenges where this is appropriate, but which takes a more nuanced and granular approach, responsive to the specific needs at sub-Sussex level.

3.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A highly attractive and liveable part of England with outstanding natural and cultural assets • Proximity to London and Gatwick Airport is attractive for investors and talent • A mixed economy, with jobs across a range of sectors, but few of the high value sectors are in East Sussex • A strong visitor economy that caters for a range of visitor types as well as strong land-based economy with nationally significant agriculture, viticulture and horticulture sectors, supported by specialist colleges at Plumpton and Bransbury • Significant anchor institutions including the health and care sector (ICB, NHS) and the public sector influencing the local labour market • Three universities with around 40,000 students between them and Institutes of Technology and innovation offering high level skills training and business support across Sussex • Established strategic economy, employment and skills networks and emerging economic governance across Sussex, including Local Skills Improvement Plan Board and the Sussex Visitor Economy Board. <p>Active voluntary and community sector organisations providing wide-ranging but fragmented skills and employment support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The employment picture in terms of demographic cohorts, job vacancy rates, employer size and composition, and employment and skills levels differ across Sussex • Areas of deprivation exist across Sussex, including more isolated coastal towns, Bexhill, Newhaven, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, as well as parts of Brighton & Hove and Crawley. Deprivation in Hastings is significant and widespread. • Housing affordability is an important issue across most of Sussex • There are significant differences in skills levels across Sussex and evidence of attainment gaps between those Special Education Needs and Free School Meal eligibility • Sussex covers a wide and diverse geography, making delivering services to dispersed populations challenging and therefore a 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to be effective • East to west transport and links between commercial and rural areas are often unreliable and patchy • Much of East and West Sussex have large and growing post-working age populations, and a retraction in populations of working age. • The lack of Higher Education presence in East Sussex risks further diluting aspiration and opportunity • Rising NEET rates across East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, with high number of 'unknown' destinations in West Sussex

3.3 Labour Supply

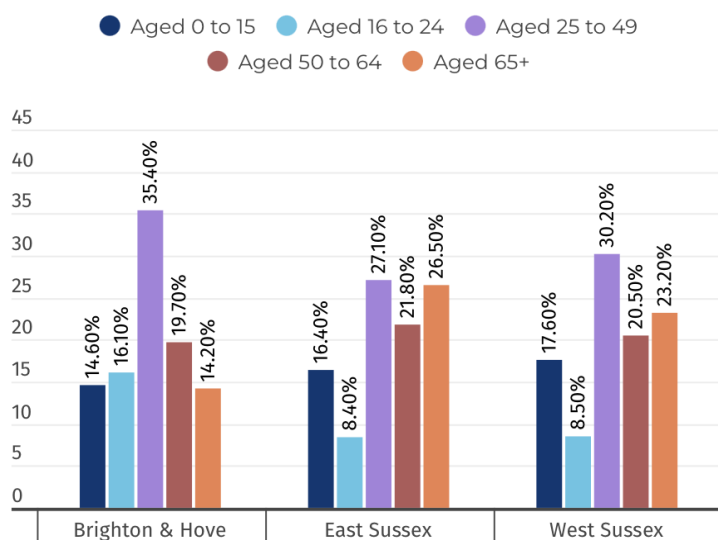
Population by Age

The table below shows the resident populations by age.

Population by Age

Area	All Ages	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+	Dependency ratio
Sussex	100%	16.7%	60.5%	9.7%	30.0%	20.8%	22.8%	0.65
Brighton & Hove	100%	14.6%	71.2%	16.1%	35.4%	19.7%	14.2%	0.40
East Sussex	100%	16.4%	57.2%	8.4%	27.1%	21.8%	26.5%	0.75
West Sussex	100%	17.6%	59.2%	8.5%	30.2%	20.5%	23.2%	0.69
South East	100%	18.6%	61.7%	10.0%	31.9%	19.8%	19.8%	0.62
England	100%	18.5%	62.9%	10.7%	32.9%	19.3%	18.7%	0.59

Source: Population Estimates; Office for National Statistics; 2023



In 2023, Sussex had a resident population of 1.74 million. Just over a million people (60.5%) were of working age.

This is a lower proportion than in England (62.9%) and the South East (61.7%). However, this masks significant variation within Sussex: more than seven in ten (71.2%) of Brighton & Hove's residents are of working age, compared with 59.2% in West Sussex and 57.2% in East Sussex.

There are also notable differences at district and borough level within the two counties. In East Sussex, all areas except

Hastings (61.5%) have fewer than 60% of residents of working age. In West Sussex, only Crawley (64.9%) and Worthing (60.7%) have more than 60% of residents in this age group.

The dependency ratio shows the number of non-working-age residents for every one working-age resident. A higher number indicates a greater proportion of residents who are either below or above working age. In Sussex, the dependency ratio was 0.65 - higher than in England (0.59) and the South East (0.62). In Brighton & Hove, the dependency ratio is significantly lower (0.40) than in East Sussex (0.75) and West Sussex (0.69). Among all districts and boroughs in Sussex, the ratio is highest in Rother (0.89).

Ethnicity

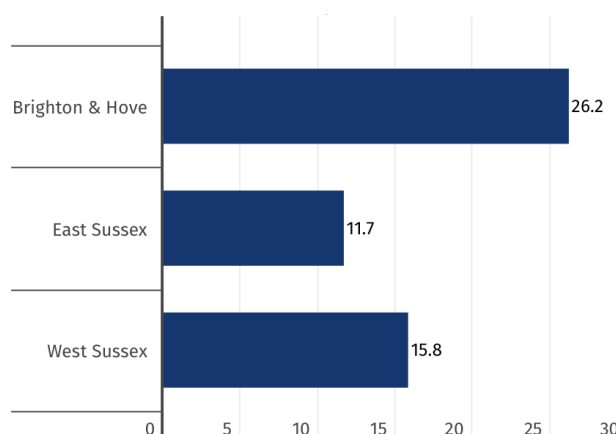
Ethnicity of Population 2021

	All Global Majority ethnic groups		Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh		Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African		Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups		Other White		Other ethnic group	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	136,076	18.1	24,835	18.3	9,955	7.3	25,541	18.8	62,134	45.7	13,611	10.0
Brighton & Hove	72,272	26.2	13,217	18.3	5,458	7.6	13,228	18.3	31,740	43.9	8,629	11.9
East Sussex	63,804	11.7	11,618	18.2	4,497	7.0	12,313	19.3	30,394	47.6	4,982	7.8
West Sussex	139,102	15.8	38,288	27.5	11,429	8.2	20,811	15.0	59,948	43.1	8,626	6.2
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Source: Census 2021

In 2021, over 136,000 Sussex residents (18.1%) were from a global ethnic majority group. This is a smaller proportion than in the South East (21.1%) and England (26.5%). However, this headline figure masks significant variation within Sussex. Over a quarter of Brighton & Hove's residents are from a Global Ethnic Majority background, compared with fewer than 12% in East Sussex and just under 16% in West Sussex.

All Minority Ethnic Groups 2021 %



Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics

'Other White' residents account for a much larger proportion of ethnic minority residents in Sussex (45.7%) than in the South-East (35.4%) and England (28.4%). All three local authority areas have a high proportion of ethnic minority residents who are classified as 'White Other'. By contrast, Sussex has a relatively small proportion of residents from Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh backgrounds, and from Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African backgrounds, when compared with the South-East region and England.

More detailed analysis shows that White – Mixed European (21,200), White Irish (15,100), and White Polish (12,500) residents make up the largest groups within the 'White Other' category in Sussex.

Indicative data from the Sussex Interpreting Service for 2024/25 shows that they provided interpreting support to 4,164 residents in Brighton and Hove, 1,862 in West? Sussex and 626 in East Sussex. Arabic was the most common language spoken by service users in Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, and Polish in

West Sussex. A lack of English language skills is a key barrier to employment. In 2021, there were 14,200 residents in Sussex who either could not speak English well or could not speak it at all. This included 7,000 people in West Sussex (of whom 2,500 were in Crawley), 3,100 in Brighton & Hove, and 2,800 in East Sussex (including 1,000 in Eastbourne).

There is also significant variation in ethnic mix at a county level. For example, in Crawley 27% of the resident population is non-white, compared to just 9% across West Sussex.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since the 2021 Census, the UK has welcomed significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. All three local authorities in Sussex provide settlement programmes to support these groups, including specific schemes for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees. The resettlement programme is a national scheme that supports Afghans who worked with or for the UK Government in Afghanistan. It provides them with indefinite leave to remain. The Government provides funding to local councils to support the resettlement effort and the extent to which local areas can accommodate people on the programme depends, to an extent, on the availability of suitable accommodation locally.

The table below shows the number of people who have arrived in Sussex under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and the Supported Asylum Programme.

Refugees & Asylum Seekers 2025

	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
Sussex	5,405	1,866	1,535	8,806	0.42%
Brighton & Hove	639	177	170	986	0.35%
East Sussex	2,065	196	121	2,382	0.43%
West Sussex	2,701	1,493	1,244	5,438	0.60%
South East	27,111	5,541	7,287	39,939	0.42%
England	125,290	23,680	94,754	243,724	0.42%

Source: Immigration System Statistics; Home Office; 2025

As at April 2025, over 8,800 people had been welcomed to Sussex under the three programmes. This includes over 5,400 Ukrainians, nearly 1,900 Afghans and a further 1,500 people arriving under the Supported Asylum programme. Over 5,400 people were supported in West Sussex, just under 2,400 in East Sussex and just under 1,000 in Brighton & Hove. West Sussex has supported a particularly large number of Afghans and other supported asylum seekers.

West Sussex (0.6% has supported a larger number of asylum seekers, relative to the size of its population than England (0.42%), the South East (0.42%), East Sussex (0.43%) and Brighton & Hove (0.35%).

LGBTQ+

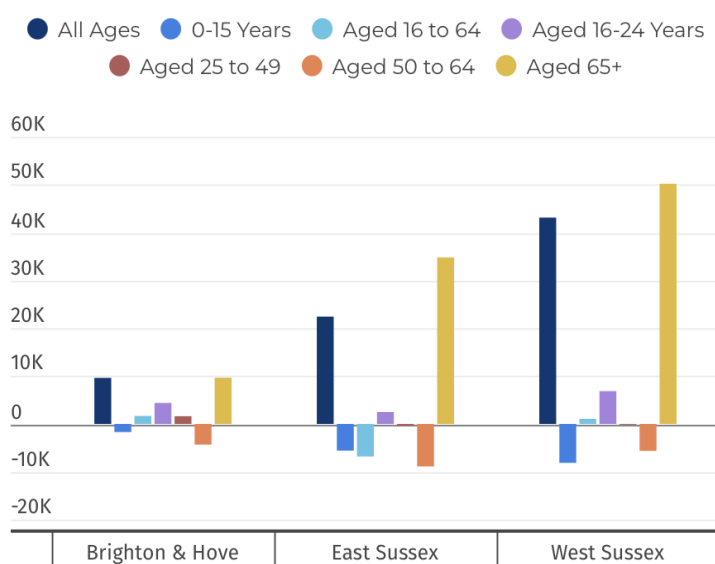
Just under 65,000 Sussex residents described their sexuality as something other than 'Straight or Heterosexual', with 41% living in Brighton & Hove, 35% in West Sussex, and 25% in East Sussex. In 2021, more than one in ten adult residents in Brighton & Hove (10.7%) identified as LGBTQ+. This is significantly higher than the proportion in England (3.1%), the South East (3.1%), East Sussex (3.3%) and West Sussex (2.9%).

Population Projections

Population Projections 2025-2035

Area	All Ages	0-15 Years	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16-24 Years	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
Sussex	+75,160	-15,408	-4,082	+13,718	+1,030	-18,830	+94,635
Brighton & Hove	+9,617	-1,702	+1,669	+4,386	+1,607	-4,324	+9,648
East Sussex	+22,429	-5,572	-6,805	+2,481	-406	-8,880	+34,795
West Sussex	+43,114	-8,134	+1,054	+6,851	-171	-5,626	+50,192
South East	+284,241	-110,309	-18,160	+84,098	-33,294	-68,964	+412,729
England	2,123,686	-506,921	264,463	595,609	108,784	-439,930	2,366,134

Source: Population Projections (2018) based; Office for National Statistics; 2025



The population of Sussex is projected to grow by over 75,000 residents between 2025 and 2035 - a 4.2% increase over the decade. This compares with projected increases of 3.0% in the South East and 3.7% in England.

West Sussex is expected to see the largest growth, both proportionally (+4.8%) and numerically (+43,100). Projected increases in Brighton & Hove (+9,600 / +3.2%) and East Sussex (+22,400 / +3.9%) are slightly more modest.

Source: Population Projections (2018) based; Office for National Statistics; 2025

The structure of the population is also projected to change, with further increases in the post-working-age population (+94,600) and reductions in the pre-working-age population (-15,400), the working-age population (-4,100), and in particular, residents aged 50-64 (-18,800).

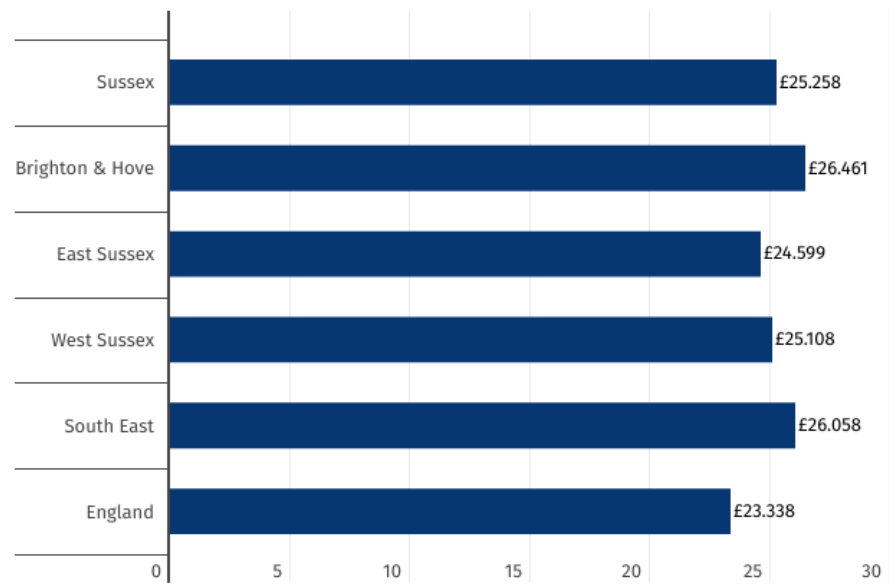
This pattern is largely reflected across Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex, with some variation. In West Sussex, the decline in the 50-64 age group is expected to be more modest (-3.0%), while East Sussex is projected to see a 5.2% increase in residents aged 16-24 - compared with +8.4% in Brighton & Hove and +9.2% in West Sussex.

The main challenge for parts of the county lies in the starting point. In many areas, the population is already disproportionately older, and further increases are likely to deepen this demographic imbalance.

For example, in West Sussex the highest percentage of projected population growth by 2043 is expected in the 90+ age bracket, with an 86% increase (higher than regional and national figures). Horsham can expect to see a 131% projected growth in the 90+ years population. This has significant implications for both the supply of and demand for labour-intensive services, many of which are characterised by low pay and job insecurity.

Households & Incomes

Average Gross Domestic Household Income (2022)



Source: Regional Gross Disposable Income; Local Authorities by ITL 1 Region; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Household income is a broad measure of household wealth. The graph shows Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head, indexed to England (100). It indicates that, overall, Sussex is a relatively wealthy part of England, with a GDHI of £25,258 - compared with £23,338 in England and £26,058 in the South East.

Brighton & Hove has the highest GDHI in Sussex (£26,461), exceeding the regional average for the South East (£26,058). GDHI is lowest in East Sussex (£24,559), with West Sussex sitting between the two (£25,108).

However, averages do not reflect distribution, and these figures are likely to mask significant inequalities within each area. Indeed, a recent report into compound disadvantage among young people highlights Brighton & Hove as a place where socioeconomic inequality is particularly pronounced - linked to low levels of social mobility, educational attainment, and higher levels of economic instability.

House Price Affordability Ratios (2022)



Overall, Sussex is a notably unaffordable part of the country when measured by the ratio of median house prices to median workplace earnings. Across Sussex, median house prices are 10.57 times median workplace earnings, compared with 7.71 in England and 9.61 in the South East. In many respects, large numbers of people across Sussex do not share in the region's overall affluence.

The median house price ratio is particularly high in Brighton & Hove (11.31), further emphasising the socio-economic inequality in the city noted earlier. However, both East Sussex (10.40) and West Sussex (10.00) also face significant affordability challenges. A more detailed sub-county analysis is presented later in this report.

A particularly striking feature of the Sussex economy is the number of areas where non-employment income accounts for a substantial share of local economic value. In England overall, 'homeowners' imputed rental' contributes around 9% to the value of the economy, but in parts of both East and West Sussex, this figure exceeds 25%.

This, combined with other forms of passive income among some residents - including pension income - can skew local economies towards lower-value, labour-intensive and low-paying employment sectors. While this may suit those who are less reliant on employment to support their household, it makes life much more difficult for those who are not asset-rich and who rely solely on earned income to meet their basic needs.

Lone Parent Households

In 2021 there were over 42,000 lone parent households with dependent children in Sussex. This is 5.7% of all households, compared with 6.0% in the South East and 6.9% in England. West Sussex (5.5%) had a lower proportion (but higher count) of lone parent households with dependent children than Brighton & Hove (6.0%) and East Sussex (6.0%).

The local areas with the highest proportion of lone parent households with dependent children were Crawley (7.8%) and Hastings (7.7%). Horsham (4.6%) and Chichester (4.9%) had the lowest proportion of lone parent households with dependent children.

Lone Parent Households with Dependent Children (2021)

	Count	%
Sussex	42,077	5.7%
Brighton & Hove	7,229	6.0%
East Sussex	14,343	6.0%
West Sussex	20,505	5.5%
South East	227,161	6.0%
England	1,617,076	6.9%

Median Earnings

Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time Workers – Residence and Workplace based 2024

	Workers		Residents		Workplace Earnings as % of Resident Earnings	
	£	Index (England = 100)	£	Index (England = 100)	£	%
Sussex	Not Available		Not Available		Not Available	
Brighton & Hove	£36,921	98	£38,556	102	-£1,635	-4.2
East Sussex	£32,703	87	£35,298	94	-£2,595	-7.4
West Sussex	£38,006	101	£38,700	103	-£694	-1.8
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	-£1,301	-3.2
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Median workplace earnings for full-time workers and full-time working residents are not available at the Sussex level. However, while both workplace-based and residence-based median earnings are slightly above the national average in West Sussex and broadly in line with the national average in Brighton & Hove, they are significantly lower in East Sussex.

Full-time working residents in East Sussex earn just 94% of the England average. The situation is even more pronounced for people working within East Sussex, who earn on average £2,595 less than local residents.

This suggests a particular challenge in the quality of local jobs available to residents in East Sussex. Put simply, too many of the county's jobs are not well-paid enough for people to afford access to the local housing market. While job quality may be an issue in other parts of Sussex as well, it is a particularly marked feature of the East Sussex labour market.

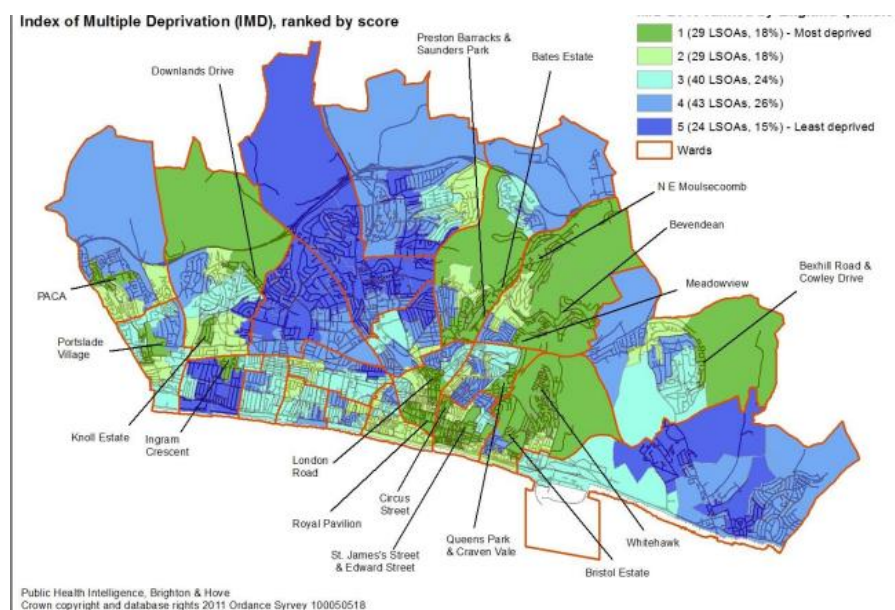
Deprivation

	Median Rank 2019	Median Decile 2019	LSOAs in top quintile	
			Count	%
Brighton and Hove	17,617	6	34	21%
East Sussex	17,729	6	46	14%
West Sussex	22,107	7	18	4%

Source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation; MHCLG 2019

The purpose of the English Indices of Deprivation is to identify small areas of England which are experiencing multiple aspects of deprivation. There are 15 neighbourhoods in the city (9%) in the 10% most deprived in England. The map below shows that deprivation is distributed across the whole of the city but is more concentrated in some areas. The highest concentration of deprivation is in the Whitehawk, Moulsecoomb and Hollingbury areas of the city but also found around Grand Parade, St. James's Street

and Edward Street. To the west of the city, deprivation is more isolated and includes neighbourhoods around Downlands Drive, Portslade Academy, Portslade Village, the Knoll estate and Ingram estate. English Indices of Deprivation 2019 – Brighton and Hove Briefing.



Indices of Deprivation 2019 – Brighton and Hove Briefing

Health & Disability

Residents (16+) with Disabilities & Long Term illness (2021)

	All Disabled		Limiting a Little		Limiting a Lot	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	311,250	18.2%	187,951	11.0%	123,299	7.2%
Brighton & Hove	51,797	18.7%	31,446	11.3%	20,351	7.3%
East Sussex	110,553	20.3%	65,361	12.0%	45,192	8.3%
West Sussex	148,900	16.9%	91,144	10.3%	57,756	6.5%
South East	1,496,340	16.1%	915,292	9.9%	581,048	6.3%
England	9,774,510	17.3%	5,634,153	10.0%	4,140,357	7.3%

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics

In 2021, there were over 311,000 residents in Sussex with a disability that limited their daily activities either a little (188,000) or a lot (123,300). This represents 18.2% of the population - a higher proportion than in the South East (16.1%) and England (17.3%).

East Sussex had the highest proportion of people living with a limiting disability (20.3%), while West Sussex had the lowest (16.1%). Four in ten (40%) people with work-limiting disabilities reported that their condition limited their day-to-day activities a lot. This accounts for 7.2% of the Sussex population. In East Sussex, the figure was 8.3%, compared with 6.5% in West Sussex.

In its evidence for the Work Well Partnership Programme, Sussex Health & Care reported that sickness absence rates were higher among women than men across most age groups. The evidence also showed that in 2022, there were just under 36,000 Employment Support Allowance claimants in Sussex - half of these claims were related to mental health, which was often cited as a secondary reason for absence.

Universal credit

Universal Credit (UC) is a monthly payment to help eligible people with their living costs who have £16000 or less in money, savings and investments. UC can be claimed by people who are working and on a low income, out of work or who cannot work because of a health condition. UC replaced working tax credits, child tax credits, housing benefit, income support, income-based job seekers allowance and income related Employment and Support Allowance.

Employment Support Allowance (ESA)

People who are employed, self-employed or unemployed with a disability or health condition that affects how much they can work can apply for ESA. Paid fortnightly it provides money to support people to get back into work who can, and they are assigned to the work-related activity group. ESA also provides money to help with living costs for people who can't work to work, they are assigned to the Support Group. People can get UC at the same time as New Style ESA which is a contributory benefit based on insurance contributions rather than income or savings. People on Old Style ESA are being moved to Universal Credit as part of the managed migration process.

Data¹⁹ from November 2024 showed there were 31,807 Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in Sussex. 43.4% were in West Sussex, 34.9% in East Sussex., and 21.7% of these were in Brighton & Hove. However, relative the population size 1.56% of West Sussex residents were in claiming ESA compared to 1.99% and 2.49% respectively in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

	Nov-24				
Phase of ESA claim	Assessment phase	Work Related Activity group	Support group	Unknown	Total
Brighton and Hove	125	721	5836	230	6912
Eastbourne	58	277	2149	90	2570
Hastings	45	223	2230	80	2580
Lewes	68	188	1594	103	1953
Rother	49	122	1513	84	1763
Wealden	83	140	1886	118	2220
Adur	51	134	1022	46	1253
Arun	83	210	2698	143	3127
Chichester	61	107	1433	75	1673
Crawley	67	126	1677	74	1940
Horsham	57	128	1445	82	1714
Mid Sussex	64	138	1482	71	1758
Worthing	42	230	1976	94	2344
Total	853	2744	26941	1290	31807

¹⁹ Stat-explore: Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

Musculoskeletal conditions and mental ill-health are the leading causes of work loss, and they are often interrelated. Several factors contribute to poor mental health, including financial difficulties, insecure and poor-quality housing, and precarious employment.

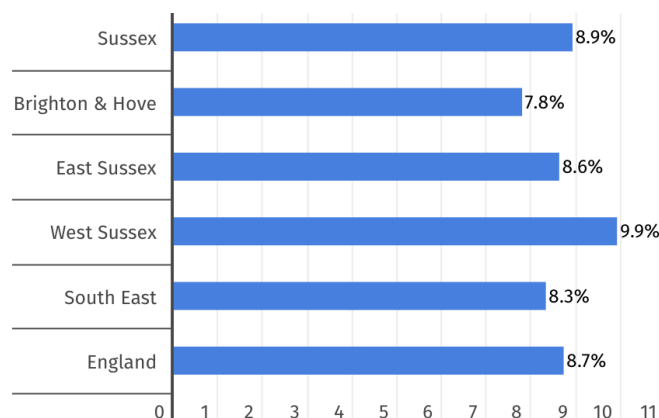
In 2022/23, General Practitioners (GPs) in Sussex issued 262,409 Fit for Work notes. In 94.1% of cases, patients were assessed as not fit for work - typically for a short period (most commonly 5 to 12 weeks). In 190,500 of these cases, no diagnosis was provided. Where a diagnosis was given, the most common was 'mental and behavioural disorders' (23,419), followed by 'musculoskeletal and connective tissue diseases' (9,106).

The number of Fit for Work notes per 100,000 registered patients was lower in East Sussex (23,987) than in England overall (28,694). However, there were notable differences across the sub-Integrated Care Board areas: West Sussex (27,898); East Sussex (23,877); and Brighton & Hove (18,915).

Unpaid Carers

Unpaid Carers (2021)

	All Unpaid Carers		20 hours +	
Sussex	145,025	8.9%	67,930	4.2%
Brighton & Hove	20,804	7.8%	9,470	3.5%
East Sussex	51,405	8.6%	25,284	4.9%
West Sussex	72,816	9.9%	33,176	3.9%
South East	733,364	8.3%	344,742	3.9%
England	4,678,265	8.7%	2,374,540	4.4%



Source: 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics

In 2021, there were 145,000 unpaid carers in Sussex - equivalent to 8.9% of the population aged 5 and over. This is a higher percentage than in the South East (8.3%) and England (8.7%). West Sussex has the highest proportion of unpaid carers (9.9%), while Brighton & Hove has the lowest (7.8%). This may relate to the different age structures of the populations, with West Sussex having a higher proportion of older working age residents.

Just under half (47%) of unpaid carers provide care for 20 or more hours per week. This represents 4.2% of the population aged 5 and over. While this is a higher proportion than in the South East (3.9%), it is slightly lower than the figure for England (4.4%).

East Sussex has the highest proportion of residents providing intensive unpaid care (4.9%), while Brighton & Hove has the lowest (3.5%).

Employment and Disability

Disability, disability employment rate and overall employment rate (2025)

	% aged 16-64 who are EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate aged 16-64 - EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate - aged 16-64	
	Count	percent	numerator	percent	numerator	percent
Sussex	292,100	28.0%	173,300	59.3%	798,000	76.5%
Brighton and Hove	66,700	31.9%	42,300	63.4%	154,900	74.1%
East Sussex	93,500	28.9%	47,600	50.9%	233,300	72.2%
West Sussex	131,900	25.8%	83,400	63.2%	409,800	80.2%
South East	1,453,900	25.7%	918,200	63.2%	4,436,900	78.4%
England	9,178,100	26.0%	5,288,500	57.6%	26,720,600	75.7%

Source : Annual Population Survey; ONS; 2025

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 292,100 16–64-year-olds in Sussex who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 28% of the working age population – higher than in the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%). Brighton & Hove (31.9%) had the highest proportion of disabled working age residents and West Sussex (25.8%) had the lowest proportion.

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 59.3%, compared with an overall employment rate of 76.5%. The employment rate for people in Sussex with disabilities was lower than in the South East (63.2%), but higher than in England (57.6%). Brighton & Hove (63.4%) and West Sussex (63.2%) had higher employment rates for disabled residents than East Sussex (50.9%).

Employment and Long-Term Health Conditions

People with long-term health conditions have much lower employment rates than the average, as shown in the table below.

Employment Rate (16+) of People with Health Conditions (2024) Source:

Annual Population Survey (2024), Office for National Statistics (2025)

	All long term health conditions		Mental health conditions	
	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	313,400	50.3%	100,900	50.0%
Brighton & Hove	69,000	64.6%	22,500	54.8%
East Sussex	95,600	47.8%	31,800	46.5%
West Sussex	148,800	47.0%	46,600	50.3%
South East	1,583,400	52.3%	455,800	50.9%
England	9,148,300	49.4%	2,592,500	46.4%

Across Sussex, just half (50%) of people with long-term health conditions are in work. This is slightly below the rate in the South East (52.3%) but slightly above the rate in England (49.4%). It is also 10 percentage points below the overall employment rate for residents aged 60 and over across Sussex. The gap is much wider in West Sussex (15 percentage points) than in East Sussex (7 percentage points) and Brighton & Hove (1 percentage point).

The employment rate for people with long-term health conditions in Brighton & Hove is relatively high (64.6%), but it is lower in East Sussex and West Sussex. This may reflect differences in age profiles across the three areas.

Around half (50%) of people with long-term mental health conditions are in employment. This is broadly in line with the South East (50.9%) and higher than in England overall (46.4%).

Education & Skills

Level 3 Attainment by 19 Years - by Characteristic 2023/24

	All	Non FSM	FSM	Attainment Gap	Non-SEN	SEN	Attainment Gap
Sussex	Unavailable						
Brighton & Hove	61.1%	67.2%	33.2%	34.1%	67.7%	31.2%	36.5%
East Sussex	52.6%	57.3%	31.6%	25.7%	57.3%	25.0%	32.2%
West Sussex	56.9%	62.8%	31.6%	31.3%	30.2%	31.6%	31.3%
South East	58.7%	63.0%	31.4%	31.7%	62.6%	33.4%	29.4%
England	57.6%	62.4%	36.8%	25.5%	64.2%	35.4%	28.8%

Source: Level 2 and 3 Attainment age 16-25 years; 2023/24; Department for Education' 2025

Qualification levels are commonly used as a proxy for skill levels and the opportunities individuals are likely to have to enter and progress in the labour market. The table above shows the proportion of 19-year-olds who have attained Level 3 qualifications. It presents percentages for all 19-year-olds, those who have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), along with the attainment gaps between these groups and their peers.

There are no data available at the Sussex-wide level. However, 19-year-olds in Brighton & Hove (61.1%) are more likely to hold a Level 3 qualification than their counterparts in the South-East (58.7%) and England (57.6%). This is not the case in either West Sussex (56.9%) or East Sussex (52.6%), where the proportion in East Sussex is notably below both national and regional averages.

The more detailed analysis in the sub-sections of this report shows that Eastbourne (50.4%), Crawley (49.9%), Arun (48.3%) and Hastings (36.4%) have the lowest proportion of 19-year-olds with Level 3 qualifications. There are skills & qualifications challenges in several coastal parts of Sussex, including parts of Brighton & Hove, but this is an issue in Crawley, too.

There are also significant differences in attainment between young people who had been eligible for Free School Meals and who had Special Educational Needs, and those without disadvantages. This disparity is particularly pronounced in Brighton & Hove, which may again point to high levels of socio-economic inequality in the city. Although as noted above overall attainment in the city is higher, over two-thirds (67.2%) of 19-year-olds in Brighton & Hove who were not eligible for Free School Meals attained a Level 3 qualification, only one-third (33.2%) of those who were eligible did so. The attainment gap is even wider (36.5 percentage points) between young people with and without Special Educational Needs.

The FSM attainment gap is also high in West Sussex (31.3%), while in East Sussex it is closer to the England average (25.7%). The SEN attainment gap is higher than the national average in all three local authority areas.

RQF Level 3 is equivalent to an advanced apprenticeship or, academically, to A-levels. It typically provides the knowledge and skills required for higher education or more specialised roles within an industry.

There are, however, significant differences across Sussex. Overall Brighton & Hove has a much lower proportion of lower-qualified residents (16.8%), although there are wards which have significantly more,

compared with East Sussex (34.5%), West Sussex (33.5%), the South-East (29.7%) and England (32.4%). In East Sussex, coastal areas, such as Hastings (40.9%), Rother (42.7%), Arun (37.1%) and Worthing (42.4%), as well as Crawley (35.4%) had a high proportion of lower qualified residents.

There is also evidence of skills mismatches among those already in employment, which may leave them vulnerable to changes in the labour market that demand higher-level skills. Across Sussex, around 221,000 people in work (29%) are reported to have lower skill levels than their jobs require. Once again, this figure is considerably lower in Brighton & Hove (22%) than in East Sussex (30%) and West Sussex (30%).

Employment

Employment Rate (2024)

	Count	Percent	Count for 80%
Sussex	807,700	77.6%	+25,500
Brighton & Hove	159,100	76.6%	+7,140
East Sussex	233,500	72.1%	+25,540
West Sussex	415,100	81.4%	-7,180
South East	4,448,600	78.7%	+73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7%	+1,499,760

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 807,700 of Sussex's working-age residents were in employment, giving an employment rate of 77.6%. This is below the rate for the South East (78.7%) but above the rate for England (75.7%). The UK Government has set a target of achieving an 80% employment rate as part of its *Get Britain Working Plan*. West Sussex (81.4%) already exceeds this target, but Brighton & Hove (76.6%) and East Sussex (72.1%) fall short. There are also differences within the three areas, which are set out in more detail in later sections.

For Sussex as a whole to reach an 80% employment rate, an additional 25,500 residents would need to be in work, assuming no change in the overall population. Brighton & Hove would need to support an additional 7,140 people into employment to hit the 80% threshold, whilst in East Sussex an additional 25,540 working-age residents would need to be employed for the county to achieve an 80% employment rate. This would require an 11% increase in the number of people in work - twice the rate of increase needed in England as a whole (5.6%).

There are significant variations within the sub-areas of Sussex. Hastings would need +7,620 more people in work to achieve an 80% employment rate and Rother would need +7,960.

Economic Inactivity

16-64 Year old Economic Inactivity Rates 2024

	Inc Students		Exc Students	
	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	199,900	19.2%	147,500	14.9%
Brighton & Hove	40,600	19.5%	22,000	11.6%
East Sussex	74,800	23.1%	58,100	18.9%
West Sussex	84,500	16.6%	67,400	13.7%
South East	1,040,000	18.4%	734,400	13.7%
England	7,450,500	21.1%	5,404,600	16.3%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2025

People who are economically inactive are neither employed nor have they been actively seeking work in the previous four weeks. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, having ill health, providing care, or being retired. Some forms of inactivity - such as studying or retirement - are not necessarily disadvantageous. The table below shows both the overall economic inactivity rates and the rates excluding students.

There are just under 200,000 working-age people in Sussex who are economically inactive. This represents 19.2% of 16–64-year-olds - a higher rate than in the South East (18.4%) but lower than in England (21.1%).

East Sussex (23.1%) has a particularly high economic inactivity rate, while West Sussex (16.6%) has a notably low rate.

Once students are excluded, around 147,500 working-age residents in Sussex - equivalent to 14.9% - are economically inactive. This adjusted rate again sits between the figures for England (16.3%) and the South East (13.7%). East Sussex (18.9%) continues to show a significantly higher level of economic inactivity than both national and regional averages. In contrast, West Sussex (13.7%) matches the South-East average (13.7%), but is below the national figure (16.3%). In Brighton & Hove, the economic inactivity rate (excluding students) is 11.6%, below both the regional rate (13.7%) and national rate (16.3%).

Reasons for Economic Inactivity (excluding students)

Reasons for Economic Inactivity - excluding students (16-64 Year olds) 2024

	Looking after a family/home		Long-term Sick		Early Retirees	
	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive
Sussex	31,600	15.8%	51,600	25.8%	34,400	17.2%
Brighton & Hove	5,000	12.4%	6,000	14.7%	3,900	9.7%
East Sussex	12,900	17.3%	20,200	27.0%	13,500	18.0%
West Sussex	13,700	16.3%	25,400	30.0%	17,000	20.1%
South East	197,100	19.0%	228,100	21.9%	150,000	12.8%
England	1,415,500	19.0%	2,009,900	27.0%	934,900	11.5%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Just over a quarter (25.8%) of Sussex's economically inactive residents are inactive due to long-term sickness. This compares with 21.9% in the South-East and 27% in England. In West Sussex, 30% of economic inactivity is due to ill health; in East Sussex, it is 27%; and in Brighton & Hove, it is 15%. The local areas that have the highest proportion of ill-health related economic inactivity are Chichester (44.2%), Crawley (44.1%) and Rother (38.9%)

This means that most of the economic inactivity is due to other reasons. In many cases, this is likely to reflect a voluntary decision to withdraw from the labour market. There are 34,400 working-age residents (17% of 16–64-year-olds) in Sussex who have retired early. This is significantly higher than in the South East (13%) and England (12%).

In West Sussex, early retirees account for one in five (20%) of all economically inactive working-age residents, and in East Sussex, the figure is 18%. The proportion and number in Brighton & Hove are much lower - 10% and 3,900, respectively.

Just under 16% of economically inactive residents in Sussex are looking after a family or home - lower than in both the South-East (19%) and England (19%). Relative to regional and national averages, this is a less prominent feature of worklessness in Sussex.

Looking after a family or home is a common reason for economic inactivity, particularly among women. It is not always clear how much of this is voluntary, and how much reflects difficulties related to the cost of childcare and in managing home and work responsibilities.

In Sussex, 44,200 (22.1%) out of 200,000 economically inactive residents report that **they want to work**. This represents a higher proportion than in the South East (18.7%) and England (20.5%). Economically inactive residents in Brighton & Hove (37.5%) are far more likely to want work than their counterparts in East Sussex (14.9%) and West Sussex (21.2%). It must be noted that the majority of working-age people who are economically inactive **do not state that they want a job**. Data at this level has quite wide confidence bands, so it needs to be interpreted with some caution.

Claimant Count Unemployment

Claimant Count Unemployment April 2024 and April 2025

	Apr-24		Apr-25		April 2024-April 2025 Change	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	33,010	3.1%	36,875	3.5%	+3,865	+11.7%
Brighton & Hove	7,800	3.9%	8,745	4.4%	+945	+12.1%
East Sussex	10,840	3.4%	11,650	3.7%	+810	+7.5%
West Sussex	14,370	2.7%	16,480	3.1%	+2,110	+14.7%
South East	170,210	2.9%	186,695	3.2%	+16,485	+9.7%
England	1,387,390	3.8%	1,529,600	4.2%	+142,210	+10.3%

Source: Claimant Count; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were just under 37,000 claimant count unemployed residents in Sussex - equivalent to 3.5% of the working-age population. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (3.2%) but lower than in England (4.2%). Brighton & Hove has the highest claimant count unemployment rate (4.4%), while West Sussex has the lowest (3.1%).

The claimant count for unemployed residents in Sussex increased by 3,865 (+11.7%) between April 2024 and April 2025. This represents a faster rate of increase than in both the South East (+9.7%) and England (+10.3%). The largest increase occurred in West Sussex (+14.7%), while the smallest was in East Sussex (+7.5%).

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table below shows the claimant count for unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18–24-year-olds 25–49 year olds and people aged 50+. In April 2024, there were also 60 16–17-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed – 25 in East Sussex and 25 in West Sussex and 15 in Brighton & Hove.

Claimant count unemployment by age 2024-2025

	18-24 Year Olds				25-49 Year Olds				50+ Years			
	Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change	
	Count	Count	Count	%	Count	Count	Count	%	Count	Count	Count	%
Sussex	5,705	6,145	440	7.7	19,080	20,485	1,405	7.4	8,175	9,565	1,390	17.0
Brighton & Hove	1,390	1,385	-5	-0.4	4,595	5,015	420	9.1	1,805	2,170	365	20.2
East Sussex	2,010	2,090	80	4.0	6,125	6,205	80	1.3	2,685	3,085	400	14.9
West Sussex	2,305	2,670	365	15.8	8,360	9,265	905	10.9	3,685	4,310	625	17.0
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2
England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 6,145 18–24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in Sussex. This is +440 (7.7%) more than there had been in April 2024 – a smaller proportionate increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%). West Sussex (+15.8%) had the largest increase and accounted for 83% of the increase in Sussex.

There were 20,485 25–49 year old claimant count unemployed residents in Sussex in April 2025. This is an increase of +1,405 (+7.4%) compared with a year earlier. This is a slightly faster increase than in the South

East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period. West Sussex (+10.9%) had the largest percentage increase, followed by Brighton & Hove (+9.1%) and East Sussex (+1.3%).

There were 9,565 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in Sussex in April 2025. This is +1,390 more (17.0%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%). Brighton & Hove (+20.2%) had the largest proportionate increase, followed by West Sussex (+17.0%) and East Sussex (+14.9%).

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

16-17 Years Olds - NEET / Activity Not Known (2025)

	Cohort	NEET & Not Known		NEET		Not Known	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	36,349	3,223	8.9%	1,283	3.5%	1,940	5.3%
Brighton & Hove	5,713	383	6.7%	286	5.0%	97	1.7%
East Sussex	11,979	695	5.8%	587	4.9%	108	0.9%
West Sussex	18,657	2,146	11.5%	410	2.2%	1,735	9.3%
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0%	7,334	3.4%	7,982	3.7%
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6%	45,395	3.4%	29,374	2.2%

Source: Participation in education, training & NEET age 16-17 by local authority; Department for Education; 2025

There were 36,349 16–17-year-olds in Sussex in 2025. Of these, 1,283 (3.5%) were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This is a very similar percentage to the South-East (3.4%) and England (3.4%).

Nearly half (45% or 587) of the known NEET cohort were in East Sussex, just under a third (32% or 410) in West Sussex, and just under a quarter (22% or 286) were in Brighton & Hove. Although West Sussex had a known NEET rate of 2.2%), there were a significant proportion (9.3%) of young people had an ‘not known’ destination - suggesting a challenge with tracking the current situations of young people in the county to be addressed. In contrast, Brighton & Hove (1.7%) and East Sussex (0.9%) had much lower rates of ‘not known’ destinations than West Sussex, the South East (3.7%), and England (2.2%).

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a monthly payment to help people with their living costs. People who are on low income, out of work or who cannot work are eligible to claim Universal Credit. It is replacing housing benefit, income support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), and income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Average Monthly Universal Credit Claimants (January 2024 - December 2024)

	Total	16-24 Year Olds	25-49 Year Olds	50-64 Years
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	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	34,588	2.0%	5,725	3.4%	20,098	3.9%	8,769	2.4%
Brighton & Hove	8,124	2.9%	1,374	3.1%	4,776	4.8%	1,974	3.6%
East Sussex	11,286	2.0%	2,018	4.4%	6,400	4.3%	2,870	2.4%
West Sussex	15,178	1.7%	2,333	3.0%	8,922	3.3%	3,925	2.1%
South East	177,194	1.9%	29,009	3.1%	104,960	3.5%	43,225	2.3%
England	1,461,140	2.5%	249,577	4.1%	874,513	3.0%	337,450	3.0%

Source: Stat-Xplore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

In 2024, there were an average of 34,588 working age residents in Sussex claiming Universal Credit. This is 2.0% of the resident population. This compares with 1.9% in the South-East and 2.5% in England. Brighton & Hove (2.9%) had the highest rate of claimants, followed by East Sussex (2.0%) and West Sussex (1.7%).

People aged 25-49 years were most likely to be claiming Universal Credit (3.9%), followed by people aged 16-24 years (3.4%) and people aged 50-64 years (2.4%). East Sussex had the highest proportion of 16-24 year olds (4.4%) claiming Universal Credit; Brighton & Hove had the highest proportion of 25-49 year olds (4.8%) and 50-64 year olds (3.6%).

Between January and December 2024, the number of Universal Credit claimants in Sussex increased by 1,780, with seven out of ten (70%) of this increase among older residents (aged 50+). Almost six out of ten (57%) of the rise was among West Sussex residents; a quarter in East Sussex (27%) and one in seven (15%) in Brighton & Hove.

3.4 Labour Demand

Jobs and Job Density

Jobs & Job Density 2024

	Count	% of Sussex	Job Density
Sussex	722,790	100%	0.82
Brighton & Hove	140,740	19.5%	0.88
East Sussex	190,300	26.3%	0.72
West Sussex	391,750	54.2%	0.86

Source: Job Density; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are 722,790 jobs in Sussex. Over half (54%) of these are in West Sussex, just over a quarter (26%) are in East Sussex, and a fifth (20%) are in Brighton & Hove. However, jobs are not evenly distributed across the county. One-third (32%) of all Sussex jobs are located in either Brighton & Hove or Crawley - both situated along Sussex's central spine between the coast and London.

Only two local areas have more jobs than working-age residents: Crawley, with a job-to-working-age ratio of 1.16, and Chichester, at 1.08. In contrast, East Sussex has just 0.72 jobs per working-age resident, significantly lower than Brighton & Hove (0.88) and West Sussex (0.86).

This disparity has major implications for matching people to jobs and ensuring transport systems are suitable to support this. Put simply, in many parts of Sussex - especially in remote rural areas of East and West Sussex - jobs are not located where people live.

Self-Employment

Self-Employment 2024

	Count	Percent	Index (England = 100)
Sussex	123,000	15.2%	121
Brighton & Hove	24,000	15.1%	120
East Sussex	37,000	15.8%	125
West Sussex	62,000	14.9%	118
South East	559,900	12.6%	100
England	3,358,400	12.6%	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

High levels of self-employment can indicate a lack of high-quality employment opportunities and can provide low-quality, insecure sources of income. Certain sectors are known for high levels of self-employment, such as construction and the creative industries, where work is often project-based and time limited.

A relatively high proportion of Sussex’s working residents (15.2%) are self-employed, compared with both England and the South-East (each at 12.6%). This pattern is consistent across Sussex: East Sussex has the highest rate (15.8%), followed by Brighton & Hove (15.1%) and West Sussex (14.9%).

Within Sussex, some of the most affluent areas have the highest levels of self-employment - Rother (21.8%), Chichester (21.1%), Wealden (21.1%) and Horsham (17.6%), perhaps reflecting a lifestyle choice in these areas, and a desire for greater flexibility.

High levels of self-employment pose challenges for supporting people on the fringes of the labour market. When self-employment is not growth-oriented, it offers limited entry points and employment opportunities for those seeking to enter work. Micro-business often lack the capacity to take on and train staff.

Employment by Sector

Local economies and their labour markets are shaped by the structure of their economic activity. In Sussex, Human Health & Social Work (16%) and Wholesale & Retail (15%) together account for nearly a third of all jobs. Some sectors are high value and provide well-paid employment, while others are more labour-intensive and tend to offer lower pay.

The table below shows how employment in Sussex compares with England.

Employment by Sector 2024

	Sussex	Brighton & Hove	East Sussex	West Sussex
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	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	6,540	0.9	40	0.0	2,000	1.0	4,500	1.1
Mining & quarrying	300	0.0	0	0.0	50	0.0	250	0.1
Manufacturing	43,500	6.0	2,500	1.7	12,000	6.3	29,000	7.4
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	2,250	0.3	1,000	0.7	250	0.1	1,000	0.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	5,200	0.7	700	0.5	1,500	0.8	3,000	0.8
Construction	30,500	4.2	3,500	2.4	11,000	5.8	16,000	4.1
Wholesale & retail	107,000	14.8	17,000	11.9	30,000	15.7	60,000	15.2
Transport & storage	37,000	5.1	3,500	2.4	4,500	2.4	29,000	7.4
Accommodation & food service	81,000	11.2	18,000	12.6	25,000	13.1	38,000	9.6
Information & communication	24,000	3.3	8,000	5.6	4,000	2.1	12,000	3.0
Finance & insurance	23,000	3.2	8,000	5.6	4,000	2.1	11,000	2.8
Real estate	13,500	1.9	3,000	2.1	3,500	1.8	7,000	1.8
Professional, scientific & technical	49,000	6.8	11,000	7.7	11,000	5.8	27,000	6.9
Admin. support service	54,000	7.5	10,000	7.0	8,000	4.2	36,000	9.1
Public admin. & defence; social security	27,000	3.7	6,000	4.2	9,000	4.7	12,000	3.0
Education	65,000	9.0	17,000	11.9	17,000	8.9	31,000	7.9
Human health & social work	114,000	15.8	23,000	16.1	37,000	19.4	54,000	13.7
Arts, entertainment & recreation	24,000	3.3	5,000	3.5	6,000	3.1	13,000	3.3
Other services	16,000	2.2	3,500	2.4	4,500	2.4	8,000	2.0
Total	722,790	100.0	140,740	2.4	190,300	100	391,750	100

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey (2024)

There is a clear pattern across much of Sussex: the economy is heavily reliant on the following sectors:

- Land-based industries (agriculture, forestry and fishing)
- Tourism (accommodation and food services)
- Health (health and social work activities)
- Creative industries (arts, entertainment and leisure)

These are also identified as important sectors in the Sussex LSIP sector deep dive reports.

There are some additions and exceptions. Brighton & Hove also has notable strengths in ICT and Finance & Insurance; East Sussex has strengths in Education and Construction; and West Sussex performs well in Manufacturing, Admin and Transport & Storage. There are also variations at district and borough level.

However, overall, Sussex is heavily reliant on some of the lowest-value sectors of the economy - many of which also rely heavily on insecure employment. In 2024, UK-wide productivity stood at £45.95 per hour. By contrast, in sectors where Sussex has strengths, output per hour was:

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing: £20.91
- Accommodation and food services: £21.61
- Human health work: £30.57
- Arts, entertainment and recreation: £24.49²⁰

In addition, Retail and Wholesale - another major employment sector in Sussex - had a productivity rate of £31.95 per hour.

²⁰ Output per hour, UK; Office for National Statistics; 2025

None of the sectors in which Sussex has significant employment strengths are high value. As a result, they tend not to offer well-paid jobs, making the local labour market a less reliable source of income - particularly when set against the region's high housing costs. However, they do offer young people in particular a valuable entry route into the labour market and opportunity to develop key employability skills and experience, as well as progression routes.

Business Units

Business Units by Size 2024

	Total	0-4		5-9		10-49		50-249		250+	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	84,900	62,180	73.2	10,320	12.2	10,265	12.1	1,870	2.2	265	0.3
Brighton & Hove	16,155	11,935	73.9	1,875	11.6	1,970	12.2	315	1.9	55	0.3
East Sussex	26,145	19,335	74.0	3,220	12.3	3,010	11.5	535	2.0	45	0.2
West Sussex	42,605	30,910	72.6	5,225	12.3	5,285	12.4	1,020	2.4	165	0.4
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2025

The business base of most local economies is dominated by micro-business units employing fewer than five people. In this respect, Sussex is broadly like other areas. A slightly higher proportion of business units in Sussex employ 0–4 staff (73.2%) compared with England (72.1%), and the figure is almost identical to the South East average (73.1%). Within Sussex, East Sussex (73.9%) and Brighton & Hove (74.0%) have slightly higher proportions of micro-businesses than West Sussex (72.6%).

The more pressing local issue is the relatively small number of medium-sized (50–249 employees) and large (250+ employees) business units. Brighton & Hove has only 315 businesses employing 50–249 staff, and just 55 employing 250 or more. In East Sussex, the figures are 535 and 45 respectively. West Sussex has a larger number, with 1,020 businesses employing 50–249 people, and 165 organisations that employ 250+ employees.

A significant proportion of larger business units in Sussex are in public services. There are 100 large organisations in public administration, education, and health, distributed across Brighton & Hove (25), East Sussex (30) and West Sussex (45). Other sectors with a reasonably significant number of large businesses include wholesale and retail (35), administrative and support services (25), and transport & storage (20).

Business Units by Sector 2024

	Sussex		Brighton & Hove		East Sussex		West Sussex	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	2,660	3.1	50	0.3	1,300	5.0	1,310	3.1
Mining & quarrying	30	0.0	0	0.0	10	0.0	20	0.0
Manufacturing	3,675	4.3	450	2.8	1,265	4.8	1,960	4.6
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	160	0.2	30	0.2	30	0.1	100	0.2
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	315	0.4	25	0.2	115	0.4	180	0.4
Construction	11,540	13.6	1,585	9.8	4,005	15.3	5,950	14.0
Wholesale & retail	13,395	15.8	2,590	16.0	4,110	15.7	6,695	15.7

Transport & storage	2,290	2.7	240	1.5	540	2.1	1,515	3.6
Accommodation & food service	6,110	7.2	1,495	9.3	1,920	7.3	2,695	6.3
Information & communication	6,010	7.1	1,790	11.1	1,465	5.6	2,755	6.5
Finance & insurance	1,520	1.8	235	1.5	420	1.6	865	2.0
Real estate	3,375	4.0	730	4.5	1,000	3.8	1,645	3.9
Professional, scientific & technical	12,885	15.2	2,790	17.3	3,635	13.9	6,465	15.2
Admin. & support service	7,530	8.9	1,390	8.6	2,130	8.1	4,010	9.4
Public admin. & defence; social security	525	0.6	90	0.6	190	0.7	250	0.6
Education	2,055	2.4	390	2.4	650	2.5	1,015	2.4
Human health & social work	4,595	5.4	850	5.3	1,485	5.7	2,265	5.3
Arts, entertainment & recreation	2,925	3.4	810	5.0	880	3.4	1,235	2.9
Other services	3,290	3.9	610	3.8	1,000	3.8	1,680	3.9
Total	84,900	100.0	16,155	100.0	26,145	100.0	42,605	100.0

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

At the Sussex level, when compared nationally, there is nothing particularly distinctive about the sectoral structure of its business units, apart from a modest concentration in arts, entertainment and recreation.

However, more notable differences emerge at county and unitary authority level. The business base in Brighton & Hove is heavily service-sector oriented, with very little production activity. There is some evidence of strength in ICT and professional, scientific and technical services - although many of these are likely to be small, lifestyle-oriented businesses. The city also has a large number of accommodation and food service businesses.

In East Sussex, there is a notable concentration of land-based industries and construction business units. The business base in West Sussex, by contrast, more closely resembles the sector profile of England as a whole. Overall, West Sussex has a more balanced economy than either East Sussex or Brighton & Hove.

Job Vacancies

Unique Job Postings - 2024

		Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufac & engineering	Visitor economy
Sussex	Count	110,500	13,728	7,277	10,410	33,331	1,714	15,846	28,194
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Brighton & Hove	Count	23,659	2,966	2,182	3,326	6,263	283	2,327	6,312
	%	21.4%	21.6%	30.%	32.0%	18.8%	16.5%	14.7%	22.4%
East Sussex	Count	28,727	3,413	1,479	1,864	10,733	477	4,206	6,555
	%	26.0%	24.9%	20.%3	17.9%	32.2%	27.8%	26.5	23.2%
West Sussex	Count	58,114	7,349	3,616	5,220	16,335	954	9,313	15,327
	%	52.6%	53.5	49.7%	50.%1	49.0%	55.7%	58.8%	54.4%

Source: Lightcast 2024

In 2024, there were 110,000 unique job postings in Sussex. Over half (53%) were in West Sussex, just over a quarter (26%) in East Sussex, and just over a fifth (21%) in Brighton & Hove.

Health and Care accounted for the largest number of job postings (33,300), followed by roles in the Visitor Economy - broadly reflecting the importance of these sectors to the Sussex economy.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Brighton & Hove had a disproportionate share of Creative, Cultural and Digital job postings. East Sussex saw a higher-than-average concentration of Health and Care roles, while West Sussex had a disproportionate share of jobs in Land-Based industries and Manufacturing & Engineering.

3.5 Current Provision

Strong strategic partnerships are well-established across each local authority area, with collaborative working increasing across Sussex. Where collaboration is less developed, this reflects a range of factors - including the commissioning structure of government contracts, and current funding constraints, as well as variations in capacity or service delivery models and organisational priorities across local agencies.

Nationally Funded Employment-related partnerships and programmes

Connect to Work

Connect to Work is a national government programme that supports people with long-term health conditions to secure sustainable employment, using a voluntary supported employment model delivered by a range of providers. The programme is administered by East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, with delivery across Sussex and Brighton & Hove.

Access to Work

Access to Work is a national programme managed by local DWP offices and offers financial and practical support to individuals with disabilities or health conditions to help them start or remain in employment. It is delivered by a range of local organisations and provides tailored services based on individual needs. It is currently under review by the government's Pathways to Work white paper.

WorkWell Programme

The WorkWell programme is a Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) initiative aimed at supporting people with health-related barriers to work by offering integrated employment and health support. There is currently no WorkWell programme in Sussex, however the Integrated Care Board is working with partners to map how the programme could be supported in Sussex with pilot projects planned for Hastings, Crawley, and East Brighton, should further funding become available in the future.

The WorkWell Discovery Phase report²¹ has found that individuals with mental health and musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions face significant barriers to work, including long waiting lists, digital exclusion, fragmented referral pathways, and inconsistent employer support the report suggests that for it to succeed, WorkWell must be designed with sustainability, equity, and local ownership at its core. It should prioritise early intervention and the use of digital tools to support this pathway where appropriate, with a call for a cultural shift around the use of fit notes as an enabler to this work to provide timely support.

²¹ NHS Sussex Workwell Discovery; Health Innovation Kent, Surrey & Sussex; 2025

Skills Bootcamps

Skills Bootcamps provide intensive, sector-specific training courses designed to improve employability and address local skills shortages in high-demand industries by supporting people into jobs and aiding career progression. Skills Bootcamps are funded by DfE and commissioned by local authorities. Delivered in partnership with local employers and training providers, courses typically last up to 16 weeks. Bootcamps are focused on a range of specific sector skills vital to the local economy, for example, digital marketing or wine production.

Restart

The Restart Scheme is a free, government-funded employment support programme for adults aged 18 and over in Sussex who have been out of work and claiming Universal Credit for at least 6 months. Commissioned by the DWP, the scheme is delivered locally by providers such as Fedcap Employment and Reed in Partnership. It offers up to 12 months of tailored, one-to-one support to help individuals overcome barriers to employment and secure sustainable work. Participants are referred by their Jobcentre Plus Work Coach and receive assistance with job searching, CV writing, interview preparation, skills development, and accessing local job opportunities. The Restart Scheme complements existing Jobcentre Plus services by providing additional, personalised support to long-term unemployed individuals.

National Careers Service

The National Careers Service is a free, government-funded support service available to individuals aged 13 and over across Sussex. Delivered by CXK in East Sussex and the Education and Development Trust in Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. The service offers personalised, one-to-one guidance to help people at all stages of their career journey make informed decisions about learning, training, and work opportunities.

Youth Employability Service

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to support young people aged 16- 18 people not in education, employment, or training (NEET), or are at risk of becoming NEET. In East Sussex it is a commissioned service; in Brighton & Hove and West Sussex the service is delivered in-house. The provision offers personalised, support and guidance to help young people explore their options and plan their next steps, as well as track destinations and identify young people who need support.

Careers Hubs

There are two Careers Hubs in Sussex: one covering East Sussex and the other covering Brighton & Hove and West Sussex. These hubs provide resources, experiences of the workplace, and other forms of support to help young people with career choices and transitions. The Careers Hubs are supported by volunteer employers such as Enterprise Advisers, who support schools with their careers strategies and Industry Champions, who take part in careers activities to support young people's understanding of the world of work. Each hub is also supported by 'Cornerstone' Employers from across the county who act as ambassadors, connecting education institutions with businesses and supporting careers events and activities.

Pan-Sussex skills and employment partnerships that can support workforce development

Local Skills Improvement Partnership

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP - Future Skills Sussex), led by the Sussex Chamber of Commerce, outlines the skills challenges, gaps, and needs across Sussex. It has resulted in the Future Skills Sussex Improvement Framework, developed under five themes: Intelligence, Conversation, Innovation, Offer, Talent²². A new LSIP Progress Report was produced in 2025 alongside updated sector deep dive reports.

Employer Representative Bodies

Whilst the Sussex Chamber of Commerce is the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for Sussex, encompassing East Sussex, West Sussex, and Brighton & Hove, there are many town and city employer networks, chambers and sector support representatives that support local skills, employment projects and Careers Hubs.

FE Sussex

FE Sussex brings together the seven member colleges serving Sussex to provide a coordinated and influential post-16 educational voice. It also supports the sharing of best practice in learning provision across the county.

Sussex Council of Training Providers (SCTP)

The Sussex Council of Training Providers represents training organisations offering apprenticeships, work-based learning, and pre-employment training across Sussex. It provides information, resources, networking, and knowledge exchange opportunities. They organise a regular pre-employment group meeting bringing local authorities, DWP and other local agencies together to discuss issues and identify opportunity.

Apprenticeships in Sussex (AIS)

AIS (run by Sussex Council of Training Providers) publishes details of apprenticeship and training providers, and pre-employment training opportunities throughout Sussex.

Sussex Learning Network (SLN)

The Sussex Learning Network is a collaborative partnership, comprising 14 core members, including further education colleges, universities, local authorities, and enterprise partnerships across Sussex. Its primary mission is to enhance access to higher-level education and improve social mobility by addressing barriers faced by learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Sussex Training Consortium (STC)

The Sussex Training Consortium is a strategic partnership of local authorities in East and West Sussex, dedicated to providing high-quality, cost-effective training for local government staff. Founded in 2004,

²² <https://www.futureskillssussex.co.uk/>

STC offers a broad range of courses, including general training, management programs, IT training, and specialised courses in investigation and enforcement. By pooling resources, the consortium ensures that training is tailored to the specific needs of local government employees, promoting professional development and service improvement across the participating councils.

The Sussex Platform for Education, Careers and Skills (SPECS)

SPECS is an initiative by the NHS Sussex Training Hub aimed at enhancing education and career development within the region. SPECS focuses on providing resources and support for individuals pursuing careers in primary care and related sectors. It offers a range of educational programmes, training opportunities, and career guidance to help individuals navigate their professional paths in healthcare.

Higher Education

There are three universities in Sussex: the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton, both with main campuses in Falmer, on the outskirts of Brighton & Hove; and the University of Chichester, with campuses in Chichester and Bognor Regis

Additionally, the new Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology developed as a partnership between Chichester College Group, NESCOL, University of Brighton, University of Chichester and University of Sussex provides high quality, higher level technical education up to level 5 including in:

- Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies
- Digital Technologies
- Construction, Planning & The Built Environment
- Sustainable Technologies & Practices

East Sussex College has recently partnered with the South East Institute of Technology (SE IOT), focusing on developing skills for the technology-driven economy in the South East. The college offers a range of technical and professional courses, apprenticeships, and higher education options, with a strong emphasis on industry partnerships and state-of-the-art facilities.

There is no dedicated higher education provision in East Sussex, but HEIs are represented on the Skills & Employment East Sussex sector task groups.

4. Brighton & Hove

4.1 Brighton & Hove Summary

Brighton & Hove is the main urban centre covering an area of 32 square miles. It is centrally located along the Sussex coast - around 38 miles west of Hastings and 31 miles east of Chichester which are the boundaries of East and West Sussex. It is bounded by the South Downs National Park to the north and the English Channel to the south, and like much of coastal Sussex, this geography limits development opportunities. It is one of the UK's most high-profile seaside locations, known for its diverse and liberal character. It benefits from good rail connections to London and Gatwick Airport and a well-connected bus service.

The Universities of Brighton and Sussex are an important part of the city's economic and cultural fabric. Together, they have around 35,000 students, many of whom remain in the city after completing their studies to enjoy its distinctive lifestyle although it is not in the UK top ten graduate retention cities²³.

The city's economy is characterised by high levels of freelance work, micro-businesses. According to Invest in Brighton & Hove²⁴, business start-ups and self-employed workers are 5% above the national average and the city has more freelancers than anywhere else in the UK. It suggests that this "contributes to an open, flexible and collaborative way of working".

Housing and rent affordability are significant local challenges. The city's 23 wards display a wide range of socio-economic profiles, with the highest levels of social and economic deprivation concentrated in areas such as Moulsecoomb, Whitehawk, Hangleton, Coldean and Bevendean.

The Brighton and Hove Economic Plan (2024–2027)²⁵ includes a strong commitment to building a more inclusive labour market by providing employment and skills support that is directly aligned with local economic needs and opportunities.

Demographically, the city is distinct from other parts of Sussex. It has a youthful population, driven in part by the large number of students attending the Universities of Brighton and Sussex which leads to a more transient community. Although future population growth is expected to be among older residents, it is also anticipated that there will be growth in the 16-49 age groups. It is a suggestion that some working age people are moving out of the city to more affordable neighbouring areas, although this is difficult to evidence conclusively.

Brighton & Hove's population is genuinely diverse and, overall, well-qualified - 20% of residents were born outside the UK. Between 2011 and 2021, the city's population increased by only 1.4%, but the ethnic mix changed considerably. There were -15,187 (-6.9%) fewer white British residents and +18,921 (+35%) more residents from other ethnic backgrounds²⁶. The design and delivery of employment and skills support services need to reflect this diversity.

Although economic inactivity is relatively high, this is largely attributable to the student population. However, 15,200 people, or 37.5% of the city's economically inactive residents - report that they would like to work.

For a city with two universities, Brighton & Hove maintains a healthy employment rate - though it remains below the Government's 80% target. However, unemployment is increasing and remains above pre-pandemic rates.

There are 69,000 residents in the city with a long-term health condition who are in work, including 22,500 with a mental health condition. However, compared with regional and national figures, the employment rate among people with health conditions is relatively high.

²³ <https://www.thestudentpocketguide.com/2025/01/student-life/education-career/graduate-retention-rate/>

²⁴ <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/article/inline/invest-in-brighton-hove.pdf>

²⁵ [Brighton & Hove Economic Plan 2024 to 2027 PDF plan, highlight report and first year action plan](#)

²⁶ Census 2011 and Census 2021 via NOMISWEB; Office for National Statistics; 2025

Brighton & Hove has a highly active and vibrant voluntary and community sector that engages with a wide range of communities. However, the sector is facing significant funding pressures, and the employability support it provides can only be delivered subject to funding.

4.2 Strengths & Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
Overall, a well-qualified and youthful resident population.	Rising unemployment 12.1% and 20% for over 50s Increasing numbers of young people Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET) 5% in 2025 compared to 4.1% in 2024.
A high profile and vibrant city that is a key visitor destination with a culturally, ethnically and LGBTQ+ population.	Whilst attainment at Level 3 is higher in the city than East and West Sussex. Attainment gaps at age 19 for SEN and free school meal pupils is also higher, this can lead to economic inequality and poor social mobility. 17% of the city's working age population don't have a Level 3 qualification.
71% of the population are working age, approximately 199,000 people (2023). With the number of working age adults aged up to 49 set to increase up to 2035. 23% of the city's working-age population are 16-24 years old.	Higher levels of self-employment than in England reflects insecurity and labour market vulnerability and the need for support for people on the fringes of the labour market. Self-employment is generally not growth-oriented and offers limited entry points for those seeking to enter work.
A notably high concentration of employment in several sectors: accommodation and food services, utilities, human health and social work, arts, entertainment and recreation, education, information and communication, finance and insurance and other services. With strong service, digital and creative sector economy.	The high working age population means the city needs to supply enough jobs to maintain a high employment rate. There are relatively low numbers of medium and large organisations in the city. However, increasing year on year unemployment growing numbers for 50+ and anticipated decline of 8% in working age population 50+ over the next 10 years
The city has 140K jobs, accounting for 20% of all employment in Sussex and a strong ratio of jobs to working age adults at 0.88.	Low productivity sectors dominate the local economy translating into low-paying jobs and labour market challenges particularly in relation to high living and housing costs and modest earnings.
At 76.6% a strong employment rate for a city with two universities and 35,000 students but still below the national ambition of 80% employment.	Sufficiency of provision of support for economically inactive people who want to work and people with physical and mental health conditions and language barriers to find and maintain employment.
A very active community voluntary sector infrastructure	Brighton & Hove (2.9%) has the highest rate of Universal Claimants in Sussex. The 25–49 age group is overrepresented among claimants, suggesting financial vulnerability among this core working age group. Based on resident population sizes, the city has higher level of residents in receipt of Employment Support Allowance at 2.5%.
A diverse city with 20% of residents born outside of the UK which brings a need and opportunity to design employment and skills support services to reflect this diversity.	Achieving an 80% employment rate requires approx. 7000 to be supported into employment. 15,200 people, or 37.5% of the city's economically inactive residents - report that they would like to work. 17.3% active

residents do not give a reason for their economic inactivity.

4.3 Labour Supply

Population by Age

Population by Age (2023)

Area	All Ages	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+	Dependency ratio
Sussex	100%	16.7%	60.5%	9.7%	30.0%	20.8%	22.8%	0.65
Brighton & Hove	100%	14.6%	71.2%	16.1%	35.4%	19.7%	14.2%	0.40
East Sussex	100%	16.4%	57.2%	8.4%	27.1%	21.8%	26.5%	0.75
West Sussex	100%	17.6%	59.2%	8.5%	30.2%	20.5%	23.2%	0.69
South East	100%	18.6%	61.7%	10.0%	31.9%	19.8%	19.8%	0.62
England	100%	18.5%	62.9%	10.7%	32.9%	19.3%	18.7%	0.59

Source: Office for National Statistics

In 2023, Brighton & Hove had a resident population of just under 280,000. Over seven in ten residents (71%) were of working age, equating to approximately 199,000 people. The city has a much higher proportion of working-age residents than the South East (62%), England (64%), and Sussex as a whole (61%).

Unlike much of Sussex, Brighton & Hove's working-age population is heavily skewed towards younger adults (16–24-year-olds). One in six residents (16%) fall into this age group, and they make up nearly a quarter (23%) of the city's working-age population. This is largely attributable to the presence of the Universities of Sussex and Brighton. Nonetheless, it is a notable feature of the city's labour market - particularly when set against the broader Sussex context, where a significant share of the population is aged 65 and over.

The dependency ratio - measuring the number of non-working-age residents for every working-age resident - was 0.40 in Brighton & Hove in 2023. This is significantly lower than the figures for England (0.59) and the South East (0.62), indicating a relatively low level of demographic dependency.

The large number of working-age residents is a potential asset for employers, offering a bigger local labour pool than many areas. However, it also creates pressure to ensure that the city offers enough jobs to maintain a high employment rate.

Ethnicity

Ethnic Minority Population 2021

	All minority ethnic groups		Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh		Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African		Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups		Other White		Other ethnic group	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	136,076	18.1	24,835	18.3	9,955	7.3	25,541	18.8	62,134	45.7	13,611	10.0

Brighton & Hove	72,272	26.2	13,217	18.3	5,458	7.6	13,228	18.3	31,740	43.9	8,629	11.9
East Sussex	63,804	11.7	11,618	18.2	4,497	7.0	12,313	19.3	30,394	47.6	4,982	7.8
West Sussex	139,102	15.8	38,288	27.5	11,429	8.2	20,811	15.0	59,948	43.1	8,626	6.2
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics

In 2021, over 72,000 residents of Brighton & Hove (26%) were from an ethnic minority background. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (21.1%) and similar to the national figure for England (27%). Brighton & Hove has a significantly larger ethnic minority population than either East or West Sussex.

‘Other White’ residents account for nearly half (44%) of the city’s ethnic minority population - a figure notably higher than in the South East (35%) and England (28%). In contrast, Brighton & Hove has relatively smaller Asian and Black populations compared with both regional and national averages.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds live in all wards of the city. Hollingdean & Stanmer (3,400) and St Peter’s & North Laine (3,100) have the largest.

Indicative data from the Sussex Interpreting Service for 2024/25 shows that they provided interpreting support to 4164 residents in Brighton and Hove. A lack of English language skills can be a significant barrier to employment. In 2021, there were 3,100 residents in Brighton & Hove who either could not speak English well or could not speak it at all.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The table below shows the number of people who have arrived in Brighton & Hove under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and the Supported Asylum Programme.

Refugees & Asylum Seekers 2025

	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
Sussex	5,405	1,866	1,535	8,806	0.42%
Brighton & Hove	639	177	170	986	0.35%
East Sussex	2,065	196	121	2,382	0.43%
West Sussex	2,701	1,493	1,244	5,438	0.60%
South East	27,111	5,541	7,287	39,939	0.42%
England	125,290	23,680	94,754	243,724	0.42%

As of April 2025, just under 1,000 people had been welcomed to Brighton & Hove under the three main refugee and asylum programmes. This includes over 600 Ukrainians, fewer than 200 Afghans, and a further 170 individuals arriving under the Resettlement Programme.

LGBTQ+

In 2021, more than 25,000 residents in Brighton & Hove described their sexuality as something other than 'Straight or Heterosexual'. This represents 11% of the city's adult population - significantly higher than the proportions in England and the South East (both 3.1%) and markedly higher than in other parts of Sussex.

This is a distinctive feature of Brighton & Hove, further reflecting the city's diversity.

Population Projections

Population Projections 2025-2035

		All Ages	0-15 Years	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16-24 Years	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
Brighton & Hove	Count	+9,617	-1,702	+1,669	+4,386	+1,607	-4,324	+9,648
	%	+3.2	-3.9	+0.8	+8.4	+1.5	-8.3	+23.2

Source: Population Projections (2018 based); Office for National Statistics; 2025

The population of Brighton & Hove is projected to grow by 9,600 residents between 2025 and 2035 - a 3.2% increase over the decade. This compares with projected growth of 3.0% in the South East and 3.7% in England.

The city's population structure is expected to continue evolving, with a further increase in the post-working-age population (+9,600) and declines in both the pre-working-age population (-1,700) and the older working-age group (50-64 years) (-4,300). However, a challenge for the city is likely to continue to be the transient nature of its resident population, accounting for the student population, and the impact of high housing costs on retaining young adults and families in the city.

Although the population is projected to age, this is not the primary labour market challenge for Brighton & Hove in the way it is for much of the rest of Sussex. The city already has a comparatively young population, and the key issue is likely to remain how best to capitalise on such a large working-age population.

Households & Incomes

Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) 2022

	£	Index England =100)
Brighton & Hove	£26,461	1.13
South East	£26,058	1.12
England	£23,338	1.00

Source: Regional Gross Disposable Household Income; Local Authorities by ITL 1 Region; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Household income is a broad measure of household wealth. The table shows Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head, indexed to England (100). Overall, Brighton & Hove is a relatively affluent part of England, with a GDHI of £26,461 - compared with £23,338 in England and £26,058 in the South East. However, this average is likely to conceal significant disparities within the city. ²⁷

Housing Affordability

House Price Affordability Ratios 2022

	Ratio	England Index
Brighton & Hove	11.31	147
South East	9.61	125
England	7.71	100

Source: House Price to Workplace-Based Earnings Ratio; Office for National Statistics; 2023

Brighton & Hove is one of the least affordable places to live in England outside London. Median house prices are 11.31 times median workplace earnings - significantly higher than the regional ratio (9.61) and the England average (7.71). East and West Sussex are 10.4% and 10% respectively.

Put simply, most local jobs do not pay enough for people to live in the city - particularly if they rely solely on their income to rent or buy a home. The high housing costs and low quality of many local jobs create serious challenges in navigating the Sussex labour market. In the 2021 Census 6% of households 7229 were lone parents.

Median Earnings

Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time Workers – Residence and Workplace based 2024

	Workers		Residents		Workplace Earnings as % of Resident Earnings	
	£	Index (England = 100)	£	Index (England = 100)	£	%
Sussex	Not Available		Not Available		Not Available	
Brighton & Hove	£36,921	98	£38,556	102	-£1,635	-4.2
East Sussex	£32,703	87	£35,298	94	-£2,595	-7.4
West Sussex	£38,006	101	£38,700	103	-£694	-1.8
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	-£1,301	-3.2
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Brighton & Hove's median workplace earnings (£36,921) are slightly below both the national (£37,617) and regional (£39,038) averages. However, the median earnings of the city's residents (£38,556) are higher than the England average but remain below the South East average (£40,339).

²⁸ <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/joint-strategic-needs-assessment-jsna/key-evidence-reports-and-briefings/annual-reports-director-public-health>

Health & Well-Being

Disability (2021)

	All Disabled		Limiting a Little		Limiting a Lot	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Brighton & Hove	51,797	18.7%	31,446	11.3%	20,351	7.3%
South East	1,496,340	16.1%	915,292	9.9%	581,048	6.3%
England	9,774,510	17.3%	5,634,153	10.0%	4,140,357	7.3%

Source: 2001 Census; Office for National Statistics; 2021

In 2021, there were just under 52,000 residents in Brighton & Hove who had a disability that limited their day-to-day activities. This represents 18.7% of the population, compared with 16.1% in the South East and 17.3% in England. Nearly four out of ten (39%) people with a disability stated that it limited their daily activities a lot. This equates to 7.3% of the population - higher than the South East (6.3%) but the same as the national average.

According to the Brighton & Hove Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA²⁸), the city has above-average levels of people with mental health issues. Over 37,000 residents are registered on GP depression registers, and just under a quarter (22%) of the population aged 20 and over has a long-term physical or mental health condition.

Unpaid Carers

Unpaid Carers (2021)

	All Unpaid Carers		20 hours +	
	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	145,025	8.9%	67,930	4.2%
Brighton & Hove	20,804	7.8%	9,470	3.5%
East Sussex	51,405	8.6%	25,284	4.9%
West Sussex	72,816	9.9%	33,176	3.9%
South East	733,364	8.3%	344,742	3.9%
England	4,678,265	8.7%	2,374,540	4.4%

²⁸ <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/joint-strategic-needs-assessment-jsna/key-evidence-reports-and-briefings/annual-reports-director-public-health>

In 2021, there were 20,800 unpaid carers in Brighton & Hove, representing 7.8% of the population aged 5 and over. This is a lower proportion than in both the South East (8.3%) and England (8.7%). Just under half (46%) of the city's unpaid carers provided care for 20 hours or more per week. This equates to 3.5% of the city's population - slightly lower than the averages for the South East (3.9%) and England (4.4%).

Employment and Disability

Disability, disability employment rate and overall employment rate (2025)

	% aged 16-64 who are EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate aged 16-64 - EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate - aged 16-64	
	Count	percent	numerator	percent	numerator	percent
Brighton and Hove	66,700	31.9%	42,300	63.4%	154,900	74.1%
South East	1,453,900	25.7%	918,200	63.2%	4,436,900	78.4%
England	9,178,100	26.0%	5,288,500	57.6%	26,720,600	75.7%

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS; 2025

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 66,700 16–64-year-old residents in Brighton & Hove who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 31.9% of the working age population – higher than in the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%).

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 63.4%, compared with an overall employment rate of 74.1%. The employment rate for working age people in Brighton & Hove with disabilities was similar to the South East (63.2%) rate, but higher than in England (57.6%) rate. East Sussex (50.9%).

Employment and Health Conditions

Employment Rate (16+)²⁹ or People with Long-Term Health Conditions (2024)

	All long term health conditions		Mental health conditions	
	Count	%	Count	%
Brighton & Hove	69,000	64.6%	22,500	54.8%
South East	1,583,400	52.3%	455,800	50.9%
England	9,148,300	49.4%	2,592,500	46.4%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics 2024

Around two-thirds (65%) of people with long-term health conditions in Brighton & Hove are in work. This is less than 1% below the city's overall employment rate for people aged 16+ (65.2%). Brighton & Hove has a

²⁹ Note: Data from the Annual Population Survey is only available for this variable for residents aged 16+, not 16-64 year olds

notably high employment rate for people with long-term health conditions compared with the South East (52%) and England (49%). This may be linked to the city's relatively young population. The employment rate for people with mental health conditions is lower, at 55%, but still above the averages for both the South East (51%) and England (46%). Note: see economically inactive table for people with long term health conditions who are not working.

Education & Skills

Level 3 Attainment by 19 Years - by Characteristic 2023/24

	All	Non FSM	FSM	Attainment Gap	Non-SEN	SEN	Attainment Gap
Sussex	Unavailable						
Brighton & Hove	61.1%	67.2%	33.2%	34.1%	67.7%	31.2%	36.5%
East Sussex	52.6%	57.3%	31.6%	25.7%	57.3%	25.0%	32.2%
West Sussex	56.9%	62.8%	31.6%	31.3%	30.2%	31.6%	31.3%
South East	58.7%	63.0%	31.4%	31.7%	62.6%	33.4%	29.4%
England	57.6%	62.4%	36.8%	25.5%	64.2%	35.4%	28.8%

Source: Level 2 and 3 Attainment age 16-25 years; 2023/24; Department for Education' 2025

Qualification levels are often used as a proxy for skill levels and the opportunities individuals are likely to have to enter and progress in the labour market. The table below shows the proportion of 19-year-olds who have attained Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. It includes percentages for all 19-year-olds, those who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM), those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and the attainment gaps between these groups and their peers.

In Brighton & Hove, 61.1% of 19-year-olds hold a Level 3 qualification - higher than in the South East (58.7%) and England (57.6%). However, young people facing disadvantage have significantly lower attainment. Only one in three (33%) young people who have been eligible for FSM achieve a Level 3 qualification by age 19, compared with 67% of those who have not. The attainment gap is -34 percentage points. A similarly large gap exists for young people with SEN, with a -37-percentage point difference compared to their peers.

In both cases, the attainment gaps in Brighton & Hove are wider than the regional and national averages. A recent report by Impetus³⁰ examining compound disadvantage among young people highlights Brighton & Hove as an area with particularly high levels of socioeconomic inequality. This inequality is closely linked to low levels of social mobility, lower educational attainment, and higher levels of economic instability.

Adult Qualifications

Residents (16-64 years) without RGF Level 3 Qualifications (2024)

Source: Annual Population

	Count	%
Brighton & Hove	34,800	16.8%
South East	1,649,000	29.7%
England	11,171,100	32.4%

³⁰ <https://impetus-org.files.svdcn.com/production/assets/publications/Report/Youth-Jobs-Gap-Establishing-the-Employment-Gap-report.pdf>

There are 34,800 working age residents in Brighton & Hove who do not hold a qualification at Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) Level 3 or above. This equates to 17% of the city's working age population. Overall, Brighton & Hove has a well-educated population, especially when compared with the South East (30%) and England (32%). However, in some wards the number of people without a L3 qualification is significantly higher

RQF Level 3 is equivalent to an advanced apprenticeship or A-levels and typically provides the knowledge and skills needed for higher education or specialised industry roles.

Employment

Employment Rate (16-64 Year Olds) 2024

	Count	Percent	Count for 80%
Sussex	807,700	77.6%	+25,500
Brighton & Hove	159,100	76.6%	+7,140
East Sussex	233,500	72.1%	+25,540
West Sussex	415,100	81.4%	-7,180
South East	4,448,600	78.7%	+73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7%	+1,499,760

Source Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 159,100 of Brighton & Hove's working age residents were in employment, with an employment rate of 76.6%. This is below the employment rate in the South East (78.7%), but above the rate for England (75.7%). This is a high employment rate for a city with two universities. For comparison, other university cities such as Bristol (80.5%), Portsmouth (80.3%), York (77.8%) and Southampton (77.6%) have slightly higher employment rates, while Nottingham (68.7%), Manchester (66.0%), Liverpool (66.7%), Leeds (70.7%) and Newcastle (65.4%) all have much lower rates.

The UK Government has a target to achieve an 80% employment rate as part of its Get Britain Working Plan. For Brighton & Hove to achieve an 80% employment rate, there would need to be an additional 7,140 residents in work, assuming no change in the local population.

Economic Inactivity

16-64 Year old Economic Inactivity Rates 2024

	Inc Students		Exc Students	
	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	199,900	19.2%	147,500	14.9%
Brighton & Hove	40,600	19.5%	22,000	11.6%
East Sussex	74,800	23.1%	58,100	18.9%
West Sussex	84,500	16.6%	67,400	13.7%
South East	1,040,000	18.4%	734,400	13.7%
England	7,450,500	21.1%	5,404,600	16.3%

People who are economically inactive are neither employed nor unemployed. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, ill-health, caring responsibilities, or early retirement. Some forms of economic inactivity - such as studying or being retired - are not necessarily disadvantageous.

In Brighton & Hove, there are just under 40,600 working-age residents who are economically inactive. This represents 20% of 16–64-year-olds, which is higher than the South East average (18%) but lower than the England average (21%).

However, when students are excluded from the figures, the number drops to around 22,000 - or 12% of working-age residents. This is a significant reduction, showing that nearly half (46%) of the city's economically inactive population are students. Once students are excluded, Brighton & Hove's economic inactivity rate is below that of the South East (14%) and England (16%). However, this still means that there are 22,000 economically inactive working age residents in the city.

Brighton & Hove Economic Activity

Percentage of population who are of working age (16-64) and are economically inactive.

Areas in green are meeting the 80% economically active target.

Figures are inclusive of students.



Reasons for Economic Inactivity (excluding students)

Reasons for Economic Inactivity (16-64 Year olds) 2024

	Looking after a family/home		Long-term Sick		Early Retirees	
	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive
Sussex	31,600	15.8%	51,600	25.8%	34,400	17.2%
Brighton & Hove	5,000	12.4%	6,000	14.7%	3,900	9.7%
East Sussex	12,900	17.3%	20,200	27.0%	13,500	18.0%
West Sussex	13,700	16.3%	25,400	30.0%	17,000	20.1%
South East	197,100	19.0%	228,100	21.9%	150,000	12.8%
England	1,415,500	19.0%	2,009,900	27.0%	934,900	11.5%

There are 6,000 working residents in Brighton & Hove who are economically inactive because of long-term sickness. This is just under 15% of all economically inactive working age residents and 27% once students are removed. There are also 5,000 (12%) of inactive working age residents who are looking after a family/home and 3,900 (9.7%) early retirees. Brighton & Hove has a large proportion of economically inactive residents who do not give a reason for their economic inactivity (17.3%), compared with the South East (12.8%) and England (11.5%). Of the 40600 who are economically inactive - 15,200 people, or 37.5% of the city's economically inactive residents - report that they would like to work.

Claimant Count Unemployment

Claimant Count Unemployment April 2024 and April 2025

	Apr-24		Apr-25		April 2024-April 2025 Change	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	33,010	3.1%	36,875	3.5%	+3,865	+11.7%
Brighton & Hove	7,800	3.9%	8,745	4.4%	+945	+12.1%
East Sussex	10,840	3.4%	11,650	3.7%	+810	+7.5%
West Sussex	14,370	2.7%	16,480	3.1%	+2,110	+14.7%
South East	170,210	2.9%	186,695	3.2%	+16,485	+9.7%
England	1,387,390	3.8%	1,529,600	4.2%	+142,210	+10.3%

Source: Claimant Count; Office for National Statistics; 2025

As of April 2025, there were 8,745 claimant count unemployed residents in Brighton & Hove, representing 4.4% of the working-age population. This is higher than both the South East average (3.2%) and the England average (4.2%).

Between April 2024 and April 2025, the claimant count for unemployed residents in the city rose by 945 people - a 12.1% increase. This rate of increase outpaced both the South East (+9.7%) and England (+10.3%).

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table below shows the number of claimant count unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18-24 year olds, 25-49 year olds and people aged 50+. In April 2025 there were also 15 16-17 year olds who were claimant count unemployed in Brighton & Hove.

Claimant count unemployment by age April 2024- April 2025

	18-24 Year Olds				25-49 Year Olds				50+ Years			
	Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change	
	Count	Count	Count	Percent	Count	Count	Count	Percent	Count	Count	Count	Percent
Sussex	5,705	6,145	440	7.7	19,080	20,485	1,405	7.4	8,175	9,565	1,390	17.0
Brighton & Hove	1,390	1,385	-5	-0.4	4,595	5,015	420	9.1	1,805	2,170	365	20.2
East Sussex	2,010	2,090	80	4.0	6,125	6,205	80	1.3	2,685	3,085	400	14.9
West Sussex	2,305	2,670	365	15.8	8,360	9,265	905	10.9	3,685	4,310	625	17.0
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2

England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6
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Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 1,385 18–24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in Brighton & Hove. This is -5 (-0.4%) less than there had been in April 2024. This compares with increases in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%).

There were 5,015 25–49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in Brighton & Hove in April 2025. This is an increase of +420 (+9.1%) compared with a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period.

There were 1,805 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in Brighton & Hove in April 2025. This is +365 more (20.2%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%).

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

16-17 Years Olds - NEET / Activity Not Known (2024)

	Cohort	NEET & Not Known		NEET		Not Known	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Brighton & Hove	5,713	383	6.7%	286	5.0%	97	1.7%
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0%	7,334	3.4%	7,982	3.7%
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6%	45,395	3.4%	29,374	2.2%

Source: Participation in education, training & NEET age 16-17 by local authority; Department for Education; 2025

In the Department for Education Scorecard published in July 2025, there were 5,713 16–17 year olds in Brighton & Hove, 286 were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), giving a known NEET rate of 5.0%. This is higher than the South East average (3.4%) and the England average (3.4%). The city has a low proportion of young people with unknown destinations (1.7%), compared with 3.7% in the South East and 2.2% in England. The overall NEET rate (including both known and unknown NEETs) is 6.7%, compared with 7.0% in the South East and 5.6% in England.

Recent analysis by Impetus (Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring compound disadvantage) suggests that Brighton & Hove has one of the highest likelihoods in England of young people with low or no qualifications becoming NEET. This pattern is more typically seen in areas of the North and Midlands with fewer opportunities.³¹

The report points to high socio-economic inequality, poor social mobility and localised social instability as key factors behind this trend. East Sussex is the only other part of the South where disadvantaged young people face a similarly high risk of becoming NEET.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a monthly payment to help people with their living costs. People who are on low income, out of work or who cannot work are eligible to claim Universal Credit. It is replacing housing

³¹ Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring compound disadvantage; Impetus; 2025

benefit, income support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), and income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Average Monthly Universal Credit Claimants (January 2024 - December 2024)

	Total		16-24 Year Olds		25-49 Year Olds		50-64 Years	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sussex	34,588	2.0%	5,725	3.4%	20,098	3.9%	8,769	2.4%
Brighton & Hove	8,124	2.9%	1,374	3.1%	4,776	4.8%	1,974	3.6%
East Sussex	11,286	2.0%	2,018	4.4%	6,400	4.3%	2,870	2.4%
West Sussex	15,178	1.7%	2,333	3.0%	8,922	3.3%	3,925	2.1%
South East	177,194	1.9%	29,009	3.1%	104,960	3.5%	43,225	2.3%
England	1,461,140	2.5%	249,577	4.1%	874,513	3.0%	337,450	3.0%

Source: Stat-Xplore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

In 2024, Brighton & Hove had an average of over 8,100 working age residents claiming Universal Credit. Of these, just under 1,400 (17%) were aged 16–24, 4,800 (59%) were aged 25–49, and 1,900 were aged 50 and over.

The city has a relatively low proportion of young (16–24) claimants when compared to the size of that age group in the population. In contrast, the 25–49 age group is overrepresented among claimants, suggesting financial vulnerability among this core working age group.

Between January and December 2024, the total number of Universal Credit claimants in Brighton & Hove increased by 280. Notably, this was entirely driven by a rise in claimants aged 50+, which increased by 330 - indicating reductions in other age groups over the same period.

4.4 Labour Demand

Employee Jobs and Job Density

Jobs & Job Density 2023

	Count	% of Sussex	Job Density
Brighton & Hove	140,740	19.5%	0.88

Source: Job Density; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Brighton & Hove has 140,740 jobs, accounting for a fifth (20%) of all employment in Sussex. There are 0.88 jobs for every working age adult in the city - comparable to job densities in Slough, Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole, and Derby. Within Sussex, only Crawley (1.16) and Chichester (1.08) have a higher ratio of jobs to working age residents than Brighton & Hove.

Self-Employment

Self-Employment 2024

	Count	Percent	Index (England)
Brighton & Hove	24,000	15.1%	120
South East	559,900	12.6%	100
England	3,358,400	12.6%	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Self-employment is a notable feature of the Brighton & Hove labour market. Just over 15% of employed residents work for themselves, compared with 12.6% in both the South East and England. However, self-employment rates in Brighton & Hove are not especially high when compared to several rural parts of Sussex, such as Horsham, Chichester, Rother and Wealden, where self-employment is much more prevalent. This may reflect the wider availability of employee-based job opportunities in the city.

Self-employment is often mistakenly used as a proxy for entrepreneurship, but the two are not the same. Only a small proportion of self-employed people set out to build and grow businesses that create jobs. For many, self-employment is either a response to a lack of viable alternatives, influenced by sector and type of work i.e. construction trades, or a lifestyle choice made possible by financial stability and a desire for greater flexibility.

Employment by Industry

Employment by Industry (2024)

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

	Count	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	40	0.0
Mining & quarrying	0	0.0
Manufacturing	2,500	1.7
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	1,000	0.7
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	700	0.5
Construction	3,500	2.4
Wholesale & retail	17,000	11.9
Transport & storage	3,500	2.4
Accommodation & food service	18,000	12.6
Information & communication	8,000	5.6
Finance & insurance	8,000	5.6
Real estate	3,000	2.1
Professional, scientific & technical	11,000	7.7
Admin. & support service	10,000	7.0
Public admin. & defence; social security	6,000	4.2
Education	17,000	11.9
Human health & social work	23,000	16.1
Arts, entertainment & recreation	5,000	3.5
Other services	3,500	2.4

The structure of the local economy significantly shapes employment patterns in Brighton & Hove. Over half (53%) of all jobs in the city are concentrated in just four sectors: human health & social work (16%), accommodation & food service (13%), wholesale & retail (12%), and education (12%). This reflects Brighton & Hove's dual identity as both a hub for learning and a prominent visitor destination.

Compared with national averages, Brighton & Hove has notably high concentrations of employment in several sectors: accommodation & food service, utilities, human health & social work, arts, entertainment & recreation, education, information & communication, finance & insurance, and other services.

However, many of these sectors - particularly those that dominate the local economy - are low productivity. Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked in accommodation & food service (£21.61), human health & social work (£30.57), arts, entertainment & recreation (£24.49), and wholesale & retail (£31.95) all fall well below the all-industries UK average of £45.95.

This reliance on low productivity sectors often translates into low-paying jobs, which makes the local labour market challenging - particularly in a city with high living and housing costs.

Business Units

Business Units by Size (2024)

	Total	0-4	5-9	10-49	50-249	250+
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	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Brighton & Hove	16,155	11,935	73.9	1,875	11.6	1,970	12.2	315	1.9	55	0.3
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are over 16,100 business units in Brighton & Hove, with nearly three-quarters (74%) employing between 0–4 people. This is slightly higher than in the South East (73%) and England (72%), reflecting a local economy dominated by micro-businesses.

The city has 315 medium-sized business units (50–249 employees) and 55 large ones (250+ employees). That equates to just 1.9% of businesses being medium-sized - lower than the South East (2.5%) and England (2.6%) - and only 0.3% being large, compared with 0.4% regionally and nationally. Brighton & Hove's business base is vibrant but small-scale.

Business Units by Sector

Business Units by Sector (2024)

	Count	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	50	0.3%
Manufacturing	450	2.8%
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	30	0.2%
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	25	0.2%
Construction	1,585	9.8%
Wholesale & retail	2,590	16.0%
Transport & storage	240	1.5%
Accommodation & food service	1,495	9.3%
Information & communication	1,790	11.1%
Financial & insurance activities	235	1.5%
Real estate	730	4.5%
Professional, scientific & technical	2,790	17.3%
Admin. & support service	1,390	8.6%
Public admin. & defence; social security	90	0.6%
Education	390	2.4%
Human health & social work	850	5.3%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	810	5.0%
Other services	610	3.8%

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Nearly half (44%) of Brighton & Hove's business units are in just three sectors: wholesale & retail (16%), professional, scientific & technical services (17%), and information & communication (11%).

The city also has notable concentrations of businesses in accommodation & food service, professional, scientific & technical services, and arts, entertainment & recreation - highlighting a strong service-sector focus with a creative and visitor-led edge.

Job Vacancies

Unique Job Postings 2024

		Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufac & engineering	Visitor economy
Brighton & Hove	Count	23,659	2,966	2,182	3,326	6,263	283	2,327	6,312
	%	100.0	12.5%	9.2%	14.1%	26.5%	1.2%	9.8%	26.7%

Source: Lightcast 2024

In 2024, there were 23,700 job postings in Brighton & Hove. Health & care and the visitor economy each accounted for 27% of these - together making up over half of all vacancies and underlining the city's strong service-sector base. The creative, cultural and digital sectors contributed a further 23% of postings, reflecting Brighton & Hove's distinctive economic character.

4.5 Current Provision

Further Education

The largest Further Education College in Brighton & Hove is Brighton MET. There are also sixth form colleges at BHASVIC, Varndean, BACA, Kings, specialist provision at Downs Link College and post 16 provision offered by a range of providers

Higher Education

Brighton & Hove has two universities, whose main campuses are located at Moulsecoomb and Falmer. There are around 35,000 students at the universities, including large numbers of overseas students, studying a wide range of learning programmes at undergraduate and post-graduate level.

Brighton & Hove Adult Learning

The city is well served with adult education providers which include the councils Adult Education Hub, MET Brighton, Whitehead Ross, Functional Skills UK, Aldridge Adult Learning and Varndean Adult Education. They offer a wide curriculum of accredited and non-accredited learning and employability support.,

In addition to nationally funded programmes delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions and the National Careers Service, examples of other organisations that provide employment support in the city are shown below. This is not an exhaustive list

Brighton & Hove Youth Hub and Employability Service

The Youth Employment Hub provides information, advice and guidance for unemployed and not in education, young people aged 16-25 years in partnership with the local jobcentre.

Brighton & Hove Well-Being Service

The Brighton & Hove Well-Being Service has an Employment Advice Service that is run by MIND. This provides support with CV writing, job applications and support to employers in how to support staff with mental health challenges.

In partnership with the Sussex Partnership NHS Trust, Southdown provides a Work and Well-Being that provides specialist employment support for people living with mental health challenges across Sussex.

BHT Sussex

BHT Sussex has an Accommodation for Work project, which aims to help homeless people into work and independent accommodation. It offers temporary shared accommodation and support with work and learning.

5. East Sussex

5.1 East Sussex Summary

East Sussex covers an area of 660 square miles, stretching from Camber Sands in the east to Peacehaven in the west. From north to south, it spans the English Channel up to the High Weald. Around 40% of the county lies within the South Downs National Park or the High Weald National Landscape.

Beyond the coastal strip, much of the county is rural – characterised by woodland, farmland, and small villages and towns serving local hinterlands. The main urban centres are predominantly coastal and include Newhaven, Seaford, Eastbourne, Bexhill, and Hastings. The county town is Lewes, located on the western edge of East Sussex, seven miles inland from the sea.

Compared with most parts of the South East, East Sussex does not have a strong economy. Transport links are often poor, with slow rail journeys and a road network that hampers the efficient movement of goods and people. Rurality compounds the problem – access to and from many parts of the county is difficult, especially for those reliant on public transport.

There are only a small number of large organisations in East Sussex. Employment is heavily concentrated in the public sector and lower-value service industries. Many parts of the county face demographic pressures, with an ageing population and a relatively small pool of working age residents.

While some areas may be asset-rich, they are productivity-poor. For those who rely solely on employment to support household incomes, low-paid job opportunities can make life difficult.

There are significant socio-economic challenges, particularly along the coastal strip. These are most acute in Hastings, where pockets of entrenched, generational deprivation remain a serious concern.

The *East Sussex Economic Prosperity 2050 Strategy* sets the framework for supporting long-term economic growth. Its *Prosperity for People* strand focuses on developing better opportunities for young people to build careers locally, attracting a skilled and diverse workforce to the county (including those returning after time away), and supporting people to develop new skills and career paths throughout their lives. The strategy also recognises that providing a more affordable and diverse mix of housing is critical to achieving these ambitions.

East Sussex has an economy that is not characteristic of most of the South East of England. Its working age population is small, yet there are still not nearly enough jobs to meet the need. None of its districts or boroughs has an employment rate close to the Government's 80% target. To reach that target, the county would need to find work for an additional 25,500 working age residents – without any change in the working age population.

There are around 58,000 economically inactive working age residents in East Sussex, excluding students. A quarter (23%) of these have retired early and a third (35%) are not working because of long-term health conditions³².

The county's urban centres, Hastings and Eastbourne, have a number of opportunities. However, multi-dimensional deprivation is widespread in Hastings, and it extends along the coast into poorly connected places, isolated from strong commercial hubs.

³² Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Rural East Sussex is more affluent, with a significant agricultural and viticulture sector supported by the specialist college at Plumpton. But there are ongoing transport and digital connectivity challenges. Many land-based businesses struggle to recruit and are operating with ever-tightening margins.

There are few large employers in East Sussex and SMEs do not have access to human resources functions, which may limit their ability to become more inclusive employers. Much of the employment is in low- and intermediate-level sectors that are not well paid and often insecure, including tourism and land-based industries. The construction sector is more prominent and can provide good work, but it remains fragmented, with high levels of self-employment and volatility.

Despite its weak economic profile, large parts of East Sussex are affluent – especially among older populations with passive incomes and limited housing costs, although a lack of affordable housing for those who need it is a significant local issue. The disparity between residents’ and workers’ median earnings suggests that many of the county’s better-paid working residents are employed elsewhere. It is a good county to live in for those who don’t rely on paid employment. For those who do, the picture is more challenging: Housing costs are high, and most local jobs do not pay well enough.

East Sussex is heavily reliant on the public sector for its higher-quality employment. This creates a strong case for public sector organisations to wield their economic power more intentionally to support the wider economy.

With the University of Brighton closing its campuses in Hastings and Eastbourne, there is now no Higher Education presence in the county. The wider impact of this is unclear, but the absence of a local university may further dilute aspirations, particularly among disadvantaged communities. The East Sussex College Group does maintain a strong presence across the county, offering a wide range of vocational learning programmes for residents and businesses. However, Level 3 attainment among 19-year-olds remains low across most of the county – particularly in Hastings.

Despite these challenges, East Sussex has a well-established skills and employability support infrastructure. Skills & Employment East Sussex and its sub-groups bring together employers, learning providers, and other partners to develop collaborative approaches to skills development across the county.

5.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality of life and excellent natural assets • Strong land-based sector, including Plumpton College as a significant supplier of skills to the sector • Well established strategic employment and skills infrastructure, including through Skills & Employment East Sussex • Considerable cultural assets and the associated opportunities in the creative industries • High levels of self-employment, particularly in rural areas • Public sector, including health, as a key source of local employment • Strong construction sector with good skills support infrastructure • Hybrid and homeworking may provide more opportunities for people who need more flexible work opportunities • There are high levels of self-employment, which, in some, cases may lead to new businesses that create jobs • Affluent residents whose talents could be deployed for mentoring and other support programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small working age population and a large number of post-working age adults, which is projected to grow • Low employment rates and high levels of economic inactivity • Significant concentrations of deprivation, particularly in Hastings, but stretching along the East Sussex coast to Bexhill, Eastbourne and Newhaven • Insufficient jobs for the number of working age residents and too many of the jobs that exist are not well-paid enough • High housing costs and low levels of affordability in most parts of the county • Large numbers of asset rich people with passive incomes (e.g. pensions, who rely less on labour market participation to support their lifestyles) • Significant numbers of workless people, some of whom are not seeking employment, particularly in coastal areas • There is evidence of an increase in unemployment amongst people aged 50+ • Difficult transport connectivity, including between commercial centres and remote communities; and also in terms of strategic links to other commercial centres • Lack of Higher Education presence and low educational attainment in many parts of the county • 86% of businesses employ fewer than 10 people and there are just 45 businesses large businesses with 250+ staff
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5.3 Labour Supply

Population by Age

Population by Age 2023

Area	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+	Dependency ratio
East Sussex	16.4%	57.2%	8.4%	27.1%	21.8%	26.5%	0.75
Eastbourne	16.5%	58.8%	9.4%	29.4%	19.9%	24.7%	0.70
Hastings	17.7%	61.5%	8.8%	31.0%	21.7%	20.8%	0.63
Lewes	16.4%	56.7%	8.4%	26.6%	21.7%	26.9%	0.76
Rother	14.6%	52.9%	7.6%	23.0%	22.4%	32.5%	0.89
Wealden	16.6%	56.5%	7.9%	26.0%	22.6%	26.9%	0.77
South East	18.6%	61.7%	10.0%	31.9%	19.8%	19.8%	0.62
England	18.5%	62.9%	10.7%	32.9%	19.3%	18.7%	0.59

Source: Population Estimates; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In 2023, East Sussex had a resident population of approximately 550,000. Of these, around 318,000 (57.2%) were of working age. This is significantly lower than the proportion in England (62.9%) and the South East (61.7%). Except for Hastings, all districts and boroughs in the county have an age profile heavily skewed towards older people. In Rother, for instance, one in three residents (33%) is aged 65 or over.

Even within the working age population, East Sussex has an older profile than both the South East and England averages.

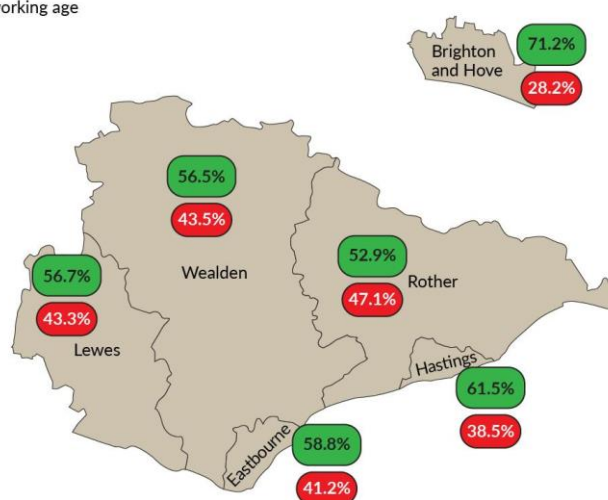
The dependency ratio – which shows the number of non-working age residents for every one person of working age – is notably high. In East Sussex, this ratio is 0.75, compared with 0.59 in England and 0.62 in the South East. Only Hastings has a dependency ratio close to the national average. In Rother, the ratio rises to 0.89 non-working age residents for every working age person.

This demographic imbalance has far-reaching implications for the county's economy – affecting the available labour supply, the attractiveness of the area to investors, and the demand for public services. As later sections of this report will demonstrate, a significant number of East Sussex residents appear to have voluntarily withdrawn from the labour market altogether.

East Sussex population by age

Proportion of working age people (16-64) compared with non-working age (0-15, 65+).

- working age
- non-working age



	All minority ethnic groups		Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh		Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African		Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups		Other White		Other ethnic group	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	63,804	11.7	11,618	18.2	4,497	7.0	12,313	19.3	30,394	47.6	4,982	7.8
Eastbourne	18,215	18.0	3,544	19.5	1,308	7.2	2,802	15.4	8,877	48.7	1,684	9.2
Hastings	13,577	14.9	2,536	18.7	1,262	9.3	2,639	19.4	5,773	42.5	1,367	10.1

Lewes	11,079	11.1	1,899	17.1	722	6.5	2,461	22.2	5,271	47.6	726	6.6
Rother	7,752	8.3	1,390	17.9	561	7.2	1,702	22.0	3,631	46.8	468	6.0
Wealden	13,184	8.2	2,250	17.1	646	4.9	2,709	20.5	6,841	51.9	738	5.6
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

Ethnicity

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics

In 2021, approximately 63,800 residents of East Sussex – 11.7% of the population – identified as being from an ethnic minority background. This is significantly lower than in the South East (21.1%) and England as a whole (26.5%). Eastbourne had the highest proportion in the county, at 18%, but no district or borough recorded especially high levels of ethnic diversity compared with regional or national averages.

What sets East Sussex apart is the relatively high proportion of residents from ‘Other White’ minority groups and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds. People from ‘Other White’ groups made up nearly half (47.6%) of the county’s ethnic minority population – a higher proportion than in the South East (35%) and England (28%). This pattern is consistent across all districts and boroughs.

A more detailed breakdown shows that the largest ‘Other White’ groups in East Sussex were:

- White – Mixed European: 5,450
- White Irish: 4,400
- White Polish: 2,600

Eastbourne had notably large Polish (1,200) and Portuguese (700) communities, while Hastings had a relatively large Romanian population (500), by East Sussex standards.

Language remains a barrier for some residents. In 2021, around 2,800 people in East Sussex said they either could not speak English well or not at all. Eastbourne accounted for around 1,150 of these, with a further 750 living in Hastings.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since the 2021 Census, the UK has welcomed significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, including through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and other supported asylum routes.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers 2025

	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
East Sussex	2,065	196	121	2,382	0.43%
Eastbourne	245	33	50	328	0.32%
Hastings	187	31	66	284	0.31%
Lewes	370	19	3	392	0.39%
Rother	374	45	0	419	0.44%
Wealden	889	68	2	959	0.58%

Source: Immigration System Statistics; Home Office; 2025

A total of 2,382 people have been supported in East Sussex under the three resettlement schemes, including 2,065 Ukrainians. Wealden has welcomed the largest number (959), while Hastings has supported the fewest (284). There are very few Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in the county. Most of the other asylum seekers who have been accommodated have been placed in Eastbourne and Hastings.

LGBTQ+

Just over 15,000 residents in East Sussex (3.3%) described their sexuality as something other than ‘Straight or Heterosexual’ in 2021. This is broadly in line with the South East and England averages (both 3.1%). Within the county, Hastings (4.6%), Lewes (4.1%) and Eastbourne (3.9%) have the largest LGBTQ+ populations.

Population Projections

Population Projections 2025-2035

	All Ages	0-15 Years	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16-24 Years	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
East Sussex	+22,429	-5,572	-6,805	+2,481	-406	-8,880	+34,795
Eastbourne	+3,262	-1,625	-1,207	+894	-1,112	-989	+6,091
Hastings	+1,284	-1,553	-2,100	+208	-795	-1,513	+4,939
Lewes	+4,561	-653	-876	+264	+406	-1,546	+6,093
Rother	+5,861	-827	-993	+399	+486	-1,878	+7,675
Wealden	+7,461	-914	-1,629	+716	+609	-2,954	+9,997
South East	+284,241	-110,309	-18,160	+84,098	-33,294	-68,964	+412,729
England	+2,123,686	-506,921	+264,463	+595,609	+108,784	-439,930	+2,366,134

Source: Population Projections; Office for National Statistics; 2025

Between 2025 and 2035, the population of East Sussex is projected to grow by 22,400 people – a 3.9% increase. This outpaces the projected growth for the South East (3.0%) and England (3.7%). The biggest increases are expected in Rother (+5.8%) and Wealden (+4.5%).

But it's not just about numbers; the shape of the population is shifting too. The number of post-working age residents is expected to rise by 34,800, while the pre-working age population will fall by 5,600 and the working age group by 6,800. There is, however, a small projected increase of 2,500 people aged 16–24.

Every district in East Sussex will see its older population grow, compounding an already ageing demographic. If these projections come to pass, the county could have 0.9 non-working age residents for

every working age resident – and in Rother, that imbalance could tip even further, with more non-working age residents than working age ones.

In short, many parts of East Sussex are already skewed towards an older population, and this trend is set to deepen. That’s a big challenge for the local economy – especially when it comes to providing enough labour for the types of jobs that are already hard to fill: often low-paid, insecure and labour-intensive roles.

Households & Incomes

Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) 2022

	£	Index England =100)
East Sussex	£24,599	1.05
Eastbourne	£21,980	0.94
Hastings	£20,006	0.86
Lewes	£25,894	1.11
Rother	£24,729	1.06
Wealden	£27,918	1.20
South East	£26,058	1.12
England	£23,338	1.00

Source: Regional Gross Disposable Household Income; Local Authorities by ITL 1 Region; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head gives a snapshot of how much money households have to spend or save after tax, pensions and benefits. In East Sussex, GDHI is £24,599 per person – higher than the England average (£23,338) but still trailing behind the South East (£26,058).

But that county-wide figure hides a stark split. Lewes, Rother and Wealden sit comfortably above the England average, suggesting higher overall household wealth in those areas. In contrast, Eastbourne and Hastings lag, with GDHI levels lower than the national average – highlighting the internal economic divide within East Sussex between its more affluent rural districts and its more deprived coastal towns.

House Price Affordability Ratios 2022

	Ratio	England Index
East Sussex	10.40	135
Eastbourne	8.48	110
Hastings	8.37	109
Lewes	12.09	157
Rother	11.07	144
Wealden	11.62	151
South East	9.61	125
England	7.71	100

Source: House Price to Workplace-Based Earnings Ratio; Office for National Statistics; 2023

East Sussex is one of those paradoxes the South East does so well – beautiful, desirable, and quietly unaffordable for anyone without a foot on the property ladder.

The county's house price to earnings ratio is 10.4 – significantly higher than the England average of 7.71 and the South East's 9.61. In places like Lewes, Wealden and Rother, that figure soars above 11. Jobs in East Sussex do not equate to the cost of housing.

Hastings and Eastbourne are technically more affordable by local standards, but they're still out of reach for many, especially for those relying solely on wages rather than assets.

The local economy is skewed towards lower-paid, labour-intensive sectors. However, for people who need to earn to support a household, including young people or those in rental accommodation, it presents a challenging scenario.

Median Earnings

Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time Workers – Residence and Workplace based 2024

	Workers		Residents		Workplace Earnings as % of Resident Earnings	
	£	Index (England = 100)	£	Index (England = 100)	£	%
East Sussex	£32,703	87	£35,298	94	-£2,595	-7.4%
Eastbourne	£33,009	88	£35,850	95	-£2,841	-7.9%
Hastings	£33,463	89	£33,275	88	£188	0.6
Lewes	£32,038	85	£35,298	94	-£3,260	-9.2%
Rother	29,417	78	32,120	85	-£2,703	-8.4%
Wealden	£32,703	87	£35,961	96	-£3,258	-9.1%
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	-£1,301	-3.2%
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	+£13	0.0

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Median full-time earnings in East Sussex are notably below the national average – £32,703 for people working in the county, compared to £37,630 across England. That's just 87% of the national figure, which is a stark indicator of the local economy's lower wage base.

What's particularly telling is the gap between what people *earn* in East Sussex and what people who *live* there earn – £35,298. That's still below the national residence-based average (£37,617), but it's the pattern that matters. In every district except Hastings, residents earn more than local workers. In places like Lewes, Rother and Wealden, that gap exceeds 8%.

In plain terms: if you live in East Sussex and you're a higher earner, chances are you commute elsewhere. These are also the parts of the county with the most unaffordable housing and the highest proportions of residents with asset or pension-based incomes. So, East Sussex continues to be a place where the wealthiest often don't rely on local jobs – and where local jobs often don't pay enough for people without other means.

Deprivation

S

	Median Rank 2019	Median Decile 2019	LSOAs in top quintile	
			Count	%
East Sussex	17,729	6	46	14%
Eastbourne	12,960	4	11	19%
Hastings	7,860	3	23	43%
Lewes	21,084	7	2	3%
Rother	16,277	5	6	10%
Wealden	22,422	8	4	4%

Source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation; MHCLG 2019

East Sussex as a whole doesn't appear particularly deprived on the surface - only 14% of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall into the most deprived 20% in England. But this overall figure hides a very uneven picture.

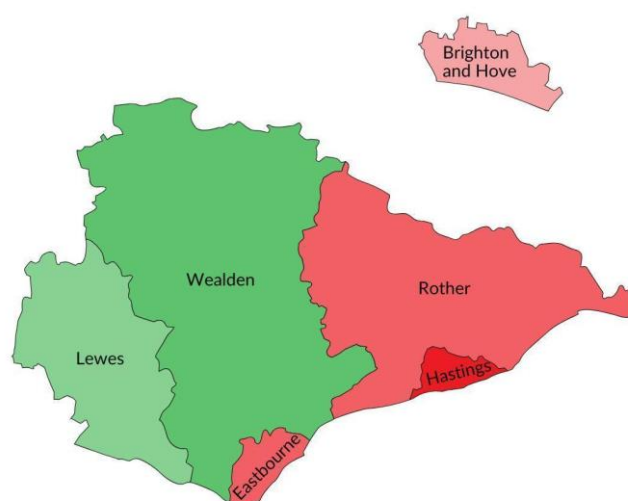
Half of these deprived areas are in Hastings alone, with another quarter in Eastbourne. That means three-quarters of the most deprived communities in the county are concentrated in just two towns. Hastings stands out as having entrenched deprivation at a scale not seen elsewhere in East Sussex.

In contrast, Wealden and Lewes barely register, with only isolated pockets of deprivation. There are two Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Lewes that are in the top 20% most deprived in England, one in Newhaven and one in Lewes town. There are four LSOAs in Wealden that are in the top 20% most deprived in England, all of which are in or around Hailsham.

So, while East Sussex might look broadly comfortable on a national scale, the local disparities are sharp and persistent - especially along the coast.

IMD Rankings 2019 (East Sussex / Brighton & Hove)

Deciles



The East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) makes a clear and important distinction: while being in employment can protect against mental health issues like psychological distress and depression, poor-quality work can have the opposite effect and actively harm mental health.

It also identifies the two leading causes of sickness absence as mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions - both of which are exacerbated by the kinds of insecure, low-paid, or physically demanding work that are common in East Sussex.

Nearly 1 in 5 residents (19%) are classed as disabled under the Equality Act, though this figure likely includes a high number of older residents who are no longer working. Still, the JSNA points to deep-rooted health inequalities in the county, driven by structural issues: unaffordable housing, precarious employment, and poor pay. In a local economy already marked by low productivity and an ageing workforce, this presents a serious challenge - not just for individuals' wellbeing, but for economic resilience too.

Limiting Long Term Illness (16+)

	Limiting Long-Term Illness
East Sussex	110,553
Eastbourne	21,919
Hastings	20,525
Lewes	20,342
Rother	20,138
Wealden	27,629

Source: 2021 Census; Office for National Statistics

According to the East Sussex JSNA, over 110,500 East Sussex residents had a long-term limiting illness. These residents live in all parts of the county.

	All Carers		20 hours +	
	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	51,405	9.9%	25,284	4.9%
Eastbourne	9,415	9.7%	5,071	5.2%
Hastings	8,665	10.1%	4,780	5.6%
Lewes	9,810	10.3%	4,490	4.7%
Rother	9,329	10.4%	4,690	5.2%
Wealden	14,187	9.3%	6,254	4.1%
South East	4,678,265	8.7%	2,374,540	4.4%
England	733,364	8.3%	344,742	3.9%

Source: 2021 Census; Office for National Statistics

In 2021, East Sussex was home to 51,400 unpaid carers - about 10% of all residents aged 5 and over. That's a touch higher than the South East (8.7%) and England (8.3%) averages and reflects a population with significant care needs spread across the county.

Roughly half of these unpaid carers (around 5% of the total population) were providing 20 hours or more of care each week - a substantial commitment. While unpaid carers live in every corner of East Sussex, Hastings has a slightly higher concentration, which aligns with its broader profile of health inequalities and deprivation.

In short, unpaid care is a hidden backbone of the East Sussex community. But the scale of care being delivered informally suggests added pressure on the health and social care system - and a need to ensure these carers are properly supported.

Education & Skills

The qualification data for 19-year-olds in East Sussex reveals significant disparities in attainment. While a majority of young people achieve Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications, those who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) fare markedly worse. The attainment gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers is stark - much wider than regional or national averages in some areas. This highlights ongoing challenges in educational equity and suggests that more targeted support is needed to close these gaps and improve progression for all learners, regardless of background or need.

	All	Non FSM	FSM	Attainment Gap	Non-SEN	SEN	Attainment Gap
East Sussex	52.6%	57.3%	31.6%	-25.7%	57.3%	25.0%	-32.3%
Eastbourne	50.4%	54.3%	33.0%	-21.3%	53.7%	27.8%	-25.9%
Hastings	36.4%	40.5%	27.1%	-13.5%	41.0%	16.0%	-25.0%
Lewes	55.3%	59.7%	33.5%	-26.2%	61.1%	24.2%	-36.9%
Rother	55.6%	59.4%	35.4%	-24.0%	61.1%	23.9%	-37.2%
Wealden	59.4%	63.6%	30.6%	-32.9%	62.9%	32.7%	-30.3%
South East	58.7%	63.0%	31.4%	-31.6%	62.6%	33.4%	-29.2%
England	57.6%	62.4%	36.8%	-25.6%	64.2%	35.4%	-28.8%

Source: explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2023-24

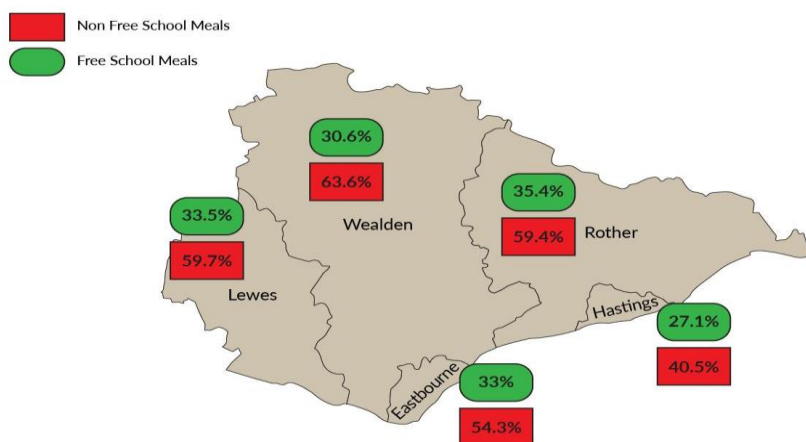
In East Sussex, just over half (52.6%) of 19-year-olds hold a Level 3 qualification - lower than both the South East (58.7%) and England (57.6%). Wealden is the only district in the county to exceed the national average (59.4%), while Hastings lags significantly behind, with only 36.4% of 19-year-olds achieving Level 3 - one of the lowest rates in the country.

The attainment gap between those who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those who haven't is 25.7% in East Sussex. This is slightly narrower than the South East gap (31.6%) and in line with England (25.6%). Hastings has the smallest FSM gap (13.5%), but this is largely due to universally low attainment in the area rather than stronger outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

By contrast, the attainment gap between young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their peers is wider in East Sussex (32.3%) than both the regional (29.2%) and national (28.8%) averages. The SEN gap is particularly acute in Lewes (36.9%) and Rother (37.2%).

East Sussex, along with Brighton & Hove, is one of the few places in the South of England where disadvantaged young people have a similarly high likelihood of being not in education, employment or training (NEET) as in some of the most deprived areas of the North and Midlands. This highlights deep-rooted challenges in ensuring equitable educational outcomes and life chances.

East Sussex attainment levels by aged 19 at level 3
2023/4



Residents (16-64 years) without RGF Level 3 Qualifications

	Count	Percent
East Sussex	110,300	34.5%
Eastbourne	16,300	26.9%
Hastings	24,500	40.9%
Lewes	18,200	30.7%
Rother	22,100	42.7%
Wealden	29,100	33.1%
South East	1,649,000	29.7%
England	11,171,100	32.4%

Source: Annual Population Survey/; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Over 110,000 working age residents in East Sussex (34%) do not hold a qualification at Level 3 or above - higher than the regional (29.7%) and national (32.4%) averages. Level 3 is broadly equivalent to A levels or advanced apprenticeships and is often the gateway to higher education or skilled employment.

There are significant variations within the county. Hastings (40.9%) and Rother (42.7%) have particularly high proportions of residents lacking Level 3 qualifications, while Eastbourne (26.9%) fares much better.

Even among those in work, skills mismatches are common. Around 70,000 people (30%) in employment are in roles that require higher skills than they currently have - posing a vulnerability as the labour market shifts. The problem is most acute in Rother (31.8%), Wealden (31.2%) and Hastings (30.8%). This suggests a widespread need for upskilling and more responsive lifelong learning systems across the county

Employment

Employment Rate (16-64 Year Olds) 2024

	Count	%	Count for 80%
East Sussex	233,500	72.1%	+25,540
Eastbourne	46,300	76.0%	+2,420
Hastings	40,300	67.3%	+7,620
Lewes	46,200	77.1%	+1,640
Rother	33,800	64.7%	+7,960
Wealden	66,900	73.6%	+5,820
South East	4,448,600	78.7%	+73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7%	+1,499,760

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 233,500 working age residents in East Sussex were in employment, giving the county an employment rate of 72.1%. This is below the South East average (78.7%) but slightly higher than England's (75.7%).

Employment rates vary widely across the county. Rother (64.7%) and Hastings (67.3%) have the lowest rates, while Lewes (77.1%) and Eastbourne (76.0%) outperform the national average.

To meet the UK Government’s 80% employment target, East Sussex would need 25,540 more people in work - an 11% increase, which is twice the rate required nationally, and assumes no rise in population. Hastings and Rother would need the biggest uplift, requiring an extra 7,600 and 8,000 workers respectively.

Employment rates for people with long-term health conditions remain lower than average, highlighting a key barrier to inclusive growth, as shown in the table below.

Employment Rate (16+) ³³for People with Health Conditions (2024)

	All long term health conditions		Mental health conditions	
	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	95,600	47.8%	31,800	46.5%
Eastbourne	16,400	46.6%	9,000	59.9%
Hastings	17,200	46.5%	6,400	43.9%
Lewes	24,200	59.2%	4,600	41.9%
Rother	15,000	39.2%	5,800	45.5%
Wealden	22,900	46.9%	5,900	39.9%
South East	1,583,400	52.3%	455,800	50.9%
England	9,148,300	49.4%	2,592,500	46.4%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In East Sussex, only 48% of people with long-term health conditions are in employment, compared with the employment rate for people aged 16+ of 58.7% in East Sussex. The employment rate of people with long-term health conditions in England is 49%) and in the South East it is 52%. The rate varies across the county, from 59% in Lewes to just 39% in Rother.

For those with mental health conditions, the employment rate is 46.5%, matching the England average. Again, there’s notable variation: Eastbourne performs best at nearly 60%, while Wealden lags at 39.9%.

Employment and Disability

Disability, disability employment rate and overall employment rate (2025)

³³ Annual Population Survey (APS) data for this variable is only available for people aged 16+ (not 16-64 years)

	% aged 16-64 who are EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate aged 16-64 - EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate - aged 16-64	
	Coun	percent	numerator	percent	numerator	percent
East Sussex	93,500	28.9%	47,600	50.9%	233,300	72.2%
Eastbourne	18,400	29.8%	8,500	46.5%	44,000	71.2%
Hastings	16,400	28.4%	9,500	58.2%	44,800	77.8%
Lewes	16,100	26.7%	8,300	51.8%	44,800	74.5%
Rother	17,200	32.7%	7,400	42.9%	34,100	64.9%
Wealden	25,500	28.0%	13,800	54.1%	65,700	72.0%
South East	1,453,900	25.7%	918,200	63.2%	4,436,900	78.4%
England	9,178,100	26.0%	5,288,500	57.6%	26,720,600	75.7%

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS 2025

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 93,500 16–64-year-old residents in East Sussex who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 28.9% of the working age population – higher than in the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%).

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 50.9%, compared with an overall employment rate of 72.2%. The employment rate for working age people with disabilities in East Sussex was lower than the South East (63.2%) rate England (57.6%) rate.

The employment rate for people with disabilities was lowest in Rother (42.9%) and Eastbourne (46.5%) and highest in Hastings (58.2%) and Wealden (54.1%)

According to the NHS Sussex WorkWell Discovery Phase report, nearly a quarter (22.5%) of the county's adult (16+ residents) has long-term musculoskeletal conditions, compared with 18.4% in England; and there were 192.7 emergency hospital admissions per 100,000 residents compared with 117 per 100,000 in England³⁴.

These figures highlight persistent inequalities in access to work for people with health conditions, especially in areas already facing wider economic challenges.

Economic Inactivity

People who are economically inactive are not in employment and have not actively sought work in the previous four weeks. The main reasons for economic inactivity include being a student, ill health, caring responsibilities, being retired or other, unstated reasons.

Some forms of economic inactivity, such as retirement or studying, are **not** necessarily disadvantageous. The table below shows the overall economic inactivity rates and the rates excluding students.

16-64 Year old Economic Inactivity Rates 2024

³⁴ NHS WorkWell Discovery; Health Innovation, Kent, Surrey, Sussex; 2025

	Including Students		Excluding Students	
	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	74,800	23.1%	58,100	18.9%
Eastbourne	13,300	21.8%	11,800	19.9%
Hastings	13,200	22.0%	10,000	17.6%
Lewes	12,600	21.0%	9,900	17.3%
Rother	16,600	31.8%	Not available	Not available
Wealden	19,100	21.1%	12,900	15.2%
South East	1,040,000	18.4%	734,400	13.7%
England	7,450,500	21.1%	5,404,600	16.3%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are just under 75,000 working age people in East Sussex who are economically inactive. This represents 23.1% of 16–64-year-olds – a higher rate than in the South East (18.4%) and England (21.1%). Rother (31.1%) has a significantly higher economic inactivity rate than other districts and boroughs in East Sussex.

Once students are removed from the estimates, around 58,100 working age residents (18.9%) in East Sussex are economically inactive. This remains higher than the rates for England (16.3%) and the South East (13.7%).

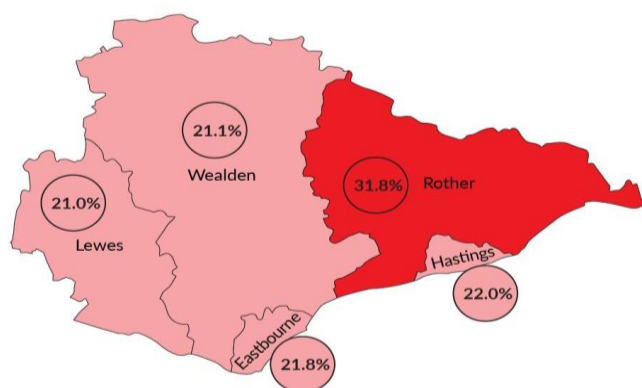
East Sussex Economic Activity

Percentage of population who are of working age (16–64) and are economically inactive.

Areas in green are meeting the 80% economically active target.

Figures are inclusive of students.

- 30–35%
- 25–30%
- 20–25%
- 15–20%
- 10–15%



Reasons for Economic Inactivity – excluding students 2024

Reasons for Economic Inactivity (excluding students) 2024

	Looking after a family/home		Long term Sick		Early Retirees		Other	
	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive
East Sussex	12,900	17.3%	20,200	27.0%	13,500	18.0%	9,100	12.1%
Eastbourne	2,700	20.4%	4,400	33.2%	3,600	27.2%	1,000	7.5%
Hastings	Not available		1,900	14.1%	2,100	15.2%	2,600	19.9%
Lewes	3,000	24.2%	3,600	28.3%	1,300	10.4%	1,000	10.8%
Rother	2,300	14.0%	6,500	38.9%	4,800	28.7%	Not available	
Wealden	2,700	13.9%	3,900	20.5%	1,600	8.6%	4,100	21.4%
South East	197,100	19.0%	228,100	21.9%	150,000	14.4%	854,800	12.8%
England	1,415,500	19.0%	2,009,900	27.0%	934,900	12.5%	133,300	11.5%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Just over a quarter (27%) of East Sussex's economically inactive residents are so due to long-term sickness. This compares with 22% in the South East and 27% in England. Once students are removed, the

percentage increases to 35%. There are over 9,100 working age residents in East Sussex who do not state the reasons for their economic inactivity.

Data at district and borough level is subject to wide confidence bands, so should be treated with caution. However, sickness-related economic inactivity appears to be more common in Rother (39%) and Eastbourne (33%) and less common in Hastings (14%).

Economically inactive residents in East Sussex (18%) are more likely to be early retirees than in the South East (14%) and England (13%). This is a particularly strong feature of economic inactivity in Eastbourne (27%) and Rother (29%). One in six (17%) of economically inactive residents in the county are looking after a family or home. Data is unavailable for Hastings, but this seems to be a more common feature of economic inactivity in Lewes (24%) than in other parts of the county.

Around 15% (11,100 out of 74,800) (15%) of economically inactive residents in East Sussex want a job³⁵. This is a lower proportion than in the South East (19%) and England (21%). 1,700 economically inactive residents in Lewes (13%) would like a job, compared with 3,400 (26%) in Hastings.

Claimant Count Unemployment

Claimant Count Unemployment April 2024-April 2025

	Apr-24		Apr-25		April 2024-April; 2025 Change	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	10,840	3.4%	11,650	3.7%	+810	+7.5%
Eastbourne	2,670	4.4%	2,905	4.8%	+235	+8.8%
Hastings	2,880	5.2%	2,910	5.2%	+30	+1.0%
Lewes	1,820	3.2%	2,050	3.6%	+230	+12.6%
Rother	1,530	3.1%	1,670	3.3%	+140	+9.2%
Wealden	1,940	2.1%	2,115	2.3%	+175	+9.0%
South East	170,210	2.9%	186,695	3.2%	+16,485	+9.7%
England	1,387,390	3.8%	1,529,600	4.2%	+142,210	+10.3%

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

There were 11,650 (3.7%) claimant count unemployed residents in East Sussex in April 2025. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (3.2%) but a lower proportion than in England (4.2%). Hastings (5.2%) and Eastbourne (4.8%) have the highest unemployment rates, while Wealden (3.2%) has the lowest.

Claimant count unemployment increased by 810 (+7.5%) in the year to April 2025. This is a slower rate of increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+10.3%). Unemployment increased fastest in Lewes (+12.6%) and slowest in Hastings (+1.0%) over the period.

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

³⁵ Source: Annual Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

The table below shows the number of claimants count unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18–24-year-olds, 25-49 year olds and people aged 50+. In April 2024, there were also 25 16–17-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in East Sussex

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age (April 2024-April 2025)

	18-24				25-49				50+			
	Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24-Apr 25 Change	
	Count	Count	Count	Percent	Count	Count	Count		Count	Count	Count	
East Sussex	2,010	2,090	80	4.0	6,115	6,200	85	1.4	2,685	3,085	400	14.9
Eastbourne	485	515	30	6.2	1,540	1,575	35	2.3	640	750	110	17.2
Hastings	570	555	-15	-2.6	1,605	1,530	-75	-4.7	695	745	50	7.2
Lewes	350	385	35	10.0	1,025	1,085	60	5.9	440	525	85	19.3
Rother	280	285	5	1.8	825	855	30	3.6	420	470	50	11.9
Wealden	325	350	25	7.7	1,120	1,155	35	3.1	490	595	105	21.4
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2
England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 2,090 18–24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in East Sussex. This is +80 (+4.0%) more than there had been in April 2024. This compares with increases in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%). The largest increases were in Lewes (+10.0%), Wealden (+7.7%) and Eastbourne (+6.2%).

There were 6,200 25–49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in East Sussex in April 2025. This is an increase of +85 (+1.4%) compared with a year earlier. This is a slower increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period. Lewes (+5.9%) had the largest increase and there was a reduction in Hastings (-4.7%).

There were 3,085 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in East Sussex in April 2025. This is +400 (14.9%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%). Wealden (+21.4%) and Lewes (+19.3%) had the fastest rate of increase and Hastings (+7.2%) had the slowest.

Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEET)

NEET and Unknowns (2025)

	Cohort	NEET & Not Known		NEET		Not known	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	11,979	695	5.8%	587	4.9%	108	0.9%
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0%	7,334	3.4%	7,982	3.7%
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6%	45,395	3.4%	29,374	2.2%

Source: Participation in education, training & NEET age 16-17 by local authority; Department for Education; 2025

In 2025, there were 11,979 16–17-year-olds in East Sussex, 589 of whom were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This represents a known NEET rate of 4.9%, which is higher than the rate in the South East (3.4%) and England (3.4%). East Sussex has a low proportion of ‘not known’

NEETs (0.9%), compared with the South East (3.7%) and England (2.2%). The overall NEET rate (including both known and unknown NEETs) in East Sussex is 5.8%. This compares with 7.0% in the South East and 5.6% in England.

Recent evidence from Impetus³⁶ suggests that young people in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove have a higher likelihood of being NEET than their peers in most other parts of the South of England. There are pockets of high numbers of NEET young people particularly in coastal areas of derivation across the geography, particularly in Hastings (9.5%).

Universal Credit

Universal Credit Claimants: Average - January to December 2024

	Total		16-24 Years		25-49 Years		50-64 Years	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	11,286	2.0%	2,018	4.4%	6,400	4.3%	2,870	2.4%
Eastbourne	2,725	2.6%	478	4.9%	1,574	5.2%	675	3.3%
Hastings	2,961	3.3%	576	7.2%	1,644	5.8%	741	3.8%
Lewes	1,905	1.9%	347	4.1%	1,081	4.0%	478	2.2%
Rother	1,614	1.7%	282	3.9%	890	4.1%	443	2.1%
Wealden	2,081	1.3%	335	2.6%	1,212	2.8%	534	1.4%

Stat-Explore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

There was an average of 11,300 Universal Credit claimants in East Sussex during 2024. Hastings (3.3%) had the largest proportion of Universal Credit claimants, followed by Eastbourne (2.6%). The rate amongst 16–24-year-olds (7.2%) in Hastings was particularly high.

The number of Universal Credit claimants in East Sussex rose by 485 between January and December 2024. Almost all this increase (+455) was among residents aged 50 and over. Lewes (+155) and Wealden (+120) saw the largest rises in claimant numbers.

5.4 Labour Demand

Employee Jobs and Job Density

Jobs & Job Density 2023

	Count	%	Job Density
East Sussex	190,300	100.0	0.72
Eastbourne	39,085	20.5	0.80
Hastings	33,825	17.8	0.69
Lewes	35,285	18.5	0.69
Rother	32,890	17.3	0.82
Wealden	50,925	26.8	0.66

Job Density; Office for National Statistics; 2023

³⁶ Youth Job Gap – Exploring Compound Disadvantage; Impetus; 2025

There are 190,300 jobs in East Sussex. Wealden (51,000) has the largest number of jobs, followed by Eastbourne (39,000). There are just 0.72 jobs for every working age resident in the county. This is similar to many areas in the north of England, including North Tyneside (0.73), Wolverhampton (0.73) and Stockton-on-Tees. None of the county’s districts or boroughs is ‘employment rich’. Wealden (0.66) has the lowest job density, and Rother (0.82) has the highest.

East Sussex does not have the employment characteristics usually associated with the South East of England. It lacks enough jobs to support even its relatively small working age population. This contributes to high levels of economic inactivity, insecure and seasonal employment, and forces many highly qualified residents to commute out of the area in search of better paid work.

Self-Employment

Self-Employment 2024

	Count	Percent	Index (England)
East Sussex	5300	15.8%	125
Eastbourne	4400	11.5%	91
Hastings	4,400	11.0%	87
Lewes	5,800	12.6%	100
Rother	7,400	21.8%	173
Wealden	14,100	21.0%	167
South East	559,900	12.6%	100
England	3,358,400	12.6%	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Self-employment is an important feature of the East Sussex labour market; nearly 16% of residents in work are self-employed. This compares with 12.6% in both the South East and England. Self-employment is particularly common in the county’s rural areas - over a fifth of working residents in Wealden (21%) and Rother (22%) are self-employed. Paid employment is more prevalent in the urban centres of Eastbourne and Hastings, although much of this is poorly paid.

A key question for East Sussex is how much of this self-employment reflects lifestyle choice, and how much is driven by the lack of decently paid local jobs. Self-employment can work well for those with the financial flexibility to choose when and how they work. But for people who need reliable income to support a household, it’s often not a viable or sustainable option.

Self-employment is too often confused with entrepreneurship, but the two aren’t the same. Only a small proportion of people who go it alone aim to grow businesses or create jobs. Many are self-employed simply because better alternatives don’t exist - or because they’re in a position to prioritise autonomy over income stability.

Employment by Industry

Local economies and their labour markets are shaped by the structure of their industries. In East Sussex, human health & social work (19%) and wholesale & retail (16%) account for over a third of all jobs. Accommodation & food service (13%) is also a significant part of the county’s economy.

The table below shows the percentage of employment by sector for the county and its districts and boroughs. The colour coding highlights where there is a higher (green) concentration of employment compared with England.

Employment by Industry 2024

	East Sussex	Eastbourne	Hastings	Lewes	Rother	Wealden
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1.0%	0.0%	0.2%	1.1%	1.5%	2.0%
Mining & quarrying	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Manufacturing	6.3%	3.8%	9.1%	6.4%	3.8%	7.8%
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.1%
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	0.8%	0.4%	0.5%	1.3%	0.3%	1.0%
Construction	5.8%	3.2%	4.5%	5.7%	5.3%	7.8%
Wholesale & retail	15.7%	17.9%	15.2%	14.3%	12.1%	17.6%
Transport & storage	2.4%	2.1%	3.0%	3.6%	1.8%	2.0%
Accommodation & food service	13.1%	11.5%	10.6%	10.0%	24.2%	9.8%
Information & communication	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%	2.6%	1.2%	2.9%
Finance & insurance	2.1%	1.3%	1.2%	0.6%	8.8%	0.9%
Real estate	1.8%	1.5%	1.5%	2.6%	1.5%	2.0%
Professional, scientific & technical	5.8%	5.1%	3.8%	7.1%	5.3%	7.8%
Admin & support service	4.2%	3.8%	3.8%	3.6%	4.5%	4.9%
Public admin. & defence; social security	4.7%	3.8%	6.8%	11.4%	1.5%	1.8%
Education	8.9%	10.3%	6.1%	10.0%	9.1%	9.8%
Human health & social work	19.4%	28.2%	30.3%	14.3%	13.6%	13.7%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	3.1%	3.2%	2.4%	3.6%	2.7%	4.4%
Other services	2.4%	1.8%	1.4%	2.0%	1.8%	3.4%

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey (BRES); Office for National Statistics; 2024

Retail & wholesale, agriculture, accommodation & food service, construction, human health & social work, and arts, entertainment & recreation are all over-represented in East Sussex. Key sectors that are under-represented include information & communications, finance & insurance, administrative & support services, and transport & storage.

District breakdown:

- **Eastbourne** is disproportionately represented in human health & social work; arts, entertainment & recreation; accommodation & food service; wholesale & retail; construction; and other services.
- **Hastings** is disproportionately represented in education; public administration; accommodation & food service; and manufacturing.
- **Lewes** is disproportionately represented in education; public administration; arts, entertainment & recreation; real estate; accommodation & food service; energy & utilities; construction; and

agriculture.

- **Rother** is disproportionately represented in finance & insurance; accommodation & food service; and agriculture.
- **Wealden** is disproportionately represented in arts, entertainment & recreation; other services; accommodation & food service; wholesale & retail; construction; and agriculture.

There is some economic diversity within East Sussex, but overall, the county is disproportionately reliant on public services, tourism-related activities, retail, and land-based industries for employment. These are not, generally, high-value sectors of the economy.

Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked in key East Sussex sectors:

- Agriculture, fishing & forestry – £20.91
- Accommodation & food service – £21.61
- Human health & social work – £30.57
- Arts, entertainment & recreation – £24.49
- Wholesale & retail – £31.95³⁷

Low productivity in these sectors means they cannot provide jobs with strong earnings potential, which makes the labour market less useful as a source of income - especially when housing costs are high.

Business Units

There are over 26,100 business units in East Sussex, just under three-quarters (74%) of which employ 0–4 people. This is slightly higher than in the South East (73%) and England (72%). Wealden (78%) and Rother (76%) have the highest proportion of micro-businesses, while the urban areas of Hastings (70%) and Eastbourne (69%) have the lowest.

Business Units by Size (2024)

	Total	0-4		5-9		10-49		50-249		250+	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
East Sussex	26,145	19,335	74.0	3,220	12.3	3,010	11.5	535	2.0	45	0.2
Eastbourne	3,810	2,610	68.5	520	13.6	550	14.4	125	3.3	10	0.3
Hastings	3,445	2,405	69.8	460	13.4	480	13.9	85	2.5	15	0.4
Lewes	4,810	3,485	72.5	655	13.6	555	11.5	105	2.2	10	0.2
Rother	4,655	3,535	75.9	520	11.2	515	11.1	80	1.7	5	0.1
Wealden	9,425	7,300	77.5	1,070	11.4	905	9.6	145	1.5	10	0.1
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

East Sussex has 535 business units that employ between 50 and 249 people, and just 45 that employ 250 or more staff. Eastbourne (125) and Lewes (105) have the largest number of medium-sized employers. The

³⁷ Output per hour, UK; Office for National Statistics; 2025

larger business units are spread across the county and are primarily concentrated in the public administration, human health and social work, and wholesale and retail sectors.

Business Units by Sector

Nearly half (45%) of East Sussex's business units are in just three sectors: construction (15%), wholesale and retail (16%), and professional, scientific and technical services (14%). Aside from wholesale and retail, these are not the sectors that provide the most jobs locally. The county also has notable concentrations of business units in agriculture, fishing and forestry; construction; and arts, entertainment and recreation.

Business Units by Sector (2024)

	East Sussex		Eastbourne	Hastings	Lewes	Rother	Wealden
	Count	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1,300	5.0	0.5	0.7	4.0	8.3	7.2
Mining & quarrying	10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing	1,265	4.8	3.4	4.9	5.4	4.7	5.1
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	30	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.2
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	115	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5
Construction	4,005	15.3	13.4	14.8	14.8	15.3	16.7
Wholesale & retail	4,110	15.7	17.5	17.4	14.8	15.5	15.0
Transport & storage	540	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.8	2.0	1.6
Accommodation & food service	1,920	7.3	10.4	9.7	6.3	8.5	5.1
Information & communication	1,465	5.6	4.7	6.2	6.3	4.4	5.9
Financial & insurance activities	420	1.6	2.0	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.6
Real estate	1,000	3.8	4.3	3.6	4.1	3.7	3.7
Professional, scientific & technical	3,635	13.9	12.5	12.0	15.6	12.7	14.9
Admin & support service	2,130	8.1	8.3	7.5	7.9	7.8	8.5
Public admin. & defence; social security	190	0.7	0.5	0.7	1.0	0.8	0.7
Education	650	2.5	2.8	2.2	2.7	2.3	2.4
Human health & social work	1,485	5.7	8.7	7.8	4.7	5.4	4.3
Arts, entertainment & recreation	880	3.4	3.5	4.2	3.8	2.9	3.0
Other services	1,000	3.8	5.1	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.3

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

- **Eastbourne** is over-represented in accommodation and food service; human health and social work; arts, entertainment and recreation; and other services.

- **Hastings** is over-represented in construction; accommodation and food service; human health and social work; and arts, entertainment and recreation.
- **Lewes** is over-represented in agriculture, forestry and fishing; manufacturing; construction; accommodation and food service; and arts, entertainment and recreation.
- **Rother** is over-represented in agriculture, forestry and fishing; construction; and accommodation and food service.
- **Wealden** is over-represented in agriculture, manufacturing, forestry and fishing; water supply and related services; and construction.

Job Vacancies

Unique Job Postings 2024

		Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufac & engineering	Visitor economy
East Sussex	Count	28,727	3,413	1,479	1,864	10,733	477	4,206	6,555
Eastbourne	Count	7,226	645	274	353	3,541	56	634	1,723
	%	25.2%	18.9%	18.5%	18.9%	33.0%	11.7%	15.1%	26.3%
Hastings	Count	5,216	694	230	356	2,075	63	821	977
	%	18.2%	20.3%	15.6%	19.1%	19.3%	13.2%	19.5%	14.9%
Lewes	Count	7,119	998	466	643	1,910	122	1,584	1,396
	%	24.8%	29.2%	31.5%	34.5%	17.8%	25.6%	37.7%	21.3%
Rother	Count	2,602	263	139	169	1,002	59	264	706
	%	9.1%	7.7%	9.4%	9.1%	9.3%	12.4%	6.3%	10.8%
Wealden	Count	6,564	813	370	343	2,205	177	903	1,753
	%	22.8%	23.8%	25.0%	18.4%	20.5%	37.1%	21.5%	26.7%

Source: Lightcast 2024

In 2024, there were 28,700 job postings in East Sussex. A quarter (25%) were in Eastbourne, another quarter (25%) in Lewes, and 24% in Wealden. The remainder were in Hastings (18%) and Rother (9%).

Eastbourne accounted for 31% of healthcare job postings. Hastings had a relatively large share of construction vacancies (20%). Lewes featured strongly across several sectors, with 29% of construction, 32% of creative and cultural, 35% of digital, and 38% of manufacturing and engineering job postings. Rother had a higher share of land-based industries (12%) and visitor economy (11%) postings compared with its overall job posting share. Wealden also had a disproportionate number of vacancies in creative and cultural (25%), land-based industries (37%) and the visitor economy (27%).

5.5 Current Provision

Skills & Employment East Sussex (SES) is the county's strategic body for employment and skills. It has an independent chair and includes representatives from local authorities, Further Education and Higher Education institutions, employer organisations, the Department for Work & Pensions, the National Careers Service, the Integrated Care Board/NHS, and the voluntary sector. It is supported by employer-led task groups aligned to key sectors of the economy, as well as cross-sector working groups: *Apprenticeships East Sussex*, *the Employability Forum* and *the Adult Learning Network*.

The *East Sussex County Council Employability & Skills Team* reports to Skills & Employment East Sussex and oversees:

- *East Sussex Careers Hub*, which brings together secondary schools, colleges, and special schools across the county, alongside employers and other partners.
- *ESTAR*, which supports adult job seekers furthest from the labour market into work through employment support programmes like Moving on Up, Level Up, Support into Work for refugee and Ukrainian visitors, and a specialist service for those at risk of homelessness.
- *Connect to Work in East Sussex*, which supports people with disabilities, long-term health conditions or complex barriers to employment, using a voluntary supported employment model.
- *Skills Bootcamps*, 16-week sector-specific training designed to improve employability and address local skills shortages in high-demand industries.

Further Education

East Sussex Colleges Group (ESCG) is the main Further Education provider in East Sussex. Its main campuses are in Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings. It also has a Marine Workshop in Newhaven; a campus in Ore Valley; and an Automotive Training Centre in Hastings. It also has a partnership with OHM Energy based at its Eastbourne campus.

ESCG offers learning programmes for 16–19-year-olds and for Adults. It has an Employer Exchange Programme that strengthens education business partnerships and includes work experience and internship programmes.

ESCG provides learning programmes up to and including degree level and operates an apprenticeship programme that develops skills across a broad range of sectors.

Specialist Colleges

Plumpton College is a specialist agricultural college that provides learning programmes for learners aged 14-16 years and 16+ years. It provides agricultural apprenticeships, LandPro training courses, Skills Bootcamps and land and environmental degree courses.

Higher Education

There are no dedicated Higher Education providers in East Sussex, although both Plumpton College and the East Sussex Colleges Group (ESCG) provide learning programmes at degree level. East Sussex College has recently launched the South East Institute of Technology (IOT), which focuses on delivering technical and professional courses and apprenticeships in collaboration with employers. The IOT aims to enhance career and employment prospects for young people and adults by equipping them with skills relevant to the technology-driven economy in the South East.

Adult and Community Learning (ACL)

ACL programmes are free to adults aged 19+, who are eligible to receive public funding. Courses focus on arts, creative writing and crafts and well-being and have a duration of 3-12 weeks.

Other Provision

In addition to nationally funded programmes that are funded and delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions, there is a wide range of skills and employment support programmes that are delivered in East Sussex by private and voluntary and community organisations. Whilst not an exhaustive list, these include:

Youth Employability Service (YES)

YES East Sussex provides guidance and support to 16–18-year-olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and those up to the age of 25 years with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)

Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA)

The SCDA Employability Team provides support people in East Sussex who are not in employment. This includes finding opportunities in volunteering, training, work experience, finding work and sustaining employment.

Work in Mind

Work in Mind is a free service run by the NHS that provides employment-related support for people who are accessing East Sussex Health in Mind mental health services.

Southdown Housing

Southdown Housing's Work and Well-Being programme provides individual placement support to people who want to work but whose mental health creates barriers to them doing so. It pairs people with mental health needs with an employment specialist to help them find and sustain work.

Further details of provision in East Sussex can be found at the [Careers East Sussex website](#).

6. West Sussex

6.1 West Sussex Summary

West Sussex covers an area of 768 square miles, around 41% of which falls within the South Downs National Park. It has a coastline of around 85 miles, stretching from Chichester Harbour in the west to Southwick in the east.

West Sussex's diverse, polycentric nature means it is a county of contrasts. Coastal towns like Littlehampton, Bognor Regis and Selsey have struggled to recover from the decline of traditional seaside resorts. Worthing, on the other hand, has a strong and diversified economy that is less reliant on seasonal employment. The county's economic powerhouse is centred around Gatwick Airport and Crawley. Worthing (18%) and Crawley (22%) between them account for around 40% of the county's economy. This area provides significant high-value jobs, including at the Manor Royal Business District, drawing from a labour market catchment that stretches well beyond the county's boundaries.

West Sussex is also home to an historic cathedral city, Chichester and market towns, including Arundel and Petworth. The quality of the county's soil and levels of sunlight make it a rich location for land-based industries, and its horticultural and viticulture sectors are nationally significant.

Overall, West Sussex has a reasonably well-performing economy, but this masks significant variations and challenges within it. These include an unbalanced resident age profile in many areas, unaffordable housing, and connectivity issues - particularly in rural parts of the county. Skills levels are variable: It remains a challenge for example in Crawley to equip local people to compete for the high-quality jobs on offer. At the other extreme, a scarcity of jobs and support services in more isolated parts of the county, particularly along the coast and in more isolated rural areas, can dampen opportunity and aspirations.

For the working age population, local jobs are often insufficiently well-paid to address the high cost of living particularly the high cost of housing.

As of the end of 2023, West Sussex was home to approximately 59,900 registered businesses, making up a diverse and dynamic economy, a range of thriving sectors and a mix of micro, small, medium, and large employers. Key industries include advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, financial and business services, transport and logistics, agriculture and horticulture, retail, and the visitor economy.

The county's economic strength is further bolstered by significant assets such as Gatwick Airport and the Manor Royal Business District in Crawley, which serve as major employment hubs and contribute substantially to the regional economy. It is rich in its economic diversity. It also has an employment rate that is already above the UK Government's 80% target, although this may mask more extensive worklessness at a more localised level.

However, much of the county is still over-reliant on low productivity sectors, including health & social work, retail, the visitor economy, and land-based industries. These often come with earnings that do not reflect the county's high house prices.

West Sussex-wide data can mask more localised need and deprivation, particularly in coastal areas and in Crawley. There are clear pockets of disadvantage, but these can be widely dispersed, making it challenging to deliver good quality skills and labour market support cost-effectively. Many people face barriers to work due to ill health or other socio-economic factors.

A shrinking labour pool potentially dilutes the attractiveness of West Sussex to inward investors that could create jobs, while environmental designations – including the South Downs National Park and the long coastline – restrict development opportunities.

Crawley is an exception to the West Sussex demographic narrative. It has a younger population, a plentiful supply of jobs, and greater ethnic diversity than the rest of the county. Crawley has some of the best jobs in Sussex, and its businesses draw talent from a much wider area than the borough itself. Located in central Sussex, it is an important employment hub for much of Sussex and parts of Surrey. Unlike the rest of West Sussex, Crawley's economy however is lacking diversity, being heavily reliant on Gatwick Airport and its supply and value chains, leaving it vulnerable to economic shocks such as that seen during the pandemic.

The rural economy is an important part of West Sussex, with strengths in sectors including land-based industries, tourism and hospitality and manufacturing; and the rural areas are where many of the county's micro-businesses and self-employed people are located. This rurality and the corresponding uneven spread of employment and training opportunities across the county mean that good transport and digital connectivity are vital to the county's economy.

Both Horsham and Mid Sussex are affluent parts of West Sussex, where many of the local concerns are around high house prices, supporting rural communities and accessing support services, talent retention, and creating good quality local jobs. Their towns are within commuting distance of London and have good access to Gatwick Airport, which makes them great locations for affluent residents who work both in county and elsewhere. Horsham has a notably high level of self-employment and there is scope for both residential and commercial development opportunities in both Mid Sussex and Horsham.

The University of Chichester with campuses in Bognor Regis and Chichester, Chichester College Group of FE colleges and the Institute of Technology, are strong local assets on the supply side. There are also good links with the universities of Sussex and Brighton. There is significant economic leverage in large public sector organisations, which can be used to support skills and workforce development in the wider economy, for example, through inclusive employment, effective procurement and commissioning, and applying social value principles.

The employment and skills support infrastructure will benefit from greater collaboration and integration across agencies and support services, including Local Authority functions, the community and voluntary sector and the health sector.

6.2 Strengths and Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High employment rate and significant local employment centres, including Crawley as a major sub-regional employment hub • University of Chichester, with campuses in Chichester and Bognor Regis • Strong FE sector; Chichester College Group • Strong links with the universities of Brighton & Sussex, supporting innovation and business growth in the region • Mixed economy with jobs across a broad range of sectors (e.g. land-based sector, visitor economy, health and advanced engineering) • Strong and diverse micro and SME community • 165 large businesses that each employ 250+ staff • Overall low levels of deprivation, and generally high quality of living • Relatively high resident skills levels (with some exceptions in Crawley, Arun and Worthing) • Relatively low economic inactivity • Outstanding natural assets and protected landscapes • Establishment of Surrey & Sussex Institute of Technology in Crawley • Establishment of new West Sussex Economic Growth Board could help to drive growth • Active community and voluntary sector providing wide-ranging, if fragmented, employment and skills support • High levels of self-employment particularly in rural areas, which in some cases, lead to growing businesses that create jobs • Many 'foundational sectors' e.g. tourism, agriculture and care, with low traditional productivity but high social productivity, for example bringing opportunities for entry routes into work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed economic performance between districts and boroughs and jobs not evenly distributed across the county • Large numbers of people who are economically inactive are so due to long-term health conditions • Barriers to work persist for certain cohorts including those with a lack of work experience, mental health challenges or skills mismatch. • Shrinking working age population and growing age-related dependencies • High house prices and low housing affordability • Heavy reliance on low value, seasonal sectors • Lack of diversity in Crawley economy leaving it vulnerable to economic shocks • Pockets of coastal deprivation • Transport and connectivity issues, especially in rural areas • Attainment deficit for SEND and Free School Meal recipients • High levels of NEET, with unknown destinations for many young people • Increasing claimant count and unemployment, particularly amongst young people and those aged 50+ years. • Dispersed disadvantaged makes it difficult to provide cohesive support cost effectively • High-cost areas have high out-commuting, with many residents crossing the county boundary for work.

6.3 Labour Supply

Population by Age

Population by Age (2023)

	Aged 0 to 15	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16 to 24	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+	Dependency ratio
West Sussex	17.6%	59.2%	8.5%	30.2%	20.5%	23.2%	0.69
Adur	17.9%	58.1%	8.0%	29.4%	20.8%	24.0%	0.72
Arun	15.2%	55.9%	8.0%	27.0%	21.0%	28.8%	0.79
Chichester	15.5%	57.1%	9.7%	26.4%	21.0%	27.4%	0.75
Crawley	21.5%	64.9%	9.5%	37.7%	17.7%	13.6%	0.54
Horsham	17.9%	58.6%	8.0%	29.1%	21.5%	23.5%	0.71
Mid Sussex	19.4%	59.8%	8.1%	31.7%	20.1%	20.8%	0.67
Worthing	16.5%	60.7%	8.4%	31.3%	21.0%	22.8%	0.65
South East	18.6%	61.7%	10.0%	31.9%	19.8%	19.8%	0.62
England	18.5%	62.9%	10.7%	32.9%	19.3%	18.7%	0.59

Source: Population Estimates; Office for National Statistics; 2023

In 2023, West Sussex had a resident population of around 900,000. Around 533,000 (59.2%) were of working age (16-64). This is a lower proportion than in England (62.9%) and the South East (61.7%). Arun (55.9%) and Chichester (57.1%) have the lowest proportions of working age residents, while Crawley (64.9%) and Worthing (60.7%) have the highest. Only Crawley has a higher proportion of working age residents than England.

The dependency ratio shows the number of non-working age residents for every person of working age. The higher the number, the greater the proportion of non-working age residents. In West Sussex, there were 0.69 non-working age residents for every working age resident. This is higher than in England (0.59) and the South East (0.62). Again, only Crawley has a lower dependency ratio than England. In Arun, there are 0.79 non-working age residents for every working age resident.

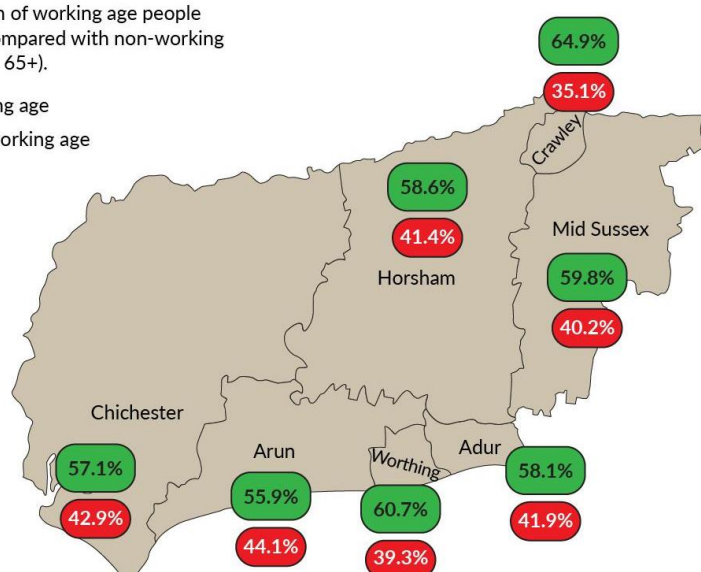
Population growth between 2013 and 2023 has been more rapid in West Sussex (+9.2%) than in Brighton & Hove (+1.5%) and East Sussex (+4.2%). With the exception of Crawley, in-migration has been the main driver of change.

This has major implications for the local economy, labour supply, attractiveness to investors, and the demand for services across most of West Sussex. Later sections of this report will explore this in more detail and demonstrate that there are large numbers of people in West Sussex who appear to have voluntarily withdrawn from the labour market.

West Sussex population by age

Proportion of working age people (16-64) compared with non-working age (0-15, 65+).

- working age
- non-working age



Ethnicity

Source: Census 2021; Office for National Statistics; 2021

	All Global Majority Ethnic groups		Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh		Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African		Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups		Other White		Other ethnic group	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	139,102	15.8	38,288	27.5	11,429	8.2	20,811	15.0	59,948	43.1	8,626	6.2
Adur	7,153	11.1	1,395	19.5	530	7.4	1,627	22.7	2,904	40.6	697	9.7
Arun	18,709	11.3	2,630	14.1	857	4.6	2,484	13.3	11,824	63.2	914	4.9
Chichester	12,249	9.9	2,168	17.7	783	6.4	2,047	16.7	6,582	53.7	669	5.5
Crawley	45,314	38.2	18,236	40.2	5,331	11.8	4,838	10.7	13,761	30.4	3,148	6.9
Horsham	17,428	11.9	3,974	22.8	1,312	7.5	3,130	18.0	8,094	46.4	918	5.3
Mid Sussex	21,595	14.2	5,505	25.5	1,337	6.2	3,827	17.7	9,753	45.2	1,173	5.4
Worthing	16,658	15.0	4,387	26.3	1,281	7.7	2,854	17.1	7,029	42.2	1,107	6.6
South East	1,963,005	21.2	650,545	33.1	221,584	11.3	260,871	13.3	694,322	35.4	135,683	6.9
England	14,949,257	26.5	5,426,392	36.3	2,381,724	15.9	1,669,378	11.2	4,242,610	28.4	1,229,153	8.2

In 2021, around 139,100 (15.8%) of West Sussex residents were from a Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) group. This is a smaller proportion than in the South East (21.1%) and in England (26.5%). The demographic make-up of Crawley is markedly different to other parts of West Sussex: over a third (38.2%) of its residents are from a Global Ethnic Majority background. The other districts and boroughs in the county have much lower proportions. For example, only one in ten (9.9%) of Chichester's residents are from an ethnic minority background.

Nearly half (40%) of Crawley's GEM population are Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh. A more detailed analysis shows that in 2021, Crawley had over 7,300 Indian or British Indian residents, 6,100 Pakistani or British Pakistani residents, and 1,900 Sri Lankan residents. Over four fifths (84%) of West Sussex's Pakistani/British Pakistani residents, over half (52%) of the county's Indian/British Indian residents, and nearly three-quarters (74%) of its Sri Lankan residents live in Crawley. The town also has large Polish (1,900) and Romanian (1,700) communities.

In other parts of West Sussex, there is less ethnic diversity, with the biggest ethnic groupings from mixed ethnic groups or 'Other White' backgrounds. At the time of the census, the county had 9,800 mixed European residents, 7,800 Polish residents, 6,700 Irish residents, and 4,200 Romanian residents.

Over a third (37%) of the county's Polish population live in Arun, particularly around Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. Arun also has nearly half of the county's Lithuanians (580) and Latvians (370). In 2021, there were 8,200 residents in West Sussex with language barriers, notably 2,900 in Crawley and 2,200 in Arun.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Since the 2021 Census, the UK has welcomed significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. This has included support through the Homes for Ukrainians scheme, the Afghan Resettlement Programme, and Other Supported Asylum routes.

A total of 5,438 people have been supported under these three schemes in West Sussex. This represents 0.60% of the county's resident population – a higher proportion than in both the South East (0.42%) and England (0.42%).

Refugees & Asylum Seekers (2025)

	Homes for Ukrainians	Afghan Resettlement Programme	Supported Asylum	Total	% of Population
West Sussex	2,701	1,493	1,244	5,438	0.60%
Adur	117	12	0	129	0.20%
Arun	383	93	2	478	0.28%
Chichester	648	172	194	1,014	0.79%
Crawley	304	1,026	399	1,729	1.43%
Horsham	533	66	113	712	0.48%
Mid Sussex	555	96	519	1,170	0.74%
Worthing	161	28	17	206	0.18%
South East	27,111	5,541	7,287	39,939	0.42%
England	125,290	23,680	94,754	243,724	0.42%

Source: 'Regional and Local Authority Data on Immigration Groups'; Home Office; 2025

Nearly half (2,701) of the refugees and asylum seekers supported in West Sussex are Ukrainian. Crawley has welcomed the largest number overall (1,729), followed by Mid Sussex (1,170) and Chichester (1,014). Of the 1,493 beneficiaries of the Afghan Resettlement Programme, 1,026 (69%) have been housed in Crawley. Mid Sussex has housed the largest number of people under the Homes for Ukrainians scheme (42%).

LGBTQ+

Just over 21,000 (2.9%) of West Sussex residents described their sexuality as other than 'Straight or Heterosexual'. This is similar to the proportion in both the South East and England (3.1%). Worthing (4.0%) and Adur (3.4%) have the largest LGBTQ+ populations in West Sussex.

Population Projections

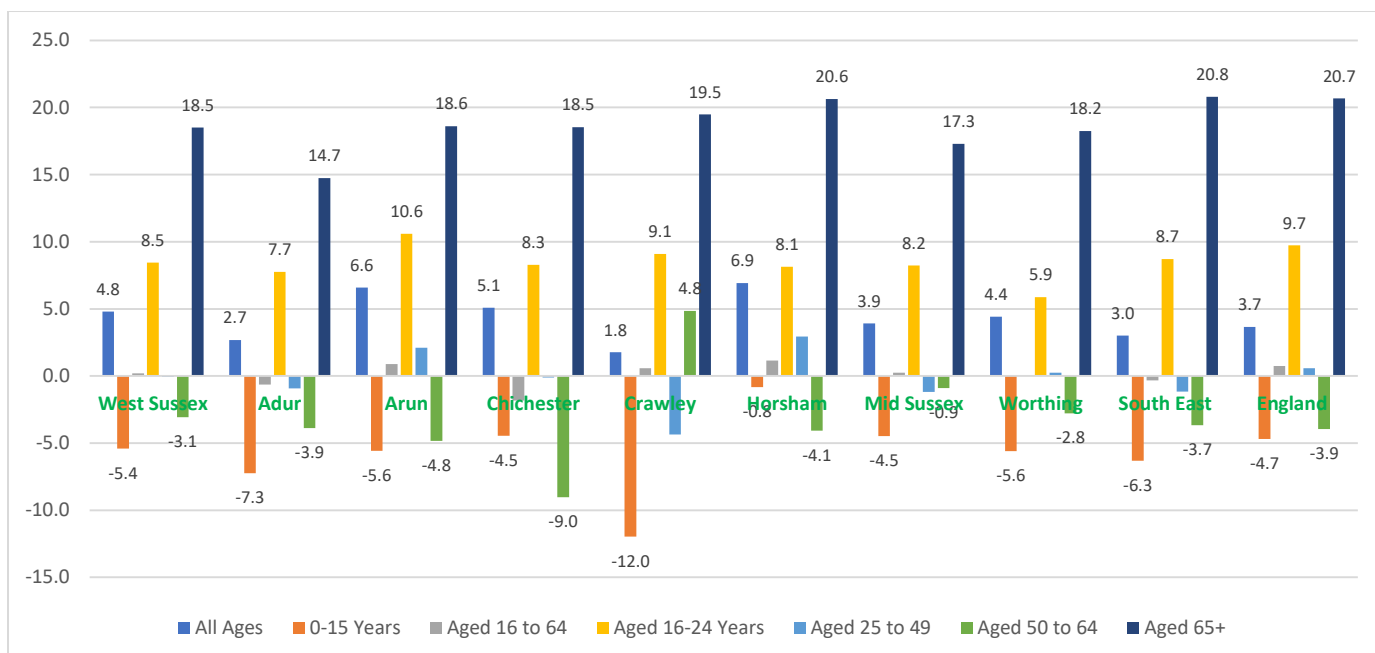
Population Projections 2025-2035

	All Ages	0-15 Years	Aged 16 to 64	Aged 16-24 Years	Aged 25 to 49	Aged 50 to 64	Aged 65+
West Sussex	43,114	-8,134	+1,054	+6,851	-171	-5,626	+50,192
Adur	+1,757	-784	-237	+449	-169	-517	+2,775
Arun	+11,169	-1,396	+824	+1,563	+924	-1,663	+11,738
Chichester	+6,427	-858	-1,236	+1,075	-33	-2,278	+8,515
Crawley	+2,030	-2,577	+438	+1,103	-1,743	1,078	+4,173
Horsham	+10,547	-220	+1,015	+992	+1,324	-1,301	+9,753
Mid Sussex	+6,131	-1,284	+232	+1,084	-558	-294	+7,186
Worthing	+5,053	-1,015	+18	+585	+84	-651	+6,052
South East	+284,241	-110,309	-18,160	+84,098	-33,294	-68,964	+412,729
England	+2,123,686	-506,921	+264,463	+595,609	+108,784	-439,930	+2,366,134

Source: Population Projections (2018 based); Office for National Statistics; 2025

The chart below shows the projected population changes between 2025 and 2035 in percentage terms for West Sussex, its districts and boroughs, the south east and England

Population Projections 2025-2035 (percentage)



Source: Population Projections (2018 based); Office for National Statistics; 2025

There are projected to be 43,100 more residents living in West Sussex in 2035 compared with 2025 - a 4.8% increase in the county's population over the next decade. This compares with projected increases of 3.0% in the South East and 3.7% in England. Horsham (+6.9%) is expected to see the largest population growth, followed by Arun (+6.6%). Crawley (+1.8%) and Adur (+2.7%) are projected to see the slowest growth.

The structure of the population is also set to shift, with a further increase in the post-working age population (+50,200 or +18.5%) and a reduction in the pre-working age population (-8,100 or -5.4%). The working age population (16–64 years) is projected to grow only marginally (+1,100 or +0.2%), with a rise of 6,900 among 16–24-year-olds (+8.5%) offset by a fall of 5,600 (-3.1%) among 50–64 year olds.

All districts and boroughs in West Sussex are projected to see an increase in their post-working age populations, building on already older-than-average demographics. If these projections are realised, there could be 0.81 non-working age residents for every working age resident in the county. In Arun, that figure could reach 0.95 by 2035.

Only Crawley (0.58) is expected to maintain a low 'dependency ratio' - indicating a high proportion of working age residents. Every other district and borough is projected to exceed the dependency ratios for both the South East (0.71) and England (0.67).

Households & Incomes

Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) 2022

	£	Index (England =100)
West Sussex	£25,108	1.08
Adur	£21,769	0.93
Arun	£23,068	0.99
Chichester	£29,358	1.26
Crawley	£19,883	0.85
Horsham	£29,442	1.26
Mid Sussex	£28,211	1.21
Worthing	£23,049	0.99
South East	£26,058	1.12
England	£23,338	1.00

Source: 'Regional Gross Disposable Household Income: Local Authorities by ITL1 Region'; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Household income is a broad measure of household wealth. The table shows Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) per head, indexed to England (100). Overall, West Sussex is a relatively wealthy part of England, with a GDHI of £25,108 - compared with £23,338 in England and £26,058 in the South East. However, there are notable differences within the county. GDHI in Crawley (£19,883) is well below both the regional and national averages, while GDHI in Horsham (£29,442) and Mid Sussex (£28,211) is exceptionally high (at 26% and 21% higher than the national benchmark respectively).

Housing Affordability

The median affordability ratio is calculated by dividing the median house price by the median gross annual workplace-based earnings, offering insight into the relative affordability of housing in different regions.

Median Housing Affordability Ratio (2023)

	Ratio	Index (England =100)
West Sussex	10.00	129.7
Adur	10.06	130.5
Arun	10.18	132.0
Chichester	12.82	166.3
Crawley	7.93	102.9
Horsham	11.68	151.5
Mid Sussex	11.35	147.2
Worthing	9.70	125.8
South East	9.61	124.6
England	7.71	100.0

Source: Housing Affordability in England and Wales: 2023; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Overall, West Sussex is one of the least affordable parts of the country when measured by the relationship between median house prices and median workplace earnings. Across the county median house prices are 10.0 times median earnings for full-time workers, compared with 7.71 in England and 9.61 in the South East region.

For residents, it is a difficult county in which to find work that matches the high cost of housing. The median house price ratio is particularly high in Chichester (12.82), Horsham (11.68), and Mid Sussex

(11.35). Crawley (7.93) is the most affordable area - if local people can access the good quality jobs available locally. Crawley is the only district or borough in West Sussex where housing affordability is close to the England average (7.73).

Median Earnings

Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time Workers – Residence and Workplace Based 2024

	Workers		Residents		Workplace Earnings a % of Resident Earnings	
	£	Index (England = 100)	£	Index (England = 100)	£	%
West Sussex	£38,006	101	£38,700	103	-£694	-1.8%
Adur	£36,273	96	£36,655	97	-£382	-1.0%
Arun	£33,048	88	£36,840	98	-£3,792	-10.3%
Chichester	£33,151	88	£36,000	96	-£2,849	-7.9%
Crawley	£42,886	114	£38,368	102	+£4,518	11.8%
Horsham	£36,808	98	£41,643	111	-£4,835	-11.6%
Mid Sussex	£37,977	101	£40,000	106	-£2,023	-5.1%
Worthing	£36,610	97	£37,381	99	-£771	-2.1%
South East	£39,038	104	£40,339	107	-£1,301	-3.2%
England	£37,630	100	£37,617	100	+£13	0.0%

Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE); ONS via NOMISWEB

Median workplace (£38,006) and residence-based (£38,700) earnings for full-time workers in West Sussex are both just above the national figures for England (£37,630 and £37,617 respectively).

However, this masks significant variation across the county. Median workplace earnings in Crawley (£42,886) are much higher than both the regional and national medians. In all other districts and boroughs - except for Horsham - workplace earnings fall below the national and regional averages. They are particularly low in Arun (£33,048) and Chichester (£33,151).

Overall, residents' earnings are higher than those of local workers, except in Crawley, where the reverse is true. Full-time workers living in Crawley earn nearly 12% more than those working in the borough. In Horsham, residents' median earnings are £4,835 higher than local workplace earnings, and in Arun the gap is £3,792.

Deprivation

	Average Rank 2019	Median Decile 2019	LSOAs in top quintile	
			Count	%
West Sussex	22,107	7	18	4%
Adur	17,775	6	1	2%
Arun	17,267	6	10	11%
Chichester	20,451	7	0	0%
Crawley	16,197	5	2	3%
Horsham	25,199	9	0	0%
Mid Sussex	27,207	9	0	0%
Worthing	18,835	6	5	8%

West Sussex IMD Rankings 2019

Deciles



West Sussex has 18 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the top 20% most deprived in England, accounting for 3.6% of the county's total LSOAs. This suggests that, overall, West Sussex is not a deprived county by national standards.

Each LSOA is assigned a rank from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived) based on various indicators across seven domains, including income, employment, health, education, crime, housing, and the living environment.

The small number of deprived areas are mainly located in Crawley, Arun and Adur, and to a lesser extent, Worthing. Crawley has two LSOAs considered to be severely deprived, and Arun has ten. Three of the county's seven districts and boroughs - Chichester, Horsham, and Mid Sussex - have no LSOAs within the 20% most deprived in England.

Health & Well-Being

The West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) 2024/25 identifies the need for targeted action on underlying causes of poor health, including mental ill health, sensory impairment, musculoskeletal conditions, and pain management.

Groups at heightened risk of poor health include people with severe mental illness, children in care and care leavers, individuals experiencing homelessness, and those with multiple complex needs. Educational attainment, employment status, and housing conditions all significantly impact health and well-being.

The JSNA highlights growing pressures on income and housing in West Sussex, with particularly high use of temporary accommodation in Crawley and Worthing. It also estimates that 20,420 children and young people in the county are living with a mental health condition.

Disability

Disability 2021

	All Disabled		Limiting a Little		Limiting a Lot	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	148,900	16.9%	91,144	10.3%	57,756	6.5%
Adur	12,577	19.5%	7,552	11.7%	5,025	7.8%
Arun	32,481	19.7%	19,331	11.7%	13,150	8.0%
Chichester	20,976	16.9%	13,088	10.5%	7,888	6.4%
Crawley	17,697	14.9%	10,475	8.8%	7,222	6.1%
Horsham	21,804	14.9%	13,923	9.5%	7,881	5.4%
Mid Sussex	22,063	14.5%	14,184	9.3%	7,879	5.2%
Worthing	21,303	19.1%	12,592	11.3%	8,711	7.8%
South East	1,496,340	16.1%	915,292	9.9%	581,048	6.3%
England	9,774,510	17.3%	5,634,153	10.0%	4,140,357	7.3%

Source: 'Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021'; Office for National Statistics; 2023

Around one in six (17%) of West Sussex residents aged 5 and over have some form of disability. This is slightly higher than the rate in the South East (16%), and broadly in line with the England average (17%). Adur (19.5%) and Arun (19.7%) have the highest proportions of residents with disabilities, while Mid Sussex (14.5%) has the lowest.

Approximately 53,000 residents have a disability that limits their day-to-day activities a lot, representing 6.5% of the 5+ population. This is slightly above the South East average (6.3%) but below the national rate (7.3%). Adur (7.8%) and Arun (8.0%) again have the highest proportions of residents with more severe disabilities, whereas Horsham and Mid Sussex have the lowest.

Employment and Disability

Disability, disability employment rate and overall employment rate (2025)

	% aged 16-64 who are EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate aged 16-64 - EA core or work-limiting disabled		Employment rate - aged 16-64	
	Count	percent	numerator	percent	numerator	percent
West Sussex	131,900	25.8%	83,400	63.2%	409,800	80.2%
Adur	14,600	38.6%	6,400	43.9%	25,300	66.7%
Arun	20,700	23.2%	11,300	54.5%	71,900	80.6%
Chichester	17,600	26.3%	11,800	66.8%	56,500	84.1%
Crawley	17,800	24.8%	11,300	63.9%	54,400	76.1%
Horsham	18,500	22.1%	14,100	76.1%	70,000	83.8%
Mid Sussex	26,500	29.0%	17,000	64.1%	74,100	81.0%
Worthing	16,300	23.2%	11,600	71.1%	57,600	82.1%
South East	1,453,900	25.7%	918,200	63.2%	4,436,900	78.4%
England	9,178,100	26.0%	5,288,500	57.6%	26,720,600	75.7%

Source: Annual Population Survey; ONS 2025

In the 12 months to March 2025, there were 131,900 16–64-year-old residents in West Sussex who were either Equality Act (EA) or work-limiting disabled. This was 25.8% of the working age population – similar to the South East (25.7%) and in England (26.0%).

The employment rate for disabled working age residents was 63.2%, compared with an overall employment rate of 80.2%. The employment rate for working age people with disabilities in West Sussex was similar to the South East (63.2%), but higher than the England (57.6%) rate.

The employment rate for people with disabilities was lowest in Adur (43.9%) and Arun (54.5%) and highest in Horsham (76.1%) and Worthing (71.1%)

Employment and Health Conditions

In West Sussex, just under half (47%) of people with long-term health conditions are in work. This is 15.5 percentage points below the overall employment rate for adults aged 16 and over (62.5%) in the county. The employment rate for this group is also lower than in the South East (52%) and England (49%)—despite West Sussex’s high overall employment rate.

Crawley has the highest employment rate for people with long-term health conditions (62%), while Adur has the lowest (31%).

Half (50.3%) of people with mental health conditions in West Sussex are in work. This is higher than the England average (46.4%) and broadly in line with the South East (50.9%), but still well below the overall employment rate for residents aged 16+ in the county (62.5%). Horsham has the highest employment rate for people with mental health conditions (68.1%), whilst Arun has the lowest (43.1%).

People with long-term physical and mental health conditions have a lower employment rate than the average, as shown in the table below.

Employment rate (16+)³⁸ and Health Conditions (2024)

	All long term health conditions		Mental health conditions	
	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	148,800	47.0%	46,600	50.3%
Adur	8,200	31.4%	Not Available	
Arun	26,400	41.7%	7,400	43.1%
Chichester	18,800	44.6%	5,900	51.2%
Crawley	23,000	62.3%	5,800	47.6%
Horsham	20,400	53.8%	7,000	68.1%
Mid Sussex	28,700	46.4%	9,900	54.5%
Worthing	23,400	48.4%	8,500	50.0%
South East	1,583,400	52.3%	455,800	50.9%
England	9,148,300	49.4%	2,592,500	46.4%

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Unpaid Carers

Unpaid Carers in Receipt of Carers Allowance (2023)

	Carers Allowance
West Sussex	8,755
Adur	830
Arun	1,885
Chichester	1,130
Crawley	1,480
Horsham	1,125
Mid Sussex	1,085
Worthing	1,220

Source: 'DWP Benefits Statistics: February 2023'; Department for Work and Pensions; 2024

In 2022/23, 8,755 West Sussex residents received Carer's Allowance. Carers live in all parts of the county, with the highest numbers in Arun (1,885) and Crawley (1,480).

³⁸ Note: The Annual Population Survey only shows this variable for residents aged 16+, not for residents aged 16-64 years

Unpaid Carers (2021)

	All Unpaid Carers		20 hours +	
	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	72,816	8.6%	33,176	3.9%
Adur	5,876	9.5%	2,800	4.5%
Arun	14,569	9.3%	7,232	4.6%
Chichester	10,490	8.8%	4,613	3.9%
Crawley	8,969	8.1%	4,635	4.2%
Horsham	11,612	8.3%	4,627	3.3%
Mid Sussex	11,582	8.1%	4,715	3.3%
Worthing	9,717	9.2%	4,553	4.3%
South East	733,364	8.3%	344,742	3.9%
England	4,678,265	8.7%	2,374,540	4.4%

Source: 'Provision of Unpaid Care, Census 2021'; Office for National Statistics; 2023

There are significantly more unpaid carers than those in receipt of Carer's Allowance. In 2021, 72,800 residents in West Sussex provided unpaid care - 8.6% of the county's population aged 5 and over. Residents in Adur (9.5%), Arun (9.3%) and Worthing (9.2%) were the most likely to provide unpaid care, and also the most likely to provide more intensive care (20 hours or more per week).

Older working-age residents (aged 50–64) are the most likely to be carers. Unpaid carers live in all districts and boroughs across the county.

Insecure Housing & Temporary Accommodation

	Owed a Duty	Temporary Accommodation
West Sussex	3,377	1,342
Adur	152	121
Arun	849	168
Chichester	372	99
Crawley	672	328
Horsham	395	133
Mid Sussex	396	73
Worthing	541	420

Source: 'West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Public Health Data Profiles 2022/23'; West Sussex County Council; 2024

According to the JSNA, in 2022/23, 3,377 households in West Sussex were owed a duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Arun (849) and Crawley (672) had the largest numbers. There were 1,342 households in the county housed in temporary accommodation, with the highest numbers in Worthing (420) and Crawley (328).

According to the JSNA, in 2022/23, 3,377 households in West Sussex were owed a duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Arun (849) and Crawley (672) had the largest numbers. There were 1,342 households in the county housed in temporary accommodation, with the highest numbers in Worthing (420) and Crawley (328). Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local housing authorities in England have specific duties to assist individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Being 'owed a duty' means that the local authority has a legal obligation to provide support to the household.

Worthing and Crawley have also seen the most significant increases in the use of temporary accommodation in recent years. The most common reason for insecure housing was the end of a shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector.

Education & Skills

Level 2 and 3 Attainment by 19 Years - by Characteristic 2023/24

	All	Non FSM	FSM	Attainment Gap	Non-SEN	SEN	Attainment Gap
West Sussex	56.9%	60.0%	29.8%	-30.2%	62.8%	31.6%	-31.3%
Adur	53.0%	57.6%	26.2%	-31.4%	56.2%	39.0%	-17.1%
Arun	48.3%	51.8%	24.7%	-27.1%	52.7%	27.5%	-25.1%
Chichester	56.6%	60.1%	27.5%	-32.6%	64.2%	29.4%	-34.8%
Crawley	49.9%	52.7%	33.0%	-19.7%	55.4%	26.3%	-29.1%
Horsham	66.6%	68.8%	33.0%	-35.9%	73.8%	39.0%	-34.8%
Mid Sussex	62.2%	64.5%	28.9%	-35.6%	68.2%	30.7%	-30.7%
Worthing	55.7%	58.7%	33.1%	-25.6%	62.4%	21.4%	-41.0%
South East	58.7%	63.0%	31.4%	-31.7%	62.6%	33.4%	-29.2%
England	57.6%	62.4%	36.8%	-25.5%	64.2%	35.4%	-28.8%

Source: Level 2 and 3 Attainment by Young People Aged 19: Academic Year 2023/24; Department for Education; Published 24 April 2025

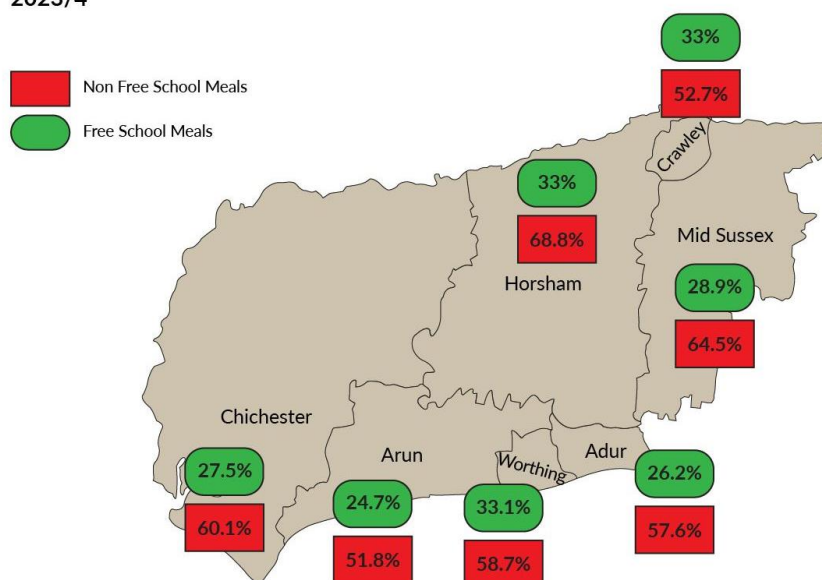
This table shows the proportion of 19-year-olds who have attained Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. It includes percentages for all 19-year-olds, those who have been eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), along with the attainment gap between these groups.

Just over half (56.9%) of West Sussex 19-year-olds hold a Level 3 qualification. This is slightly below the South East average (58.7%) and the England average (57.6%). Only in Horsham (66.6%) and Mid Sussex (62.2%) does the proportion exceed the national average. The proportions in Crawley (49.9%) and Arun (48.3%) are particularly low.

The attainment gap between 19-year-olds who have been eligible for FSM and those who have not is smaller in West Sussex (30.2%) than in the South East (31.6%) but wider than in England (25.6%). The smallest FSM attainment gap is in Crawley (19.7%), and the largest gaps are in Horsham (35.9%) and Mid Sussex (35.6%).

The attainment gap between SEN and non-SEN 19-year-olds is larger in West Sussex (31.3%) than in the South East (29.2%) and England (28.8%). The gap is particularly high in Worthing (41.0%), Horsham (34.8%) and Chichester (34.8%), and lowest in Adur (17.1%).

West Sussex attainment levels by aged 19 at level 3 2023/4



Adult Qualifications

Residents (16-64 years) without RQF Level 3 Qualifications

	Count	Percent
West Sussex	169,200	33.5%
Adur	10,500	27.3%
Arun	32,400	37.1%
Chichester	15,600	23.1%
Crawley	24,300	35.4%
Horsham	23,300	28.5%
Mid Sussex	33,600	36.5%
Worthing	29,600	42.4%
South East	1,649,000	29.7%
England	11,171,100	32.4%

Source: 'Workforce Qualification Levels Across England and Wales: Census 2021'; Office for National Statistics; 2023

There are 169,200 working-age residents in West Sussex who do not hold a qualification at Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) Level 3 or above. This represents over a third (33.5%) of the county's working-age population - higher than the proportions in the South East (29.7%) and in England (32.4%).

Level 3 qualifications are equivalent to an advanced apprenticeship or A-levels and typically provide the knowledge and skills needed for higher education or specialised roles in industry.

There are significant differences within West Sussex. Worthing (42.4%) and Arun (37.3%) have the highest proportion of 19-year-olds without this level of qualification, whereas Chichester (23.1%) has the lowest.

There is also evidence of skills mismatches among people already in employment, with people technically underqualified for the local labour market demand; potentially making them vulnerable to labour market

changes that demand higher-level skills. In West Sussex, over 122,000 (30%) people in work have lower skills levels than are required for their jobs. According to the ONS, skills mismatches are most pronounced in Arun (32.5%) and Adur (32.8%).

Employment

Employment Rate (16-64 Years) 2024

	Count	%	Count for 80%
West Sussex	415,100	81.4%	-7,180
Adur	26,200	68.1%	+4,600
Arun	73,500	83.6%	-3,100
Chichester	57,500	85.3%	-3,580
Crawley	56,600	80.9%	-600
Horsham	70,500	83.8%	-3,220
Mid Sussex	74,400	80.7%	-720
Worthing	56,400	80.7%	-560
South East	4,448,600	78.7%	73,320
England	26,720,000	75.7%	1,499,760

Source: 'Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics'; Office for National Statistics; 2024

In 2024, 415,100 of West Sussex's working-age residents were in employment, giving an employment rate of 81.4%. This is higher than the rate for the South East (78.7%) and for England (75.7%). The employment rate is lowest in Adur (68.1%) and highest in Chichester (85.3%).

The UK Government's *Get Britain Working* plan has set a target of an 80% employment rate. As West Sussex already exceeds this target there are opportunities to target those with the most barriers to employment and those in areas of most deprivation to boost national and regional employment targets.

Economic Inactivity

16-64 Year Old Economic Inactivity Rates 2024

	Including Students		Excluding Students	
	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	84,500	16.6%	67,800	13.8%
Adur	9,900	25.8%	not available	
Arun	12,700	14.5%	9,500	11.2%
Chichester	9,900	14.7%	not available	
Crawley	10,800	15.4%	8,100	12.0%
Horsham	11,800	14.0%	8,300	10.3%
Mid Sussex	16,700	18.1%	14,500	16.2%
Worthing	12,600	18.1%	8,200	12.5%
South East	1,040,000	18.4%	734,400	13.7%
England	7,450,500	21.1%	5,404,600	16.3%

Source: Economy Snapshot: July 2024; West Sussex County Council; 2024

People who are economically inactive are those aged 16 and over who are not in employment and do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment. This means they have not been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks. As a

result, they are not classified as part of the labour force. The main reasons why people are economically inactive are being a student, ill-health, caring and being retired. Some forms of economic inactivity, such as being retired or being a student, are NOT disadvantageous. The table below shows the overall economic inactivity rates and the rates excluding students.

There are 84,500 working age people in West Sussex who are economically inactive. This is 16.6% of 16–64-year-olds – a lower rate than in the South East (18.4%) and England (21.1%). Adur (25.8%) has a higher economic inactivity rate than other districts and boroughs in East Sussex.

Once students removed from the estimates, around 67,800 (13.8%) of working age residents in West Sussex are economically inactive. This is lower than in England (16.3%), but similar to the economic inactivity rate in the South East (13.7%).

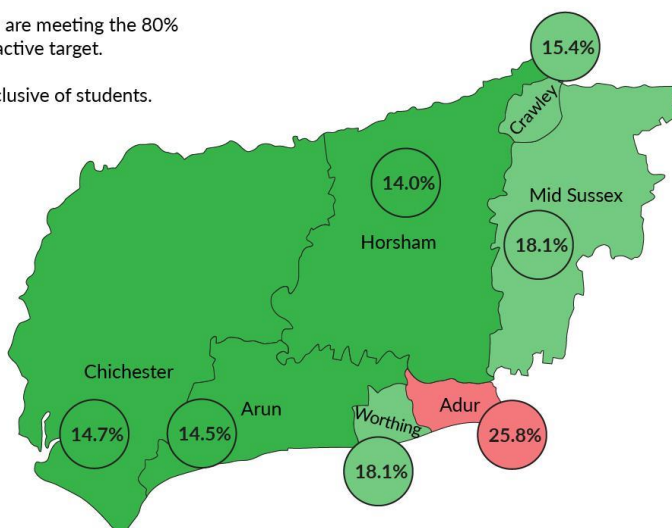
West Sussex Economic Activity

Percentage of population who are of working age (16-64) and are economically inactive.

Areas in green are meeting the 80% economically active target.

Figures are inclusive of students.

- 30-35%
- 25-30%
- 20-25%
- 15-20%
- 10-15%



Reasons for Economic Inactivity excluding students 2024

Reasons for Economic Inactivity (16-64 Year Olds) 2024

	Looking after a family/home		Long-term Sick		Early Retirees	
	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive	Count	% of Economically Inactive
West Sussex	12,900	16.3%	25,400	30.0%	17,000	20.1%
Adur	Not Available		3,500	35.1%	Not available	
Arun	Not available		3,500	27.2%	3,600	28.1%
Chichester	Not available		4,400	14.7%	3,600	26.7%
Crawley	2,800	26.0%	4,800	44.2%	Not available	
Horsham	Not available		2,400	44.1%	1,800	27.2%
Mid Sussex	3,500	20.9%	3,800	33.2%	4,500	16.1%
Worthing	Not available		3,100	14.1%	3,000	15.2%
South East	197,100	19.0%	228,100	21.9%	150,000	12.5%
England	1,415,500	19.0%	2,009,900	27.0%	934,900	14.4%

Nearly a third (30%) of West Sussex's economically inactive residents are so due to long-term sickness. This compares with 22% in the South East and 27% in England. Data at district and borough level is subject to wide confidence intervals, so should be treated with caution. The ONS does not provide the data for some areas where the confidence level in data accuracy is too low. However, from what is available, we can see that sickness-related economic inactivity appears to be more common in Crawley (44%) and Horsham (44%), and less common in Chichester (15%) and Worthing (14%).

Economically inactive residents in West Sussex (20%) are also more likely to be early retirees than in the South East (14%) and England (13%). This is particularly evident in Arun (28%), Horsham (27%) and Chichester (27%).

People are economically inactive for a wide range of reasons. Of the people who are economically inactive in West Sussex 17,900 (21%) say they would like to work. This is a slightly higher proportion than in the South East (19%) and the same as in England (21%).

Claimant Count Unemployment

Claimant Count Unemployment April 2024-April 2025

	Apr-24		Apr-25		April 2024-April; 2025 Change	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	14,370	2.7%	16,480	3.1%	+2,110	+14.7%
Adur	940	2.5%	1,140	3.0%	+200	+21.3%
Arun	3,135	3.3%	3,480	3.7%	+345	+11.0%
Chichester	2,115	2.9%	2,500	3.4%	+385	+18.2%
Crawley	3,090	3.9%	3,685	4.7%	+595	+19.3%
Horsham	1,700	1.8%	1,780	2.0%	+80	+4.7%
Mid Sussex	1,700	1.8%	1,785	3.6%	+85	+5.0%
Worthing	1,805	2.6%	2,110	3.1%	+305	+16.9%
South East	170,210	2.9%	186,695	3.2%	+16,485	+9.7%
England	1,387,390	3.8%	1,529,600	4.2%	+142,210	+10.3%

Source: Claimant Count by unitary and local authority (Experimental Statistics); Office for National Statistics; April 2025

There were 16,480 (3.1%) claimant count unemployed residents in West Sussex in April 2025. This is a similar proportion to the South East (3.2%), but lower than in England (4.2%). Crawley (4.7%) has the highest unemployment rate, while Horsham (2.0%) has the lowest.

Claimant count unemployment increased by 2,110 (+14.7%) in the year to April 2025. This is a faster rate of increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and in England (+10.3%). The sharpest rises were seen in Adur (+21.3%), Crawley (+19.3%) and Chichester (+18.2%). The slowest increases were in Horsham (+4.7%) and Mid Sussex (+5.0%).

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age

The table below shows the claimant count for unemployed residents in April 2024 and April 2025 for 18-24 year olds, 25-49-year-olds and people aged 50+. In April 2024, there were also 25 16-17-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in West Sussex.

Claimant Count Unemployment by Age (April 2024-April 2025)

	18-24				25-49				50+			
	Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24- Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24- Apr 25 Change		Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr 24- Apr 25 Change	
	Count	Count	Count	Percent	Count	Count	Count	Percent	Count	Count	Count	Percent
West Sussex	2,305	2,670	365	15.8	8,360	9,270	910	10.9	3,685	4,310	625	17.0
Adur	190	205	15	7.9	510	600	90	17.6	245	315	70	28.6
Arun	495	595	100	20.2	1,750	1,870	120	6.9	880	950	70	8.0
Chichester	285	375	90	31.6	1,225	1,375	150	12.2	605	705	100	16.5
Crawley	495	565	70	14.1	1,945	2,330	385	19.8	640	785	145	22.7
Horsham	235	250	15	6.4	910	1,005	95	10.4	440	495	55	12.5
Mid Sussex	245	270	25	10.2	1,010	1,010	0	0.0	445	480	35	7.9
Worthing	360	410	50	13.9	1,010	1,080	70	6.9	430	580	150	34.9
South East	28,640	31,425	2,785	9.7	100,075	106,225	6,150	6.1	41,220	45,425	4,205	10.2
England	243,300	265,305	22,005	9.0	826,000	883,235	57,235	6.9	315,885	349,340	33,455	10.6

Source: Claimant Count Unemployment; Office for National Statistics; 2025

In April 2025, there were 2,670 18–24-year-olds who were claimant count unemployed in West Sussex. This is +365 (+15.8%) more than there had been in April 2024 – a larger proportionate increase than in the South East (+9.7%) and England (+9.0%). Chichester (+31.6%) and Arun (+20.2%) had the largest proportionate increases and Horsham (+6.4%) had the smallest proportionate increase.

There were 9,270 25–49-year-old claimant count unemployed residents in West Sussex in April 2025. This is an increase of +910 (+10.9%) compared with a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+6.1%) and England (+6.9%) over the period. The fastest increases were in Crawley (+19.8%) and Adur (+17.6%) and there was no increase in Mid Sussex.

There were 4,320 aged 50+ claimant count unemployed residents in West Sussex in April 2025. This is +625 (+17.0%) more than there had been a year earlier. This is a faster increase than in the South East (+10.2%) and England (+10.6%). The fastest increases were in Worthing (+34.9%), Adur (+28.6%) and Crawley (+22.7%). Mid Sussex (+7.9%) and Arun (+8.0%) had the smallest increase amongst this age group.

Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

16-17 Year olds NEETs and Not Knowns 2025

	Cohort	NEET & Not Known		NEET		Not Known	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	18,657	2,146	11.5%	410	2.2%	1,735	9.3%
South East	215,720	15,100	7.0%	7,334	3.4%	7,982	3.7%
England	1,335,160	74,769	5.6%	45,395	3.4%	29,374	2.2%

Source: NEET Participation Local Authority Scorecard; Department for Education; 2025

In 2025, there were 18,657 16–17-year-olds in West Sussex, 410 of whom were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This represents a known NEET rate of 2.2%, which is lower than the rate in the South East (3.4%) and England (3.4%). West Sussex has a high proportion of ‘not known’ NEETs (9.3%), compared with the South East (3.7%) and England (2.2%). The overall NEET rate (including

both known and unknown NEETs) in West Sussex is 11.5%. This compares with 7.0% in the South East and 5.6% in England.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit Claimants: Average - January to December 2024

	Total		16-24 Years		25-49 Years		50-64 years	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	15,178	1.7%	2,333	3.0%	8,922	3.3%	3,925	2.1%
Adur	996	1.5%	184	3.6%	550	2.9%	263	2.0%
Arun	3,235	1.9%	505	3.8%	1,831	4.0%	899	2.5%
Chichester	2,221	1.7%	282	2.3%	1,308	3.9%	631	2.3%
Crawley	3,291	2.7%	509	4.4%	2,086	4.6%	695	3.3%
Horsham	1,703	1.1%	235	2.0%	991	2.3%	478	1.5%
Mid Sussex	1,785	1.1%	240	1.9%	1,076	2.2%	467	1.5%
Worthing	1,948	1.7%	378	4.0%	1,080	3.1%	492	2.1%

Source: Stat-Xplore; Department for Work & Pensions; 2025

There was an average of 15,200 Universal Credit claimants in West Sussex during 2024. Over half (59%) of claimants were aged 25–49, a quarter (26%) were aged 50–64 years, and around one in six (16%) were aged 16–24.

Crawley (2.7%) had the highest Universal Credit rate and Mid Sussex (1.1%) had the lowest. It had the highest rate in all age groups – 15–24-year-olds (4.4%); 25–49-year-olds (4.6%); and 50–64-year-olds (3.3%)

The number of Universal Credit claimants in West Sussex increased by 1,015 between January and December 2024. This included rises of +215 among 16–24-year-olds, +335 among 25–49-year-olds, and +455 among those aged 50+.

There were significant increases in the number of Universal Credit claimants across all parts of West Sussex, except for Horsham (-15) and Mid Sussex (+15).

In May 2024, 30,028 (44.5%) of the 67,404 Universal Credit claimants were in employment. This is a higher proportion than in the South East (41.0%) and England (38.4%). The proportions were higher than the region and national in all of the West Sussex districts and boroughs, with Horsham (46.6%) and Mid Sussex (47.6%) having the highest proportion of in-work claimants.

The table below shows the Universal Credit claimant data and those who are in and not in work in May 2024.

Universal Credit Claimants – In Work and Not in Work May 2024

	Total	% of 16 year olds	Not In Work	In Work	% In Work
West Sussex	67,404	12.7	37,376	30,028	44.5%
Adur	4,894	13.0	2,815	2,073	42.4%
Arun	14,382	15.5	8,095	6,284	43.7%
Chichester	9,002	12.5	5,160	3,843	42.7%
Crawley	13,479	17.3	7,510	5,969	44.3%
Horsham	8,077	9.2	4,313	3,766	46.6%
Mid Sussex	8,560	9.2	4,480	4,078	47.6%
Worthing	9,012	13.3	5,003	4,015	44.6%
South East	746,352	16.3	440,681	305,671	41.0%
England	5,869,099	12.9	3,614,445	2,254,654	38.4%

Source: Department for Work & Pensions; via West Sussex County Council 2024

6.4 Labour Demand

Employee Jobs and Job Density

Jobs & Job Density 2023

	Count	%	Job Density (jobs per head of population)
West Sussex	391,750	100.0%	0.86
Adur	20,865	5.3%	0.61
Arun	50,880	13.0%	0.60
Chichester	64,035	16.3%	1.08
Crawley	88,515	22.6%	1.16
Horsham	58,015	14.8%	0.84
Mid Sussex	60,540	15.5%	0.80
Worthing	48,750	12.4%	0.82

Source: Jobs Density by Local Authority, 2023; Office for National Statistics; Published 15 March 2024

There are 391,750 jobs in West Sussex. Nearly a quarter (23%) of these are in Crawley. There are 0.86 jobs per working age resident in the county, but these are not evenly distributed. Both Crawley (1.16) and Chichester (1.08) have more jobs than working age residents, while job density is much lower along the West Sussex coast: Arun has just 0.60 jobs per working age resident, and Adur has 0.61. Worthing fares slightly better, with 0.82 jobs per working age resident.

West Sussex has a relatively healthy labour market, but the distribution of jobs varies significantly. This creates different challenges across the county. While finding work in Crawley may be less difficult, many of the better-paying roles are filled by people commuting from outside the area. Chichester also draws in

workers from neighbouring districts such as Arun. This can put pressure on the county's infrastructure, with transport bottlenecks and limited connectivity between employment centres and some of the more rural and remote communities.

Self-Employment

Self-Employment Rates 2024

	Count	Percent	Index (England)
West Sussex	62,000	14.9%	118
Adur	2,300	8.7%	69
Arun	9,900	13.5%	107
Chichester	12,100	21.1%	167
Crawley	6,500	11.5%	91
Horsham	12,400	17.6%	140
Mid Sussex	11,400	15.3%	121
Worthing	7,400	13.1%	104
South East	559,900	12.6%	100
England	3,358,400	12.6%	100

Source: Annual Population Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2025

Self-employment is an important feature of the West Sussex labour market; nearly 15% of working residents are self-employed. This compares with 12.6% in both the South East and England. Self-employment is more common in the predominantly rural parts of the county, particularly in Chichester (21%) and Horsham (18%). In contrast, paid employment dominates in the urban centres, with lower self-employment rates in Crawley (12%) and Worthing (13%). Adur has the lowest proportion of self-employed residents, at just 9%.

Self-employment is too often used as a proxy for entrepreneurship, but the two are not the same. Only a small proportion of those who work for themselves aim to grow businesses or create jobs. Many people choose self-employment because of a lack of better alternatives—or because they are in a financial position that allows them to prioritise flexibility over security.

Employment by Industry

Employment by Industry 2024

	West Sussex		Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing
	Count	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	4,500	1.1	0.2	1.6	3.5	0.0	1.2	1.3	0.1
Mining & quarrying	250	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing	29,000	7.4	10.7	6.9	9.4	6.7	6.9	5.7	7.0
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	1,000	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.3
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	3,000	0.8	1.0	1.4	0.2	0.3	0.9	0.5	2.0
Construction	16,000	4.1	6.0	4.4	3.9	2.2	6.0	4.9	2.5
Wholesale & retail	60,000	15.2	19.0	17.6	14.1	12.4	17.2	16.4	14.0
Transport & storage	29,000	7.4	2.9	4.4	1.4	23.6	2.6	3.3	2.0

Accommodation & food service	38,000	9.6	8.3	15.7	10.9	7.9	8.6	9.8	7.0
Information & communication	12,000	3.0	4.8	1.6	2.7	2.8	5.2	3.3	2.5
Finance & insurance	11,000	2.8	0.6	0.7	2.0	3.4	3.0	4.9	3.5
Real estate	7,000	1.8	1.1	1.4	3.1	0.7	2.6	1.6	2.0
Professional, scientific & technical	27,000	6.9	6.0	4.9	7.0	6.7	8.6	7.4	4.5
Admin & support service	36,000	9.1	6.0	7.8	6.2	15.7	10.3	5.7	7.0
Public admin. & defence; social security	12,000	3.0	1.9	3.4	4.7	2.8	1.6	1.5	6.0
Education	31,000	7.9	10.7	6.9	9.4	3.9	8.6	11.5	7.0
Human health & social work	54,000	13.7	11.9	15.7	14.1	6.7	8.6	14.8	26.0
Arts, entertainment & recreation	13,000	3.3	6.0	3.4	5.5	1.7	3.9	3.7	2.5
Other services	8,000	2.0	2.4	2.0	2.0	0.8	3.9	2.9	1.6

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Local economies and their labour markets are shaped by the structure of their industries. In West Sussex, human health & social work (14%) and wholesale & retail (15%) together provide 29% of all jobs. Accommodation & food service (10%) is also a significant part of the county's employment base.

The table above shows the percentage of employment in each sector across the county and its districts & boroughs. The colour code highlights where there is a higher-than-average (green) sector concentration compared with England.

West Sussex has an above-average share of employment in agriculture, transport & storage, accommodation & food service, and arts, entertainment & recreation.

By district and borough:

- **Adur** has high concentrations in manufacturing; water supply; construction; wholesale & retail; education; and arts, entertainment & recreation.
- **Arun** is over-represented in agriculture; manufacturing; water supply; wholesale & retail; accommodation & food service; education; arts & entertainment; and other services.
- **Chichester** stands out for agriculture (notably horticulture); manufacturing; accommodation & food service; real estate; and arts, entertainment & recreation.
- **Crawley** has strong concentrations in utilities; transport & storage (driven by Gatwick Airport); administrative support services; manufacturing; accommodation & food service; real estate; and arts, entertainment & recreation.
- **Horsham** shows higher employment in agriculture; water supply; construction; wholesale & retail; real estate; admin support; arts, entertainment & recreation; and other services.
- **Mid Sussex** is diverse, with high employment in agriculture; water supply; construction; wholesale & retail; accommodation & food service; real estate; admin support; finance & insurance;

education; arts & recreation; and other services.

- **Worthing** has notable concentrations in water supply; public administration; and human health & social work—particularly the latter, which accounts for a quarter of all jobs.

Each area shows distinct patterns. Chichester’s agricultural strength (especially horticulture) and Crawley’s dominance in transport & storage (due to the influence of Gatwick Airport) stand out. Worthing’s economy leans heavily on human health & social work.

Overall, West Sussex has a diverse economy, but many coastal areas are overly reliant on lower-value sectors such as agriculture, accommodation & food service, and arts, entertainment & recreation. These sectors tend to be low in productivity and frequently offer seasonal or insecure work, contributing to challenges around wage levels and job stability.

This is not the case in Worthing, which has a diverse and highly productive economy. For West Sussex, employment and skills challenges are not just coastal issues. Crawley, in particular, has significant challenges in raising skills levels, tackling deprivation and enabling more local people to access the good quality jobs in the borough.

Business Units

Business Units by Size 2024

	Total	0-4		5-9		10-49		50-249		250+	
	Count	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
West Sussex	42,605	30,910	72.6	5,225	12.3	5,285	12.4	1,020	2.4	165	0.4
Adur	2,670	2,000	74.9	310	11.6	295	11.0	60	2.2	10	0.4
Arun	6,420	4,610	71.8	840	13.1	830	12.9	120	1.9	20	0.3
Chichester	7,665	5,675	74.0	905	11.8	905	11.8	155	2.0	25	0.3
Crawley	4,635	2,965	64.0	620	13.4	770	16.6	230	5.0	50	1.1
Horsham	8,345	6,230	74.7	1,020	12.2	915	11.0	165	2.0	20	0.2
Mid Sussex	8,215	6,115	74.4	955	11.6	965	11.7	165	2.0	20	0.2
Worthing	4,650	3,320	71.4	575	12.4	610	13.1	125	2.7	20	0.4
South East	465,155	340,175	73.1	55,570	11.9	56,195	12.1	11,540	2.5	1,680	0.4
England	2,735,615	1,972,515	72.1	341,000	12.5	339,670	12.4	71,435	2.6	11,000	0.4

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

There are over 42,600 business units in West Sussex. A fifth (20%) are in Horsham, 19% in Mid Sussex, and 18% in Chichester.

Just under three-quarters (73%) of the county’s business units employ between 0–4 people. This is broadly in line with the South East (73%) and England (74%). Horsham (75%) has the highest proportion of micro-businesses, while Crawley (64%) has the lowest.

West Sussex has 1,020 business units employing between 50–249 people, and 165 that employ 250 or more. Crawley has the largest number of both medium-sized (230) and large (50) businesses. Large business units can be found across the county, but Crawley stands out with sizeable employers in transport & storage, hotels, finance & insurance, professional, scientific & technical services, and manufacturing.

Chichester and Worthing each host a small number of large manufacturing businesses. In most other areas of the county, large employers tend to be in public administration, health, education, and retail.

Business Units by Sector

Business Units by Sector 2024

	West Sussex		Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing
	Count	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1,310	3.1	0.7	2.1	6.3	0.2	5.0	2.8	0.2
Mining & quarrying	20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0
Manufacturing	1,960	4.6	6.0	5.5	4.8	3.5	5.1	3.8	4.0
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	100	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	1.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	180	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.3
Construction	5,950	14.0	19.5	16.0	12.1	11.7	13.2	14.5	13.8
Wholesale & retail	6,695	15.7	16.9	17.4	15.3	18.4	14.7	14.1	15.1
Transport & storage	1,515	3.6	3.4	4.0	2.2	10.0	2.6	2.3	2.7
Accommodation & food service	2,695	6.3	5.6	7.3	6.8	7.2	4.9	5.3	8.1
Information & communication	2,755	6.5	6.6	4.8	5.2	6.4	7.2	7.1	8.5
Financial & insurance activities	865	2.0	1.3	1.6	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.6
Real estate	1,645	3.9	3.0	3.9	4.9	2.5	4.1	3.7	3.9
Professional, scientific & technical	6,465	15.2	12.5	12.0	16.8	11.3	17.0	17.8	14.3
Admin. & support service	4,010	9.4	8.1	8.6	8.9	11.5	9.8	10.2	8.1
Public admin. & defence; social security	250	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.6
Education	1,015	2.4	2.4	1.9	2.3	2.5	2.3	2.9	2.3
Human health & social work	2,265	5.3	4.9	6.3	4.4	5.1	4.1	5.5	8.0
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1,235	2.9	3.2	2.7	3.4	1.9	2.9	3.0	2.9
Other services	1,680	3.9	4.3	4.3	3.5	3.5	3.7	4.1	4.7

Source: UK Business Counts; Office for National Statistics; 2024

Nearly half (45%) of West Sussex's business units are in just three sectors – Construction (14%), Wholesale & Retail (16%), and Professional, Scientific & Technical Services (15%). The county has a broad business base with businesses across a wide range of economic sectors, and its overall business unit profile broadly reflects that of England.

However, there are some local sectoral concentrations across the districts and boroughs:

- **Adur:** High concentration in Manufacturing, Water Supply, and Construction.
- **Arun:** High concentration in Manufacturing, Water Supply, Construction, and Human Health & Social Work.
- **Chichester:** High concentration in Agriculture, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Public Administration, and Arts, Entertainment & Leisure.

- **Crawley:** High concentration in Utilities, Transport & Storage, and Administrative & Support Services.
- **Horsham:** High concentration in Agriculture, Water Supply, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, and Education.
- **Mid Sussex:** High concentration in Construction, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Administrative & Support Services, and Education.
- **Worthing:** High concentration in Accommodation & Food Service, Information & Communications, Human Health & Social Work, and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation.

Job Vacancies

Unique Job Postings 2024

		Total	Construction	Creative & cultural	Digital	Health & care	Land based	Manufac & engineering	Visitor economy
West Sussex	Count	58,114	7,349	3,616	5,220	16,335	954	9,313	15,327
Adur	Count	2,414	312	146	227	754	46	444	485
	%	4.2%	4.2%	4.0%	4.3%	4.6%	4.8%	4.8%	3.2%
Arun	Count	6,115	635	297	237	1,954	110	760	2,122
	%	10.5%	8.6%	8.2%	4.5%	12.0%	11.5%	8.2%	13.8%
Chichester	Count	9,867	1,480	670	588	2,761	206	1,477	2,685
	%	17.0%	20.1%	18.5%	11.3%	16.9%	21.6%	15.9%	17.5%
Crawley	Count	13,423	1,899	995	1,859	2,366	137	2,930	3,237
	%	23.1%	25.8%	27.5%	35.6%	14.5%	14.4%	31.5%	21.1%
Horsham	Count	8,865	1,004	513	816	2,548	191	1,465	2,328
	%	15.3%	13.7%	14.2%	15.6%	15.6%	20.0%	15.7%	15.2%
Mid Sussex	Count	9,602	1,116	634	891	2,843	193	1,207	2,718
	%	16.5%	15.2%	17.5%	17.1%	17.4%	20.2%	13.0%	17.7%
Worthing	Count	7,828	903	361	602	3,109	71	1,030	1,752
	%	13.5%	12.3%	10.0%	11.5%	19.0%	7.4%	11.1%	11.4%

Source: Lightcast; 2024

There were over 58,000 unique job postings in West Sussex in 2024. Health Care (28%) and the Visitor Economy (26%) accounted for more than half of these postings combined. Arun had a disproportionate share of vacancies in both sectors. Chichester had a large share in Construction, Creative & Cultural, and Land-Based Industries. Crawley featured strongly in Creative & Cultural, Digital, and Manufacturing & Engineering roles. Horsham and Mid Sussex had a significant number of job postings in Land-Based Industries, while Worthing had a high concentration of roles in Health & Care

6.5 Current Provision

In 2023, West Sussex County Council developed a Skills Reset Action Plan to better align its approach to skills development. The plan aims to position the council at the forefront of the local skills agenda, fostering cross-council collaboration to support a dynamic, demand-led skills system that contributes to inclusive economic growth.

The newly established West Sussex Economic Growth Board will oversee the actions required to deliver the West Sussex Economic Growth Strategy (2025-2035) ambition to 'Ensure a dynamic and skilled workforce'.

Further Education

Chichester College Group (CCG) is the dominant Further Education provider in West Sussex, with colleges in Chichester, Worthing, Haywards Heath, and Crawley. The group also provides commercial and professional courses supporting residents and businesses including Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, a range of free on-line learning programmes and degree level qualifications awarded by the University of Chichester and the University of the Arts. It also has a work experience programme.

Higher Education

The University of Chichester is the principal Higher Education provider in West Sussex, with campuses in Chichester and Bognor Regis. In addition to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes delivered across 14 academic departments from creative arts to education, the university offers degree apprenticeships, as well as a broad CPD programme, primarily focused on health-related disciplines, business, and the humanities. The University ranks highly nationally in Education, Psychology, Social Work, and Sports Science.

Specialist Education

Brinsbury College near Pulborough, part of Chichester College Group, is a specialist land-based college, within the South Downs National Park. It offers a wide spectrum of qualifications, from entry level to foundation degrees and HNDs, catering to both school leavers and adult learners. Students study subjects such as agriculture, animal care, horticulture, equine studies, blacksmithing, and furniture making, with specialist facilities including a working farm, animal care centre, forge, and stables. It also offers apprenticeships and workforce development programmes. There are dedicated buses that transport learners to and from different parts of West Sussex.

West Dean College near Chichester, provides specialist courses through its three academic schools of Conservation, of Arts, and of Design. Qualifications range from foundation diplomas to degrees and master's degrees, validated by the University of Sussex. The School of Conservation is internationally renowned for training in areas such as clocks, furniture, and metalwork, while the KLC School of Design,

following a merger with West Dean in 2021, delivers industry-focused courses in interior and garden design. The college is owned and operated by the Edward James Foundation, a charitable trust.

West Sussex County Council

West Sussex County Council provides a broad spectrum of economy, employment and skills support across its services and directorates playing a key role in empowering residents and supporting inclusive growth.

Connect to Work

The Adult Education Service offers accessible learning to support personal development, employability, and community engagement. The service has included programmes such as free courses in English, maths, and digital literacy, ESOL language support for non-native speakers, Routes into Employment to help adults enter or progress in the workforce, Learning for Adults with Disabilities, Family Learning, Leisure and lifestyle courses that promote confidence, creativity, and social connection, and Skills Bootcamps - short, intensive courses to develop in-demand skills for the local job market.

The Synchronise Forum exists to improve the quality of supported employment for residents who need help in reaching their work potential. This multi-agency forum which meets quarterly includes DWP (JobCentre Plus), councils, Probation/ Prison Service, NHS provider services and their commissioners, Public Health, learning providers with a worklessness remit, Supported Employment and Employment service providers, shares best practice and progress. This group has much potential as we look for opportunities to enhance partnership across employment, skills, health and the community sector.

Support for Young People West Sussex County Council provides supported internships for people aged 16-24 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who also have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) through its in-house Post-16 Service. It also offers careers advice to young people aged 16 to 24 years who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). There is also an Employability Advisor who offers care leavers additional employability support for roles in the Council and beyond. The Council has a job interview guarantee scheme for care leavers.

The West Sussex & Brighton and Hove Careers Hub works with secondary schools, colleges and independent training providers, linking education and employment to support the delivery of high-quality, inclusive careers education.

HR initiatives - Career Tasters are opportunities for people to trial jobs at the Council for 12 weeks.
Apprenticeships

The County Council's Refugee Team supports to become independent by learning English, finding employment and sustaining activities of daily living.

SEND Employment Forum is a council-convened forum that brings together partners to support people in the county with special needs to access meaningful employment.

West Sussex Economic Growth Board

West Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board chaired by the county council's Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing. Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board include representatives from the health and care system, including the county council, NHS Sussex, NHS service providers, district and borough councils, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs), and Healthwatch West Sussex.

Other Provision

There is a wide range of other provision in the county, including national programmes, delivered at local level. Below are listed just some examples of some of the other provision that is available from the health, local government and community sectors to support people to develop skills and into employment.

NHS Talking Therapies Employment Support provides employment support delivered by employment advisers to people who are on waiting lists or in treatment.

Supported Employment West Sussex delivered by Aldingbourne Trust and Impact Initiatives provide support to people in West Sussex with lifelong disabilities, physical and sensory issues, acquired brain injury and those who are carers.

Districts and Borough Council provision

Each District and Borough council also has its own approach to improving skills and employability. For example, Crawley Borough Council's *Invest in Skills for Crawley* programme aims to better connect residents with local employment opportunities and to enhance skills and training provision within the borough. Adur & Worthing Councils works with partners to deliver a Help to Work programme, which provides information, advice and guidance in relation to employment issues. This includes help finding job vacancies and apprenticeships, CV and interview preparation and how to access childcare support.

7. Summary and Conclusions

This report is the data evidence that will be used to inform the development of the Get Sussex Working Plan, and the area implementation plans for Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex.

Sussex is diverse in terms of its geography, economic base, its demography and its socio-economic conditions. Nevertheless, there are employment and skills issues that transcend administrative boundaries and that can be progressed on a pan-Sussex basis, whilst acknowledging and responding to differences at more localised level.

Networks and support structures are already in place at different spatial levels. However, there is merit in strengthening these at pan-Sussex level to work collectively on common challenges; share knowledge; scale up successful projects; and collaborate to influence decisions at national and sub-national level and to lobby for funding to address issues that will best support Sussex's needs.

Coastal deprivation and rural isolation, high house prices, low paid employment, a dominance of micro and small businesses, and transport connectivity challenges are all issues that feature to some degree in many parts of Sussex and better coordination to address these could yield better outcomes. Much, but not all of Sussex, has an older age population than average. This potentially, leads to higher rates of long-term

health and disability challenges, which can inhibit labour market participation. An ageing population and mature workforce brings both challenges and opportunities: one challenge may be a need for re-skilling to respond to future labour market demands; whereas there is opportunity if more older people could be supported to remain in meaningful work ensuring that their valuable skills, experience and knowledge is utilised to support local economic growth if age diversity in the workplace is better encouraged and enabled.

Sussex is one of the UK's most sought after places to live, but its natural environment designations restrict development opportunities and limit the potential for major inward investment, particularly in coastal and protected rural areas. There is much potential for increased economic and employment growth through effective support of existing companies including start-ups and micro-businesses to grow. There is considerable talent within Sussex, not least amongst the large number of students that graduate from the three universities each year. Effectively connecting local talent to unevenly distributed job opportunities across Sussex demands strong coordination, smart knowledge-sharing, and innovative, targeted support tailored to diverse community needs across Sussex.

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Appendix 3: List of Participating Stakeholders

The following organisations contributed to the Get Sussex Working stakeholder engagement process and have given permission to be named in this report. Their insights and lived experience were essential to shaping the findings and recommendations presented:

Adur and Worthing Councils
Aldridge Adult Learning
Amaze
Astaris
BACA
Balfour Beatty Living Places
Bexhill Sixth Form College
Brighter Horizons Training and Development
Brighton and Hove City Council – multiple service teams
Brighton and Hove Chamber of Commerce
Brighton and Hove Education Academy
Campus Training Limited
Cavendish School
Chailey Heritage Foundation
Change Grow Live (CGL)
Cheesmur Building Contractors
Chichester College Group
Chichester District Council
Chichester District Foodbank
Choose Work
Cleankill Pest Control Ltd
Coastline Hospitality Academy
Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
Creative Process Digital
Crimsham Farm CIC
Cultural Nexus Ltd
CXX
De La Warr Pavilion
Department for Work and Pensions
Digital Brighton & Hove - AbilityNet
East Sussex College Group
East Sussex County Council – multiple service teams
East Sussex Careers Hub
Eastbourne Borough Council
Eastbourne Chamber of Commerce

Eastbourne Education Business Partnership
Education Development Trust - National Careers Service
Education Futures Trust
Elev8Careers
Employ Crawley
FE Sussex
Fedcap
Felcon Limited
Flexibility Matters
FSN Charity
Gatwick Diamond Business
GM Monk
Grace Eyre Foundation
Hailsham and District Chamber of Commerce
Hastings Borough Council
Health Innovation Network
Heathfield Community College
Horsham District Council
House on the Brooks - Ingrams Farm
Iberian Lighting Ltd
Impact Initiatives - Workability
Kent County Council
Kert J Lesker Company Ltd.
Kier Group PLC
Kingsrock Construction
Lansdowne Hotel
LATC Automotive UK
Lewes and Eastbourne District Council
Little Gate Supported Employment
Littlewood Fencing
London Learning Consortium
LoveLocalJobs.com
Making Theatre Gaining Skills and The Bognor Makerspace
Manna Nexus CIC
Marshall Tufflex
Mermaid Inn
MET Brighton
Mid Sussex District Council
Moda Energy
Money Advice Plus
Money and Pension Service

Morrisons
National Careers Service
Naturally Talented Me
NHS Sussex
Oakdown House
People and Their Brilliance
People Matter
Plumpton College
Recruitment South East Ltd
Rewards Training Recruitment Consultancy Ltd
Robert Brown Associates (2013) Ltd
Robertsbridge Community College
Rother District Council
Rye & Beyond Holiday Cottages Ltd
Rye College
Sarah Bell Childminders
SCDA
Shoreham Port
Skills for Care Sussex
South Downs National Parks Authority
Southdown
Sovereign Commercial Installations Limited
St Wilfrid's Hospice
Stagecoach South East
Stonepillow
Sussex 4 Day Week
Sussex Chamber of Commerce
Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA)
Sussex Council of Training Providers (SCTP)
Sussex Housing Trust
Sussex Learning Network
Sussex Training Hub
Sutton & District Training Ltd
TechResort
Thakeham
The Berkley Hotel/Coastal Hospitality Academy
The Eastbourne Academy
The Hangleton and Knoll Project
The Launchpad Collective
The People Matter Trust Ltd
The Root of It
TraC

TRANSFORM Service (ESCC)
Trust For Developing Communities
UK Harvest
University of Brighton
University of Chichester
University of Sussex
Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester
W.E.A.
Watch This Sp_ce
Wealden District Council
West Sussex County Council - multiple service teams
West Sussex Partners in Care
West Sussex, Brighton & Hove Careers Hub
Whitehead Ross
YMCA Downslink Group

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all participants, including those who opted to remain anonymous.

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Get Sussex Working Plan | Stakeholder Engagement | ESCC

1. Introduction

Purpose

This report informs the development of the Get Sussex Working Plan (The Plan) a local initiative aligned with the UK Government's broader Get Britain Working (GBW) strategy to reduce economic inactivity and raise national employment levels to 80%. The GBW agenda promotes systemic reforms across employment, health, and skills sectors.

The Get Britain Working White Paper outlines a national vision for addressing workforce challenges, improving employability, and driving sustainable economic growth through systemic reforms across employment, health, and skills sectors. It has a strong focus on local solutions tailored to community needs. Local GBW Plans are central to delivering this ambition, serving as a bridge between national objectives and regional priorities and ensuring labour market responsiveness.

In Sussex, the 'Get Sussex Working Plan' (The Plan) coordinated by West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, and Brighton & Hove City Council will provide an interconnected vision, narrative and shared ambitions for Sussex.

The Plan will identify opportunities for pan-Sussex collaboration, for example relating to common stakeholders and demographics. Each local authority area will also develop an Action Plan to support the Sussex ambitions through place-based responses to local opportunities and challenges, identified in part, through stakeholder engagement.

Effective solutions depend on strong stakeholder engagement, with individuals and organisations that play a critical role in tackling employment barriers and fostering inclusive growth. Understanding lived experience is also essential to designing practical, impactful policies that work well for residents.

This report provides an overview of East Sussex stakeholder engagement activity and contributions, the challenges and opportunities identified, and the key areas of focus to inform local actions.

Methodology

Stakeholder engagement activities in East Sussex were coordinated by East Sussex County Council's Employment and Skills team, and the outline report was prepared by Fresh Ambition Ltd in collaboration with the team.

Each local area selected stakeholders for group discussions and one-to-one consultations, with the survey disseminated through direct outreach and via partner networks.

Stakeholder engagement data sources comprised MS Forms surveys, Teams-based consultations transcribed using automated tools, Mentimeter outputs, in person consultation.

In East Sussex the team held Get Sussex Working Plan workshops for the following Skills East Sussex groups:

- Joint Construction & Built Environment and Engineering & Manufacturing Task Group
- Joint Creative, Cultural, Digital and Media and Visitor Economy Task Group
- Health and Social Care Task Group (Sussex-wide coverage)
- East Sussex Adult Learning Network
- Apprenticeships East Sussex
- Additional workshop for Sussex Council of Training Providers (SCTP) members (Sussex-wide coverage)

The team undertook 18 stakeholder interviews and collated 75 survey responses.

User voice was an important aspect of the stakeholder consultation with 68 inputs from young people and adults via interviews and small focus groups. Themed questions for surveys, groups and 1:1s were developed around the policy priorities outlined in the Get Britain Working White Paper, including employer engagement, workforce inclusion, and labour market barriers. The resultant data (much in the form of open text responses) was then analysed using a thematic framework. The themes presented in this report were informed by this analysis, shaped to align with the strategic aims of the Get Britain Working programme, to support the local plan.

Secondary stakeholder insights from the 2023 Connected Futures Hastings Research, which involved peer-to-peer engagement with 450 young people, 91 employers, and 84 stakeholders in Hastings and East Sussex, identified systemic barriers to young people's social mobility and economic prosperity. High level findings are included in the stakeholder report.

Confidentiality and data integrity were ensured through secure data handling, participant consent protocols and anonymisation of texts.

2. Stakeholder group - summary of insights and perspective

The below table provides a top-level summary of the insights and perspectives from a number of stakeholder groups, this includes challenges, current landscape as well as suggested solutions.

Stakeholder Group	Unique Perspective/ Relevant Insights
Local Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers report a lack of work-ready skills and behaviours among young people • Employers' needs often conflict with young people's aspirations. • Incentives (financial or resource) would enable employers to host apprenticeships/work experience etc • Employers need to adapt to change to differing ways of working / learning • Concern over managing complex needs in small businesses/teams who lack HR/senior staff with the right knowledge or training • Strong support for job carving/tailored induction • Struggles with retention where wage expectations differ • Current financial climate means it is a challenge to upskill workers to allow progression • Siloed relationships with providers - myriad of information and lack of one-stop shop to see it all in one place (clarity of programmes - what, where, how, when) • Cross sector brokerage and coordination would be beneficial -Transform and SES cited - increase promotion and knowledge amongst sectors. • Open to new models and ways of working (eg creative sector - shared work experience to address micro nature of the sector)
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners lack knowledge of LMI and careers progression pathways once in work • Demand for apprenticeships outstrips supply • Need for structured employer links • Curriculum often misaligned with job market demands - support for collaborative curriculum development to address this • SEND learners face transition challenges - insufficient understanding or fear of reasonable adjustments <p>Improved links between schools/VCSE and health are needed</p>

Employment Support Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics of job seekers has changed - more complex and significant needs and vulnerabilities • Difficulties placing clients due to employer misinformation or misunderstanding • Young people, those with caring responsibilities and over 50s are most underserved by current employment system • Need for coaching/121 bespoke support, not just signposting • Childcare/caring responsibilities are a barrier to progression and maintaining employment • Losing essential benefits can discourage upskilling or seeking better-paid roles • Poor feedback loop limits progress tracking • Integration of DWP, health and housing is key • Data sharing/CRM to support client journey - to avoid telling their story multiple times.
Voluntary & Community Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex needs require intensive engagement • Geographical accessibility is a substantial challenge • Need for inclusive employer toolkits • Discrimination and access barriers persist • Need for wrap-around models with health, housing and work • Limited funding currently available for supported placements • Short-term programme contracts reduce continuity of support • Job seekers lack necessary skills to maintain employment • Call for commissioning based on lived experience insight • Importance of VCSE sector inclusion in strategic skills and employment partnerships • Case conferencing and warm handovers to support client journey • Collaboration can be challenging due to competition for and reduction in available funding
Health Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment can be a recovery tool Work • is a health outcome • Health professionals want clear employment information and referral options • Social Prescribing - embedding employment into health spaces and provision

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with long term health conditions need continuity of support • Recovery trajectories do not match current programme funding models • Employment boosts self-esteem but can destabilise benefits • Careful management of phased return to work needed across the board • Integration with local VCSE and employers underdeveloped • GPs need to be a core part of the employment conversation and networks - health often considered a missing voice • Joint commissioning and delivery of programmes • Ageing population offers an opportunity to reimagine role for retirees to provide mentoring support for new entrants to the labour market • Frontline Primary Care staff have an important role to play - those who issue fit notes, receptionists, occupational health • Social prescribers need to understand the benefits of employment and who to refer patients to for support
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for joint work with DWP VCSE Health and training/Employment support providers to address unemployment • Importance of encouraging employers to offer opportunities for job seekers/young people • Social value procurement is a powerful tool for leveraging jobs and training • Workforce/LMI data is underused in planning • Seasonal, low density and low skilled, low paid roles are dominant, although do provide valuable entry routes and experience for young workers • Need to be raising aspirations at an early point in disadvantaged geographies, especially where there is multigenerational unemployment • Consistent, ongoing support for disadvantaged cohorts such as Care Experienced and SEND young people should be prioritised • Connect to Work / Skills Bootcamps provide opportunities but loss of UKSPF will be a problem as it helps those very far from the labour market. What funding will fill this gap? • Working with employers to support their growth is essential. Need to make sure they have clear channels for information about training, HR support, recruitment options

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pooled budgets and joined up planning needed • Challenge of aligning with differing accountability structures and funding • Employment and skills should be factored into all key local authority plans as a cross-cutting theme (housing, health, infrastructure, transport etc) to ensure that opportunities are leveraged to support skills and jobs • Simplified referral routes • LAs provide a coordinating role for partnerships/groups
Adult user Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location and transport key to participation • Job market sparse, especially in coastal areas - not well suited to those with additional needs • Lack of awareness/clear signposting of support available • Instability of jobs (e.g. seasonal, short term etc) is a disincentive • Need for more flexible/empathetic workplaces over more training - barriers include inflexible hours, lack of childcare, transport • Access to locally based employers is needed • Prefer trusted providers for support • Housing is a challenge. Hard to find affordable rent near where the jobs are. • Homelessness is a barrier to working. If you have unstable housing it is hard to pin down a job • Employer attitudes are sometimes not optimum, they can lack understanding and empathy about challenges some adults face and dont know about things that can help like (eg reasonable adjustments, access to work) • Need for advocacy and benefits guidance • Poor experiences with mainstream provision • Once stop shop model preferred for employment support programmes for ease of access and support. They need support but dont want to navigate which programme would be right for them • System wide coordination and better collaboration needed • Online only or centralised services often a barrier for many

Young People User Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety around failure and lack of experience • Peer mentoring - highly valued • Lack of knowledge and support on job application process • Inadequate careers preparation and limited awareness of local job opportunities and progression pathways • Limited work experience - opportunities are scarce and often inequitable • Confidence, physical/mental health conditions and social isolation are key barriers to employment • Roles requiring experience exclude most young people - is the experience requirement necessary or can it be taught? • Frustration with service inconsistency and jargon • Desire for exploratory informal workplace experiences • Employers need better training/information on how to support young people, especially those who are neurodivergent/additional needs • Value continuity and personal relationship with advisors • Digital tools are helpful if co-designed from the outset • Insufficient support for neurodivergent and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) young people to find employment. • Late identification SEND and neurodivergent needs can hinder outcomes and negatively impact young people. • Not enough support for transition from education to employment. • Young people are underrepresented in decision-making and therefore do not reflect the diversity of groups such as Care Experienced, SEND or those who have missed education. • Inconsistency in services and funding for young people leads to missed opportunities to access practical guidance, mentorship and support tailored to their needs.
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2.1 Understanding employment barriers

Stakeholders in East Sussex identified multiple, complex and interconnected challenges that prevent many residents from entering or staying in work. These include long-term physical and mental health conditions, low confidence and lack of motivation, caring responsibilities, housing instability, lack of or low qualifications and digital exclusion. These barriers are even greater for individuals with SEND, social care experience, insecure immigration status, long-term unemployment or little work experience and for those living in deprived rural or coastal areas.

These are not one-off issues; rather, they accumulate over time and reinforce each other, leaving people stuck in cycles of disadvantage. Many services are not set up to respond flexibly to these realities, particularly when people's needs are hidden or frequently change.

“If you’re anxious, broke and stuck at home, getting a job feels like climbing a mountain.” – Young person

“We need to start with the basics - housing, transport, food. Then people can think about work.” – VCSE practitioner

Often, applicants do not meet employer needs due to insufficient job ready skills, such as communication, customer services, workplace professionalism, or because they lack technical expertise and qualifications.

“If you can build the confidence, the communication skills and the aspirations of a young person or an adult, that’s priceless, because actually the rest of it then will come quite naturally in my experience” - VCSE sector (CXK).

Working expectations or requirement may differ from business needs or prevailing operating models. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, approaches to communication and perspectives on employment, such as work life balance, flexibility, hybrid working and reasonable adjustment requirements, have further contributed to this disparity.

SES Task Group employers noted that limited access to information on employment support programmes, financial incentives or resources hinders their ability to employ and support staff, especially young people and those with additional needs or health conditions. The current economic climate and increases to National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Insurance (NI) were also cited as a challenge when employing, with some pausing recruitment or becoming more risk adverse. Wage incentives such as those on the Kickstart scheme (2020-2022) or for apprentices were noted as a way of mitigating this.

“For people that have no experience. In order for a business to take that risk, we would need funding. If it’s only partial funding or whatever because we need some kind of basis in order to say that to my bosses, we’ve mitigated that risk is

only going to cost us £6 an hour instead of £12 an hour for the first six months while we're trialling". - Employer (SES Task Group).

Limited capacity of small employers and a lack of large employers contributes to unstable or scarce job opportunities. Stakeholders fed back that smaller employers, without significant HR functions, are not always able to explore the myriad of employment support programmes or put in the necessary support in place for people with additional needs in the workplace. Seasonal, short-term, and part-time work, especially in coastal areas, was also cited as a particular concern.

Young people, particularly those who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), often experience isolation, low confidence, unclear job pathways, limited support, and a lack of adult role models.

"Navigating the employers and what they're asking for is the hardest thing because they ask for experience that no young person could feasibly have". Young person's focus group participant.

Insights from the Connected Futures Hastings project reinforced these findings - transitions from education to employment are fragmented, careers advice can be inconsistent, and local opportunities and labour market awareness are limited. Young people identify that opportunities to access work experience are crucial in helping them to develop practical skills, build confidence and stand out to employers.

"I just think there needs to be more opportunities, better training and better preparing people for how to do these things because you only really get help as a young person to get a job if you actively seek it out." Young persons focus group participant.

Many stakeholders reported that services can be fragmented or challenging to access or locate. Individuals may interact or 'bounce' between multiple agencies and repeat their information several times without a coordinated plan in place. This is particularly hard for those with limited digital access or who lack a support network.

Geographical accessibility can significantly restrict access to support services and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas where public transportation may be unreliable, or on the coast, where transport costs present substantial barriers. Inadequate road infrastructure, high parking fees, and a general lack of transportation options, especially for individuals with low incomes, can further limit access to the workforce.

"Public transport is unreliable in rural areas." Adult user voice participant.

2.2 Labour Market Needs

Business recruitment and retention challenges

Employers across East Sussex face ongoing recruitment challenges, particularly in health and social care, hospitality, logistics, construction and hospitality. Emerging growth sectors such as retrofit, digital, AI and professional services remain less visible to job seekers and young people due to lack of information.

While many businesses want to improve diversity and create more inclusive workplaces, many report limited confidence or practical knowledge about how to do so. This is particularly the case for small and medium-sized enterprises.

“We’re told to engage young people, but no one trains us how.” – Small business employer

“It’s not just hard skills - it’s how to act in a workplace, how to manage anxiety.”
– Education provider

Employers that engaged in the consultation via the SES Task Groups frequently cited that they are committed to supporting, young people, individuals with additional needs or health challenges, and former prisoners in joining their workforces. However, the majority of employers in the county are SMEs, many of them microbusinesses, and this presents challenges. Many lack the capacity and knowledge to provide the appropriate support.

Inclusive employer toolkits, an on-call employer advice service and access to a one stop shop of information on the myriad of organisations and support available were noted as helpful tools to address this. Those that proactively build partnerships reported positive experiences. The county council’s Transform Service was highlighted as a valuable resource, offering impartial and tailored support to SMEs, particularly on accessing apprenticeships.

Young people with additional needs, including those with mental health issues, special education needs or from care backgrounds, often feel unprepared for work. Employers, in turn, lack the resources to provide structured, supported placements. This mismatch leads to placement failures or missed opportunities.

The Sussex LSIP Inclusive Pathways report (2023) highlights that traditional recruitment processes often disadvantage neurodivergent applicants, and there is a clear need for guidance on making reasonable adjustments and accessible jobs design.

There is a mismatch in East Sussex between the needs of employers and the local workforce. Although there are vacancies, especially in health, care, construction and emerging green sectors, many residents face barriers that prevent them from accessing or progressing in these roles. In addition, some training and employment

pathways are misaligned with the skills currently in demand. There is also a gap between jobseekers' expectations and those of employers. For example, some young people may have job expectations that are not aligned with available opportunities, while employers often expect job seekers to be job ready even at entry level.

"Some young people aspire to careers without understanding the qualifications or steps required" - Local authority representative on care experienced young people

The county's ageing population means a shrinking working-age base alongside increased demand for care and health-related roles. SES stakeholders identified an opportunity to engage older workers and retirees to support the development of new entrants to the labour market through mentoring and coaching.

Stakeholders recognised that effective partnerships and collaboration depend on coordinated efforts. Skills East Sussex and the Sector Task groups were identified as a robust framework for advancing employer engagement, partnership development and alignment of skills training and employment in key sectors. They also pointed out that a local approach is needed in order to ensure that opportunities are seized.

"The way it's constructed here with oversight from the SES board and the 6 clear priorities I like and the way the task groups work within that, its quite clear. I like the collaboration between private sector business, voluntary sector and public sector. It is a well-developed structure that supports what we're all trying to achieve really well" DWP Officer

"What works in Brighton doesn't work in Bexhill - we need local answers." – Education provider.

Organisations that are engaged with the SES task groups noted that employers are more likely to participate when there is clear benefit to them. Programmes need to be framed around the labour market recruitment needs of East Sussex and involve employers in programme design. While many employers already engage positively with job seekers, those not involved in Skills East Sussex networks may require additional guidance, so current engagement initiatives should be better promoted.

"Just by knowing you [officer from the ESCC employment and skills team], if I if I don't know where to get something or how to do it, I can speak to you. And if you're not the right person, the chances are you know the right person. And within days I've got an answer to how I might be able to proceed with a project or whether there's no support there or whatever so yeah, like I said, as far as the support there, I think the support is relatively flawless. I just don't think enough people know about the support." East Sussex employer and SES task Group member interview.

East Sussex task group employers acknowledge their role in supporting workforce development and addressing current challenges. They spoke positively about engagement with the Careers Hub as a way to engage with schools, teachers and young people. Stakeholders noted that the current education curriculum needs to better align with the reality of the world of work to support understanding of the labour market, and to offer consistent opportunities for young people and businesses to engage with each other. It was noted that careers exposure often starts too late, limiting young people's understanding of sector pathways and progression beyond entry-level roles.

"There's got to be a step change in industry because not everyone that comes out of college is going to be a fully skilled engineer. That's where we add the context. And I think that that's where Industry, whether it knows or not, needs to make that step change to actually start out reaching more and engaging with the colleges and being a constant throughout the education career of the students."
East Sussex Manufacturing employer.

2.3 Reaching and supporting priority groups

Stakeholder insights consistently identified several key cohorts that require targeted support to access or sustain employment or training in East Sussex. These include:

- **Young people**, particularly those not in education, employment or training (NEET), care leavers, and those with SEND or mental health challenges.
- **Economically inactive and unemployed individuals**, facing multiple barriers to employment such as poor mental health, addiction recovery, or long-term health conditions
- **Older workers**, face workforce exit, age-related bias, health issues, and limited upskilling opportunities.
- **Disabled and neurodivergent people** often face employer uncertainty about reasonable adjustments and systemic access barriers.
- **Parents and unpaid carers** are impacted by high childcare costs and limited flexible working options.
- **Global majority communities, migrants and refugees**, many of whom possess high qualifications but may encounter challenges related to language proficiency, credential recognition, and access.
- **Rural residents**, both younger and older, who are affected by limited transport links and restricted digital access.
- **Adults with low skills on low incomes** in insecure work or facing benefit-related disincentives to progression.

Stakeholders were clear that some groups face additional, and often overlapping, challenges in accessing employment.

Young people

Young people in East Sussex can often encounter difficulties entering the labour market as a result of insufficient personalised guidance, limited opportunities for work experience and a lack of clear career pathways. Young people living in poverty, with SEND or who have experienced the care system are particularly affected; they frequently do not receive adequate support to become employment ready. To better support these groups, closer cooperation among education providers, the VCSE sector and health services is essential.

Provision at Entry Level, Level 1 and 2 for young people who are NEET, have SEND, or require re-engagement and employability support is currently limited. This lack of comprehensive support at foundational levels may result in many young people facing persistent barriers to education and employment, limiting their ability to acquire essential skills for the workforce. Over time, these constraints can lead to reduced opportunities for career advancement, lower earning potential, and increased risk of social isolation. Expanding tailored programmes and interventions would not only address immediate gaps but also foster long-term resilience and empowerment, enabling young people to participate more fully in society and achieve sustainable personal and professional growth.

“Young people come to us already defeated - they don’t think work is for them.” - Education provider

“Most training and learning doesn’t really do anything in helping you get a job as a young person, unless you have hard qualifications, A levels, Degrees - things I physically cannot and will never achieve.” - Young person

“Everything stops when college ends - no one checks where you land.” - Parent of SEND learner

Economically inactive and unemployed individuals

The economically inactive and unemployed population in East Sussex is diverse. Many are facing multiple barriers to employment such as poor mental health challenges, ongoing addiction recovery, or long-term health conditions. Some have lost confidence after long absences from the workforce, and others are discouraged by repeated failures. Many are hidden from mainstream services and do not engage with traditional jobcentre offers. Some individuals avoid conventional support services, which can be perceived as impersonal or inaccessible.

These barriers can deeply affect their well-being and reduce opportunities for sustainable employment. The most effective engagement occurs through approaches that prioritise active listening, peer-led outreach, mentoring, participation in panels sharing lived experience and targeted, personalised and community-based interventions. These strategies help rebuild trust, foster social

connections, and gradually restore self-belief, ultimately improving individuals' prospects for re-entering employment and contributing positively to the local economy. Stakeholders agreed that connecting VCSE employment services with health care and establishing clear referral pathways is essential.

"It's not just about finding a job. It's about managing pain, energy, confidence."
– Participant with a health condition

"Co-production works when it's not rushed, when we're treated like equals." –
VCSE facilitator

"You can't build confidence if you're thrown in the deep end with no support." –
SEND specialist

Overall, stakeholders emphasised that re-engaging inactive individuals requires time. To build confidence and enter (or re-enter) the workforce, a personalised, integrated approach is needed. Short-term interventions are rarely enough.

Older workers

Older workers, particularly those over 50, encounter a complex set of challenges when re-entering the workforce. These can include health concerns, changes in personal circumstances such as caregiving responsibilities, persistent age-related biases in hiring and advancement, limited access to or familiarity with new digital technologies, and a shortage of flexible or part-time positions that accommodate evolving needs.

"We need joined-up working... not just one project doing its bit, but councils, services, charities, and employers all working together." - Older job seeker

Despite these obstacles, organisations greatly benefit from the depth of experience, reliability, and unique perspectives that older employees provide. Their institutional knowledge and problem-solving skills often lead to improved team performance and innovation. Employers can make a significant impact by building truly inclusive workplaces. This includes implementing targeted digital skills training programs, designing roles with flexibility in mind, and actively combating ageism through policies and culture. When older workers are involved as mentors, they help accelerate the professional development of younger staff, foster confidence, and promote valuable intergenerational learning. Ultimately, such support not only enhances workplace productivity and morale, but also creates more resilient and adaptable organisations.

Disabled and neurodivergent people

Disabled and neurodivergent people continue to encounter significant obstacles when entering or re-engaging with the workforce. These barriers include a lack of tailored recruitment processes, limited workplace understanding of neurodiversity, and insufficient access to reasonable adjustments. As a result, many are excluded from meaningful employment, impacting their financial security, social connections and sense of purpose.

Yet, when organisations invest in accessible career pathways and foster genuinely inclusive cultures, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. Businesses gain from diverse perspectives, enhanced problem-solving, and increased innovation. Supporting disabled and neurodivergent workers, through targeted outreach, flexible roles, and reasonable adjustments, can unlock untapped potential, build resilient teams, and strengthen community cohesion. By removing structural and attitudinal barriers, we can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute, thrive and shape a more equitable local economy.

Stakeholders have highlighted the need for proactive outreach, greater employer awareness of reasonable adjustments and support for navigating digital and AI driven recruitment processes.

“They say they’re inclusive, but when it comes to reasonable adjustments, they either don’t understand or don’t want to.” - Adult job seeker

“Joining up... making sure organisations can support an individual through a journey... sharing information to support those individuals.”- SCTP representative

Parents and unpaid carers

Parents and unpaid carers experience a unique set of impacts, balancing employment aspirations with the demands of caregiving often leads to interrupted careers, limited job progression and financial insecurity. The emotional strain of managing both roles can affect mental wellbeing and confidence, making re-entry to the workforce daunting. They can be impacted by high childcare costs and limited flexible working options. However, as awareness grows and employers increasingly adopt family-friendly policies, new opportunities emerge. Expanding access to flexible hours, remote work and job-share schemes enables carers to participate more fully in the labour market without compromising their responsibilities at home.

Additionally, targeted support services, peer networks, and tailored job matching can empower carers to upskill, regain confidence, and pursue meaningful employment. By embracing inclusive practices and harnessing the potential of this often-overlooked group, organisations and communities can benefit from their resilience, adaptability and valuable life experience.

“Until those wider barriers to employment are addressed... a successful progression into work is quite challenging... those support issues come first.” - ITP representative

Global majority communities, migrants and refugees

Global majority communities, migrants and refugees frequently face significant obstacles in accessing employment opportunities.

“I can’t apply for jobs because my visa doesn’t allow me - it’s a trap.” – Migrant support worker

Even when holding advanced qualifications and significant professional experience from their home countries, these individuals often struggle to find roles that reflect their skillsets. Challenges such as limited English proficiency, unfamiliarity with UK recruitment practices, and the lack of recognition for overseas qualifications can result in underemployment or joblessness. In addition, visa restrictions and lengthy bureaucratic processes can hinder both job search efforts and employers’ willingness to offer positions.

By investing in targeted outreach, flexible training options, and inclusive recruitment practices, organisations can tap into the resilience, adaptability and diverse perspectives that refugees and EAL individuals bring. In turn, this not only addresses skills shortages but also adds richness to the cultural fabric of the workforce and community.

“Community hubs such as the Links Project in Hastings and the Sanctuary Café in Eastbourne, that combine ESOL, employment, and wellbeing support have delivered strong results.” - Local Authority representative

Adults with low skills or low incomes

Adults with low skills or low incomes, and in insecure employment face persistent barriers to progression that are often compounded by benefit-related disincentives. The precariousness of their work means they are less likely to access training or development opportunities, and the fear of losing essential benefits can discourage upskilling or seeking better-paid roles. Many are caught in a cycle where taking on additional hours or responsibilities leads to only marginal financial gains, or in some cases, leaves them worse off.

To address these challenges, tailored interventions are essential—such as flexible, locally accessible training linked directly to career advancement, clearer information about in-work benefits, and personalised guidance to manage transitions between benefits and employment. Establishing stronger links between employers, training providers, and support agencies can empower individuals in

this cohort to build skills and confidence, ultimately enabling sustainable progression out of low-wage, insecure work.

More broadly, the low workforce skills levels were recognised as having wider implications for economic growth and job creation locally.

‘To attract larger businesses into Sussex and or to help our existing SMEs to grow, we need a higher skilled workforce. Higher skilled jobs would mean better pay and growth and would encourage people to aspire to more complex roles and to continue in learning to secure higher level qualifications.’ Local Government Officer

Improving the skills of residents was seen not only to have benefits to individuals, but to the local economy as a whole, supporting the potential to attract businesses into the county and to raise the aspirations of adults and young people. This was described as a ‘chicken and egg’ scenario - new businesses can encourage higher skills and aspirations, and higher skilled workers can attract new businesses.

Rurality

Rural residents, including both younger and older individuals, often experience unique barriers to employment and inclusion. Limited transport connections can isolate these communities, restricting access not only to job opportunities but also to essential services and training programmes. In areas where public transport is infrequent or prohibitively expensive, the practical challenge of simply reaching interviews or workplaces can be insurmountable.

Compounding these issues, weak digital infrastructure or low rates of digital literacy further disadvantage rural jobseekers, making it harder to search for roles, complete applications, or pursue online qualifications. As a result, talented individuals in rural areas are frequently underrepresented in the labour market, and their potential contributions to the local economy and society are left untapped. Addressing these challenges through targeted investment in transport and digital access is essential to ensure rural residents are not left behind.

Strategies for inclusivity and tailored provision

Stakeholders called for more holistic, person-centred services, particularly for young people, and those with mental and physical health conditions, neurodiversity or SEND, or caring responsibilities. The strongest feedback was around the need for continuity, trust, and services that reflect real lives.

The LSIP reports reinforce the need for more inclusive recruitment and training practices. For example, supported internships and on-the-job coaching have been successful for young people with SEND, especially when employers receive guidance and peer support.

“People’s circumstances now are so varied and nuanced that one to one support seems to us to be the thing that is necessary.” VCSE representative

Examples of good practice

East Sussex has examples of integrated support that tackles health, housing, and work readiness together; local travel funds for rural jobseekers; and confidence building programmes that blend practical skills with personal development.

Moving on up, Work and Health Programme, Sector-based Work Academies (SWAPs) and the Homelessness Prevention Employment Service, were frequently cited by stakeholders as helping priority groups take steps towards employment. Some of these schemes are no longer funded but finding ways of continuing the best elements of them was strongly advocated by stakeholders.

“We launched a 50+ SWAP campaign following the great resignation after COVID... we called it ‘Your Experience Matters’... and that yielded a lot of positive outcomes.” - FE Provider

Steps to Success was cited as an effective programme for engaging young people at risk of becoming NEET. Pupils on Free School Meals (an indicator of poverty), persistently absent or with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were provided with an individualised approach of careers coaching and tailored work experience, with proven impact in supporting their transitions post-16.

“If you had like a list of children and you see someone who is probably like me, really bad attendance, not great grades, I would pick them for this, because I feel like you could improve that and that’s going to change the trajectory of the rest of their lives” Steps to Success longitudinal case study participant.

The Youth Employment Service (YES) works with NEET young people aged 16-18 and is seen as critical in providing an individualised approach. The service excels in identifying and understanding at-risk youth but lacks access to adequate provision to refer young people to and enable them to take steps towards further training, apprenticeship or employment.

“I like the Youth Employability Service (YES). They have a great team and provide a great service” - young person’s focus group participant.

“YES is a very good service. They have helped me as much as they possibly could.”
- Young person

“Youth employability service has helped lots of my friends.” - Young person

2.4 Employer engagement and workforce inclusion

Perspectives on business engagement

Stakeholders fed back that there is a lack of reasonable adjustments readily available in workplaces as standard, including from application and interview stage. Some people only feel able to work in the third sector peer-led organisations that understand their health needs and are supportive of them.

Some stakeholders reported that AI and automated recruitment and screening systems, particularly used by larger employers, disadvantage individuals who are less connected to the labour market. Feedback indicated that candidates, who had completed pre-employment courses, were required to complete pre-screening tests, and that the use of specific words or requests for reasonable adjustments excluded them from progressing with the application process. Additionally, online application processes can be challenging to navigate, and in some cases, who have been unsuccessful are unable to reapply through the platform.

‘She said she was unable to go any further after she added reasonable adjustments [to the recruitment application].’ Pre-employment provider

“There’s a lack of suitable and supportive employment pathways... even though the rhetoric is often very positive from employers... unreasonable and unnecessary recruitment policies and practices prevent that from happening.”- VCSE

“Employers just having more understanding of disabilities... It’s like, no, I’m not lazy. I do want to do this. I just need help.” - Young person

Employers involved in the stakeholder feedback expressed a willingness to support inclusive employment but highlighted practical and cultural barriers. Smaller businesses often lack dedicated HR capacity and feel under-equipped to take on candidates with additional support needs. While many are open to employing a more diverse workforce, they are unsure where to begin or how to navigate the support landscape.

“We want to do more, but we don’t know where to start or who to speak to.” – SME employer

“There’s a lack of suitable and supportive employment pathways... even though the rhetoric is often very positive from employers... unreasonable and unnecessary recruitment policies and practices prevent that from happening.”- VCSE

“We’ve got the roles, but not the resources to mentor someone properly.” – Local employer

Stakeholders noted that business engagement efforts are often fragmented or short-term, with little continuity or follow-up. This creates confusion and disengagement. There is a clear appetite for more consistent employer-facing support and clearer communication about the benefits and practicalities of inclusive recruitment.

“You build up a head of steam working with people and then contracts end... there needs to be some longevity in the approach.” - Local education provider

The **Transform service** was cited as a way of working with employers to help them navigate government funded programmes like apprenticeships and skills training, as well as an effective vehicle to deploy apprenticeship levy transfer as a financial incentive. It provides an example of ‘one-stop shop’ employer engagement that enables impartial signposting to a number of different programmes according to employer need.

Support needed to diversify and expand hiring practices

Larger employers reported better awareness of initiatives such as supported internships and Access to Work funding but often face internal challenges in scaling inclusive practice across departments or sites.

Employers identified several areas where they would welcome support. There was a strong demand for inclusive employer toolkits and practice support for employers to de-risk and support them to take on employees who may need additional support or adjustments. Other areas highlighted by stakeholders include:

- Advice on making reasonable adjustments for candidates with disabilities or health conditions
- Help designing inclusive job descriptions and interview processes
- Clarity around legal responsibilities and funding available for support in the workplace
- Peer learning opportunities to share what works with other local employers

“We’ve had great results with supported interns, but it took a lot of trial and error.” - Public sector employer

“Sometimes just having someone to call makes all the difference.” - Local employer

“Access to these groups [priority groups] is not a problem... it’s having the time and the resource to be able to set this up – that’s the crunch.” - Local employer

Insights from LSIP and Connected Futures Hastings reports also underline the value of employer networks and co-designed placement models, particularly for young people with additional needs or those seeking their first experience of the

workplace. New programmes like Connect to Work offer opportunities and some funding to support employers to embed more inclusive workplace practices.

Many employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, continue to view recruitment as a considerable financial and operational risk. Concerns frequently centre around the costs associated with onboarding, uncertainty about whether candidates are truly ready for the workplace, and a lack of sustained support to aid retention. These factors contribute to cautious hiring behaviours and a hesitancy to engage with formal employment programmes unless they are accompanied by robust, locally responsive wraparound support.

Stakeholders suggested the growth of a more structured and visible employer engagement offer, through a single access point like Transform, including dedicated advisers, training on inclusive employment and recruitment support.

Employer appetite for work experience, apprenticeships and flexible training

While enthusiasm for offering work experience and apprenticeships was high, practical barriers persist. These include limited capacity to supervise new entrants, uncertainty around expectations, and concerns about the impact on productivity. Some businesses, particularly in hospitality, creative, cultural and digital, and health and care, noted that current apprenticeship models are not always well suited to their operational needs.

Nonetheless, there is strong interest in more flexible and responsive models, such as bite-sized work tasters, shared apprenticeships, and tailored pre-employment preparation. Employers also expressed support for models that provide continuity and light-touch support before and during placements. The emerging Foundation Apprenticeships offer provides an opportunity for employers to engage in this way.

“Short tasters work well, it’s less pressure on us and gives people a chance to see what the job is really like.” –Construction employer

“We’d like to offer more opportunities, but we need help setting them up properly.” – Tourism employer

“They [SMEs] need support in understanding what each option is and what’s best for their business... demystifying apprenticeships for them... peer-to-peer mentoring support.” -Sussex LSIP Lead

Financial incentives for hosting work experience or apprenticeships would be welcomed to increase the number of businesses offering opportunities. It was noted that apprenticeships can be a challenge for businesses to set up and manage, particularly if they have never done it before or are small/micro.

There is a clear opportunity to expand and sustain employer engagement by offering more tailored and supported options that reflect local business realities.

Examples of good practice:

Supported employment models that are already delivering locally for those with additional needs were cited as effective. Kickstart, Future Jobs Fund, Traineeships and Level 2 apprenticeships were given as examples of provision that have provided positive ‘first rung’ entry onto the jobs ladder. The new Foundation Apprenticeships may further enhance this offer.

The Transform Service was cited as an example of where bespoke support is key to supporting organisations fill employment and skills gaps in their current and future workforce, as well as providing financial incentives to employers through Apprenticeship Levy transfer.

The East Sussex Careers Hub plays a pivotal role in supporting employers by brokering meaningful relationships with schools and colleges to strengthen opportunities for young people to meet employers and gain workplace experience. Through structured employer support via Enterprise Advisers and established links to Industry Champions, and Cornerstone Employers, businesses help shape careers education and provide young people with valuable real-world insights. This model has been widely praised for offering employers a supported and strategic way to influence future workforce development. Additionally, the Open Doors initiative complements this work by giving students direct access to local workplaces, helping them explore career opportunities and understand the skills employers value, further reinforcing the connection between education and employment in East Sussex.

Steps to Success (see above) was also cited as an example of best practice, offering longer periods of bespoke work experience to young people identified as at risk of NEET.

2.5 Strengthening local collaboration, innovation and inclusion

Partnership working in employment and skills delivery

Stakeholders across East Sussex recognised that effective partnership working is essential to addressing the complex barriers people face in entering and sustaining work. Although there is strong strategic oversight and collaboration via Skills East Sussex, associated sector task groups, Apprenticeships East Sussex and the Adult Learning Network, further collaboration between local authorities, the VCSE sector and education providers can be vulnerable to disruption when funding or staff change.

“We support the same person three times because no one else picks up the thread.” – Local authority officer

“Real collaboration starts with trust - tech and forms come after.” – Commissioning manager

In many cases, duplication and disconnection remain significant issues. Repeated assessments, inconsistent referrals, and lack of shared planning lead to missed opportunities and inefficiencies. There is a shared appetite for more joined-up delivery models, with multi-agency teams, shared outcomes, and aligned funding streams.

Education provider roles, curriculum alignment and funding

Education providers are key partners in preparing young people and adults for work. However, stakeholders noted a need for more responsive curriculum planning, especially to reflect employer needs in growth sectors such as care, construction, and green industries. While some colleges and training providers are working closely with local employers and Careers Hubs, others reported challenges aligning offer with demand.

“You can’t copy and paste services - they have to reflect place.” – Local authority representative

Funded provision for NEET young people and SEND transitions remain a particular concern. Despite the submission of a ‘Gaps in Provision’ funding request to the Department for Education, there are young people aged 16-18, many with additional needs, who are currently on waiting lists to access vocational courses or employability provision. There is a distinct lack of Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 vocational courses for young people to access.

Those with SEND often experience abrupt endings to support after leaving school or college, with limited progression into training or work. Improved transition protocols and closer coordination between education, health, and employment services are seen as vital.

“The SEND cohort... they’re one of our highest cohorts of NEET young people... not necessarily having the skills or work experience to be successful in employment.” - East Sussex County Council representative.

Health integration across stakeholders

Health professionals are often the first point of contact for individuals who could benefit from employability support. However, integration between health and employment systems is inconsistent. Stakeholders noted that Primary Care settings, mental health services and community health teams are not always aware of local employment offers and employability is rarely embedded as a health outcome.

“Staff are expected to deal with complex trauma without any training or supervision.” – Youth service manager

“Locating an employment support coach in each GP practice... you’d get your money back really quickly on that.” - Local employer

“We need joint working between health services and employability services... combined training and resources.” - Housing support provider

The Future Skills Sussex LSIP (2024) highlights examples of integrated support, such as trauma-informed care and mental health-informed coaching models, that could be scaled across the county.

The Work Well Board for Sussex is exploring small pilot Work Well schemes that will start to test new approaches around health and employment referrals in Crawley, Hastings and Brighton that may offer models to roll out across the county to support better integration of existing employment support and health practice (e.g. around fit notes).

Good practice and potential innovation

Across East Sussex, stakeholders noted examples of effective practice where services are joined up, person-centred, and tailored to local contexts. Several highlighted the value of consistent, trusted relationships, whether through named support workers, community-based programmes, or wraparound delivery models. These approaches are most effective when they address the whole person, recognising the interconnection between health, housing, learning and employment.

“We don’t need more pilots—we need the people who work with someone from beginning to end.” — Local authority officer

“We need joined-up working... not just one project doing its bit, but councils, services, charities, and employers all working together.” - Job support service

Integrated delivery models, such as co-located employment and health services or shared Youth Hubs, were seen by stakeholders as particularly effective, although not yet widespread. Connected Futures Hastings was frequently cited as an approach to involving those with lived experience in project design.

“We need to trust our local areas... local decisions for local people.” - VCSE Partner

Supported internships and realistic work tasters also emerged as strong models for young people with SEND or those lacking work experience. Where placements were supported by well-briefed employers and dedicated mentors, stakeholders described improved outcomes and increased confidence among participants.

“Having a mentor in place made all the difference—it gave both us and the young person a safety net.” — Employer

Other promising innovations included travel subsidy schemes for rural participants, an example being the Wheels to Work scheme (2013-2021) trauma-informed coaching in employment settings; and flexible outreach through community

venues. However, many stakeholders noted that these successes are often dependent on short-term funding or individual champions, raising concerns about sustainability.

The Homelessness Prevention Employment Service and Steps to Success were both identified as innovative preventative approaches to supporting transitions into employment.

Cross-sector collaboration and suggestions for improvement

There was strong support for improving collaboration across employment, skills, health and voluntary sectors. While pockets of good practice exist, particularly in communities where long-standing relationships have been built, many participants described current systems as fragmented. Information is often not shared, referral pathways are unclear, and different organisations may work with the same individuals without coordination.

“We’re all pulling in the same direction, but with different maps. We need a shared route.” – VCSE partner

Suggestions for improvement included creating more consistent multi-agency planning forums; enabling joint commissioning across services; one stop shops for employment support and training for unemployed people and for businesses, and introducing shared professional development, such as training on neurodiversity, trauma-informed practice, or inclusive communication. Stakeholders also called for improvements in data-sharing arrangements, led by clear protocols and client consent, rather than risk aversion.

“People fall through cracks because we don’t know what each other is doing.” – Careers adviser

Unrepresented stakeholders who can add value

Several groups were identified as underrepresented in the current stakeholder landscape. These included smaller faith-based and cultural organisations, which often serve as trusted anchors in communities experiencing disadvantage, and young carers or home-educated young people, whose employment pathways are less visible.

Stakeholders also called for more structured involvement from primary care professionals, such as GPs, social prescribers and link workers, who regularly support people facing both health and employment barriers but may not be connected to local labour market initiatives.

“We often pick up people at crisis point, but the GP saw them months earlier. That’s the intervention point we’re missing.” – Employment adviser

Transferable programmes or models from other areas

A number of national and regional models, past and present, were cited as useful references for East Sussex. These included a joined up 'No Wrong Door' approach to service access, with effective referral across and between different agencies and organisations, including health, education and employment. Specialist models offering tailored support for neurodivergent individuals were also highlighted as particularly impactful in offering workplace coaching, job design advice, and neurodiversity awareness training for employers and practitioners. Inclusive employer toolkits, supported employment and supported internships were all highlighted as effective delivery.

Stakeholders also referred to proven models that had been funded in the past, including the Entry-to-Employment (E2E, 2003-2010) programme of individualised support for young people to help them into training or employment; and the Future Jobs Fund (2009-2012) and Kickstart (2020-2022) which provided incentives for employers to provide job opportunities.

While stakeholders were open to drawing on successful programmes from other areas or periods, they consistently emphasised that these must be adapted to local contexts, particularly the distinct needs of East Sussex's rural, coastal and economically disadvantaged communities.

"You can't just import a model and expect it to land, it has to reflect the place."
- Local authority representative

Stakeholders were clear: the challenge is not a lack of effective ideas, but rather the need for long-term investment, political leadership, effective coordination and a co-production approach that embeds these models into everyday delivery rather than treating them as time-limited pilots.

2.6 Monitoring progress and driving improvement

Local measures of success

Stakeholders across East Sussex strongly emphasised the need for a broader understanding of success that reflects the varied and often non-linear journeys people take into employment. While achieving job outcomes and qualifications is important, many stressed that these alone do not capture the full story. Progress might include small but significant steps such as building confidence, developing a daily routine, improving wellbeing, or engaging in volunteering or short work tasters.

"For some people, just turning up every week is a breakthrough. We need to count that." — VCSE support worker

Participants suggested that success should be assessed both at the individual level and across systems. For individuals, meaningful markers of progress might include sustained engagement over time, increased digital skills, improved mental health, or a growing sense of stability. At the system level, signs of success might involve better collaboration between services, more joined-up support, and smoother transitions between education, health and employment pathways.

There was also a call for greater use of qualitative data, such as participant case studies and personal stories, to complement standard performance measures. These forms of evidence, stakeholders argued, offer valuable insights into what is working, for whom, and why. They also help humanise delivery and policymaking, ensuring that decisions are grounded in real experiences rather than only numerical targets.

Suggestions for feedback mechanisms and planning

A recurring theme was the need to build stronger feedback loops into both service delivery and strategic planning. Many stakeholders and participants described being consulted on pilots or programmes but never hearing the outcome or seeing any follow-up action.

“They asked our opinion, but I never saw anything change.” – Young person

To address this, stakeholders proposed more regular and transparent opportunities for service users to share their views, not as a one-off event but as part of ongoing dialogue. This could include check-ins during and after programme delivery, lived experience panels that shape service design, and clearer routes for individuals to see how their input has influenced decisions.

The Connected Futures Hastings researchers also proposed that existing decision-making mechanisms would benefit from diverse young people’s voices to ensure the creation of more inclusive, supportive and effective pathways into the future workforce.

At a strategic level, there was appetite for more cross-sector reflection, bringing together partners to jointly review what is being learned, share challenges, and agree improvements. Some suggested that learning should be embedded in the culture of services, with space for experimentation and adaptation rather than solely focusing on compliance or output-driven funding.

Digital tools were mentioned as a helpful way to gather feedback from people who may not engage through formal mechanisms. However, stakeholders stressed that technology should enhance, not replace, relational and inclusive approaches to listening and learning.

Ultimately, there was a shared recognition that responsive, effective employment systems are those that listen, adapt and evolve. As one stakeholder reflected,

“We won’t get better unless we’re brave enough to listen—and act on what we hear.”

3. Conclusions and local recommendations

Localised short-term and long-term priorities

Stakeholder feedback clearly highlighted the need for both immediate, practical improvements and longer-term structural change.

In the short term, priorities include improving transitions into employment for young people, particularly those with SEND or who are NEET, and strengthening support for people with health conditions, caring responsibilities, social care experience or insecure immigration status. Enhancing access to tailored employment services in rural and coastal areas, where transport and digital exclusion are particularly acute, is also essential.

Longer-term goals should focus on embedding a joined-up, inclusive system that enables sustained engagement and progression, as well as mechanisms for employers to engage. This means moving beyond siloed programmes towards integrated pathways that align employment, health, and education services. Investments in cross-sector infrastructure, such as shared case management, multi-agency delivery hubs, and locality-based navigation roles, are crucial to making these aspirations a reality.

Good practice and potential innovation

The consultation process revealed strong examples of what works across East Sussex.

The Careers Hub has continued to provide schools and colleges with training and resources to better support young people to understand the labour market and embed careers in the curriculum. It has provided schools with links to employers to provide Open Doors workplace visits and greater take up of work experience to ensure young people are getting a first taste of the world of work to support their career decision making.

Models that provide a tailored approach and early engagement were identified by stakeholders as effective and scalable. Steps to Success has evidenced success in identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET while still in school (those on Free School Meals, persistently absent from school and/or with SEND) and supporting them to transition successfully post-16.

The Youth Employability Service (YES) does a good job of working with individual young people who are NEET but needs greater access to provision for 16-18 year olds such as vocational qualifications and employability support to enable their progression.

Programmes like Moving on Up, Level Up, Homeless Prevention Employment Service and Support into Work, delivered in community settings, have provided a tailored approach to engaging the most vulnerable groups and supporting people into work.

Supported internships, specialist neurodiversity programmes, realistic work tasters and local travel funds were highlighted as practical interventions with demonstrable impact. Stakeholders also showed interest in adapting proven models from previous funding iterations (e.g. E2E, Future Jobs Fund and Kickstart).

Stakeholders flagged that devolved funds through Connect to Work, Skills Bootcamps and the potential of Youth Guarantee in future, if effectively deployed through a joined-up approach, could provide graduated opportunities to engage and support residents into employment, training and career progression. Foundation apprenticeships will also provide opportunities for young people taking their first step into employment.

Stakeholders identified the need for a ‘No Wrong Door’ approach to providing individuals with advice and support with effective signposting between health, education and employment services. This can be supported through local community-based infrastructure, including via healthcare settings, Family Hubs and Youth Hubs. As the DWP Jobs and Careers Service emerges, it will be important to ensure a joined-up approach, with potential for co-location where possible.

Employers are keen to support new initiatives but they need help, easy mechanisms and incentives to engage and offer training and recruitment opportunities. The Transform pilot has modelled an impartial way of working with employers to help them navigate government funded programmes like apprenticeships and skills training, as well as an effective vehicle to deploy apprenticeship levy transfer as a financial incentive. New programmes like Connect to Work offer opportunities to support employers through training and direct support such as access to HR or Occupational Therapy advice to embed more inclusive workplace practices and Growth Hubs, Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses all have important parts to play in working together to develop better joined up support

Finally, there was a strong consensus that new programmes and services must be sensitive to East Sussex’s specific geography and demographics and that local people with lived experience must be involved in programme and service design, monitoring and evaluation.

Challenges

Despite positive examples, stakeholders noted a range of persistent barriers. Funding cycles remain short and fragmented, limiting the ability to plan and sustain effective interventions. Many promising initiatives are pilot-based, with no guarantee of continuation. Inconsistent commissioning practices and a focus on

outputs rather than outcomes can disincentivise the kind of patient, relational work that supports long-term change.

There are also systemic barriers to collaboration. Siloed information systems, unclear referral pathways, and varying levels of digital infrastructure all hinder joined-up delivery. Staff turnover, especially in smaller organisations, affects continuity of support. Several contributors emphasised that even strong partnership working is often dependent on individual relationships rather than embedded structures.

3.1 Calls to action for specific stakeholder groups

Local and strategic authorities are well-placed to lead strategic coordination and should continue to convene multi-agency partnerships with clear governance, shared goals, co-location of services and aligned funding. Commissioners should prioritise longer-term, outcomes-focused contracts that enable flexibility and innovation.

Employers must be supported to adopt inclusive recruitment practices through tailored advice, funding access, and peer learning opportunities.

Education and training providers should co-design curricula with employers and young people, ensuring routes into meaningful work are clearly visible and achievable.

Health services need to embed employability within their recovery and wellbeing frameworks, recognising work as a health outcome.

Meanwhile, VCSE organisations should be recognised not only as delivery partners but as key system influencers with deep community insight.

Finally, individuals with lived experience must be involved throughout, as co-designers, advisers, and evaluators. Their voices are essential to ensuring that services are grounded in real-world needs and experiences.

This report reflects the diverse insights and shared ambition of stakeholders across East Sussex. It highlights not only the complex challenges that many residents face in accessing and sustaining work, but also the creativity, commitment and collaborative spirit that exists across sectors. The path forward will require more than technical solutions, it demands strategic alignment, long-term investment, and the courage to centre lived experience in every stage of planning and delivery. With coordinated effort, mutual accountability, and a clear focus on inclusion, East Sussex has the potential to create a labour market that works for everyone, one that values contribution, supports progression, and responds to local realities. The findings and recommendations presented here provide a foundation for action that is both practical and aspirational, grounded in evidence and shaped by the voices of the community.

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