



GET SUFFOLK WORKING 2025

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

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Please note: this is a summary of the full Get Suffolk Working Plan.
The full plan is also available to read at [Suffolk County Council](#)

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1

Introduction

What is economic inactivity and why is it important?

In the UK, economic inactivity refers to people who are not in employment and who have not been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks.

There are many and varied reasons as to why someone may be economically inactive. It includes those who are in full time study, those caring for children or other family members, those who may have decided to retire early and even those who are in unpaid training, internships or voluntary work but not seeking paid employment. However, economic inactivity can also be related to a long-term health condition, a disability and even disillusionment with the labour market.

Whatever the reason for economic inactivity, it is important to note that many people who are economically inactive would prefer to work but are unable to do so.

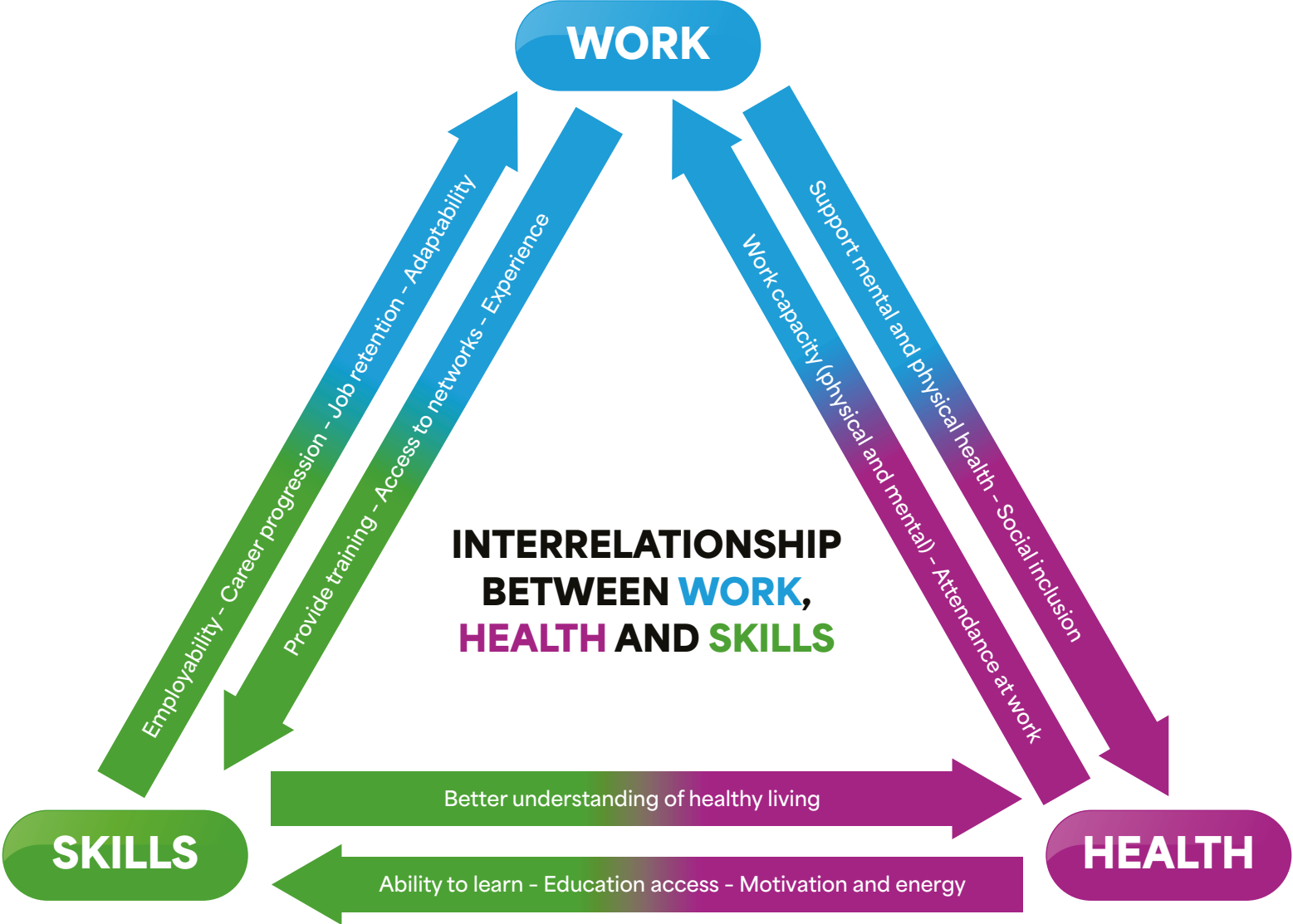
Addressing economic inactivity by removing barriers for those who could otherwise be part of the workforce not only improves the health, wellbeing and life prospects for our residents but also helps to:

- Boost economic growth as more people working means a greater ability to produce goods and services.
- Reduce pressure on public finances as fewer people rely on benefits like Universal Credit or disability payments and more people contribute through income tax and National Insurance.
- Address key labour shortages and gaps by re-engaging inactive workers to fill vacancies.
- Support demographic sustainability as our population ages and higher participation is needed to help sustain pension system.
- Increase diversity in the workplace by enabling more people from under-represented categories into work.

It is also important to keep all those that are economically active in employment due to the direct link between moving from employment to unemployment and substantial increases in health needs and costs.

Many factors impact on the levels of economic activity and employment in any given area, with particularly strong interdependencies between work, health and skills.

Figure: The interrelationship between work, health and skills



Get Britain Working

The 'Get Britain Working' White Paper was published in November 2024 and set out a long-term ambition for the UK to achieve an 80% employment rate. It is a key part of Government's mission to kick-start growth and build an inclusive and thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity of good work, and the chance to get on at work.

Achieving this would reverse the trend of the last 5 years which has seen employment rates in the UK fall. As our population lives longer, the country is beginning to see gaps in skills and the number of workers versus positions available. This gap is widened further by the growing number of people who are unable to work due to health conditions/disability.

The White Paper identified 6 key issues that need to be tackled:

- Too many people are excluded from the labour market – especially those with health conditions, caring responsibilities or lower skill levels.
- Too many young people leave school without essential skills or access to high-quality further learning, an apprenticeship or support to work so that they can thrive at the start of their career.

- Too many people are stuck in insecure, poor quality and often low-paying work, which contributes to a weaker economy and also affects their health and wellbeing.
- Too many women who care for their families still experience challenges staying in and progressing in work.
- Too many employers cannot fill their vacancies due to labour and skills shortages, holding back economic growth and undermining living standards.
- There is too great a disparity in labour market outcomes between different places and for different groups of people.

The White Paper also identified a key role for all local areas to develop local Get Britain Working plans and to convene local partners to work together to deliver these.



Get Suffolk Working

An enhanced approach to addressing economic activity would support many of our ambitions for Suffolk. This includes, in the Suffolk Economic Strategy, the ambition to expand our talent pool by growing our economically active population by 35,000 by 2045.

The 'Get Suffolk Working' plan sets out the first steps we intend to take to build a shared understanding of demand and better join up local work, health and skills support in a way that will meet the needs of our people, our businesses and our communities. It focuses on the first of the 'Get Britain Working' challenges identified. Namely to reduce the amount of people excluded from the labour market by addressing economic inactivity.

Future iterations of the plan will expand the scope to all other Get Britain Working challenges. The full plan can be found on the main Suffolk County Council website. This document provides a summary of the key content.

Key stakeholders including, but not limited to, regional Jobcentre Plus leads, Integrated Care Board officers and relevant representatives from across local authority departments (i.e. public health, economic development, skills, education and adult social care) have contributed significant time, information and perspectives to inform the plan.



2

Understanding economic inactivity in Suffolk

Suffolk in Context

Suffolk has a total resident population of approximately 786,231. Over the past 10 years this has increased by 5.6%.

As outlined in the Suffolk Economic Strategy, Suffolk contributes £21 billion to the UK economy, with a strong foundation of business growth and sectoral diversity. It is home to over 30,000 businesses, with a notable 90% growth in business incorporations between 2019 and 2024, more than double the UK average increase.

Further statistics and information on the key strengths of our local economy can be found in the [Suffolk Economy Strategy](#) and the supporting evidence base.

However, Suffolk is not without socio-economic challenges:

- **Productivity** is below the national average, at £30.96 per hour compared to £35.86 in England.
- **Average wages** are also lower, at £31,000 versus £36,200 nationally.
- **Qualification levels** lag behind national benchmarks, particularly for higher levels (RQF Level 4+), which inevitably impacts on employability and career progression.
- **Pockets of high deprivation and low social mobility.** 79,130 people live in Suffolk's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that are within the 20% most deprived in England (including health, income and education), and all areas of Suffolk - apart from Mid-Suffolk - contain social mobility cold spots that are in the lowest 20% nationally for social mobility.
- **An ageing population.** The majority of the recent growth in the population has been in the 67 and over age group, which has grown by 24,500 people (16.8% since 2015) and is projected to grow by a further 22.7% in the next 10 years (2025 to 2035).





Economic Inactivity & Unemployment

During 2024, 19.5% (86,000) of individuals in Suffolk aged between 16-64 were classed as economically inactive and Suffolk's unemployment rate was 3.9% (14,000).

While the rate of economic inactivity has remained relatively constant over the past 10 years in Suffolk, the reasons that people are economically inactive or unemployed has changed over time.

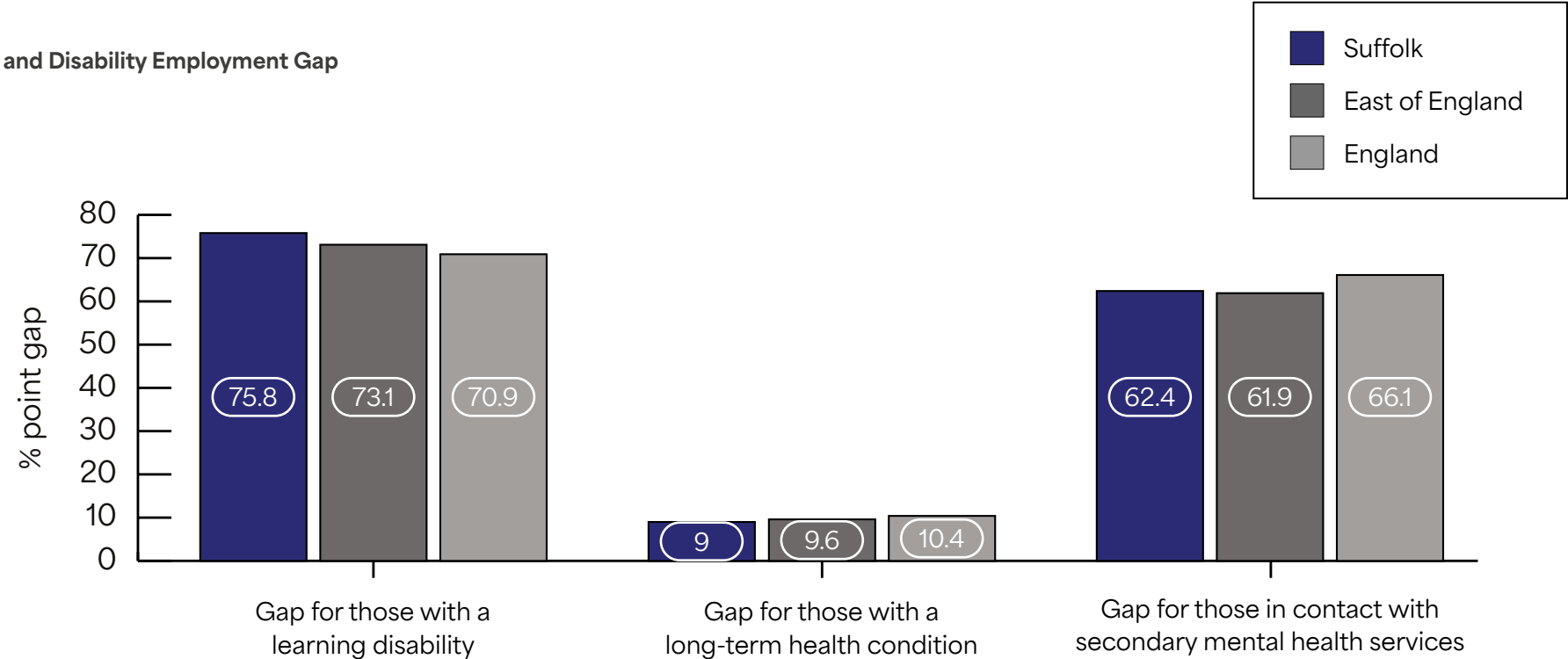
Health

Health is now the primary driver of economic inactivity in Suffolk with a long-term health condition, disability or illness being the top single reason given (29.6% of all those economically inactive). This is the highest it has been in the past ten years and has risen from 24% in the last three years. Suffolk's 2024 proportion was also higher than the East of England (24.7%) and the UK (27.4%).

Disability

18.3% of the total population in Suffolk are considered disabled under the equality act (compared to 17.3% nationally) and this proportion has been increasing. The 'disability employment gap' is the difference in the employment rate of people with disabilities and people without disabilities. In Suffolk, the unemployment rate for EA core or work-limiting disabled is 6.1%, notably higher than that of the general population. Whilst the gap for those with a long-term health condition or for those in contact with secondary mental health services is smaller than the national average (9.0% compared to 10.4% for long-term health and 62.4% compared to 66.1% for mental health), Suffolk exceeds the national average for those with learning disabilities. In Suffolk this employment gap is 75.8% (versus 70.9% in England). This suggests individuals with learning disabilities in Suffolk may face greater barriers to employment than elsewhere in England. Given the growing number of people in Suffolk with a disability it is imperative that we look to focus in on narrowing all aspects of the disability employment gap.

Health and Disability Employment Gap



Mental Health and Wellbeing

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is a benefit designed to support people who are unable to work due to illness or disability. Almost 13,000 people were claiming ESA in Suffolk in November 2024. Mental and behavioural disorders account for almost half of claims (48%). There are between 7,000 and 10,000 new depression diagnoses in Suffolk every year (2013/14 to 2023/24). Anxiety in combination with depression is the most prevalent reason for people in Suffolk and North-East Essex being economically inactive due to health needs.

As noted in the Tackling Poverty Together report, the relationship between mental health and poverty is complex. Struggling with mental health and wellbeing can make maintaining employment difficult and lead to financial difficulties, which in turn exacerbates mental health issues, trapping people in a vicious cycle, enhanced by long waiting lists and delayed interventions. Supportive workplaces can help, where individuals can openly discuss their struggles without fear of repercussions and be reassured reasonable adjustments will be made.

Caring Responsibilities

In Suffolk, 16.7% of our economically inactive cohort are inactive due to looking after a family/home and only 45% of 16-64-year-olds who provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care in Suffolk are in employment. This tends to be concentrated in urban areas with females disproportionately impacted.

Suffolk's ageing population and the rising prevalence of complex care needs are placing increasing pressure on local health and social care services. As a result, a growing number of individuals are likely to undertake unpaid caring responsibilities, further contributing to economic inactivity.

Qualifications and Aspiration

In Suffolk, there is a skew towards lower qualifications compared to both regional and national averages. A smaller proportion of our workforce hold higher-level qualifications with only 61.0% qualified to Level 3 and above (compared to 67.3% nationally) and only 38.9% holding an RFQ L4+, compared to the national average of 46.8%. Lower qualification levels can limit growth, helping to entrench low productivity and low wages in the economy, limiting personal progression.

Efforts to raise aspirational levels are important as a means to help drive up both participation and qualification levels as part of a wider ambition to enable a culture of lifelong learning, personal and professional development. Work is underway in Suffolk through initiatives such as 'icanbea' (led by The Mason Trust and supported by Suffolk County Council) which provides details on the variety and wealth of careers options in Suffolk and the work being undertaken to ensure Sizewell C and Freeport East are used as catalysts for increasing aspirations across all age groups.

Retirement

In Suffolk there is a higher proportion of people economically inactive due to retirement (16.5% compared to the national average of 12.4%).

Of those who were economically inactive in Suffolk during 2024, just 13.5% (11,600) were reported as wanting a job. This was lower than the proportion of economically inactive wanting a job in the East of England (13.9%) and the UK (18.6%) and is the lowest it has been since the pandemic with a fall from 21.3% in Jan-Dec 2023.

Access to Job Opportunities

The availability and accessibility of jobs and support varies across Suffolk and can be both a driver of economic inactivity itself as well as a barrier for those wanting to return to the labour market. The Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan notes transport and digital access as significant barriers to participation in both training and employment. For those that require it, accessibility to training to upskill or support and coaching to prepare them for work may also be a barrier. This signifies the importance of infrastructure enabling both digital and geographical connectivity across the county. Key groups that are disproportionately impacted by transport and connectivity barriers are young people, those in rural or coastal communities, those with low incomes and those with a disability impacting mobility or the ability to drive.

All of the above drivers and barriers need to be considered to help get Suffolk working. Several groups are identified as being particularly susceptible to certain drivers but we need to do more to improve our understanding at a local level of the intersectionality between drivers and various groups to enable us to target finite resources on clear priorities that will have significant impact.

Spatial and Demographic Disparities

Geography

Suffolk wide economic activity and employment rates can mask regional disparities and pockets of deep deprivation and disadvantage. Suffolk's diverse mix of rural, coastal, and urban communities presents varying social and economic challenges.

Rural

- Residents in our rural areas often have limited transport options making access to key services more difficult and potentially limiting social mobility.
- Many rural areas in Suffolk have fewer local employers and limited job diversity. Residents often need to travel to urban centres like Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds for work, which can be an additional barrier.
- Although Suffolk's digital infrastructure is improving, some rural communities still experience poor broadband and mobile coverage, limiting access to remote work, online training, and job search platforms.

Coastal

- Some of our coastal communities have some of the poorest health outcomes in England, often alongside particularly high levels of deprivation and lower educational attainment.

- They also have a significantly higher economic inactivity rate¹⁶ and availability of jobs is often seasonal, which can lead to underemployment and discourage long-term workforce participation.
- Long-term unemployment is projected to rise by 20% within a decade without intervention with intergenerational worklessness identified as a major challenge.

Urban

- Over 80,000 people live in the 11% of Suffolk's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that are within the 20% most deprived in England. Pockets of greater relative deprivation can be found in more built-up areas, such as Beccles, Bury St Edmunds, Felixstowe, Ipswich, Lowestoft, and Stowmarket.
- Urban areas often face pressures on affordable housing, in turn meaning social housing is more concentrated in urban areas of Suffolk, such as Ipswich, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds, due to greater population density and pockets of deprivation. Individuals in social housing often face multiple disadvantages, including low income, poor mental and physical health, low educational attainment, and stigma/ discrimination which in turn can create environments where economic inactivity becomes entrenched, often across generations.

Our diverse spatial areas and the varying socio-economic challenges which come with them means our interventions must be specific and place based.

Demographic

Gender

Although the last 10 years has seen an increase in the number of females who are economically active, Suffolk still has a wider than average gender disparity (87.2% of working age males are economically active compared to 74.8% of females). This is due to a combination of structural, social, and economic factors that influence their participation in the labour market including gendered expectations, access to childcare, gender disparities in occupational sectors and health disparities.

Whilst narrowing our gender disparity gap will be a key focus, we also need to monitor and understand the trend of increasing female and decreasing male economic activity.

Ethnic Background

Inactivity data, split by ethnic group, reveals clear disparities. To understand the disparities in economic activity and employment rates between different groups we must consider the different structural barriers these groups are prone to experiencing. These can range from discrimination in the job market, health inequalities and cultural expectations. It is essential to move beyond a siloed analysis of structural barriers and groupings of individuals. Structural barriers do not operate in isolation, and individuals' experiences are shaped by the intersection of multiple factors, including ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and socio-economic background.

Young People

Economic activity is highest in the 25 – 54 age groups and unemployment is highest in the 18 – 24 age group whilst there is a high percentage of 55 – 66-year-olds who are economically inactive due to early retirement.

Suffolk's proportion of young people at academic age 16 and 17 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and unknown was 5.60% in March 2025 (compared to 5.05% in the East of England and 5.25% nationally). Whilst this proportion has remained fairly static, actual numbers are increasing as cohort sizes increase. Children in Care and Care leavers (aged 16 – 25) are at particular risk of poor educational outcomes and unemployment.

An increasing proportion and number of young people are requiring additional support to achieve their full potential, placing increasing demand on services. This includes those with special educational needs, disabilities and mental health challenges.

The above trends present a significant risk for future economic inactivity. These early disadvantages can have long-term consequences, as young people without qualifications or work experience are more likely to face barriers entering and sustaining employment. Therefore, Suffolk may see a growing segment of its working-age population excluded from the labour market. Some of the interventions with the greatest long-term impact is therefore those that address the economic inactivity of our young people.

Jobs and Employment in Suffolk

Overview of Suffolk's Labour Market and Economy

Suffolk's economy is on a strong trajectory as set out in the Suffolk Economic Strategy. Underpinned by leading sectors in Clean Energy, Agri-Food & Drink and Ports and Logistics with a growing presence in ICT & Digital Creative, Life Sciences & Biotech and Financial Services, Suffolk is playing a vital national role in powering, feeding and connecting the UK.

The forecast increase in workforce demand will provide opportunities for Suffolk residents but will also exacerbate what is usually a tight labour market. Although job vacancies have dropped in recent months, many employers are still likely to struggle to fill all their vacancies.

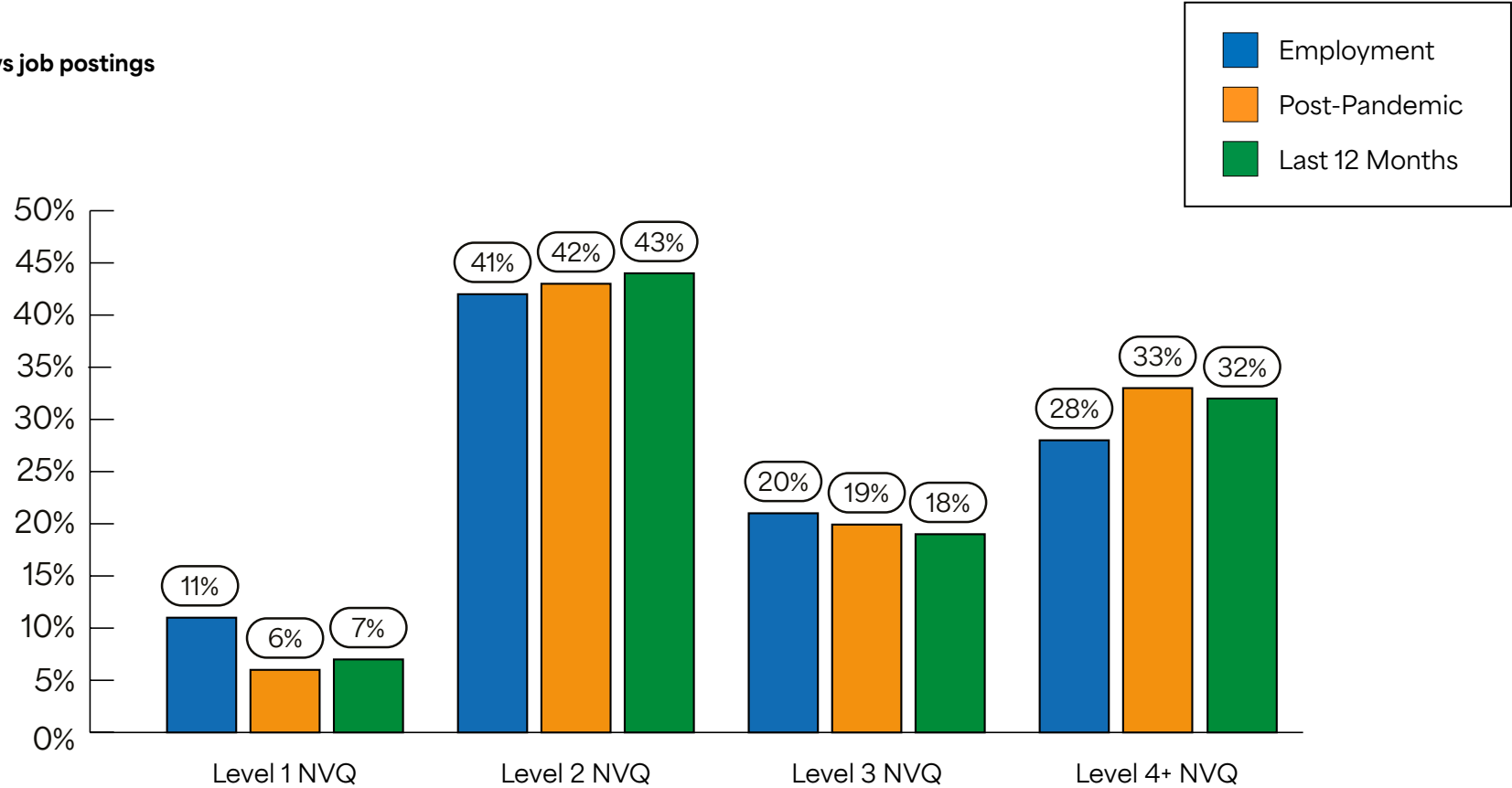
Demand across Suffolk's economy can and does fluctuate, particularly within some of Suffolk's key sectors including agri-food, hospitality and construction. All can experience significant volatility that can be masked within annual figures given the seasonal nature of some work and sensitivity of the sectors to wider economic forces. For individual workers this can result in a lack of job and financial security that can stifle an individual's ability and opportunity to develop and progress.



There is consistently high demand across the Suffolk economy for roles generally requiring lower-level qualifications resulting in a wage profile below the national average.

Demand by qualification is, however, shifting towards higher level roles as the labour market starts to reflect the changes we are seeing within the economy, including cross-sector adoption of new methods and technologies as well as the high level and emerging growth referenced above and described in more detail in the Suffolk Economic Strategy. The % of job postings requiring level 4+ is higher than their current employment share (33% over the last five years compared to 28% market share) whilst Level 1 role vacancies are advertised significantly less than their current market share.

Education levels vs job postings



Mirroring to a degree those occupations that are the most in demand, the hardest to fill vacancies in Suffolk over the past five years have been across caring, health, sales and elementary administration and service occupations. However, skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades have also been consistently hard to fill. Further increases in demand are expected in mechanical, heating and electrical roles across the construction, engineering and energy sectors.

Most of the skills in demand from employers reflects the findings of the Local Skills Improvement Plan. This includes communications which is the top common skill required in postings in Suffolk over the past five years and problem solving. Specialised skills in consistently high demand since the pandemic include auditing, finance, personal care and warehousing.

Conclusions

Suffolk's employment and economic activity rate currently compares favourably with national averages. However, the population of Suffolk is ageing, meaning the ratio of workers to 'dependant' populations is decreasing. At the same time there is likely to be a significant increase in demand for labour across our high growth, emerging and value growth sectors, driven by new developments (such as significant infrastructure projects), innovation and increasing demand for services such as health and social care. This means, that despite a recent drop in job postings, a tight labour market is likely to become even tighter and there is a need to increase the economic activity rates of the working age population as much as possible.

To achieve this, we must aim to tackle an increasing rate of health-related economic inactivity and unemployment, as well as further focus on the disability, age and gender disparities.

This will need to be achieved despite expected increases in levels of disability and mental health conditions within the working age population that will further increase the scale of support needed.

As the requirements of our employers change in line with innovation and growth in the economy, we will also need to ensure our workforce adapts to mitigate against movement from employment into unemployment and potential economic inactivity. This includes women, young people aged 20-24, and part-time workers who are most likely to be in roles at high risk of automation²⁰ including A.I.

Employers play a vital role in fostering an inclusive workplace culture that supports individuals with mental health conditions and disabilities to enter and remain in employment. By creating environments that prioritise flexibility and accessibility, employers can break down barriers that often lead to economic inactivity.

Despite a lower than average % of those economically inactive wanting to work, there are still many in Suffolk who are economically inactive and want to work. We need to identify, engage and support them to do so whilst continuing to raise aspirations and remove barriers where possible for those who state they do not want a job. Identifying and engaging these individuals will require coordination across the work, health and skills system.

There are, of course, multiple underlying and interconnected factors which contribute to, and exacerbate, economic inactivity and the disparities we see in Suffolk. Although we know what many of these individual drivers and causes are (as outlined above), some of the reasons that people are economically inactive can be deep-rooted and complex, even contributing to intergenerational worklessness. We need to strengthen our understanding of the intersectionality of these causes and drivers, and how they affect particular groups (including by ethnicity) so that we can ensure our interventions and effort are targeted and impactful.

We also need to consider job availability and the expected demand in particular sectors, especially those sectors and developments that may be able to provide the entry level roles that many of our residents with barriers to employment could benefit from.

3

Current system and offer - Addressing economic inactivity in Suffolk

Current system and offer – addressing economic inactivity in Suffolk

Work is already being undertaken by a wide range of organisations to help address the causes and drivers of economic inactivity in Suffolk and provide the support and provision needed to move individuals closer to, and into, the labour market.

Current Strategic Landscape

There is a strong golden thread of priorities, ambitions, objectives and actions focused on addressing economic inactivity running through regional and local strategies and plans. This includes the following.

- The **Suffolk Economic Strategy (2024)** aims to boost productivity through workforce health and wellbeing initiatives and build an inclusive talent pipeline for the Suffolk economy. This includes an ambition to grow the economically active population by 35,000 by 2045.
- The **Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)** aims to address the skills gaps and shortages in the region by strengthening collaboration between employers and providers to ensure training is aligned with local needs. The plan also emphasises the importance of soft skills, such as communication, adaptability and teamwork in reducing economic inactivity.
- The **Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Strategy** looks to address health inequalities, reflecting the importance of decent work on good physical and mental health.
- Suffolk's **Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 'Preparing for the Future' (2022-2027)** addresses the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, including employment, and supporting good mental health for all. One of the priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board is good work and health.
- **Tackling Poverty in Suffolk Strategy (2022)** sets out actions to support people living in crisis, those whose disposable income is decreasing and could be at risk of experiencing poverty and addressing the root causes and impact of poverty.
- **SEND strategy 2024-2029** – co-developed with partners from across health, education, social care and the voluntary sector, this sets out how services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in Suffolk are delivered, including those that look to prepare those with SEND for change and transition into adulthood.
- **Volunteer Strategy for Suffolk (2025-2028)** supporting people to volunteer, and be more engaged in their community to enhance wellbeing and actively encourage participation.
- Strategies to capitalise on specific developments such as the **Freeport East Skills Strategy** (providing additional employment opportunities for all, but especially those who are currently inactive, unemployed or underemployed) and the **Sizewell C Employment, Skills and Education Strategy** (providing access to training and skills along with commitments to help support those furthest from the labour market).

The Get Suffolk Working approach is intended to bring together, align with and support rather than duplicate these, and all other related, pre-existing strategies.

Activity and Support - The Work, Health and Skills System

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) is a government agency, funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) that provides the core support on offer in England to help individuals of working age who are on welfare or unemployed to find work including the provision of several related benefits including Jobseeker's Allowance, Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments and the Disability Living Allowance.

There is a wide range of support offered by JCP across Suffolk to:

- **Help individuals**, especially those on working-age benefits—overcome barriers and move into work. This includes targeted support programmes for individual's dependant on various characteristics (such as age), current personal circumstances (such as disability, long-term unemployed) and previous experience (such as military leavers or those transitioning from custody).
- **Support employers**, including help with job matching, work experience, advertising, and pre-employment training (such as Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes).



Integrated Care Boards

Suffolk & North East Essex (SNEE) and Norfolk & Waveney (N&W) ICBs have a responsibility to

- Support the health and work agenda by improving outcomes in population health and health care through strategic commissioning.
- Support the social and economic development of Suffolk.
- Tackle inequalities in outcomes, experience, and access and enhance productivity and value for money.

SNEE and N&W are currently developing an ICB Health and Work Strategy.

Local Authorities

Local Authorities in Suffolk have a major role to play in addressing economic inactivity, both as strategic coordinators and direct deliverers of related research, services and activity. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Directly providing health improvement and prevention activity, workplace health promotion, data & intelligence and strategic leadership and collaboration.
- Working directly with adults who are eligible for support through the Care Act 2014, including those with a physical or learning disability, mental health need, autism, sensory impairment along with adults struggling with alcohol or drug dependency and at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Providing learning opportunities for adults in Suffolk who face the greatest barriers to securing employment.
- Working collaboratively with schools and other key partners to identify young people who may need extra support to successfully transition at year 11 and decide who is best placed to offer this.
- Equipping care leavers with the confidence, credentials, and networks to thrive.
- Housing and homeless support.
- Local welfare and financial support.

- Working to create job growth and availability.
- Collaborating with, or commissioning, charities and social enterprises to deliver various schemes such as employment readiness programmes and mental and physical health and wellbeing support.



Further and Higher Education

The Further Education and Higher Education institutes in Suffolk provide education, training, guidance and outreach that supports local people to overcome barriers to gaining and sustaining employment. Not only do they equip both young people and adults with the skills, qualifications and competencies required in our local workforce but can also provide the inclusive environments and wraparound support that many of our residents (e.g. care leavers) need to fulfil their potential.

Employers

Employers play a central role in addressing economic inactivity by ensuring an availability of, and access to, employment opportunities for all that support from the wider work, health and skills system can move residents towards. Collectively this can then create a more inclusive and resilient workforce for Suffolk.

To maximise the involvement of employers and the prevalence of inclusive practices, strong employer engagement is required with a key role for our employer representative bodies and business associations such as the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce.

Independent Training Providers

Independent Training Providers (ITPs) can also provide support to employers to access a broader range of talent by engaging with individuals and offering targeted training programmes that upskill these individuals for specific roles.

Voluntary Sector

The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) in Suffolk plays a significant role in both preventing and addressing economic inactivity. The sector works within local areas, often at neighbourhood level and are recognised as being able to reach those who are often hidden from more mainstream, statutory services.

The sector plays a key role in preventing and addressing economic inactivity, through:

- Engagement with health partners to promote good health and supporting individuals to be fit for work.
- Providing support to those who are economically inactive through delivery of support to enhance skills, confidence and access to employment opportunities.

Housing Associations

Housing associations provide secure and affordable housing to those furthest from the labour market, are recognised as a community champion and can provide a convening, place-based function for the wider support on offer. Housing Associations in Suffolk provide a myriad of support for those facing barriers to employment including funds, skills development, guaranteed interviews and advice.

Justice System

The Justice system also contributes to addressing economic inactivity in Suffolk by working to support those coming out of custody into employment, a proven factor in reducing re-offending, as well as promoting inclusive recruitment practices and tackling the stigma and perception of employing those with experience of the justice system.

Mapping the Offer

To further understand how the work, health and employment system in Suffolk (outlined above) provides the support, training and opportunities to move a Suffolk resident closer, into, and progressing within the labour market, a mapping of the services available has been undertaken by OPR Consultancy as part of the development of the Get Suffolk Working plan. To aid our understanding this mapping has been broken down into six identified key stages of the 'journey into employment'.

This initial mapping can be found in the full version of the Get Suffolk Working plan.

These are:

- **Addressing Barriers** – support to assess and address an individual's needs across a broad spectrum and including, but not limited to skills, transportation, health considerations, inclusion factors, confidence and motivation.
- **Becoming Work Ready** – supporting individuals with a range of transferable skills and training, managing workplace expectations, what to expect as an employee, what your employer will expect of you.
- **Becoming Job Ready** – support with specific skills and training to be successful in a chosen job, and how to apply for work. This could include programmes commissioned by councils and delivered via local colleges and the voluntary sector.
- **Supporting into work** – specific programmes designed to support individuals or cohorts to gain employment, this could include e.g. application writing and CV development and work placements / experience.
- **Sustaining employment** – on-going support and coaching to ensure individuals can retain a job once they have secured employment. This can also include employer-based support e.g. mental health in the workplace programmes.
- **Progressing within work** – on-going support to individuals or cohorts to progress within their current job role or to seek progression elsewhere, this could include e.g. business networking events and professional development courses.

Key Considerations and Opportunities

Across the work, health and skills system there are a significant range of services and interventions available to help people to gain the competencies, confidence, qualifications, experience, training, and support into employment that they may need. However, this does not mean that the needs of all individuals are fully met.

The landscape is complex, many of the schemes receive time limited funding and are commissioned by different system partners, so the offer available in any given area, for any given group, is consistently changing and there is no single directory for service provision that is used across the health, skills and employer engagement network. System partners and service users are therefore not always aware of what is on offer or how to access support. The overwhelming response from engagement with service users and stakeholder organisations has been that there is rarely a clear journey for a person entering the system, and once in the system, the silo approach can intensify.

The development of Get Suffolk Working has accelerated work that had already begun locally to gain a clearer directory of provision. The ICBs, the County Council and DWP will work together to establish a method of maintaining a dynamic system for all relevant partners to access and utilise.

Whilst there is a good record of partnership working across the region with both strategic and operational groups in place to help develop and deliver programmes and projects that will contribute to Get Suffolk Working, there is a room to strengthen these working arrangements to ensure the **system works as an integrated work, health and skills system.**



4

Ambitions, Priorities and Initial Actions

Ambitions, Priorities and Initial Actions

Suffolk County Council, the Department for Work and Pensions (Norfolk and Suffolk District) and both Integrated Care Boards serving Suffolk, will collectively work towards the following ambitions working alongside stakeholder organisations across the wider work, health and skills system such as, but not limited to, education and training providers, VCFSE organisations and employer representative bodies.

However, Suffolk is not without socio-economic challenges:

- Match the national ambition for an **employment rate of 80%** alongside an economic **activity rate of 80%**.
- This will be supported by **halting the rising trend of health-related economic inactivity**.

We also need to ensure we are working to close gaps where they exist and address all needs. Through an analysis of economic inactivity in Suffolk alongside additional stakeholder engagement we have identified the following set of additional ambitions for Suffolk, linked to the DWP outcome metrics for Get Britain Working:

- **Reduce the disability employment gap** for people aged 18 to 66.

- **Increase the economic activity rate for women** aged 18 to 66, whilst also maintaining a focus on the reducing rate for men.
- **Reduce the proportion of young people (18 to 24) not in education, employment or training.**

The launch and delivery of Connect to Work will support Suffolk to meet these ambitions alongside a selection of other significant work, health and skills delivery programmes which will help maximise impact. This core programme of delivery will sit alongside efforts to bring together and explore how to maximise the impact of activity already being undertaken from across the work, health and skills system focused on:

- **Preventing economic inactivity** through early intervention.
- **Finding and engaging** those who need support, education or guidance.
- **Supporting** individuals with an offer that is locally delivered and coordinated.
- **Progressing** individuals on their pathways through the support and provision available to ensure they are taking progressive steps towards (or within) employment.

These aims are underpinned by the following Get Suffolk Working overarching priorities to:

- **Strengthen our understanding** of the drivers and causes of economic inactivity.
- **Enhance the integration** of current services.
- **Take further action** to address unmet needs.

We also need to ensure we are working to close gaps where Get Suffolk Working provides us with the opportunity to strengthen the strategic alignment between the work focused on addressing economic inactivity and our wider ambitions for the people, businesses and places of Suffolk. Get Suffolk Working therefore builds on, contributes to, and will be supported by, the aims and ambitions set out in other related local strategies.

This includes the aims:

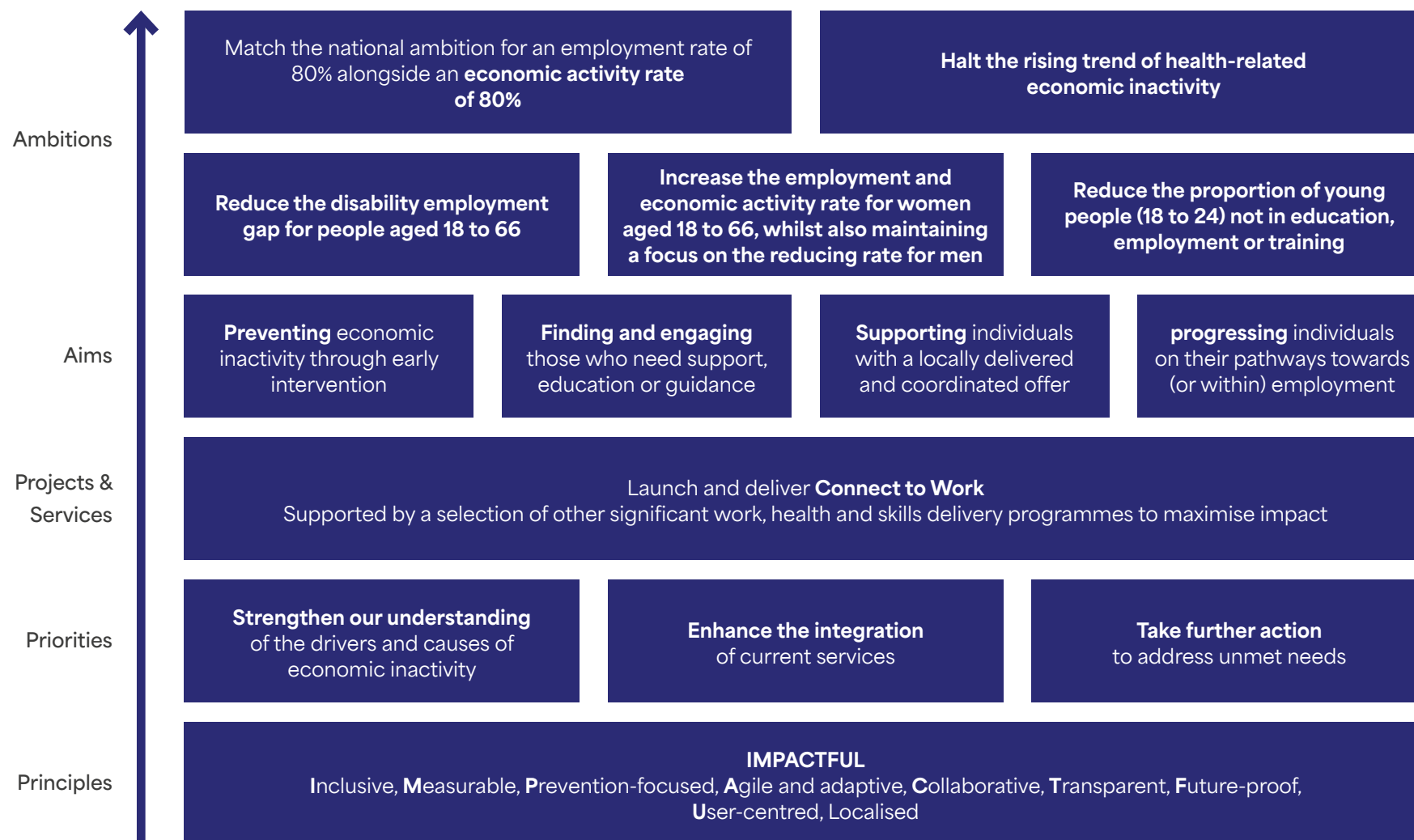
- in the **Suffolk Economic Strategy** to enable the clean and inclusive growth of the Suffolk Economy by supporting high growth, emerging growth and value growth opportunities.
- in the **Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan** to better align the skills needs of local employers.



- **Plan** to better align the skills needs of local employers.
- of both **Integrated Care Boards** covering Suffolk to address health inequalities and improve healthy life expectancy.
- in the **Tackling Poverty Strategy** to support people into sustainable employment.

The full Get Suffolk Working document contains details of an initial action plan to be taken forward to support the achievement of our stated ambitions.

Get Suffolk Working – single page summary



Governance Arrangements

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has approved the publication of the Get Suffolk Working plan.

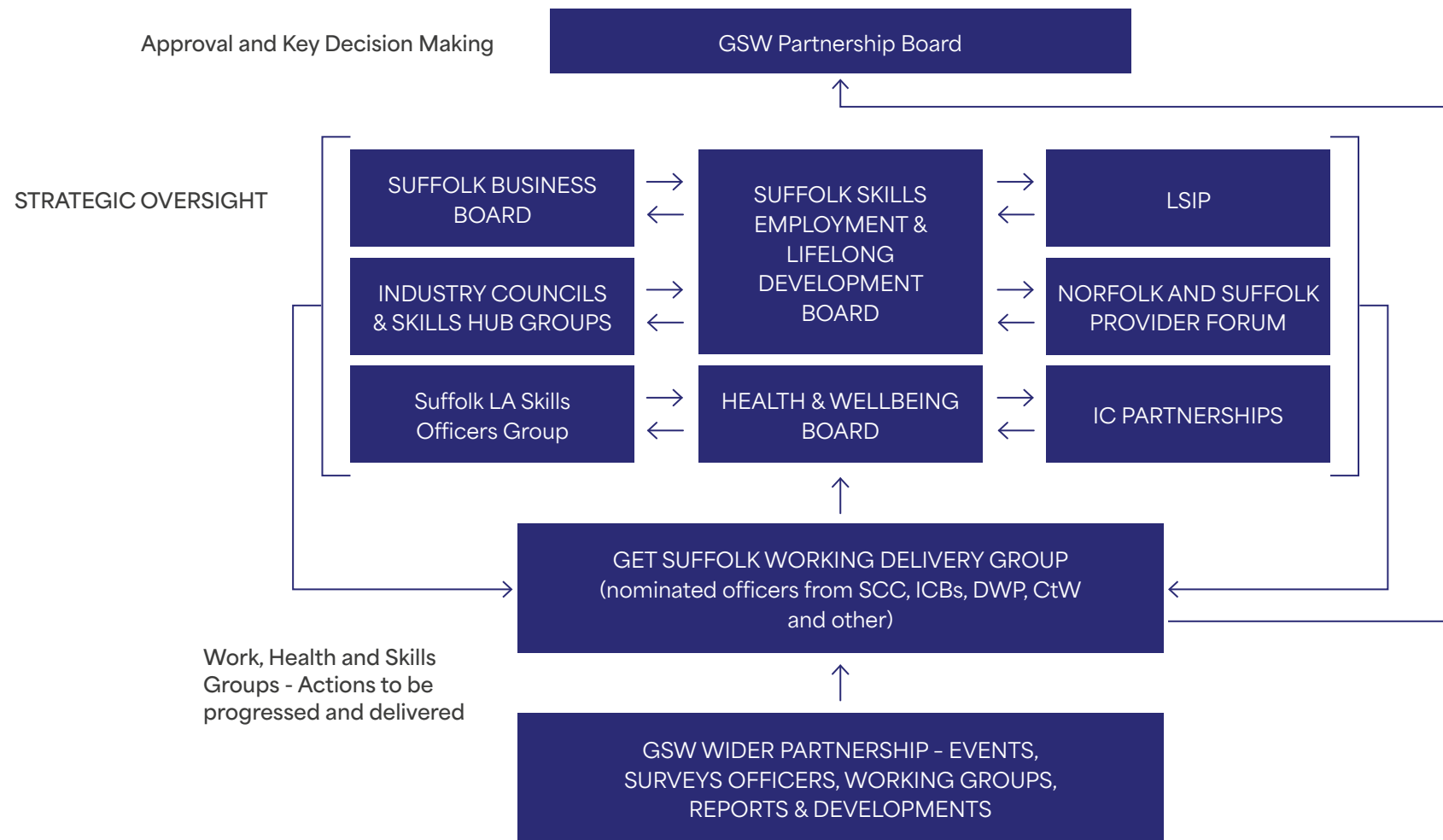
A new '**Get Suffolk Working' Partnership Board (GSWPB)** comprising of senior leads from DWP, both relevant Integrated Care Boards (SNEE and Norfolk & Waveney) as well as Suffolk County Council has been established to provide cross-system endorsement of the plan. Moving forward, the GSWPB will remain in place to oversee and approve both the development of future versions of the plan and the delivery of actions. Membership will be reviewed and expanded as considered necessary by the respective partner organisations. The Board will also provide oversight for the implementation of the joint Norfolk and Suffolk ICBs Work and Health strategy.

A **Get Suffolk Working Project Delivery Group (GSWDG)** has met on a regular basis to review, monitor and agree the development of the plan. This group will continue to meet and membership will be reviewed and expanded to include wider representation from across the system, with clear links through to the related strategies and activity identified in this plan, to oversee the delivery of 'Get Suffolk Working' actions and related actions in the ICB Work and Health Strategy. This group will report directly to the GSWPB and provide updates to both the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Suffolk SELDA Board.

The **Suffolk Skills, Employment and Lifelong Development Advisory Board (SSELDA)** board was formed in June 2025 to provide strategic and coordinated leadership across the skills and employment system in Suffolk, enhancing skills availability, fostering a culture of individual lifelong development and improving related social and economic outcomes stronger coordination. It advises on, and ensures wide awareness of, the development and delivery of key skills and employment initiatives including, but not limited to, Get Suffolk Working and Connect to Work.

The **Health and Wellbeing Board (H&W Board)** was established in accordance with the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to improve wellbeing outcomes for Suffolk and develop a stronger role promoting joint commissioning and integrated provision between health, public health and social care. Membership includes SCC Councillors, SCC Officers, representatives from other public bodies and voluntary groups.

Moving forward the both the SELDA Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board will receive updates and provide constructive challenge and strategic advice regarding the delivery of the Get Suffolk Working plan. Additional forums such as a Suffolk Local Authorities Officers group (for skills), the Norfolk and Suffolk Provider Forum, the Integrated Care Partnerships and the Suffolk Business Board may also from time to time receive updates on the work of Get Suffolk Working in order to ensure alignment with respective strategies and workstreams.



The **Get Suffolk Working Wider Partnership** comprises of over 100 key stakeholders and interested parties that have received regular updates on the development of Get Suffolk Working and provided a range of input. As well as organisations mentioned in other parts of our Governance arrangements, membership includes Housing Associations, Business Associations, specific VCSFE organisations and District and Borough Councils. We will continue to keep this network of organisations live and involved in the delivery of the plan.

Indicator	Baseline (Source)	GSW Ambition	Related National Ambition*
Economic Activity Rate	80.5% (APS)	Maintain at least 80% and continue to track higher than the national average***	N/A
Economic Activity Rate for Women	74.8% (APS)	Increase to at least meet the national average	Increase the employment rate of women aged 18 to 66 from 72.3%.
Employment Rate	77.4% (APS)	80%	80%
Disability Gap	22.2%**** (APS)	Reduce the disability employment gap	Reduce the wider Disability Employment Gap from 30.1% (ONS)
Disability Gap for Learning Disabilities	75.8% (APS)	Reduce (towards the national average of 70.9%)	Reduce the wider Disability Employment Gap from 30.1% (ONS)
Proportion of young people (academic age 16-17) NEET & Unknown*****	5.25% (Suffolk Participation Data)	Reduce the proportion of young people (18-24) not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Reduce the proportion of young people (18-24) not in education, employment or training from 15.8% (ONS - LFS)
Health Related Economic Inactivity	5.8%** (APS)	5.8%** (APS) Reduce and halt the increasing rate of health-related economic inactivity	Reduce from 6.8% (DWP Analysis of the ONS Labour Force Survey)

*National Ambitions have been set using some datasets that are not available locally or are not considered to be the most robust to use at a local level. Despite these differences there is a clear link between the measure we will focus on locally and a contribution to achieving a relevant national outcome.

**This is the proportion of the working age population (16–64) economically inactive due to long term sickness or disability not the proportion of those who are economically inactive due to health. It is the best local indicator we have but is not directly comparable to the national LFS figure. 5.8% is therefore 25,500 as a % of 442,100.

*** Although Suffolk's economic inactivity rate is already at 80%+, it does fluctuate over time and maintaining this across the next 5-10 years despite challenges, increasing proportions of health conditions, an ageing population and changes to the labour market.

****Difference between EA Core/Work Limiting Disability and Non-EA Core/WLD

*****Further indicators for 18-24 NEET under consideration

Future Iterations of Get Suffolk Working

The GSW plan primarily focuses on addressing economic inactivity and the first 'Get Britain Working' challenge focused on supporting individuals, especially those with health conditions, who are excluded from the labour market. The remaining five 'Get Britain Working' challenges are of course interconnected and as a result the plan also covers (to varying degrees):

- Youth employment (too many young people leave school without essential skills or access to high-quality further learning, apprenticeships or support to work).
- Insecure and low-quality work (many people are stuck in insecure, poor-quality and low paying jobs, affecting their health and wellbeing).
- Challenges for women (women who care for their families face challenges in staying in and progressing in work).
- Employer vacancies (employers struggle to fill vacancies due to labour and skills shortages, impacting economic growth and living standards).
- Disparities in labour market outcomes (between different places and groups of people).

The full Get Suffolk Working document contains details of an initial action plan to be taken forward to support the achievement of our stated ambitions.



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Thank you for reading our document.

Please see the full version of the Get Suffolk Working plan online at
[Suffolk County Council](#)

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